



**BuildNeighborhoods**  
Resources for Communities

# Neighborhood Builder

A Resource for Neighborhood Activist, Leaders, and Planners

Written by Roger Sexton

**Block Builder | Organization Builder | Leadership Builder | Plan Builder**

**A Build Neighborhoods Manual**

## What If?

What if we looked at our neighborhoods as a place where we live and not how affluent it was? Instead, consider the fact every day in every neighborhood, children are learning about life and what it means to grow up. Each day parents struggle to make ends meet and look out for the children in their care. Each day, we lose the wisdom and experience of our elderly population. What if everyone woke up one day and realized neighborhoods are more than just houses and streets?

What if we realized that relationships with each other actually made the difference in how we felt about our life? Having friends, from the best of friends to people you just simply know, can have an enormous impact on our self-image and our feeling of happiness and belonging. That neighborhoods are about the relationships between the people who live there. What if we woke up one day and made it a point to meet more people with the intention of having a better life through relationships?

What if everyone had real opportunities to look forward to? Children would see the power of getting a good education to allow them to follow their dreams. Young men and women would be able to find jobs to allow them to build a bountiful life. The American dream would be more of a reality than a concept. What if we woke up to a community that focused on building hope for everyone?

## One Day . . .



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What if people in the neighborhood did the right thing? When issues occurred people would address them in a unified way. Neighbors would be leaders and pursue solutions to problems such as arguments, racism, neglect, and wrong decisions that affect the neighborhood and the larger community. What if people stood up for what is right?

What if we were inclusive of all people in our neighborhood? The walls we put up between us were torn down and understanding occurred. All opinions mattered and no one felt unaccepted. People would feel good about their value to the neighborhood they live in. What if we did just “all get along”?

What if you felt hopeful and not helpless to make a difference in your neighborhood and community? You could express your opinions about how things should be and find support from the people around you. Your neighbors would empower you and not discourage you to pursue what could be and not settle for the way things are.

What if you stepped forward?

# Dedication

This book is dedicated to several influential people in my life and career.

## **Ken Reardon, PhD.**

Dr. Reardon led me down to East St. Louis during my first semester at the University of Illinois. The work I performed during my undergraduate and graduate degrees shaped the way I look at neighborhoods, interact with neighbors, and showed me what can be accomplished when you work hard at something. Ken's influence on my work cannot be overstated.

## **Dick Goral, 7<sup>th</sup> Ward Alderman, Rockford, IL**

Mr. Goral was a dear friend of mine who I came to know through my work in Rockford Illinois. Dick pulled me closer to the wonderful people of Rockford's neighborhoods. Through my relationships in Rockford, my work seemed to matter even more than before. I will never forget the people I met at the core of the neighborhood movement in Rockford. Dick Goral was at the very heart of the movement and I take away great memories of a great man who stood up for what he knew to be true. Dick died while in public office and the City of Rockford suffered a very noticeable loss. It was in Dick's spirit I wrote this book.

## **Lyla Stewart, Mother**

What would my dedication be without the mention of my dearest mother. My mother always believed in me and my ability to accomplish things I wanted in my life. In 1986, my mother changed careers from part-time checker in a grocery store to a professional Realtor. She was quite successful in this role. This monumental change in her life showed me I could be anything I wanted to be in mine. Throughout my life and my career, I continuously encountered people telling me the things I couldn't do. Over and over, I proved them wrong as I overcame hurdles and accomplished various milestones in my life. Inspired by my mother, I will always let the Lord decide what I can and cannot do. I will leave the limits the world places on people to those who are content with being told what they can do.

## **My Wife and Family**

My family endured with me when I worked for low pay at nonprofits, followed me to Texas for my career, and waited for me to return from evening meetings. They mean the world to me and I greatly appreciate them and their support.

## How to Use this Book

This book is intended to help anyone looking to improve a neighborhood. There are not many books or manuals out there which get down to this level of instruction and insight. The process of improving a neighborhood will vary from city to city, with no particular approach being universal to all locations. Neighborhood Builder gives the reader a very good initial thrust into neighborhood improvement. Before, during, and afterword, the process can be tailored to meet the realities of both the place and the people involved.

This book is free to distribute and feel free to pass the book on to others working in neighborhoods.



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# Block Builder

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# Block Builder

## Section 1: Introduction

Cities across the nation are working at stabilizing deteriorating neighborhoods and finding ways to improve them. A common thread through most of these efforts is to organize the residents so they can be involved in the process. History has shown us without the involvement of neighborhood residents, our solutions are doomed to fail.

Getting neighborhood residents to become active and involved in their community has been proven somewhat difficult. The act of getting residents out for an important meeting has occurred in every city. The problems arise when trying to keep them involved beyond the first meeting. Furthermore, progress is slow and may not attract the skeptical people in the community. But maybe the most important element missing in the process is the empowerment of the residents.

Trained community leaders are, at times, lacking. Many of the leaders who come to the surface have certain charismatic attributes or energetic drive. However, comprehensive training is required if the leader is to have a significant and sustainable impact on his or her surroundings.

### The Block Builder Manual

The following is a manual for taking an urban neighborhood through a process of improvement. The block building process sets the stage for empowerment and the actual improvement of the neighborhood. The Neighborhood Builder approach expands citizen involvement, increases relationships, gives direction to leaders, and puts the neighborhood back on the road to recovery.

We begin with working with volunteers from the neighborhood who wish to become block captains. To accomplish our far reaching goals, we will need to increase their capacity in this role. From there, we work with the residents to produce solutions for the problems facing their street. The block group then identifies who should be involved in these solutions. Implementation follows this process with the block captains working with the organization's leadership to bring significant positive change to the overall neighborhood.

The overall organization leader also improves in their role as the leader of the block captains. Through this process, a structure is created for the neighborhood organization; leaving the organization leader supported by well trained block captains. The block captains are further supported by active residents who will undertake minor roles in what needs to happen on their streets.

With this structure in place, streets will experience visible improvements, people will get involved, and then anything is possible.



# Block Builder

## Section 2: Neighborhood Management

Neighborhood management refers to a new way of looking at your neighborhood. By looking at it as something requiring your time but has a big impact on your life, you can make your neighborhood more enjoyable.

As we look at our neighborhoods today, there are changes occurring in each one. For the most part, the changes seem to be negative or at the very least taking the neighborhood in the wrong direction. The changes include rapid turnover of homeowners, increase in rental property stock, decreasing standards within the neighborhood, and more. The changes reflect a lack of management by someone. The first place we look to is the local city organization.

After all, we provide our hard earned tax payer money to take care of things. From the City perspective they provide services based upon the amount of money provided to them. There may be some situations where changing a strategy of providing their service could make a difference, however it generally boils down to available money.

But what about the management of the neighborhood? In the past, when demands were low, it appeared the city staff was managing not only the larger city, but individual streets. Actually, they were managing the big picture, but on the street level they were simply providing services designed to meet or exceed the demands at the time. Everything ages, including neighborhoods. With age come new challenges as things wear out.

The city continues to operate as they have in the past; managing the overall city and providing services to the neighborhoods. Unfortunately the needs have outpaced the supply and types of services. This overpowering of the city services calls for neighborhood management. The city government is not in a position to properly manage your neighborhood while doing the same for every other neighborhood.

The management of the neighborhood belongs in the hands of the true owners, the neighbors. Who better than the people who live in the area to monitor and take action? In some ways, the neighbors were always managing the neighborhood. In the past, the duties were not very substantial so it was easy. In today's aging neighborhoods, the duties are more pronounced and more difficult.

In the absence of management, everyone does their own thing; assuming someone else will address what is wrong. In a managed environment, someone has

established a set of standards for the neighborhood and takes action to correct any deficiencies. They would also seek to position the neighborhood to go beyond expectations. The bottom line: someone would promote neighborhood pride.

Neighborhood management requires organization of the people. This organization can be quite simple and even lacking in structure. The important element is the coming together of people to improve the neighborhood. With many neighbors involved, many things are possible. Using a system such as the Neighborhood Builder process will make your organization much more efficient.

The Neighborhood Builder process is about identifying issues, educating neighbors about how to respond, and finally encouraging action. The secret to making these methods work is bringing people together to do them. Today's neighborhood cannot be saved by one or two people looking out for the neighborhood.

Neighborhood management is for not only challenged neighborhoods, but all parts of the community. Even newer neighborhoods need to encourage communication and stay on top of what is happening. Homeowner associations are now common in new subdivisions, but they should be embraced by all their members as a structure for keeping the neighborhood maintained.

Bringing people together to improve the neighborhood is not all about work. There are distinct roles social events can play in creating and preserving the social fabric of a neighborhood. Neighborhood management is really about being neighborly with a purpose.

### Organizations and Groups

Neighborhood management calls for the formation of organizations within your neighborhood. The organization could involve an area wide organization or much smaller groups depending on what works in your region of the city. You may already have a group started and are looking to make the group bigger or more effective. Neighborhood Builder allows for both start ups and existing organizations to utilize the system.



# Block Builder

Section 2: Neighborhood Management  
*Continued*

If you are a start-up you should start with a handful of people wanting the same level of improvement you do. Hopefully the other members live on different streets than you do. This will give you a starting point to build a larger organization. If your initial people are on the same street, you will be forming a block organization. In starting a neighborhood group, your goal would be to find people on adjacent streets to form a block organization on their street and then join you as you form a larger organization.

An existing group will also benefit from this process because it strengthens your group by getting more people involved through recruiting block captains and providing them instruction on what they need to do. It also gives you insight into designing effective meetings and utilizing committees to make progress. Progress is what people are looking for!



# Block Builder

## Section 3: Working With Block Captains

It is not enough to have block captains, you will need to work with them to get the most out of everyone's effort.

Block captains and block watches are nothing new in America. Local police departments have stressed them to residents throughout many communities. Block watches become popular among residents who have recently experienced a significant crime or string of crimes in their area of the city. These groups are quick to form and just as quick at becoming inactive. Many people today scoff at forming block watches in response to today's headlines of high powered gangs, drug dealers, and signs of aging.

These block watches are usually islands in the sea of deteriorated neighborhoods and are soon overwhelmed by several factors. The block captain is bombarded with request and questions while not being provided training or a support system for their work. Many people are active complainers but fail to show up when there is work to be done. The police departments want to help, but are often limited in their resources for their neighborhood watch programs. These issues soon lead to an ineffective block watch.

The answer to these problems is not to throw away the model of block watches, but to improve it to the point in which it works. We must think about increasing the level of recruiting and training of block captains. To be effective we must design a system they can follow to bring positive, resident led change. To start with let us discuss block captains and their potential.

### What is a Block Captain?

The Block Builder process is built on a foundation of block captains. Let us look at what makes a neighbor a block captain.

#### A visible leader

As a neighborhood struggles with issues and problems, someone will have to emerge as a leader. In order to rally the people together, it will more than likely be a visible leader who steps into the position of a block captain. This person will be known to all on the block and will be thought of as someone who gets things done.

#### A resource

Visibility and high profile can get a block group jump started and active. However, even more important is the block captain who can be a resource to his or her fellow neighbors. When a problem arises, it is highly likely the block captain will not know the answer right away. The block captain can, however, know who to call to get the answer. Simply by calling the right phone number and explaining the problem, a block captain can get at least some answers from city hall or other agencies. When the block captain relays the information to his or her neighbors, they become a useful resource to the group.

#### An immediate representative

No matter where you live, you have a variety of political and appointed representatives to represent you in city council, county board, school district, and many other entities effecting your life. Chances are none of these representatives live on your block. As a matter of fact, when you contact these representatives, you are only one voice in a crowd of people they represent.

By appointing a block captain, you are creating a leader who can best represent you and your immediate neighbors. Your elected officials can make positive impacts on your neighborhood; however you don't have the opportunity to see them everyday. The block captain can be your representative to contact local agencies to get things fixed on your block. If you have a good block captain, he or she will work with your elected officials and help them understand your needs.

### Using Block Captains to Build Your Neighborhood

Now we understand what a block captain is, let us look at the big picture and why we have chosen to create the Block Builder process on a foundation of block captains.

#### Organized blocks become more stable

Today's neighborhood is plagued by the lack of interaction between neighbors. This leads to an increase in criminal activity because the neighborhood is not watching



# Block Builder

Section 3: Working with Block Captains  
*Continued*

out for each other. Criminals find these areas attractive once they commit a crime and find no resistance.

Organizing a block under a block watch system increases neighbor interaction. More people know the names and faces of neighbors from down the street. As this occurs, people look out for each other. Furthermore, as a block watch forms under the Block Builder system, certain physical elements are improved. The block watch may push for better street lighting, better sidewalks, deteriorated buildings to be improved or demolished, and other visible actions to stabilize their residential area.

The results can be tremendous. The same people who once felt they were all alone in their views about improving the block, come together with like minded people and accomplish common goals. The street takes on a different look and feel, with more people out in their yards talking with one another. People passing through the neighborhood can see these changes occurring and the story of improvement will continue across the city.

## Imagine a block captain on every block

Making improvements to a single block in an unstable or distressed area is a wondrous accomplishment. For those residents, life improves from what it was like before. But what about the rest of the larger neighborhood? Criminal elements are still operating on the next block over. It would seem a criminal could easily cross over into the block watch area and commit a crime and be gone. A block watch can only do so much on their street with regard to crime prevention.

In light of this, picture a block captain on each block of a larger neighborhood. Each street would pursue the same remedies used to stabilize the first block. The increase in activity by block watches could actually overpower the criminals who sell drugs or steal from area residents. With so much activity, they would simply move their operation to another area where the citizen activity is not so great. If one block can organize, so can another, and another, and so on. Power is in the numbers. This is the same way criminals brake a neighborhood in the first place. With so many criminals and acts of violence, people were overwhelmed. This process can work in reverse if residents get other blocks to organize.

## The need for leadership

Getting people on a street to come together to form a block watch is somewhat easy and has been accomplished time after time. What is more difficult is the block

captain on every block concept. Just like the block needing a visible leader, a neighborhood wide effort will need someone to lead the charge. It may be a single leader is only needed to get things started, eventually being replaced with a board of representatives from all the organized streets.

A leader would be responsible for recruiting and the instruction of new block captains. The leader creates a small army of captains which will stabilize the neighborhood. The leader will host block captain meetings where captains can discuss their difficulties and their victories. Most of all, the leader should have vision to see the big picture of what is possible when so many streets are organized and improving themselves.

## Block Captains and Your Organization

Your organization may fit the common model of most other starting organizations. This model is made up of a few dedicated members, struggling to get others involved and having dreams of making big changes. These groups are clear on the reasons why they are involved; however are at a loss why others are not involved. To find this out, your organization needs to be in touch with the residents. The Block Builder process involves reaching out to your fellow residents through people they respect living on their own streets.

### A network of block captains

What if you already have a larger neighborhood organization. Do you have a network of block captains? Imagine your neighborhood has 15 blocks capable of organizing as individual block groups. These new block captains would receive training and encouragement from you to get things done on their block. For discussion sake, let us say you have five current board members who are active and have some knowledge about improving your neighborhood. These board members could then be supported by 15 trained block captains who could rally their individual blocks if necessary. This would most likely be more support than you have ever had before.

### Representation of the masses

Looking back at the idea of immediate representation mentioned earlier, let us look at representation at the larger neighborhood level. If block captains represented their group at monthly meetings, the neighborhood organization could then reach a level "of the people, by the people, and for the people". This is what democracy in our country is all about. Let the residents voice their concerns to their block captain, who in return voice their opinions to the larger neighborhood organization. Politicians will listen to the organization when they realize how many people are



# Block Builder

Section 3: Working With Block Captains  
*Continued*

represented. Our political system can work better if we get people to be active on their block and create a system to get their voice out to the officials.

## Summary

The end result of using block captains would be a well organized response to the chaotic world in which we live in. Block captains could bring our community back to the democratic level our founding fathers intended. The possibilities, with trained block captains supporting active board members in an organization, is endless.



# Block Builder

## Section 4: Crime Prevention

Block Captains, they are about fighting crime right? No, block watches are about crime prevention.

A block captain should have a good understanding of crime prevention. During meetings, people will bring up crime related concerns and look to you to have some answers. There are a variety of ways to prevent crime in your neighborhood.

### Patrols

If the neighborhood you live in warrants having citizen patrols, there are some things to keep in mind. The first is of course safety. As the block captain, your number one responsibility is the safety of yourself and your neighbors. If your neighbors want to just start-up a neighborhood patrol without being prepared, your job will be to stop them. Stress to them there is a right way and a wrong way to patrol the neighborhood. Starting a neighborhood patrol without thinking everything through is dangerous.

To ensure everyone's safety, here are some things to consider:

### Police Training

Most police departments offer a Citizen on Patrol training seminar. If your department offers one, your first task is clear. As the leader of your block or neighborhood, ask everyone interested in participating in a neighborhood patrol to sign up for the next training. If you can't organize people to attend the training, you probably have no business organizing the patrol itself. Sounds a little harsh, but ultimately very true.

Not to steal the thunder of the instructor, but you will be instructed on the safe way to patrol your neighborhood. You and your neighbors will be surprised at the time of day and night the streets need to be patrolled. They will give you tips on what to look for and how to operate in a safe manner. As the block captain, you should plan on reminding people of these steps well after the training.

### Not Crime Fighters

You will hear it from the police and you are hearing it from me, the author, you are not crime fighters. It doesn't matter what your background is, you will not be

physically preventing any crime in your neighborhood. The job is to report crimes or potential crimes in your neighborhood, not to physically get involved.

You can play an important role by letting your fellow neighbors know if you see something they could do better to prevent crimes. Often people forget to turn on their porch light or they left their car in the street with their windows down. Having contact information or simply stopping at the door to let them know these things can help prevent crimes in your neighborhood. The idea is to make sure your neighborhood is not known as an easy mark to thieves or vandals.

### Communication

When on a patrol, you and your neighbors need to have a good system of communication. Cell phones are great, but you need to have phone numbers to contact other people in your neighborhood. When on patrol, there should be a person they are checking in with every twenty to thirty minutes. This could be the patrol's family member or another neighbor. If they don't check in, then someone needs to check on them. Obviously, you need a cell phone to notify the police of suspicious activity. Police departments also have a non-emergency number they ask people to use when the situation is not an emergency. The people on patrol should have these numbers when they are active in the neighborhood.

### Car vs. Pedestrian

The people patrolling your neighborhood have three choices; patrol in a vehicle, on a bicycle, or on foot. Most likely, people will choose a vehicle. As the block captain, you should encourage people to patrol on foot, especially during the day time. Having people walking the neighborhood is good for the neighborhood. Patrols will find they notice more things when they are walking because of the slower pace. It also gives them opportunities to engage their neighbors when they see them out. There is a great opportunity to build a sense of community with foot patrols while

## 1

**Block Builder**Section 4: Crime Prevention  
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making the neighborhood safe. There is still a need for vehicle-based patrols in large neighborhoods and during poor weather conditions.

**Encourage Home Safety**

The block captain can share tips with their neighbors during meetings, in newsletters, or special flyers dropped off to the neighbors. There are recommendations a captain can make to their neighbors to make their homes safer and less inviting to criminals.

**Lighting**

The number one deterrent to criminal behavior is lighting. Criminals do not want to be seen coming or going from the scene of the crime. They realize if they make a noise or someone happens to look out their window and they are standing in a lighted area, they will be identifiable. They look for houses they can approach and leave without anyone getting a good look at them.

The first step would be to get everyone to turn on their porch light at night. With the low energy light bulbs of today, it shouldn't increase power bills very much. A good investment will be motion activated lights aimed at the yard or the side of the house. Installing yard lights between the house and the sidewalk can illuminate more area to include the sidewalk/street area. With a large number of your neighbors utilizing yard lights, the street will appear very illuminated and can deter criminals from even considering the street.

**Doors and windows**

Secure doors and windows are the next step after proper lighting. Doors should be equipped with deadbolts to be truly secure. Well positioned peep holes are also a good for seeing who is knocking before opening the door. Storm doors can be installed for energy efficiency, but also come with a lock. This added layer of protection can help slow down or deter criminals if kept locked.

Windows are more difficult to secure due to their ease of being broken; however homeowners should still check windows before going to bed or leaving the house, especially when they have been opened to bring in fresh air.

**Alarms**

House alarms can be effective; however some police departments give them low priority unless someone can confirm a thief is actually breaking in. This confirmation could be from video cameras or a report from a neighbor. Still the sound of the

alarm itself can make a burglar run away from the house. If there is interest from your neighbors in getting alarm systems, you should consider inviting an alarm company to make a presentation to your group. Numerous customers may result in a discount for everyone in the neighborhood.

**Item identification**

Many stolen items end up in pawn shops. Today's pawn shops are very sophisticated in identifying stolen merchandise; however property owners must do some basic things. The first is to record any serial numbers of electronics. These will be given to the police if you are a victim of theft. These numbers can be entered into the system pawn shops use to check for stolen merchandise. Pawn shops are very good at checking numbers because they don't want to be accused of trafficking stolen merchandise. The problem is most people do not keep records so pawnshops have no idea. Without these numbers it is almost impossible to get your items back.

Another step an owner can do is to use an engraving tool to etch an identification number on the item. Police recommend your license number or even your address. These distinguishing marks can be put into the system and help everyone return the stolen merchandise to the owner.

**Vacations**

Many of you already know the likelihood of break-ins happening while you are on vacation. There are things you can do to make your property safer:

**Lighting**

Having a light on in the house helps the house look occupied. Using a timer would be the best. Thieves can notice your light on at 3:00 AM when the rest of the neighborhood is dark and snoop around to see if anyone is really home. A timed light can turn off at 11:00 PM and look natural. Also nightlights can also provide just a enough light in the house to make the thief have doubts.

**Mail**

If you will be gone for several days, have a neighbor pick up your mail. Wall hung mail boxes by the front door can be very noticeable when overstuffed with mail. This is a sign to thieves the owner is out of town. They simply wait until dark and break in with no fear of the occupants being home.

**Checking doors and windows**

If someone will be gone for a while, they should ask a neighbor to walk around the house every day to inspect windows and doors. They should check to make sure they are secure and don't have any signs of being tampered with. If a door or window is found unlocked, they should call the police to check it out. There is great potential for danger if the thief is still inside. Many break-ins happen during the day



# Block Builder

Section 4: Crime Prevention  
*Continued*

so the police should still be called. No one should enter a home where it appears someone has broken in. Let the trained police officers do this.

## Making the Street Safe

Home safety is very important, but neighbors want more than feeling safe in their home. Your neighbors want a safe street as well, where they can walk in the evening, kids can play in front yards, and people sitting on front porches enjoying the evening hours. To have this, the neighbors on your street will have to work at it. The following are ideas to secure your street:

### Yard lights

As stated previously, the street needs to be well lit. You will find the city is not interested in putting up a large number of public street lights just to illuminate your street. Homeowners will need to take it upon themselves to install lighting in their front yard designed to illuminate the sidewalk and part of the street. A well lit street is a safe street.

### Parking on streets

Today's residential streets are crowded with parked cars due to lifestyle changes resulting in each house having numerous vehicles. Vehicles on streets create a limited view of sidewalks and yards, making people uneasy. The block captains should encourage people to try to keep their cars off the street when possible. It also makes it a little more difficult for thieves to break into the vehicles by putting them closer to the house.

### Greeting Visitors

Criminals like to come and go unnoticed in a neighborhood. There is a very friendly way to make them feel uncomfortable on your street; smile and greet them! Say good morning or afternoon to everyone you encounter in your neighborhood and encourage your neighbors to do the same. You want everyone to know you have seen them and would likely recognize them later if necessary. Thieves trying to case the neighborhood may find the residents too alert and active for their liking.

### Vehicles

Vehicles play an important role in criminal activity. Criminals park either on the street where they are planning mischief or on the next block over. These cars may

appear suspicious to your neighbors because they don't look like they belong. Your neighbors need to get into the habit of writing down descriptions, license plate numbers, time, and dates of suspicious vehicles. It helps to be aware of what vehicles are common to the street. If nothing comes of it, then it was just a simple inconvenience. But if there was a break-in, then the information about the vehicle could lead to the arrest of the thief.

### Neighbor Walking Program

There is a fun community building activity your neighbors can do to make the neighborhood safer; have a neighborhood walk! Pick one evening of the week and let everyone know they should get out and walk through the neighborhood. It's good exercise and people will have the chance to encounter their neighbors. The larger the area, the more exciting the event becomes. You can also make quite a statement if you have people buy and wear neighborhood tee-shirts, letting everyone know you are an organized street. This can be a lot of fun.

### Times of Day/Night to be Alert

Many people think thieves operate at night; they do! However you would be surprised at how many operate in broad daylight. They look for neighborhoods void of activity during the day and find houses where everyone is at work or school. A break in at 1:30 in the afternoon is not uncommon.

The best defense are seniors and stay at home parents. Ask them to take walks during the day or keep their curtains open to monitor the street. If you have a neighborhood patrol, ask them to occasionally patrol during the day. Suspicious vehicles and people walking on the street are very easily seen. Don't let your guard down during the daytime.

## Communicating Crime Alerts

When there is someone suspicious on the street, or there has been criminal activity in the neighborhood, the block captain needs to get the word out. Today's technology is a definite advantage. Communication is a great thing but don't worry if you go a span of time without needing to send out a message, this is a good thing! Here are some ideas to get the word out:

### Email Blast

Collect everyone's email and promise them you won't send them messages unless it is important. You may want to make two separate email lists, one for general information and one strictly for crime prevention. Some may want to only be on the crime prevention list.

### Twitter



# Block Builder

Section 4: Crime Prevention  
*Continued*

This site is all the rage with young people and superstars letting us know where they ate lunch or what they think about current events. Block captains can use it for alerting people about safety issues. Today's consumers have smart phones, net books and other devices on all day to receive these types of notifications.

## Web Site

Use a web site to keep people informed. Posting articles or news alerts regarding suspicious vehicles, crime trends, and other useful information can be greatly appreciated by your neighbors.

## Flyers

The old fashion flyer is always a trusty way to go. Type up a crime update and make copies. Drop them off at everyone's door and let them know it is important to read the flyer when they see it on their porch.

## Phone Tree

A little old fashion but create a phone tree where you call three people with an alert and they do the same. No one has to make more than three calls and it can quickly cover hundreds of houses. Simply gather names and phone numbers at meetings and arrange them in groups of three.

## Conclusion

There are things you and your neighbors can do about crime. Your neighbors can provide the prevention and the police can provide the enforcement.



# Block Builder

## Section 5: Effective Block Captains

It won't be enough for you to point to a list of people who have volunteered to be block captains. They will need to be effective in getting things done.

There are some basic things a block captain can do to increase their success as a leader for their street. Having an agenda, knowing where to go for help, and getting excited about what you are doing can put you on the right path.

### Always Have an Agenda

Avoid planning a meeting without an agenda. People are very afraid of meetings going on forever or seem to have no direction. You, as a leader, must understand the meeting will take on a life of its own if you are not directing it. How can you direct if you don't have a clear picture of where you are going with the meeting?

The answer is to write up the topics you wish to cover and put them in the order you want to discuss them. Another good idea is to put people's names by the topics they will be speaking on. It gives them a feeling of importance and lets them know when you are going to call on them.

Try to stay on track, but understand we live in an imperfect world. A leader must keep the agenda in mind, while allowing good discussion to happen as it happens. Don't feel bad if you get off the agenda here and there. The idea is to get to all of the items you have identified and deal with the business you have intended.

### So You Don't Know Where to Go For Help?

Let us say you have just had your first meeting and there were several hot issues discussed. The meeting is over, leaving you to figure out what to do next. Don't just sit there; make a phone call. Depending on the topics you discussed at your meeting, there is probably one or more city departments or other agencies to assist you.

If you can figure out what government office you need to call, just do it. If you can't, just wing it! There is no right or wrong way to make the phone call. You will be surprised at how helpful the person on the other end of the phone call will be.

### Get Excited!

It never ceases to amaze me what people can do with just plain enthusiasm or excitement. Please understand people want to be with others who display excitement. Whether you are going up to a door of a neighbor for the first time or holding your 10th meeting in your neighborhood, show your excitement.

With excitement comes interest. With interest comes participation. With large numbers of people, anything is possible. So believe in what you are doing and show it. By stepping forward to be a block captain, you have already demonstrated you feel strongly about improving your block. Go all the way and let people see the smile on your face and hear the tone of your voice.

People do not want to follow a person who seems depressed or unsure of themselves.

### Don't Know What to Say? Get a Speaker!

After the first or second meeting, you are probably concerned about the content of future meetings. You may think, "I don't have anything to say to my neighbors, so there is no need to have a meeting". WRONG!

You need to keep the meetings going so people continue to bond together. Try having interesting speakers at each of your meetings. People love to have officials or speakers share what they do and how they do it. The list of speakers is endless. Try these:

#### Police Department

*Community Services*

*Metro Narcotics*

*Gang Unit*

*Graffiti Unit*

#### City Officials



# Block Builder

Section 5: Effective Block Captains  
*Continued*

## Public Works

Your County Officials

Health Department

Your Citywide Neighborhood Coalition

## Property Standards

Neighborhood Development

Neighborhood Group Board members

Members of other groups

This is a great way for people to learn more and it builds a relationship between your members and the resource people of our community.

## Your Second in Command

Do you want an easy way to burn out and give up on improving your neighborhood? It's simple, just do everything yourself. It won't take long before you just get mad at the people around you for not helping and just watching you.

However, if you want to be effective and in high spirits, recruit an assistant. This may be your best friend or just some one who seems more interested than the others. Approach the person about helping you on a few things.

Don't overwhelm the poor soul, just ask them to make some phone calls for you or to help set up for the meeting. Even the smallest things the person can do for you, will make the biggest impact when you feel there is so much to do and so little time.

Your second in command will grow in their abilities in time. Just try not to rush their progress or they will get overwhelmed just like you!

## Summary

Try to incorporate some of the suggestions mentioned here. Strong block captains are the desire of all neighborhood organizations. Neighborhood organizations need people who have the capacity to get things done. Your street will improve and you will feel a lot better about your neighborhood.

## Five Stages of Being an Effective Block Captain

Let us look at the five stages a person goes through in the process of being an effective block captain. These are not set in stone and many people do not get past the first stages. However, it is good to have an understanding of what should come next.

### Stage One

1. Declare your boundaries.
2. Talk to your immediate neighbors about starting a block watch.
3. Set a meeting time and place.
4. Create a flyer for the meeting and make copies.

### Stage Two

1. Knock on every door, talk to some one at each house and leave a flyer.
2. Hold the meeting, getting people to introduce themselves and discuss issues.
3. Write down all complaints, suggestions, or information discussed in the meeting.

### Stage Three

1. Contact City and County offices with the issues requiring their attention.
2. Start learning the ropes of working with your government agencies.
3. Hold update meetings with your neighbors to let them know what is going on with the issues you are pursuing.

### Stage Four

1. Celebrate your victories; keep pursuing your struggles.
2. Start to reach out to other groups in your area, use them as a resource.
3. Recruit a second in command; you are not enough.
4. Look for more training opportunities.

### Stage Five

1. Attend meetings of any citywide organization for neighborhoods.
2. Try to see the big picture, the need to keep doing the things you are working on and encourage others to do the same.



# Block Builder

## Section 6: Training the Block Captains

To have an effective organization utilizing block captains, you will have to train them how the organization works and what their role is.

Block captains will be key players in your organization. As you can see, they play an important role in the gathering of the residents in the form of house meetings. Later in the process, they will be leading their group of residents through activities to improve their street and neighborhood. When one considers the variety of activities to be performed by the groups, the training of the block captains can appear overwhelming.

The proper way to approach this is for the block captains to begin by learning some basic functions they can perform for their neighbors. They could then rely on the board members and staff of the larger organization to handle the more technical aspects of the Block Builder process. However, as their capacity to undertake activities increases, the board and staff need to slowly increase the block captains' training and responsibilities. This will lead to a second tier of leaders who are trained to assist in operating the organization.

### The Role of Block Captain

A block captain is a person who acts as a source of basic information for residents who live around them. By showing leadership in issues affecting his or her street, a block captain also becomes an asset to the larger organization.

People often are unaware of ways to approach neighborhood problems. Many times, people live with the problem for years rather than pursuing a remedy. There are many reasons for this type of behavior, however it all boils down to excuses. As a neighborhood organization, you must remove some of these excuses in order to prevent problems from occupying the neighborhood.

### The Role of the Organization Leader

Neighborhood organizations should be made up of numerous block groups represented by block captains. To bring order to this organization, an organization leader should be appointed or elected to lead the organization. Beyond organizing the overall neighborhood group, the organization leader should work to support the block captains. Some problems will seem overwhelming to the neighbor and the

block captain. The block captain needs someone to work with on these issues. The organization leader should fill this need by helping them in any way he or she can.

#### Dividing Problems Into Levels

By using a system to deal with problems, some structure can be given to this process. In this chapter, we divide problems up into three levels of problems. Level 1 problems are solvable by the Block Captain by using a list of people or departments to call. Level 2 problems are more difficult and requires the block captain to ask the organization leader for assistance. Level 3 problems require the action of the entire neighborhood organization and involves interaction with the organization leader and other block captains. In addition to the three levels, this chapter includes advice on some of the issues you will face as a block captain.

#### Dealing With Problems

In this section, you will find a basic framework for block captains to follow when dealing with the variety of problems. The levels divide things into different levels of difficulty. Block captains need to know what types of problems they are expected to handle themselves and when they need to bring in additional help.

#### Level 1 Problem

Examples: Cars parked in yard, witness to a crime, illegally parked cars, bulk item pick up, information on who to call, illegal dumping, barking dogs, excessive noise, graffiti, and other similar types of issues.

#### Action Steps:

1. Enter complaint in journal.
2. Use local government to find appropriate departments and phone numbers.
3. Ask the person to make the call to the appropriate department or agency.
4. Follow up on the complaint by calling the same number the next week.
5. Turn in weekly reports of activity to organization leader.

## 1

**Block Builder**Section 6: Training the Block Captain  
*Continued***Level 2 Problem**

Examples: Suspected drug activity, un-secured vacant houses, house in poor condition, un-mown lawns, gang activity, poor performance from landlords in managing their property, and other similar issues.

**Action Steps:**

1. Enter complaint in journal.
2. Collect as much information about the issue you can by talking to the complainant and other neighbors.
3. Contact organization leader.
4. Host block meeting to get neighbors involved.
5. Act as a go between for the organization leader and the residents on your block.

**Level 3 Problem**

Examples: unwanted major rezoning request, physical improvements of the neighborhood such as resurfacing streets, demolition of vacant buildings, failure of government departments or agencies to handle a request properly, and other similar issues.

**Action Steps:**

1. Enter the complaint in journal.
2. Contact organization leader and inform them of the issue.
3. Work with the leader and other block captains to create a strategy for solving the problem.
4. Host block meeting with residents to involve them in the process to address the issue.
5. Share work load with organization leader.

**Instructions To Residents From The Block Captain**

The block captain should instruct the residents to do things to keep the block captain informed. Some type of reporting sheet should be designed to prompt the resident for information. These could be distributed to residents to fill out if they see anything improper. They could then drop them off with the block captain after the

incident. At a block meeting, the block captain should instruct the residents to do the following:

Tell people to keep their eyes on the block. They should watch for:

- Suspicious vehicles
- Large amounts of traffic at a particular house or apartment
- People gathering at the same location repeatedly
- Kids creating disturbances
- Activity at houses when you know the owner is not home.

**When you see suspicious activity**

Fill out the report sheet with as much information as you have. The more information, the more likely the problem can be addressed. Call the block captain and let him or her know about the incident and you will be dropping off a report sheet. Take the sheet to the block captain's house at the next available time.

**Participation in the Phone Tree**

The block captain should create a phone tree connecting the neighbors on their street. The block captain will call several people with a message such as a meeting announcement or to alert people about an incident. Some people will be given one to three names and phone numbers to call and relay the message. If this is you, simply call the person and tell them who you are and repeat the message. It is a simple process and you will always be talking to a nearby neighbor you probably already know.

**Dealing with Drug Dealers**

The days of confronting drug dealers face to face are over. The criminals are armed and dangerous. We have professional police officers trained and willing to do this type activity. However, the police do not live in your neighborhood and cannot see what is happening on your street day after day. A block watch's function is to watch their streets and inform the police of the activity in the neighborhood. With this information they can be more effective. Here are some tips when working to close down drug houses:

Keep a record of all activity you witness at the suspected drug house. This includes license plates of visitors, descriptions of visitors, day of the week and time. If you can't see the license plate, write down the description of the car.

Watch for the hiding place of the drugs. Drug dealers will keep the drugs in cars, piles of junk, wood piles, garages, sheds, under the porch, garbage cans, and other places. If you see them go to one of these areas repeatedly when people are purchasing drugs, write it down.



# Block Builder

## Section 6: Training the Block Captain *Continued*

When the police are called, the block captain should use the phone tree to get people to come out of their house once the police are on the scene and the situation is under control. The residents should stand together so the criminals know it was the whole block who turned them in. Standing in a group also makes it hard for the criminals to see which houses people came out of.

There are other ways to close a drug house. Zoning, building codes, health codes, property standards are also tools to use in closing a drug house. The block captain and organization leader should contact these departments to get instruction on what is a violation. Neighbors can then report violations when they occur.

Keep the neighborhood clean and beautiful. Drug dealers do not like locating in stable neighborhoods. Keeping up the neighborhood may require offering to help a property owner who is physically unable to maintain their property. Getting neighbors together to assist each other is simply the best thing for a neighborhood.

Never confront or argue with drug dealers; it is not your job as a citizen. It is very important to leave this to the police. Our job is to supply information to the police.

Once you have cleared your block of drug houses and illegal activity, you need to stay on guard to prevent the activity from moving back in. Continue to have block meetings with your neighbors. Plan social activities such as cook-outs and chili suppers. Beware of the winter time, dealers move-in during this season. The winter keeps residents in their home and makes them inactive. Dealers stay mostly dormant during the cold months but watch out for the spring and summer when the drug traffic increases.



# Block Builder

## Section 7: Block Meetings

For those of you reading this manual, you may find yourself in one of several situations. You may be an experienced block captain, reading this for some new ideas. The situation may be you are completely new to this sort of thing and need some direction. You may also find yourself being a neighborhood organization wishing to improve your neighborhood by encouraging block captains.

Regardless of where you are starting from, you will most likely find yourself encouraging new block captains. For the sake of this manual, let us approach this as if you are a neighborhood organization trying to strengthen your neighborhood with block captains. In this chapter, we will discuss recruiting block captains and helping them with holding their first meeting.

The first meeting is key to the success of the Block Builder process. First impressions are lasting ones, so we must have something useful for neighbors to come out for. In the first chapter, we discussed the benefits of having a block captain. We stressed the need for the block captain to be a representative of the block he or she resides on. The block captain then, must know what the residents think is important. The first meeting will be about listening to neighbors, many of which you have not heard from at this point.

### Identifying Block Meeting Host

Most organizations have either few or no block captains. The organization then must move forward to identify potential block captains.

#### Is there a block watch?

The first question is whether there are existing block watches in the target area. This could save a lot of time in creating the building blocks of your organization. You should contact the local police department to see if they can tell you if any exist and who is the listed contact person.

If there are one or more block watches in the target area, you should set up a meeting with them. Working with an existing block watch can be very helpful, however there are some things you should keep in mind. The first would be

To have an effective organization, you will need to have block meetings on the streets of your neighborhood. But what about areas where you don't have any block groups.

neighborhood groups can be territorial. Implying you want them to join your organization could be taken in an offensive manner. You will need to stress you are looking for other groups to partner with to avoid alienating these groups. Groups must be able to maintain their independence and identity through the Neighborhood Builder process, if you intend for them to participate.

One problem with working with existing block watches would be their lack of activity in recent years. This may lead you to overlook working with them because they don't really seem to be a viable organization. This may or may not be true, but for your purpose, you need only a contact person who wants to improve their neighborhood. Through the Block Building process, block groups can be formed or reborn.

#### Who do you know?

If no group currently exist, you will need to identify someone who has leadership qualities. Try approaching someone who you have talked to while you gathered information about the neighborhood. You should try to find someone you know or have some type of connection with.

This person may not be interested in hosting a block meeting, but may know someone on the block more vocal or active in neighborhood issues. By following leads, you will eventually find someone who is interested in hosting a block meeting. You may not even find a leader of the group until the day of the first block meeting.

#### If You Can't Identify a Leader

If you have no luck in finding a host through the above mentioned activities, then some old fashioned door knocking is in order. Set a date, time, and place to gather the street's residents for a block meeting. For this first meeting, it could be a nearby church, park or vacant lot. Create a flyer with all of this information on it and make copies to bring with you.



## Block Builder

Section 7: Block Meetings  
*Continued*

### The Art of Door Knocking

To ensure a good turnout, everyone needs to know of the meeting. Putting out flyers announcing the meeting is one way to accomplish this. However, to make it more successful, The captain should knock on all of the doors on the street. Face to face contact is essential to getting people to come out for a meeting.

Having a resident of the street with you when you knock on doors further improves your chances of getting people to talk to you and to attend your meeting. Many times people will know the block captain by sight, but will not know their name or the person is their block captain. A great way to increase the participation even more is to carry on a short conversation about the neighborhood with the person who answers the door. If no one answers, then simply leave the flyer in their door. It is important to note at no time should you put an announcement in their mailbox, because this is against Federal law.

#### Are You Nervous?

Being frightened of knocking on doors on your street is natural. Sometimes you will know the people, but most times you will not. The key thing is to remember is you are doing something good for the neighborhood. When you tell people what you are doing, you will see their defenses drop and the speech you were planning to give turn into a nice conversation.

#### Work In Pairs

Knocking on doors by yourself can be done; however you are making it hard on yourself. You should get a neighbor, friend or a relative to go with you. This will make you feel much safer when you have to knock on a door you find uninviting. In addition to safety and feeling comfortable, having a partner assisting you really helps. Often people get very excitable and forget things they want to say. Having a partner listening to what you are saying and remembering the things you forget can be a more thorough method. Knowing you have someone “batting clean-up” for you has a relaxing effect on the inviter.

#### Have Flyers With You

The person doing the talking should have flyers to pass out to residents. Having something in your hands keeps them occupied. The flyer should have the date, time,

and location of the meeting. It is also a good idea to have the block captain's name and phone number on the flyer in case the resident cannot attend the meeting.

#### Extending the Invitation

As the block captain approaches the door, they should smile pleasantly. No one wants to open the door for someone who doesn't appear to be happy. Try to relax; this is just your neighbor. When someone comes to the door, introduce yourself and tell them you are the block captain for your street. Avoid trying to say everything at once by saying part of it and giving the person a chance to respond to what you say. Don't get concerned if you don't tell the person everything you wanted to say. You will find you are likely to leave things out. This is why you have your partner listening and ready to say anything you may have forgotten.

The partner should try to sense when you have hit a snag or are thinking of what to say. It is his or her job to fill in the gaps. Both the block captain and the partner should try to keep things brief and to the point, avoiding long speeches. Long speeches bore the resident and may discourage them from attending your meeting.

Most people will ask what the meeting is about. Tell them the group will discuss what they feel are the important issues on their street. Let them know how important their input would be at the meeting and how nice it will be for everyone to meet their neighbors.

You should end the conversation with instructions to bring their lawn chair because it will be out in the front yard and you don't have enough lawn chairs for everyone. While talking about the lawn chair, actually point towards the house the meeting will be held at. This let's them know it is not far from their house. You should also state you feel there will be a good turnout.

### Planning the Block Meetings

The following are tips for planning a block meeting. If you are helping a block captain get started you can help with these details.

#### Refreshments

Although this element of gathering the neighbors is probably the farthest from the captain's mind, it is still important to plan. The most important refreshment for a block meeting is having something to drink. In the summertime, when the weather is good for gathering outside someone's house, it is also hot. Offering a cold cup of lemonade or ice tea can be very inviting. You should also mention this when door knocking to let people know there will be refreshments.

Having refreshments available also puts a sort of social atmosphere on the event which helps people relax. Preparing some cookies could also be attractive to the crowd. When people are nervous, they like to keep busy; eating can keep their

## 1

**Block Builder**Section 7: Block Meetings  
*Continued*

hands occupied. This is important when you have people coming together for the first time.

Some block captains may consider having more elaborate refreshments to include a cook-out of some type. This is a good idea, but not necessarily for the first meeting. A second or third meeting would be better timing, so people could be asked to bring a dish to pass or contribute towards the expenses.

**Materials**

The most important item to have is a sign in sheet. Having a piece of paper with name, address, e-mail, and phone number across the top can establish who came and give you phone numbers to reach them. It may seem minor to mention, but make sure you have several pens with you. It is common to lose pens at meeting such as this.

Second, you should prepare a simple questionnaire for people to write down what they like and don't like about their street or block. You can do this on a half sheet of paper and it can be real simple. Do not put a line for them to put their name on it. It works the best if they feel it is anonymous.

A third thing you should have ready is a legal pad to write down comments and information you get from the audience. Don't try to be neat, because the comments will come quick and can be quite lengthy. Try to get the main point of what the people are saying.

**If you are assisting a new captain**

Having the block captain run the meeting themselves is an all around good idea. Most block captains may not be experienced in leading a meeting and all indicators will seem to point to you the outsider to run the meeting. After all, you may be a much better speaker than the block captain. As the outsider, you should avoid this.

The group is much more likely to survive over time if you force the block captain to be in charge. Your role should be to do a little hand holding with them to build their confidence.

1. Start by making out the agenda
2. Go over the agenda with the block captain
3. Stress they are not being called upon to give speeches or to say anything requiring memorization. As a matter of fact the idea is the residents are the

ones doing the most talking, the block captain is simply facilitating the meeting.

During the meeting itself, you should be ready to assist the block captain if they seem to falter or to forget what they are supposed to be doing. It is important once the meeting is back on track, you turn the control back over to the block captain.

**The Meeting**

These instructions are intended for whoever is running the meeting. The best scenario is for the block captain to run the meeting while being supported by either an organization leader or outside technical assistance.

**Time of day**

Time is important to a meeting. The best time is on a week night about 6:30 PM. People will be home from work and will be able to attend. People often eat dinner between 5:00 PM and 6:30 PM, so hopefully the meeting will not interrupt their meal. In the summer time, it stays light longer so darkness will not be an issue.

Saturdays can also be a good time. However, the time should change to late morning or early afternoon. Saturdays are also good for holding meetings in the winter time when it gets dark early.

**The host site**

The most practical location is the front yard of the block captain's house. There are several reasons for this. The first is everyone can see where it is and it doesn't require going into a stranger's house. Secondly, the gathering of people in a front yard can attract the attention of others who may be watching to see how many people show up before they decide to attend. One good thing to mention when inviting people is to tell them to bring a lawn chair. This provides sitting accommodations for the neighbors and adds to the neighborly atmosphere you are trying to instill.

**What should be discussed**

It is very tempting to simply ask what they think is wrong with their block, write everything down and adjourn the meeting. Although this would be very informing and useful to your assessment of the neighborhood, it trivializes the good things in the neighborhood. The captain should be building a foundation on what is good in the neighborhood.

The first thing is to ask for a round of introductions. This should be followed by a brief presentation about how the neighborhood residents could take their neighborhood and make it better. Be sure not to insult the residents by referring to



# Block Builder

## Section 7: Block Meetings *Continued*

their block as bad. Instead talk about taking a good neighborhood and working to make it better.

The next step is to just simply ask people what they like about their street or block. If people are hesitant, select a person in the audience and ask them directly. Encourage others to jump in with their comments about the good things on their block. Be sure to write these things down for future reference. Unfortunately, this part of the meeting will go quickly. Mostly because people are much more talkative about the negative things affecting their neighborhood.

What is wrong with the block is the next logical question. Again, you may have to prompt people to start the conversation. However, once started, it will most likely take on a life of its own. You should spend your time taking notes, nodding your head and giving general encouragement. Another good technique is to ask some probing questions about what a person is asking. You can also ask these questions to others in the group.

Captain: What do you think is the most pressing issue Mrs. Smith?  
Mrs. Smith: I think the flooding at the intersection is real bad.  
Captain: Does it occur when it rains real heavy or any amount of rain, Mrs. Smith?  
Mrs. Smith: Mostly on heavy rains.  
Captain: Mr. Jones, have you noticed this problem?  
Mr. Jones: I have and I think it is because the city doesn't send the street sweeper down our street.  
Captain: Ms. Johnson, you live at the corner, are the sewer openings clogged with debris?  
Ms. Johnson: I don't recall seeing anything covering the drains.

This is an example of how to ask questions to get more information and how to get the group to discuss an issue together. Residents who hear other people agree with their observations feel encouraged and are more likely to participate.

### Summary

This is a good way to get started. Future meetings can be put together in a similar manner. Meetings can be organized to focus on a particular concern or to simply give people an opportunity to get together.



# Block Builder

## Section 8: Creating the Block Profile

Many block captains try to keep everything happening on their street in their head. An effective captain has the information on paper. Creating a written profile of their street helps in many ways.

A block profile is a document you can create with the information gathered at the block meeting. Armed with this report, the block captain can refer to it when trying to understand the concerns of their people. Likewise, if the other block captains also create and share a block profile, then the captain will understand the concerns of the streets around their block.

### Summarizing Comments from Block Meetings

#### What is Useful

Block meetings can produce a multitude of information. During the course of the meeting, some very big issues can arise. At the same time, one can hear large amounts of smaller issues too. The question then becomes "What to do with this information? Is it all useful?"

The answer to the last question is yes. All information is useful to the Block Building process. When you omit things brought up at these block meetings, you are circumventing the grassroots process. By choosing what to include and what not to include, you are thereby setting the future agenda. This nullifies any attempt by the residents to take charge and improve what they see as important. For example:

A resident states at a meeting she is concerned about cats getting into her yard. A second resident remarks he hears dogs barking at night. The discussion leader feels there are more significant housing and crime problem in the neighborhood and therefore chooses to leave this comment out of the Block Profile.

The result is you have eliminated an opportunity to bring peace to the residents by making animal control a recognized issue in their neighborhood. You must remember you may be the outsider when operating away from the block you live on. If you do live on the street and are attempting to be the block captain, be careful not to assume you know everything going on within your block.

#### Tabulating Results

This section deals with the written comments from the block meetings. The questions on the handout asked for things they liked and disliked about their neighborhood. The first thing is to separate them into these two categories by listing them separately. As you write them down, put a number by each one for the number of times it was mentioned on the forms. If two responses are somewhat similar, try to combine them. The result should look like the following:

#### Liked

Neighbors	4
Streets in good shape	2
Low taxes	3
Low property values	3

#### Disliked

Suspected drug house/ related activity	6
Garbage	5
Speeding cars	4
Dogs Barking	1

As you can see by the numbers in the previous chart, some issues scored more votes than others. Do not worry about the total numbers in each column. This is not an exact science, nor does it need to be. The goal is to list and prioritize the concerns, not to determine the agenda of the residents at this time.

These results need to be typed up in a table form similar to the following pages. The first page is more of a worksheet to help you get a handle on what needs to be done. The second sheet carries over some of the information you entered in the first sheet. The second sheet is a little more formal, but can act as an informative sheet for all the neighbors on your street. This can be done in a word processing or a spreadsheet program. Furthermore, a narrative should be written to summarize the findings. Using the previous table, the following page is an example of the summary:



# Block Builder

Section 8: Creating the Block Profile  
*Continued*

## Neighbor Survey Results

**Things Found To Be Good**

**What Should Be Done To Build On This**

**Who Will Take Action**

**When Will It Be Done**

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**Things Found To Be Bad**

**What Should Be Done To Correct This**

**Who Will Take Action**

**When Will It Be Done**

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# 1

## Block Builder

Section 8: Creating the Block Profile  
*Continued*

<b>Strengths</b>	4. Near highway access
1. Houses in good condition	<b>Issues</b>
2. Near parks	1. Broken street lights
3. Neighborhood School	2. Suspected drug activity
	3. Property maintenance

### Current Activity

Issue	Solution	Responsibility
Broken Street lights	Call power company and register a complaint	Neighbors
Suspected Drug Activity	Metro Narcotics will investigate and then make arrest if necessary	Police
	Circulate flyers informing there is a block watch and for everyone to report suspicious activity to the police.	Neighbors
Property Maintenance	Neighborhood Management flyers to be circulated to remind people of expectations.	Neighbors

### Future Activity

<b>Activities</b>	<b>Projected Dates</b>
Block Party	August
Chili Party	January
Neighborhood Training	April

<b>Leaders</b>		
Bill Smith	701 Houston St.	123-555-5555
Oscar Williams	725 Houston St.	123-555-9999
<b>Active Members</b>		
Susan Wilson	705 Houston St.	123-555-8888
Joe Briggs	714 Houston St.	123-555-2222
Lucy Arnez	728 Houston St.	123-555-4444
Billy Bob	735 Houston St.	123-555-8899
Shelly Swanson	738 Houston St.	123-555-8722



# Block Builder

## Section 9: The Solutions Meeting

It is not enough to simply get the neighbors to say what the negatives are; they also need to discuss and understand the solutions.

So far we have asked people what they like and dislike about the street they live on. At this point, we most likely have not broken any new ground with the participants. They have attended meetings before where they have voiced their concerns. This is the point where we take them in a new direction.

In this chapter, we will learn about conducting a "Solutions" meeting. You will be getting input from the very residents who have complained about the issues we are now trying to solve. Identifying problems is an easy process, thinking about how to solve them takes a lot more effort. However, residents have already thought about how to solve these problems. This previous pondering by the resident, supplemented with input from other residents can produce a possible solution to the problem. The solution can be further improved by fine tuning it with advice by experts in the related field of the issue.

### For Example:

Street lighting is targeted as an issue on the street by Mr. Smith. During the solutions meeting, he points out the street needs three more street lights to make the street safe. Ms. Williams adds she believes the trees around the existing lights need to be trimmed back to allow the light to reach the streets and sidewalks. The solution is to get the trees trimmed and add more street lights. Upon presenting the solution to a public works employee, the group learns after trimming the trees around the existing lights, only two more would be required to produce adequate light. Furthermore, he points out the proper location on the map for the lights.

This example illustrates how one person can produce the main thrust of a solution and how others can improve it. Sometimes, no viable solution is produced for an issue through this process. In which case, some research on the issue may be called for.

## Before The Meeting

Although putting a lot of effort into planning your meeting is important, time spent on getting people to come to the meeting will be well spent. The block captain and leader should not take the invitation process lightly.

### How to contact people

Although you possess the phone numbers of the people who came to your first meeting, it is still a good idea to knock on doors to invite people to the second meeting. Until you build up a relationship with all of your neighbors, face to face contact will get the best results. Again, create a flyer with the time and place to give people or to leave at doors where no one is home.

### Materials

You should have a large writing tablet available such as newsprint. Different colored markers should also be on hand. Always have a sign in sheet, due to new people joining the meeting previously not in attendance. Refreshments should also be offered.

### Running The Meeting

In the entertainment business, this is known as show time. Again the organization leader should work with the block captain to practice for the meeting. The meeting should include the following topics:

### Presentation of the Block Profile

The Block Captain should discuss the results of the previous meeting as it is presented in the Block Profile. A good thing would be to point out the issues receiving the most votes, both good and bad. After going over the block profile, the block captain should see if everyone is agreement on the issues discussed at the last meeting.



# Block Builder

## Section 9: The Solutions Meeting *Continued*

Next the captain should announce the rest of the meeting is going to dwell on producing solutions to the problems. Furthermore, the Block Captain should inform the attendees their is the primary way solutions will be found.

### Talking about solutions

The Block Captain should read issues off the list one-by-one. For each negative issue, the group should discuss what are some possible solutions. These solutions could require action by the residents, local government, or non profits. As solutions are agreed upon as feasible, then they should be listed on the newsprint. It is also a good idea to list several solutions for any given problem. It may be hard to get 100% agreement on solutions, however if there is a substantial amount of approval of the solutions, they should be listed on the sheet.

Once all of the solutions are listed, the block captain and the group should write down who has the ability to accomplish each solution. It may be a city department, an area nonprofit, or the residents themselves. When writing down “residents” as the group to solve the problem, some thought should be given to whether it should be done by the overall neighborhood organization or the block group itself.

### Closing the Meeting

Once the solutions are listed and organizations are designated to perform the solution, you should discuss the next step. The block captain should announce the work done at the meeting would be put in the form of a solutions document. In this document will be a strategy to get action on the solutions identified by the group.

The block captain should also point out to the group if they see any of these solutions occurring, they should attribute them to their efforts of their block watch. Some discussion should occur about the next meeting date and time. The next meeting should be a month after the solutions meeting to give the block captain a chance to create a strategy and start acting on it. At the next meeting the captain can give a report on his or her activities and what the people need to do.

### Creating The Solutions Document

The information you have gathered is quite interesting. This section discusses how to break it down so it is useful.

### Dividing The Solutions

Following the meeting you will have a list of issues, possible solutions, and who is going to perform the solution. These will be separated into three groups Grassroots, Non Profit, or Government. This groups the activity by who is going to perform the solution. When finished, the neighbors can see exactly what they are going to do and what others are going to do.

Grassroots means the people on the street are performing the activity such as painting a house on the street. “Non profit” is assigned when the task requires a non profit organization to perform a service on the street such as renovating housing. Government is indicated when it requires putting in street lights, repaving the street, or increasing city services.

### Creating The Chart

This information should be organized so it is easy to be read by all. To accomplish this, a chart format should be created. The following example illustrates the chart format for the Street Level solutions. Notice how easy it is to read the chart due to being very brief in descriptions. There will be more room for explanations in the narrative portion of the Solutions Documents.

#### Example: Grassroots

Issue	Solution	Time
Lighting	Residents identify where lights should go	Short
Lighting	Residents identify trees that are blocking	Short
Lighting	Residents encourage people to have own Porch or yard lights on at night	Medium
Boarded Houses	Residents identify vacant houses	Short
Boarded Houses	Residents put on celebration for either the Start of Construction or Finish. Maybe have an activity day to perform general yard work on house	Medium
Sidewalks	Residents hold fund-raisers to raise money for 50% match	Medium
Loud Stereos	Block Group sends letter to all homes explaining their visitors should be told to lower there stereo's when visiting their Block	Short
Loud Stereos	Repeat offenders will have their license number recorded and turned over to Police	Short
Trespassing	Call Police, ensure vacant buildings are boarded-up	Short



# Block Builder

## Section 10: Informational Topic Meetings

Before pursuing the problems identified in the issues and solutions meetings, you must first find out more about them to create a base of knowledge. Even if you or another leader feel they are well informed on the topic, others in the group may not be. A group can only travel as fast as their slowest member. This may be an exaggeration, but the leader's efforts may soon become a one-person crusade failing to build the organization if they are the only ones "in the know".

The answer is to find knowledgeable people able to give your group a basic understanding of the topic. The issue may be about graffiti, abandoned houses, gangs, or other similar issues. The leadership must look over the notes from the previous meetings and determine the topics to be explored. Then a great deal of work will need to be done on identifying speakers and arranging an informational meeting.

### Selecting topics

There will be several large topic areas to choose from. Avoid the feeling you need to do them all at once or in rapid succession. The important thing is to get the ball rolling.

#### What is the most pressing issue

Start by looking back at what seemed to come up as the most pressing issues. This is likely to be crime, abandoned houses, or something else of serious nature. However, do not be disturbed if a topic like loud music from cars is the most talked about issue. You may be hungry to tear into a more substantial issue, but the residents need to set the order of the topics. Besides, if the issue is small and somewhat easy to solve, the group will gain a lot of momentum quickly.

#### Can some issues be discussed together

If the residents identify gang activity, drug houses, and graffiti as issues, even if they see some as more pressing than others, you should group these together. Speakers on drug houses may also be knowledgeable about gang activity in the area and what is being done to reduce it.

When the neighbor's issues can be addressed by simply making a phone call or other type of request, the block captains should handle it with their neighbors and work on complex issues with their larger neighborhood organization

By addressing multiple topics in one meeting, you are saving your residents' valuable time. Most people are not interested in coming out every week for a meeting and if you waste their time by stringing out the meetings they will quickly lose their drive.

### Getting the Panel of Experts

The organization needs to identify and invite speakers on the various topics. You will find by advertising the speakers and their titles, you will get a good response from the residents. So the question is, where to start.

#### Crime

Most police departments have some type of community liaison/relations officer to work with the public. This would be the place to start in getting speakers on crime prevention. Simply contact the police representative by calling the non emergency police number and asking for the phone number of the person assigned to working with block watches or public relations. When you reach this person, explain who you are and your desire to meet with them to discuss your neighborhood. Avoid inviting them to a neighborhood forum without meeting with them first.

By meeting with the officer first, you gain two things: a chance to get a good impression of the officer and a chance to start a relationship before the big meeting. Not every police officer will perform well in front of a neighborhood group. You need to get to know them so you have some type of idea if he or she will be stiff and formal or friendly and easy going. This may affect how you utilize the officer in your public meeting on crime prevention. If the officer's attitude or personality seems lacking, ask them if they could arrange several other officers to join him or her at the meeting.

Asking for representatives from the narcotics, tactical team, or community policing division could provide more speakers who may be more dynamic than the public relations officer if necessary. The different divisions in the department will be very interesting to the audience. A very interesting speaker could be from the division

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**Block Builder**Section 10: Informational Topic Meetings  
*Continued*

responsible for graffiti removal, who could inform people about what the graffiti means. This has proven very popular at other meetings.

By meeting with the police officer prior to a large meeting, you can ease their fears of walking into a hostile crowd. If you explain your organization wants to know more about the crime occurring in their neighborhood and not to question them about past negative experiences with the police, the officer will be more receptive. As the facilitator of the meeting, your job will be to keep the meeting from becoming a gripe session. Your goal will be to give your residents a true picture of what crime is occurring in the neighborhood. From this information you can develop strategies with the police department.

**Housing**

To find speakers about housing redevelopment, you should start with the local organization of Real Estate professionals. This is sometimes called the Board of Realtors and you could get the phone number from any real estate agent. When you call, ask for to speak with either the director or a person who is familiar with local efforts in affordable housing. Local Realtors either know something about the topics of housing renovation or development, or they at least know someone who does.

For a good discussion on the topic, you should have representatives of both for-profit and not-for-profit professionals and several representatives from the local city government. This would include a building inspector and someone who works with any housing-based grants. The result is a well rounded group to discuss the topic of what to do with the neighborhoods housing.

You may not need to meet with each one of these speakers but you should send them a written description of the purpose of the meeting and the boundaries of your neighborhood. This gives them some idea of what direction the discussion may go.

**City Services**

Your city council person would be the first person to contact to speak about city services for your area. You can contact them through your local city hall by calling the mayor's office. When you reach your council person, identify yourself as a neighborhood organization within their district and you would like to meet with them about an upcoming meeting you want to plan.

By explaining you want to get the residents involved to improve the neighborhood, you should see at least some level of interest, if not great enthusiasm. Ask them if

they could get a small panel of representatives from Public Works, Sanitation, Zoning and Building, and the Planning Department. Let the council person know you want the representatives to speak about how their department could be involved in stabilizing and improving your particular neighborhood. Again, you should provide the neighborhood boundaries to the city council member so they can pass this on to the representatives. The more specific the conversation about the actual neighborhood the better the event will go.

**Youth**

Getting youth involved in your effort or providing youth activities to keep them occupied is not an easy undertaking. The best place to start is to get local providers of youth activity to educate your group about what is already existing and how well it is utilized. Furthermore, people who work with young people could maybe discuss with your group how young people think. This would be crucial if your group intends to provide youth based activities. It would not be unheard of if activities were planned but no young people attended.

You should not take young people for granted and, as a reminder, remember it has been some time since you were in their shoes. Good places to start is to contact the local community centers. Even if the center is far from your neighborhood, they probably know the organizations operating in your neighborhood. Invite these groups to speak about what is being offered and what is needed. They will have pretty good ideas based upon their interaction with children and young people.

**Materials needed**

The materials needed to host a neighborhood meeting can be quite simple. However, if you forget an item, it can easily disrupt a meeting. Beyond the presence of chairs and maybe some tables, some form of device will be necessary to write on. Sometimes your room may have either a blackboard or marker board. This can work rather well, as long as someone is taking notes on notebook paper. After a while there will be a need to erase the board to write more things and it will be important for the notes to be recorded prior to erasing.

If there is no chalkboard, you should use something called newsprint. These are large white sheets of paper usually found in a large tablet designed to be placed on a tripod to write on. As people make important points, they should be written with a large marker so people in the audience can keep track of them.

During these meetings, the organization leader should have information documents about the neighborhood. This may be simply be a stack or notebook of what the block captain has gathered over time. This would allow them to field as many of the questions as he or she can. This will also aide in the confidence level for the leader



# Block Builder

## Section 10: Informational Topic Meetings *Continued*

when questions come up. Having a large neighborhood map is very useful to discussions involving a particular street or area of the neighborhood.

### Running The Meeting

The best scenario for the meeting is for the organization leader to run the meeting. The leader should follow this basic outline:

#### Introduction

The organization leader should begin the meeting by introducing themselves and give a one to two minute overview of what the neighborhood group wants to accomplish. They should then go on to explain the purpose of the meeting. The leader should then introduce the panel of speakers, giving their name, job title, and organization. Each speaker should then give a short presentation on what they do in the course of their job. Once the speakers finish, the leader should call upon each block captain to discuss their street's problems as they relate to the speakers.

#### Block Captain Presentation of Problem

The block captains should make a quick presentation of their block with regard to the topic being addressed at the meeting. For example, if the topic is Crime Prevention, then a block captain should discuss what are the crime related problems on their street. The block captains should use the block profile generated in the street meetings as a reminder of the issues their fellow residents identified. Furthermore, the block captain should announce what solutions were discussed at their solutions meeting. The block captain should then ask the panel of speakers how they could assist the residents with their proposed solution.

As each block captain is called upon, the organization leader should point out on a large map where the person's street is. Be sure the speakers can see the area so they can picture in their mind the location being discussed.

#### Response From Panel

The speakers should address the block captains regarding the issues they raise. They should provide background information to either the specific problem or the process in place to address the issue. The organization leader should monitor the interaction between the audience and the speakers to make sure people avoid accusing or becoming defensive. The whole idea of the meeting is to become better informed.

### Brainstorming Solutions

After the discussion of problems, the organization leader should lead the group to formulate solutions. The audience needs to take what the speakers spoke of and discuss how they will address the problems in their neighborhood and on their streets. Good note taking during discussion is very important. This is not the time to decide whether an idea is feasible, but simply to list them out. Later, after the ideas have been presented, the leader should work with the group to select the most likely solutions.

After having a series of meetings, you might wonder where is this effort going.



# Block Builder

## Section 11: Great, But Now What?

So far, this has been a nice approach to neighborhood organizing. It is now time to maximize your efforts. The key to any activity such as this is the follow up. Saying you will work on the issue of a boarded-up house is not the same as doing it. Beyond the immediate, your organization needs to continue on as things get taken care of. There will always be new things to deal with, some small . . . some large. The only way you will make this effort successful is by focusing on how to keep this movement going.

### What if you have one or more staff?

There are some groups lucky enough to have a paid staff member. Usually they are the director for the group. If the group has a paid staff, things can get done in a more efficient manner than just relying on volunteers. The staff member should be used to leverage more volunteers to do the work. This is a good model to follow instead of relying more on the staff member to do all the work identified for volunteers. There are several mentions of staff from this point on, but the system works just fine without them.

### Keeping Things Going

The important element, necessary for the organization to continue as a functioning group of people, is for everyone to know their roles. It is important to understand the role of the president, the board and the block leaders in keeping everything running.

### What is your role?

As the block /organizational leader, you need to move forward. This can be a very blind time for you. You have just taken people through a series of meetings where you seemed to be in complete control. The steps were easy and you just followed the manual. Great.... but now what? You need to understand your role.

### Take care of your assignments

The solutions document is a great plan of action. However, at this point you have not done anything not already talked about. You need to spur people into action. The best way is to lead by example. Start doing the things you believe are your responsibilities. You need to do the task but also inform the block captain what you are doing. Your actions should inspire them to take on the tasks they have been assigned.

### Provide encouragement

To say your block captains are new to this activity is an understatement. Leading by example does wonders for their morale. You still need to focus on encouragement and motivation of these block captains. Help them identify what their first action should be and let them know your confidence in them. When they complete an action, let them know how great an accomplishment it was. Explain how their activity and what you are doing ties together. They then get to see the big picture. This stretches their vision of what is possible, leading them to work to complete other tasks on the solutions list.

Let us talk about your encouragement needs. As the leader, working on helping a street of residents makes you feel good. If your block captain does something on the list, you will congratulate them and make them feel good about themselves. Something very dynamic happens at this point. Your level of confidence and accomplishment receives a terrific boost. You will actually feed off of someone else's accomplishments, which will drive you to do more. This will be your first taste of true power in this process.

### Meet with your block captains

This is a beautiful picture we are painting of cooperation and getting things done. The greatest threat to this picture is failing to maintain the level of interest within your block captains. There needs to be monthly meetings with your block captains to pump them up. Use these meetings to find out what roadblocks they are experiencing. You need to give advice and, in some cases, get directly involved in



# Block Builder

## Section 11: Great, But Now What *Continued*

their activities. The biggest thing you need to avoid is taking over a task just because the block captain is not doing it. The block captain doesn't learn from this and it sets you back by making you do all the work. The block builder strategy is to keep you from doing everything yourself.

### What is your board members role?

Your organization may or may not have a board of directors or representatives. If you do have a board, they may also be your potential block captains. This would be a very good scenario because as you build their capacity as block captains, they will become better board members. However, if your board members are separate from your block captains, there should be a role for them.

One exciting activity for meetings is for the board members to call for reports from block captains. This accomplishes several things for your organization. It establishes the chain of leadership by having the captains report to the governing body of the organization. Second, it gives the block captains a feeling of responsibility. They realize if they don't stay on top of things on their street, they will have nothing to say when called upon. When they hear from other captains, they get excited about what they are hearing and what they could get done on their street. In addition to the benefits to the block captains, all people attending your meeting get a quick picture of what is happening in the larger neighborhood.

The board members need to be focused on the big picture and not drawn into the day to day operations of the neighborhood. They need to hear what is happening and offer advice. Board members could direct staff, if there are any, to assist the captains as problems are discussed. The role of the board members is to summarize what they have heard through these reports and put a positive spin on the discussion. It may be the reports discussed negative issues, but if the block captains are also getting things done to correct problems, then the progress should be promoted.

"As Charlie and Jean have said, we have several drug houses in our North West corner. However, Jean also told how she got the vacant lot mowed. This is a good thing for the residents on Elm Street. We need to be looking at our problems separately and solving them. Today, we have improved a vacant lot, tomorrow we will focus on clearing out one of the two drug houses. From there, we will continue until our neighborhood is like we want it!"

Always remember, people like to be recognized. Board members must publicly support all of their efforts and pay tribute to their accomplishments. Now we would all applaud a block captain for getting a vacant house renovated. Would we also applaud a captain who hosted a block meeting to discuss the street? Well we should. It is not easy for some one to leave their comfort zone and invite people to a meeting and speak to them. We must recognize people when they perform their duties as a block captain, no matter how small the activity is. The result will be a desire by the block captain to do bigger and better things.

The board members should also ensure staff members, if there are any, are assisting the block captains. Although you want to let the block captain show initiative and address the issues on their street, the staff should be working with them. For example, you may want the captain to make a call to public works. However, a daytime meeting is necessary to move forward on the issue. If the block captain cannot attend a day time meeting, then a staff member or board member should attend the meeting on their behalf.

### Provide training

In an earlier chapter of this manual, there are instructions to becoming a block captain. Your organization should create a training event where your potential block captains can go to learn about their role. Furthermore, the training should be announced city wide to get more people trained as block captains.

One idea would be to make contact with the police officer assigned to block watches in your local police department. Let them read this manual regarding what a block captain should know. They may have more ideas and could take the lead in putting together a training session for block captains. If your organization has to do it, simply present the information in the chapter on being a block captain.

Advanced training would also be required for block captains who have attended your training. You should create similar training sessions on new topics such as:

- How to invite people to your meetings
- How to run a block or organization meeting
- How to work with city departments to get things done

### Give encouragement

An organization leader or board should not take activities of block captains lightly. At meetings, ask the block captains what they have been doing or what they plan to do. Upon hearing this report, give them encouragement. You can say things like "that's wonderful!" or "It sounds like you are starting to get things done!". After all the block captains have reported, ask the group to give them a hand and applaud their efforts.

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# Block Builder

## Section 11: Great, But Now What *Continued*

Beyond your encouragement, listen closely to what they are working on. You may identify a way in which to help the block captain. For example, the captain states she is trying to organize a block clean-up day. You may have had a good experience with your own clean up and you might offer to assist her in planning the event. This is very important in several ways:

- It establishes why block captains should belong to a larger organization. The larger group exposes them to more resources and information than what they have as a small block watch.
- The block captain will no longer feel they are alone in organizing their neighbors and will actually be motivated to do more.
- The leader/board member offered to help, not to take the lead. Notice in the example, the board member did not volunteer to run their block watch, only for a particular short term role.
- The board member is setting the standard to which the other board members will attempt to mirror.

### Let them know what is happening

Asking for reports puts block captains on the spot by asking them to report their activities. The same needs to be true of the board and staff. Within the agenda, there needs to be a point in which the staff announces what they have been working on in the past month and will be working on in the future.

The role of the board members should be to keep up with what is happening locally. Board members need to attend area wide meetings to give reports to the neighbors of what is happening with other groups. This should also occur at neighborhood meetings. Between hearing reports from block captains, staff and board members, people should get an overall picture of the "neighborhood scene", which will hopefully inspire them to more activity.

### What is the role of the block captains?

Block captains need to pursue the solutions laid out in their solutions chart. A short list of block captain activities should be included in the solutions chart. The block captain should work down the list one by one. If they run into trouble completing a particular task, they should contact a staff member or organization leader for assistance. Block captains should also check on what other people are supposed to be doing on their behalf. For instance, if the council person said they would tell the street cleaning crew to clean your street, the captain should call to find out if the cleaning is going to happen.

Block captains who do not hold block meetings are really not block captains. They are simply people getting things done on a street. A block captain has the support of his or her neighbors, which is important when there is work to be done. In order to have this support, the block captain must get the residents together to discuss things. Giving people a voice in how their block improves will build the level of support needed by the captain. The captain needs two main things from these block meetings: new information and encouragement from their neighbors.

Having block captains give reports to the organization at monthly meetings is important. Block captains need to look at this as a time to brag a little about their activity, seek help on difficult issues, and a chance to hear from other captains. When this happens, a feeling of camaraderie between the block captains occurs.

Most of all block captains must be leaders. They need to remain positive and focused on getting things done. The best leaders lead by example. You cannot expect your neighbors to be positive about getting something done when their leader is saying negative things.

### What if Your Overall Neighborhood is Large?

It is recommended you start with a small area for your overall organization and slowly enlarge your boundaries. Often groups have already determined their area prior to this process and it is rather large. There is no need to panic if it seems you have bitten off more than your group can chew.

Here are some thoughts to ponder in your group if your neighborhood is large (comprised of more than ten blocks or streets). The first is you will likely find yourself unable to identify one thing you could do for the neighborhood to make a substantial difference to all residents of your area. Second, your membership may be high in number, but will not be evenly distributed in the neighborhood. If things are not happening in the immediate area of where your members live, they will lose interest in your group.

#### **Divide your neighborhood into smaller sections**

With this in mind, I recommend you divide your neighborhood into smaller sections and focus on them one at a time. Start with your first sub area or target area and begin the Block Builder Process. After block captains have formed on several of the streets and you have a person to continue the process, consider starting the second target area. This may be a slow process, but will create lasting affects on your neighborhood and organization.

It will be important to explain this dividing process to the members of your organization. They need to see the logic involved and should be excited when the process reaches the target area they reside in. Members need to realize this will take time. For those members who are impatient, they can take the time to learn



# Block Builder

## Section 11: Great, But Now What *Continued*

this process and start it in on their block themselves. However, if they chose to start in this manner, they should make a commitment to work with adjacent streets.

### **Create leaders for the smaller sections**

As the target area or sub area of your neighborhood increases the number of block captains, you will need to start thinking of creating leaders of the sub-areas. The most logical approach would be to promote the most capable block captain to this position. The other block captains will have respect for this new leader because they are aware of the leader's accomplishments and the person lives in close proximity to their street.

The area should also have some sort of name. It could be given a simple names such as Area A, B, or C. However, you may want to give it a real neighborhood name such as Forest- State Neighborhood because two of the main streets within the area are Forest Avenue and State Street. Other names could come from what the area is historically known for. For instance, a name such as Morrison Neighborhood could be the name if the subdivision was given the name Morrison after the developer Joe Morrison. The goal should be to create leadership and a sense of identity for the group of block captains.

The long term affect of this action could change the way your organization is designed. For example if all the block captains look to their area leader for direction and assistance, shouldn't this leader become a board member in your overall neighborhood organization? This could lead to every board member representing a sub area of your neighborhood and would be supported by several block captains. This could dramatically strengthen your neighborhood group.

### **What is the Role of Section Leader?**

So, you have elected a person to be a section leader over several block captains. The question now becomes, what does a section leader do. A section leader should do the following:

- Keep in touch with all block captains
- Monitor each street's progress based upon their solutions chart
- Provide advice whenever possible

### **Keep in touch with all block captains**

Section leaders need to hold regular meetings with only the block captains of their section. This could be once a month or every two months. The section leader should provide encouragement to their block captains to keep them motivated. During the first year, the section leader should call each block captain each week to find out what is happening on each street.

### **Monitor each street's progress with their solutions chart**

As streets complete the Block Builder process, the section leader should have a copy of the block profile and solutions chart for each street. The section leader should study the solutions chart and determine if the block captain is making any progress towards the stated goals. This can be determined by walking down each street and identifying the issues outlined in the solutions chart to see if things are getting corrected. Also, during conversations with the block captains, the section leader can find out what the block captain is working on. If needed, the section leader needs to identify ways to assist the block captain. The section leader needs to be careful not to simply do the work of the block captain.

## Summary

Running an organization can be difficult at times. However, if you are armed with a system such as the Neighborhood Builder process, you can avoid many of the problems plaguing neighborhood groups. Knowing who does what, providing encouragement, and building leadership in others could be the difference between success and failure. Organization Builder

The block captain process outlined in the Block Builder section of this manual does a great job of focusing on the micro level; however there are many references to a neighborhood group. The remainder of the is book is focused on building a strong neighborhood organization. The first chapters center on common issues facing neighborhood groups such as attendance and getting things done through committees. Organization Builder then finishes up with a section devoted to the leaders who will try to keep the organization going. It is my hope the entire neighborhood builder inspires you to improve your current organization or to start one from scratch. I cannot put all I have learned in a single book, but I have tried to put together a coherent path for you to follow.

# 2

## Organization Builder

### Section 1: Introduction

The block captain process outlined in the Block Builder section of this manual does a great job of focusing on the micro level; however there are many references to a neighborhood group. The remainder of the is book is focused on building a strong neighborhood organization. The first chapters center on common issues facing neighborhood groups such as attendance and getting things done through committees. Organization Builder then finishes up with a section devoted to the leaders who will try to keep the organization going. It is my hope the entire neighborhood builder inspires you to improve your current organization or to start one from scratch. I cannot put all I have learned in a single book, but I have tried to put together a coherent path for you to follow.

# 2

## Organization Builder

### Section 2: Increased Attendance

So your meeting attendance is a little off? You have tried everything from personal invitations to door prizes with little change. Yes, you had the one or two big meetings, but since then low attendance. Don't be discouraged; you're just doing it wrong. Wrong! Whatever do I mean?

Let us take a different approach. If you were starting a business and made an announcement in the local business section of the paper, would you expect to have thousands of customers? Probably not. What is missing is action. A business could not build a customer base until it could prove to the initial customers it could deliver. Once it did, the business could start to grow. It would still have obstacles to overcome, such as competition, the need for more staff, and other similar factors of business. Let us look at the obstacles facing neighborhood groups:

#### **Lack of visibility**

If your neighborhood covers an area of 3,000 people, how many would know you exist? Most likely very few people are aware unless you have had some high profile events. Do you know what gets people to notice you? ACTION. You can have all the well-meaning people in your group, but without some type of action, people will not know you are there.

If you want people to join your group, you must have visibility. But as you will see later on, this is just part of the ingredients you will need.

#### **Prior experiences of lack of action**

We asked Mrs. Mary Better-Than-You why she stopped coming to your group and she said all you did was talk. This is a common occurrence in neighborhood groups. Like most groups, I bet you could list ten reasons why we should not pay attention to Mary. Don't focus on the fact Mary never did anything either. Pay attention to the fact Mary might be right.

Not long after getting your big group started, the less driven will fall out, leaving you with only a few of the die-hards. You curse at the fall-outs and praise the die-hards. Wrong! The die-hards are there because they feel sorry for you or they believe in

The importance of good attendance at neighborhood meetings can not be stressed enough. One of the first questions most people will ask you when you talk about your organization is “how many people are in your group?”

your cause, not because you are making progress. This is hard to take, but it is true. If you had progress, the others would still be around the table.

#### **Life's busy schedule**

Ever feel down when people tell you they are leaving town for the weekend and cannot make your meeting? Or how about they are just busy and can't make it? You feel torn inside because you want to get them to your meeting, but you understand their reason. As a neighborhood leader, it is not for you to determine what excuses are legitimate and which ones stink. Your job is to create such an exciting meeting people rearrange their schedule to make your meeting.

I always know when I am on to something when the person I am inviting tells me they will make an excuse to get out of one activity in order to be at mine. Forget analyzing what people are telling you. Action is everything. You must prove your group is about action and they must prove they are with you by showing up when you call them.

#### **The meaning of ACTION**

Action is not a meeting. Action is not a newsletter. Action is when there is a problem and your group improves the situation. This is what your group needs to be about. Don't bother sitting around talking about world peace when you don't have any way to influence it.

#### **Talk is cheap**

I have sat in meetings and ran meetings where people talk about what is wrong. Sometimes, we even talked about the solution. The problem was no one took the solutions and acted upon them.

#### **Without action nothing happens**

Do you remember the issue you brought up last September? The problem is still there. Why? Because you did not take action. Only the things you or someone else acted on changed. Those issues you talked to death in July will still be there in

## 2

**Organization Builder**

Section 2: Increased Attendance  
*Continued*

January unless people took action. Are you starting to get the picture? This is a wake-up call.

80% of the work is done by 20% of the group

We have all heard this. This is nothing new. What is new is you are going to form action groups able to get things done. You may not change the percentage, but you will be able to increase the number of people in the 20%.

**What you are striving for?**

So, I have been busting your chops without really offering any advice. The reason is I want you fired up when you read the rest of this chapter. This is what you are striving for:

**Action committees**

You want action committees taking on important issues and make progress. Imagine five to ten people working on improving the appearance of housing in your neighborhood. They are organizing painting projects, turning in code violations to the city, complimenting people whenever they roof their house or hang new siding, and just flat getting things done. Your committee on street improvement is taking inventory of where potholes are in your neighborhood, meeting with public officials, and highlighting where the priority areas are.

You have several committees each taking responsibility for their topic and creating positive change.

**Monthly reports of action**

Your housing committee is working hard but they don't know what the other committees are doing. So once a month, you have your monthly meeting to let committees make their reports and to hear the progress of others. Imagine the housing committee standing up and telling them they found 20 violations since the last meeting and 15 of them have been corrected. The economic development committee stands up and says they held a business forum for local business owners with an attendance of 50 people. This is a head turning event.

**An attractive offer of participation**

Positive reports of action will build your attendance. They will make attending members really invite their neighbors and friends to get involved. If someone came in to your meeting and heard the exciting committee reports from their neighbors, they would be very impressed. They could then join and find a place to fit into one of the committees, knowing their effort will pay off for the neighborhoods.

**Visible changes in both the organization and the neighborhood**

You will see your neighborhood organization changing. The flurry of activity surrounding these action committees will bring excitement and positive thinking. The people will feel empowered for the first time through your organization. As the committees reach their goals, physical changes in the neighborhood can be noticed. Less code violations, new businesses, and improved city services mark the progress of different action committees.

**Where do you start?**

You are pumped up now and you want to know how to get started. It really isn't a big of change for your organization. First you need to do some planning before you role out this concept. As a leader, you must know where you are going before you announce any change in direction.

**Figure out how many committees you can support**

Don't kid yourself into thinking you have more members than you do. Quite simply, you only have the people who regularly attend your meetings. If it is four people then it is what it is. You can't change overnight, so just acknowledge it. If you have more, then you are in a better position. A committee should have at least three people to start with, but it will be clear one of their first efforts should be to attract more people.

The other side of the coin is to not start too many committees in the beginning. Remember committees must be kept up with and assisted. Neighborhood leaders should not over extend themselves. It would be better to have twenty people on one committee than to start with twenty committees.

**Determine several hot topic areas**

What seems to be the most talked about topic in your group? Can you form a committee around it? The topic might be too narrow at first, such as cars parked in yards. You may need to broaden the topic to housing, to encompass more activity by the committee. An organization should have two to four committees to serve the neighborhood.

# 2

## Organization Builder

Section 2: Increased Attendance  
*Continued*

### Think through some initial steps for each group

For each committee, you will need to develop the first steps they should undertake. For housing, it could be to make a list of violations to turn into the city. For economic development, it may be to find out what business owners need help with. Whatever the topic, there should be some easy steps to start off with. As the group gets through the first steps, they will determine what they want to do next. You can then give some general directions and lend any support you can. The most important thing is to have a positive start through proper planning.

### Making the initial thrust

Once you have a basic plan for each committee, you need to stumble forward. I say stumble because you won't feel very confident at first. You may even think you should plan more or think it through. Don't second-guess yourself.

### Announce at your monthly meeting

Put the activity of forming action committees on your next agenda. Warn some of your key leaders or members ahead of time, this is going to happen. Most likely they will be in agreement with you and will support you on this. At the meeting, explain why you want to form these committees and announce the committees you want to form in the beginning. Let members know they can only volunteer for one committee to avoid burnout.

### Ask for people to pick a topic

You want to get members signed up for the committee. Go around the table and ask people what committee they are interested in. Have someone write the names down on the board or on paper. This helps solidify in people's minds they have signed up for a committee.

### Set times for meetings

Once people have indicated what committee they want to sign up for, you need to set meeting times. They should be during the very next week so the activity starts right away. Inform them each group will meet once or twice between monthly meetings.

### Create agendas

Between the time you announce the committee strategy and the time they meet, you will need to develop agendas. After one or two meetings, the chair of the committee should create the agendas on their own. Which brings up one of your first agenda items; appointing a leader.

### Appointing a leader

As people are stepping forward and adding their names to a committee list, think of which ones will have the capacity or at least willingness to follow your direction. You can either ask someone during the meeting or wait until after the meeting to approach them. Select a person and move on. Don't dwell on the matter too long. In time, the person will either work out or someone else will present themselves.

## Managing the effort

### Check in with your chairperson

Simply stay in-touch with your chairperson. Let them tell you what they have accomplished and where they think they are headed. Feel free to give them directions to keep them on course. However, avoid micromanaging them to the point they feel like your puppet. You may find them doing something in a different way than you would. Ask yourself, are they still making positive progress? If so, it may be beneficial to let them go on with only a minimal amount of advice from you. Later you can review the situation and discuss how successful their approach was.

### Make sure action is occurring

Above all, make sure the chairperson is asking members to be involved in the action. If your meeting rolls around and they have no action to report, warning sirens should go off. No month should go by where action has not occurred; stress this to your leaders.

### Limit sharing progress

This sounds petty, but it is part of the magic of the action committee program. You will want people from each committee to be curious what the other committees are doing. They should have to come to your monthly meeting to find out. This is what increases your attendance at your monthly meeting. You need a high number of neighbors in attendance to get everyone excited about the potential of your organization.

### Add committees as needed

After several months and an increase in numbers, you should start to expand. If you want to see a burst of life from your existing leaders, consider moving them over to head a new committee and moving their second in command up to take their place.

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Section 2: Increased Attendance  
*Continued*

This is a good way to harvest new leaders for your group. It also gives the leaders a change in scenery as they move from say the Housing Committee to the Committee on City Services.

**Consider subcommittees**

After about five committees, you may be asking for trouble if you start a sixth. It may be too difficult to manage a host of committees. Consider starting a subcommittee under an existing committee. This gives the responsibility of keeping up with the new committee to an existing committee chairperson.

**Summary**

So I fired you up and gave you some instruction. Now what? Just do it, as they say. Move to an action orientated organization and watch your organization build. Constantly recruit new members to your committees. Let people work in areas they are interested in and they will find satisfaction with your organization. With an army of committee members, things can change in your neighborhood.

# 2

## Organization Builder

### Section 3: Stronger Committees

Most organizations form committees or subcommittees now and then, only to see mediocre success. People within the group cringe when they hear the words "we will now form a committee to . . ." The reason is many see it as a waste of time. The cause of this situation is people try to run the committee in the same way the normal board meeting is held. Committee meetings are where the action really happens so we must adopt a different approach to our committee meetings.

#### How to prepare

To have a good committee meeting, the leader needs to properly prepare. Too often I see chair people simply show up to the meeting and try to lead the group. After several minutes of watching this, the other members realize the unprepared chairperson is no different than they are and chaos breaks out. Let us start with some pointers on preparation.

#### Have an agenda

We have all heard and seen agendas, but have you really given them the credit they deserve? Before you contact members to attend a meeting, you should have already typed up an agenda. This tells you what to say to members when you are inviting them. You may tell Joe to come to the meeting because you will be discussing the three vacant houses and hearing a status report from Mary who talked to the City Council member for your area. This creates an interest in Joe, compelling him to attend. You can do this because you have built your agenda prior to talking to people.

The main purpose of the agenda is to assist you and your committee members in staying on track during the meeting. Remember you are dealing with people who are not used to a productive committee setting and it is your job to keep people from getting off topic. Put some time into the agenda to make sure it delivers a good meeting. The agenda should have interesting discussion topics, make assignments for action by the committee members, and move the group closer to their goals.

Many people get nervous when you talk about forming a committee to take action on something. The best remedy is to operate an effective committee and earn their trust. So how do you run a strong committee?

#### Contact all members

Your committee members should have tasks assigned to them between meeting times. Your tasks will be to create agendas and to make sure people come to your meetings. You can send out a reminder letter or simply call the members a few days before to remind them of the meeting. This task is just as important as any you might assign to members. If there are only a few members at your committee meeting, the results will be a shadow of what it could be.

#### Running an effective meeting

This is where the chairperson will earn their keep. An unorganized meeting can lead to frustration, lack of progress, discouragement, and low future attendance. So take these suggestions to heart and put them into practice.

#### Follow your agenda

Your first mistake is to let people pull you away from your agenda. Follow this logic, if you accomplished everything on the agenda, it would be a good meeting. This is how you designed it. Because Suzy brings in some late-breaking news, doesn't mean you abandon your schedule. The new topic should be discussed at the appropriate part of the agenda or discussed last.

The chairperson should always control the meeting. When people start getting off the agenda, the chair should give the speaker a little time to make their point. But when other people try to build off their point, stop the discussion and remind people they need to stay on schedule. If the person has a good point, let the audience know you will revisit the point later in the meeting. You should write down a note about the point and return to it at the end of the meeting.

There will always be difficult people. The best way is to stand firm on the agenda. People who continuously challenge the schedule should be told to contact you when you are working on the agenda to give input. As your meetings become productive, you will find fewer people challenging you and more people giving you the respect you need to run the meetings.

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## Organization Builder

Section 3: Stronger Committees  
*Continued*

### Keeping order

How you conduct yourself will determine how much control you have in a meeting. When you arrange the room for the meeting, try to set yourself apart from the rest of the group by sitting at the head table or away from the other chairs. Let people see you as being in charge. Don't be shy during meetings or people will ignore your position.

When you are speaking, you should be standing. This helps set you apart from the others. When other people are giving reports, you should sit down and ask them to stand up. This puts the attention on the person speaking. If the group gets out of control, you can get their attention quickly by standing up again.

### Understand your role

Your job on the committee is to deliver productive meetings, nothing else. When tasks are being assigned, do not volunteer or accept any request from the group. This is where many chair people fail. You already are doing too many tasks in preparing and running the meetings. Delegate all other responsibilities to the other members. Chair people make the mistake of taking on all the tasks other members don't volunteer for. **WARNING!** You are headed for burnout and incompetence because your plate is already full! Don't do it if you really want to be an effective leader.

### Set dates and deadlines for assignments

You have not really delegated any tasks, until you have a person who agrees to take on the responsibility and you have set a due date for the action. People's lives are too busy to simply throw in a request without a deadline. The member's life will be busy and before they know it, the next meeting arrives without them accomplishing their assignment. They then feel bad about it and will most likely not attend the meeting for this reason.

Help them out by saying, Bill, I need you to get the information to me by Tuesday of next week. I will be calling you Tuesday night if I don't hear from you. This forces Bill to make time in his busy schedule because you are setting the deadline. You may need to ask Bill how reasonable the request is. Bill may have something planned Monday and Tuesday and will need until Thursday to get the information. Adjust your expectations accordingly.

### Hold people accountable

As discussed earlier, setting dates and deadlines makes people accountable. It is your job to hold people accountable. This means contacting people outside of the meetings to make sure they are getting things done. The best thing for accountability is assignment of little tasks to people so an air of accomplishment surrounds the members. This makes people try harder to finish their task on time so they fit in with the group. Use peer pressure to hold people accountable.

## Reporting activity

### Stand up to address the organization

When at the larger organization meetings, the agenda should give you a time to report your activities. Again, don't be shy. Stand up and be proud of your group. Speak up and get the organization excited about your group's activities. Nothing makes your group work harder for you than you praising them in front of the larger organization. Be brief and report mostly positive outcomes of your work. When you finish, your goal should be to receive applause for your efforts. This is your reward, don't turn it down.

### Keep in touch with the organization leader

Your committee should have a lot of discretion to accomplish your goals. This only works if you are in constant contact with your organization leader. Leave them messages on their answering machine if you can't always reach them. This way they can give you feedback and at least stay informed of your activities. Don't keep your leader in the dark, or there will surely be a power struggle in the future. There is no need for power struggles in a neighborhood organization if sharing activity reports would prevent it.

## Summary

Every organization seems to have committees. Very few of the committees are considered strong committees. It takes a lot of effort and focus on behalf of the chairperson to create a strong committee. However, an organization with one to five strong committees would be unstoppable. Can you picture your organization being described as the most powerful in your community? You can accomplish this, if you just work hard at it.

# 2

## Organization Builder

### Section 4: Going Forward

#### Having a Plan

In the Neighborhood Builder manual, there is a section devoted to block captains on the street level and then a larger organization working through committees. The block captains are the foundation of the effort to improve the neighborhood. The overall neighborhood organization is driven by committees who are focused on a particular topic. In the center of this activity is the neighborhood organization's board of directors or leadership.

The activities of the group should be directed and steered by the neighborhood leaders. The question is how will they accomplish such a task? The answer is through a neighborhood plan. A neighborhood plan is a document describing what a neighborhood wants to be and informs the reader on how to accomplish this. By addressing identified goals in critical topic areas, the neighborhood plan steers choices by stakeholders and actors within the designated area.

When a neighborhood is organized as described in the Neighborhood Builder Manual, they will be in a better position than one which is not. An unorganized neighborhood can be led through a planning process, but will find the process difficult capacity and without an experienced neighborhood planner directing the effort. When a neighborhood has a committee structure in place, educated participants, and a good idea of what they want to accomplish, the planning will go much quicker and easier.

An organized neighborhood will produce a much better product in their neighborhood plan. A great amount of effort is expended for an unorganized neighborhood simply to engage their neighbors. If this process has already been accomplished, more effort can be put into delivering proper solutions and identifying resources for the neighborhood's future improvement efforts.

#### How it begins

The neighborhood organization will have to come to grips on a few points before they get started. The first task is to understand how large the area of their

By now you have a good understanding of the Neighborhood Builder approach. You will need to review it several times before taking your first steps. Here are some last minute words of advice I want to share with you.

neighborhood is. This discussion will shed light on what other groups may also be active within the planning area. If there is more than one organization active within the area, the plan will need to be a joint plan, involving participation from multiple groups. Even in an area where the neighborhood group is the only recognized organization, the city government will need to be involved in the planning for the neighborhood.

Multiple organizations and the non participating general public creates a complicated mess for the leadership to contend with. A well thought out process can make a big difference in the quality of the neighborhood plan. Plan Builder, a complimentary manual for Neighborhood Builder, can provide the guidance required by leadership. The Plan Builder method creates a joint plan where issues are identified and possible solutions are recommended. The neighborhood plan is then accomplished through the action plans of organizations who commit to achieving the vision and goals of the joint neighborhood plan.

#### How it Ends

Following a neighborhood planning effort, the leadership will find themselves working in a well documented direction. People within their organization and the neighborhood will know what the group intends to do. The neighborhood plan is not the holy grail and will not in itself solve all the problems of the neighborhood. It will however help the group agree upon the needs of the neighborhood and the path they must take to address them.

#### The Last Word

The Block Builder and Organization Builder work together to become the Neighborhood Builder approach. Each can stand on its own merits, however when combined, they feed off each other to take a neighborhood much farther than as an individual approach. The Block Builder can definitely bring together neighbors on a street and create a foundation of a neighborhood-wide organization. The question is then how do you operate such an organization. The Organization Builder can provide some answers to the question, however neighborhood organizations should answer

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Section 4:    Going Forward  
                  *Continued*

the question, “are we really representing the neighborhood or simply the people in attendance?”

I truly wish the system was so easy to follow and clear cut anyone could use it. Each neighborhood and city varies in their age, issues, and realities. Yes, there will always be some basic things they have in common. Neighborhood Builder tries to build on the perceived common elements of all neighborhoods. The system is not a recipe or complete instruction manual; the reader will have to fill in the blanks and make modifications as they see fit.

The basis of everything I have inserted into this system is people want to live in a great neighborhood, period. How a great neighborhood is defined will vary and this is alright. The Block Builder process takes an approach to peel away issues blocking people’s ability to see the true value and potential for a neighborhood. The Organization Builder creates a neighborhood group with a purpose: Support the block leaders in their effort to improve the neighborhood.

I wish you the best of luck as you rally your neighbors to improve where you live. It is my wish you will read this book and let it provide you a sense of confidence when planning your strategy for how you will make things better.



# Leadership Builder

## Section 1: Introduction

It is not enough to have block captains, you will need to work with them to get the most out of everyone's effort.

Neighborhood leadership differs in many ways from corporate leadership. The first is the mission of a neighborhood organization can seem insurmountable. Secondly, neighborhoods are full of some of the craziest, weirdest groups of misfit people of our society. It is for this last reason I truly enjoy what I do the most. The very notion of bringing together a cast of very different characters is both challenging and rewarding. To be successful, however I have found a leader must be present to make it all come together.

When managing in difficult times, a leader must know where the organization is going and to identify milestones along the way. It would be difficult for me to pass on all the knowledge and experience I have gained over the years; however I can provide you some useful pointers and provide a picture of what your organization can look like.

Although there is a great variety of activity your group will be engaged in, I have found it seems to fall into: Economic Development, Social, Infrastructure, and Housing. Each one holds a key to your future success and each one is related to and dependent on the other. Few efforts can survive focused on only one topic. A comprehensive approach will allow additional leaders to come forward and will build off each other's efforts.

In Block Builder, I shared not only street level activity, but also ideas on how to have an action based organization designed to get things done. What I didn't focus on was the leadership required to pull all of this together and to keep it moving. Organization Builder provides insight and inspiration to guide you in leading your organization.

It is great to ask for a volunteer to lead an effort for the group, but what happens when they turn to you for direction? Using the Organization Builder, you will give them some general directions and activities they can undertake to get started. I wish I could make you some sort of Zen master, but I can't. By reading this section, you will get pointers and develop insight in what it takes for a committee to find success.

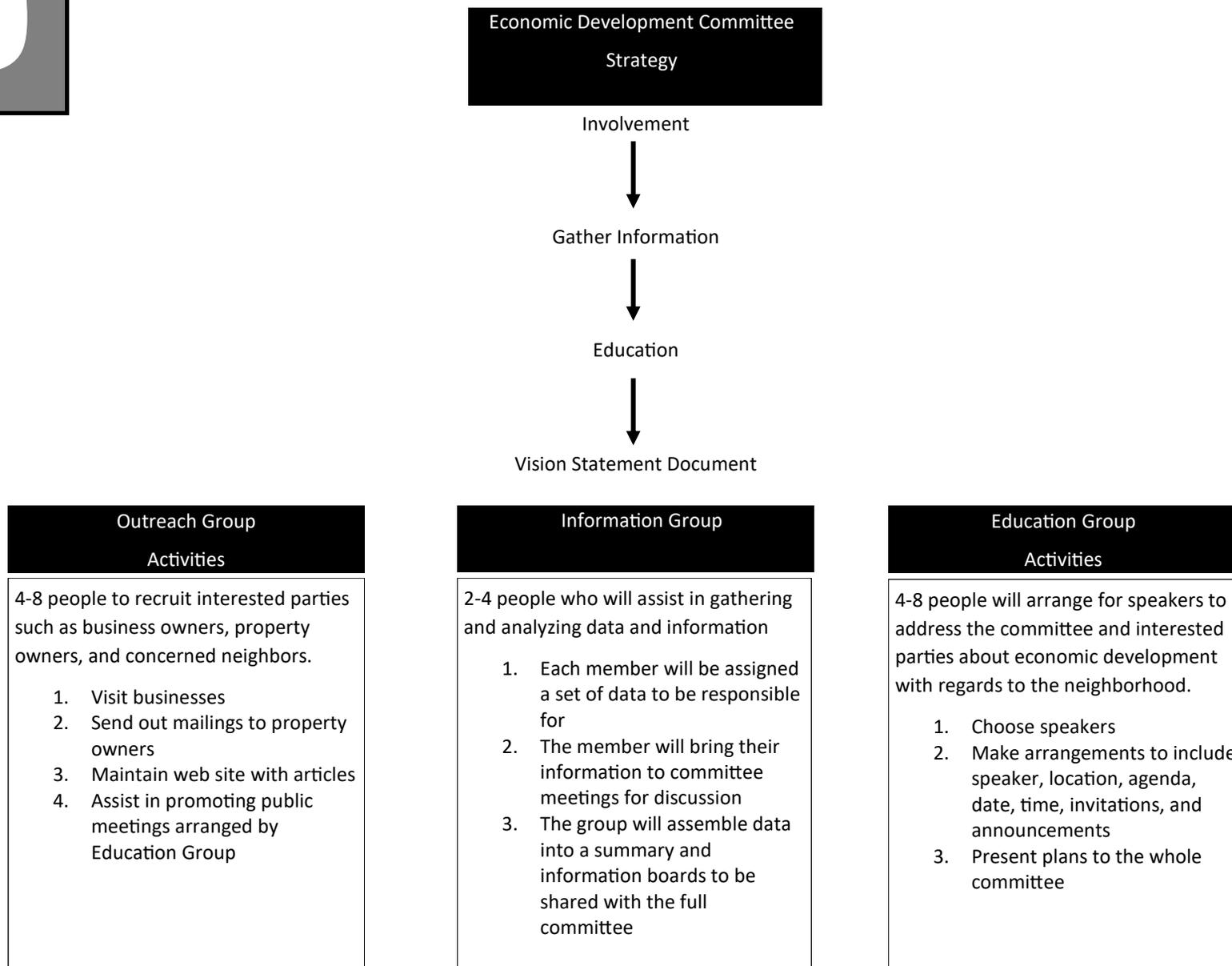
Use this guide to go beyond the instructions of the Block Builder to bring your organization to a new level of activity and accomplishment.

It is not enough to have block captains, you will need to work with them to get the most out of everyone's effort.

# 3

## Leadership Builder

### Section 2: Economic Development





# Leadership Builder

## Section 2: Economic Development

### Introduction

So you have been asked to start or lead an economic development or business committee. The goal of a neighborhood organization is to create a vibrant and successful commercial area for the neighborhood. Below are some ideas where to start; however don't get caught up in thinking you have to do everything mentioned or operate the way described. Instead let the ideas below stimulate your own ideas and of your group.

### Involvement

The key to creating your overall organization is involving the people who live, work, or invest in your community. Your economic development efforts will require the same approach. Getting people of the business community involved and sharing what is happening with everyone will help you succeed.

- **Outreach to business stakeholders**

This means going out and talking to business owners, commercial property management firms, and contacting owners of real estate. To discuss the future of the commercial areas of your neighborhood, you must have these stakeholders working with your committee.

Let the stakeholders know your organization wants to see a vibrant and successful commercial center serving the needs of the neighborhood. Invite them to the next committee meeting and remember to share with them the agenda. Make sure you are planning an interesting meeting to help encourage them to come.

It is important to capture the business stakeholders' contact information, so gather business cards, and/or write down their information when you approach them. Creating a mailing list will allow you to alert them to future meetings. This will be a good activity to start with and could involve the outreach subgroup of the committee.

- **Investigate forming a business owners organization**

Just as it is important to organize the neighbors, business owners will have some unique needs. Asking them their interest in forming a merchant or business owner group allows them a chance to explore the possibilities. A good method would be to first circulate a flyer with possible benefits and activities they could enjoy as an organization. Use examples you find on the Internet to show them what other business districts are doing. Follow up the flyer a week later with a survey document designed would give you a better understanding of their desires and willingness to participate.

- **Develop communication tool (web site/ newsletter)**

If your group does not have a web site or newsletter, now would be a good time to start one. Neighborhoods are full of great stories people would want to hear. Business news can be very interesting to the neighborhood. The Outreach Subgroup will play a very important role in bringing the residential and business community together by writing interesting stories about the business areas.

The sub group will also have the responsibility to identify people who can assist in producing a newsletter. If you are interested in having a web site, ask people in the sub group to research possibilities on the web for creating a web site. They can also search within your organization for someone with web design skills. They need to take the lead or work with other committees on this project so the communication channel can be established.

- **Create contact list**

As mentioned earlier, the contact information gathered during outreach, both among the neighbors and the businesses, is important. The information should be arranged so different groups of people can be contacted as needed. Using a spreadsheet can help you arrange the names so it is easy to send a notice to only commercial property owners or just business owners.

## 3

**Leadership Builder**

Section 2: Economic Development  
*Continued*

- **Discuss productive relationships between neighbors and businesses**

In many instances, neighborhood organizations have a tendency to avoid businesses or treat them as advisories. Strong neighborhoods encourage interactions between neighbors and businesses because they both have the same goal: a healthy neighborhood. Neither can survive in a declining neighborhood.

When you attract business owners to your committee, take time to discuss how you can work together. Neighbors can offer to support local businesses by promoting and purchasing goods and services. Local businesses can respond to neighbors' needs by offering goods and services they need and want. The committee can agree to conduct surveys to determine what people spend money on and how much. This information can be provided to businesses as a gesture of a willingness to work together.

For a neighborhood business to be successful, it needs to fill the demands of the neighborhood and the area surrounding it. If a business is to start offering a new product or service, they have to know the neighborhood is going to support it. If the neighbors promise they will purchase the product, the business owner can move with more confidence.

There are other ways to forge a relationship with businesses such as creating business directories, selling coupon books, encouraging people to shop local and other similar ideas. It all comes down to having a mutual interest in the neighborhood.

## Gather Information

- **Review any area or neighborhood plans**

Cities and economic development groups often create planning documents for areas of the city. If there are any plans covering your area, they will contain useful facts and narrative designed to inform the reader. Members of the sub group assigned to gather information should review these documents and summarize the information to share with others. To find these documents, the sub group should start with the city planning office and the chamber of commerce.

- **Identify information needed**

The members of Information Sub Group should create a list of information they believe will be useful for understanding the area and the needs of both the businesses and the neighbors. They should then present the list of what is needed to the rest of the Economic Development Committee at a meeting. The committee should be able to give additional ideas on what is needed and where to find it.

- **Assign data gathering to members**

The Information Sub Group should now meet with the updated list and make assignments to their members to gather information. It is perfectly ok to work in pairs and to group assignments if the items share the same source. This is a great opportunity for people to work with their fellow neighbors they didn't know previously.

- **Consider surveys and implement if agreed upon**

Some of the information the group wants may not be available. It may be the group wants to know how much money will neighbors spend with a drycleaner if it opened in the business district. There may not be a source for this information. If important, the group will need to conduct a survey asking people if they would purchase different services and how much they would spend on them. The Information Sub Group would create the survey and then present it to the Economic Development Committee to work out how it will be distributed in the neighborhood.

This is a big undertaking; however it will go far to establish the group as an active participant in local economic development efforts. The sub group can seek out help from the city's planning department, local colleges, or the chamber of commerce.

## Education

- **Identify resource people to speak**

There may be a variety of people who have knowledge about the topic of business or economic development. The Education Sub Group will increase your committee's knowledge on the topic by arranging for speakers to address the group. The sub committee should do some homework on identifying who has specific knowledge about your situation. Speakers on real estate, market

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# Leadership Builder

Section 2: Economic Development  
*Continued*

analysis, finance, infrastructure, and business attraction could be included in your list of speakers.

Don't try to have everyone speak at the same meeting, spread them out at your monthly meetings so you have a speaker and time to take care of the other items on your agenda. The trick is to speak with the person you are inviting and let them know your situation and direct them to speak on specific items. This will give your speaker reference points to direct his or her presentation so everyone finds it useful.

- Organize information into easily understood document for members to read

The information sub group should arrange gathered information so other neighbors can pick up the summary and understand what they are reading. There will be other neighbors and business owners interested in what is being discussed and discovered, but may not be on the committee. Arranging information in the form of a fact sheet will allow the committee to bring a person up-to-date quickly. Along with the facts, goals and accomplishments of the committee should be included.

- Arrange for public meetings to invite the community to hear from resources

Some speakers may be more technical and not as useful for the general neighborhood population. There are others who may have an exciting message the entire neighborhood should hear. In this case, the Economic Development Committee should bring a proposal to the organization board to put a speaker on the agenda at a neighborhood wide meeting. The committee should look for opportunities to build interest and involvement of the entire neighborhood in the topic of economic development. Giving them an opportunity to hear exciting information about your topic has enormous upside.

- Send members to regional or national training opportunities

There are numerous national organizations offering economic development training. Most are geared for practicing professionals; however you will find them extremely informative and inspirational. By attending training by professionals who have completed compelling projects, you may be able to see what is really possible and a general understanding of how it can be done. If you are not exposed to this level of experience, you will be limited in seeing the potential for your neighborhood.

Don't be afraid to ask the city to assist you in your tuition cost. There are times they want to see neighbors take initiative. Many training sessions are in tourist friendly locations, so look at it as a working vacation. You can also take up a collection from organization members to assist you with the cost.

## Vision Statement Document

- Write a descriptive document for the group regarding the hopes and desires of the neighborhood

While gathering data and listening to speakers, some possibilities will start to present themselves. Open discussion about the possibilities for the economic development of your neighborhood should occur both in the committee and at the larger neighborhood meetings. It will be the committee's goal to sort through them and choose a direction the group should follow. It could be the development of very small retail shops is your best option. Maybe a mix of upscale restaurants is a better fit for your neighborhood.

As the group makes their choice of options, it needs to be put on paper. This becomes the beginning of a vision statement. Next to be added is your vision of what you want the neighborhood business areas to be. It is one thing to describe the types of businesses you want, another to paint a picture of how it will be used. The Vision Statement Document should contain descriptive paragraphs of how people will see and use the future development.

### Examples could include:

- In the future, pedestrians from within the neighborhood will arrive using sidewalks to visit our grocery based shopping district. Shoppers will visit modern storefronts containing butchers, produce, and dry goods stores. Small cafés will provide community based gathering areas for neighbors.
- Our neighborhood will host a unique retail district where high-end clothing stores will meet the needs of a regional audience. Shoppers from miles

## 3

## Leadership Builder

### Section 2: Economic Development *Continued*

around will be aware of the great shopping opportunity our neighborhood offers. The shopping district will act as an attraction for future homebuyers to select our neighborhood over others.

### Use information discovered during the process

The reader will want to know how you reached the conclusions you reached in your document. Use information discovered to support what you picture for the neighborhood. If the data you found during research shows the income levels of your neighborhood would support your vision statement then include it in your Vision Statement Document.

#### Examples:

- 45% of our neighbors have household incomes of over \$50,000.
- Our resident survey indicated 90% of respondents said they would spend an average of \$85 per week on groceries from local sources if they were present
- The City Planning Department stated the Comprehensive plan called for Green Street to be light commercial.

#### Economic Development Summary

The committee work in the topic of Economic Development can be very exciting. It is a complicated matter and should not be taken lightly. The issue is key to the progression of most neighborhoods in America and beyond. Addressing the appearance, location, and selection of commercial establishments can have a great impact on the success of your efforts as a neighborhood group.

As a leader, making sure the committee comes together, shares a vision, and then focuses in on the things they can effect is vital to the success of the neighborhood. Most people do not have a significant background in the topic, yet many people will have ideas on at least some aspect of the commercial needs of the neighborhood. If you can use the ideas presented in this chapter to jumpstart the activity you may be surprised at what will occur through your efforts.

# 3

## Leadership Builder

### Section 3: Crime Prevention

## Crime Prevention

#### Recruitment Group Activities

2-4 people who will actively recruit captains for defined sub-areas of the neighborhood

1. Create defined block areas
2. Identify potential captains through relationships or canvassing
3. Maintain contact list
4. Replace leaders when existing ones step down.

#### Crime Education Group Activities

4-8 people will create a campaign designed to educate neighbors about preventing and reporting crime.

1. Determine what ideas and concepts should be distributed
2. Develop best distribution methods to include public meetings, newsletter, posters, and flyers.

#### Crime Prevention Committee Strategy

Recruit Block Captains



Develop Block Captain Procedures



Encourage Meet and Greet Activities



Increase Awareness/ Education



Measure Crime Statistics



Achieve low crime rates

#### Statistics Group Activities

1-2 people will track the crime statistics of the neighborhood, but also adjacent neighborhoods to determine progress.

1. Determine which information should be tracked
2. Develop tracking system
3. Report monthly to the committee.

#### Procedures Group Activities

1-2 people will design a written set of instructions for block captains. The instructions will let people know what is expected of them.

1. Meet as a group to discuss what every block captain should do.
2. Meet with officer to get additional ideas.
3. Create an attractive document to be distributed to the committee for approval.

# 3

## Leadership Builder

### Section 3: Crime Prevention

#### Introduction

In many neighborhoods, the presence or perception of crime is a key issue. The crime prevention committee is tasked with finding and implementing solutions to address the perception or reality of crime.

#### Involvement

Crime prevention requires a great amount of people to get involved at different levels of activity. At the lowest level, you want people to be aware of suspicious activity and know who to call. More advanced levels include people acting in the role of a block captain or committee member.

- **Recruit block captains**

Your efforts are not going to be successful if your numbers are limited to a small committee. You will need to make an appeal to current members to act as their street's block captain. Ask to be added to your next neighborhood meeting agenda. Make a short presentation of what you expect a block captain to do and then ask for volunteers. If there are not enough people interested, the committee should plan additional outreach/recruitment activity.

The committee should form a sub group focused on recruitment. They should take the lead on developing the process to get people signed up.

- **Create recruitment material**

The sub group should develop a flyer to inform people what is involved and why people should step forward. Ideally the flyer is inviting them to a special meeting to discuss the role of the block captain. The sub committee should consider inviting the police department's block watch coordinator. The sub group should present the flyer to the other members of the Crime Prevention Committee before distributing it. The other members of the committee can be involved in the actual recruitment activities if needed.

- **Divide up area into set boundaries**

For large neighborhood areas, boundaries for block groups need to be set so everyone knows the areas of responsibility. When recruiting block captains, your potential recruits will want to know how big of area you have in mind for them. A small focused group is what is needed to make decisions on the boundaries. For this reason, the recruiting sub group is a logical choice. Areas for block captains should be limited to one street and not longer than two blocks. Just remember the areas have to be manageable for the block captain.

- **Target small number of contiguous streets with flyers, door knocking, and other methods**

If you need to recruit leaders in an unrepresented area, you will need to attract new people to the effort. Distributing flyers will make people aware of your efforts to establish block captains. This needs to be done by the Recruitment Sub Group. Other members should help, but the sub group will lead the effort. This is an excellent time to not only recruit block captains but to also build awareness of the organization. Use the recruitment materials developed in the previous section to distribute in selected areas.

- **Host a block captain training event**

After reading the Neighborhood Builder system, your committee should design and offer a block captain training session. You can accomplish this by dividing up the sections of the training among committee members. Also meet with your police department representative and offer for them to speak specifically about crime prevention during your training. This can be a great opportunity for your group to show the neighborhood you are taking steps toward addressing the issues affecting the neighborhood.



## Leadership Builder

Section 3: Crime Prevention  
*Continued*

### Develop Block Captain Procedures

- Decide what activities and responsibilities are reasonable for the block captains

There are many activities a block captain can engage in. If you share all the possibilities with your block captains, they will probably run away from you and your organization as fast as they can. So what is a reasonable amount of responsibilities to expect from them? The first is to determine what minimum activity is required. Some neighborhoods may have high crime, requiring a significant amount of activity just to make a difference. Other neighborhoods may only require a yearly street party and a short visit with the neighbors during the year. You will find the needs of the street dictate the expectations of everyone involved. Scale the involvement to what is actually needed and you will find people receptive to what you are asking.

- Put expectations on paper to be distributed to block captains and future leaders.

Once you have made some decisions about the block captain's responsibilities, put it on paper so all can see. When talking to prospective leaders, it will be helpful if you have something to demonstrate what is expected of them.

### Encourage Meet and Greet Activities

- Ask new block captains to host street meetings and social events

A great way to get a new block captain moving in the right direction is to encourage them to hold a block meeting. The meeting should only be a "Meet & Greet" with limited remarks from the block captain. The Outreach Sub Group should meet with new leaders to share past success stories or provide some pointers. Remember there is a difference between encouraging and simply doing it for them.

- Ask for assistance from Social Committee

If you have a Social Committee, they may be able to play a role in this activity. Your Outreach Sub Group may encourage new leaders regarding the "Meet & Greet", but your Social Committee may be the ones to provide direction to the block captains. Use the directions included in the Neighborhood Builder about inviting and running the meeting.

### Increase Awareness/Education

- Create materials to spread crime prevention tips, crime alerts, and news

The Education Sub Group could work with the police department and find tips online to pass on to the neighbors. Flyers, door hangers, or postcard size handouts could be developed and then printed up for distribution. The idea is to raise awareness of both crime prevention and the organization.

- Develop recruitment materials for block captains to distribute encouraging non participating neighbors to get involved

There should also be some similar materials developed to recruit active members from the population of the neighborhood. Use the reasons your current members give for being involved. The Education and Outreach Sub Groups could work together to design these materials and use the block captains to distribute them.

### Measure Crime Statistics

- Several members will gather and process neighborhood crime statistics from the Police Department

Many police departments make crime statistics available to block captains and the public about their neighborhood. The Statistics Sub Group will gather and review the information from these reports. The idea would be to determine if crime is rising or falling and if there are any patterns the neighborhood organization can influence. For example if a great amount of crime is happening during hours school is in session, then neighborhood patrols during the day may be a logical response. They can look for people out of place and report suspicious activity to the police. The work of the committee can make crime prevention activity more effective. The sub group should report at the Crime

## 3

## Leadership Builder

### Section 3: Crime Prevention *Continued*

Prevention Committee meeting. If there is a substantial crime related item, it should be presented in the committee's report at the larger neighborhood meeting.

## Maintain Low Crime Rates

- Continue efforts designed to decrease crime even in times of low crime activity.

A lack of crime can make prevention efforts become dormant over time. There should always be a minimum level of activity from the committee so everything is in place if crime incidents increase, even if the committee decides to reduce neighborhood patrols to once a month and block captains only gather neighbors for social purposes.

## Conclusion

The Crime Prevention Committee and their activity are extremely important on many fronts. As mentioned throughout the Neighborhood Builder manual, the block captain builds the foundation from which everything else is built. Although the block captain may be utilized by other committees and purposes such as social events, the crime prevention role truly establishes their position.

When people think of a block captain, their first thought is crime prevention. Not every street or neighborhood needs a strong response from these leaders or your committee. If it does, the committee has developed a response involving an army of block leaders. In times where no criminal activity is present, the block captains can serve other purposes.

The Crime Prevention Committee should not overwork their members. The chairperson should feel free to bring in new committee members and let the overworked members take a breather. At first, your activity will seem like a sprint where time is of the essence to get things addressed. In time, you will see the committee's action is long term and will always have some level of activity.

# 3

## Leadership Builder

### Section 4: Social

## Social

#### Small Activities Group Activities

2-4 people who will actively assist block captains in having block level social activities

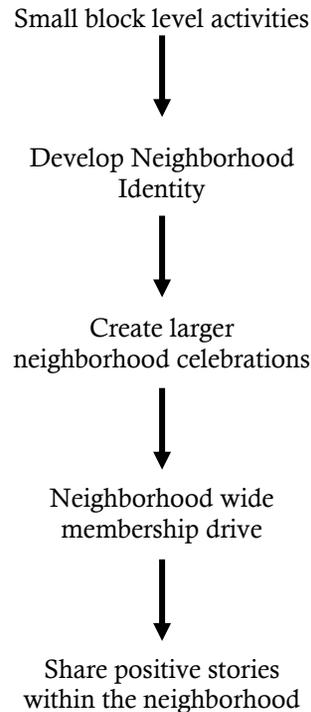
1. Create list of possibilities to share with block captains
2. Review Social tools in the Neighborhood Toolbox
3. Offer to assist block captains in planning and/or hosting the event

#### Event Planning Group Activities

2-8 people will plan neighborhood wide events.

1. Design events the neighborhood would like to attend
2. Organize all logistics involved in producing events
3. Raise funds/ gather donations to make the events a success

#### Social Committee Strategy



#### Membership Group Activities

2-4 people will focus on attracting people to:

1. Determine what ideas and concepts should be proposed
2. Develop best recruitment methods to include public meetings, newsletter, posters, and flyers.

# 3

## Leadership Builder

### Section 4: Social

#### Introduction

In communities today, there are large deficiencies hampering the progress of neighborhoods moving to resemble what they want to be. There has been a leaking of social relationships over time and it now is painfully obvious to even the average person. Where are the connections between people on the street? Where are the relationships responsible for holding the people together? They have gone to the wayside because people have forgotten how to forge a connection with each other.

These relationships need to be revived. There is more to life than just remaining in your house waiting for the next day to begin. Busy schedules need to make room for investments of time and energy in the social relationships of the neighborhood.

#### Small Block Level Activities

- Create instructions for hosting small social events for block captains to utilize

Block meetings can be used to build up your organization. The Social Committee can play an important role by designing events created to be used by all block captains for their individual blocks. Ask some people to host a social event and see what works. A block captain will be encouraged to host these events, but may not know exactly what is involved. Later, your committee's written instructions can provide confidence to the block captain and result in more leaders hosting social events. Some experimentation should occur while writing out some basic instructions.

- Promote the idea of block captains offering block level social events

The best way to promote the idea is to have the committee report success at neighborhood meetings. The chair of the Social Committee should call on

participating block captains to give reports of their event. Stories of people really enjoying and appreciating the events gets people excited about having one for their street. The audience may contact and encourage their block captain and offer to help them organize an event for their street. The stories at the neighborhood meeting will be key to making this activity really take off.

- Assist leaders in hosting events

It would be great if all the block captains could simply read the directions and pull off the event all by themselves. The reality is, they will need some assistance. The important role for the committee member is to assure the block captain, he or she can do it. The committee members should avoid doing any of the task associated with the event when possible. Sometimes a block captain simply needs the presence of someone who has produced the event in the past to talk with them. Once it becomes common place, the committee no longer needs to be involved.

#### Develop Neighborhood Identity

- Identify strengths of the neighborhood

Neighborhoods usually have something to offer the community. It may be historic buildings, affordable housing, parks, a view of a river, or something similar. The Committee should identify what their assets are and plan to capitalize on them. To accomplish this, they should get the input from their fellow neighbors. The Committee could circulate questionnaires at the street events to get input from people.

Some questions to ask are:

- What do you think of when you think of your neighborhood?
- What do you want people to think about your neighborhood?

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# Leadership Builder

Section 3: Social  
*Continued*

The Committee could follow this questionnaire activity with a neighborhood meeting to present what the sub group discovered from the neighborhood responses. Comments and voting could help the committee focus on what they want their image to be and activities the group should do to shape their current image.

- **Investigate how people currently learn about the neighborhood**

Discuss in your committee how people learn about your neighborhood. Is it talked about in the local media? Can people see the neighborhood from a major highway or street? What image is projected? Are there steps the neighborhood can take to change the perception? There is also a possibility the impression people have of your neighborhood is good. How can you strengthen this message?

- **Develop a positive message about what people should know about the neighborhood**

Use the committee to develop the positive message you want your brochure, web site, and flyers to convey. Your message may be the neighborhood is a great place to raise a family or your home prices are a great value. Use your different types of media to get the message of why this message is true. You can present statistics, comments from neighbors, or pictures to make your point. Once you develop the message, use it to develop all communications such as brochures and web sites.

- **Develop strategies to improve the message people receive when learning about the neighborhood**

Developing a positive upbeat brochure could help combat a poor reputation for a neighborhood. Even if the result is simply getting the target to question what the truth is when later confronted with negative information. For a neighborhood with a poor image problem, something needs to shake the foundations of what people are thinking.

A brochure or website can highlight positives such as the neighborhood school, proximity to shopping or employment, attractive properties and other signs of neighborhood pride. The information can then be distributed to all the neighbors to present to their friends and family to spread the good message about your neighborhood. Other uses would be to send to Realtors, newspapers, and TV stations who tend to help influence peoples' perception of the neighborhood.

## Create Larger Neighborhood Celebrations

- **Focus on major holidays or other opportunities to determine if there is interest in hosting a larger social event**

One activity designed to put a positive image on an area is a neighborhood celebration. They are great for getting people to socialize with their fellow neighbors. Successful celebrations can grow to a point where they attract crowds from the outside to join the neighbors in the celebration. These events can go a long way to improving the image of a neighborhood in the minds of outsiders, but also the residents themselves.

Most celebrations actually start out rather small and grow over time. As people gain confidence, they add more complex elements, increase promotions, and learn lessons allowing them to grow larger. It all starts with a small committee finding a way to put on a small yet successful event. Over time, more people will be attracted to the committee bringing more experience and skills.

Some examples of activities include carnivals, ice cream socials, art shows, concerts and barbeque contests. The committee should discuss what possibilities seem attractive for the neighborhood. Start it small and watch it grow over time!

- **Develop a planning committee to run all facets of the event**

Start with the concept of the event then sell people on getting involved. The committee chair should break down the activities into small understandable sub groups so people can know what they are signing on for. Focus on painting a picture of what the event will be like in the beginning and then paint a picture of what it could be in the future. Build the excitement and then ask people to sign up for the committee.

## 3

**Leadership Builder**

Section 3: Social  
*Continued*

There are always workhorses in every group. Don't let them take on all the tasks or your event will always be limited to what the person can handle. Make sure others sign-up and carry out tasks assigned to them.

- **Market neighborhood wide events to draw out people who don't normally participate in meetings or other organization events**

The magic of the celebration will be when you get the people who never seem to participate. Not everyone likes to come to meetings and will choose not to. However the same people want great things for their neighborhood and may choose your event to show their support.

Develop your committee to promote the event to their neighbors with flyers and phone calls. Instruct them not to discard people because they have yet to participate in any neighborhood event. Talk the event up to everyone because you truly believe they will be happy when they get there. Your committee has to have conviction to pull off a well attended event.

## Neighborhood Wide Membership Drives

- **Design marketing materials to encourage people to purchase membership**

The Membership Sub Group should create attractive looking materials for signing up new members. Membership sales can be a tough business, so when you get someone interested, make sure the materials reassure the member they are making the right choice. Starting with the membership card when they join. When they present their membership fee, make sure it looks clean and neat. Don't present a copy of a copy of a copy. If you have someone good at desktop publishing, ask them to make an attractive form.

When a neighbor signs up, they really like to have a take-away explaining what they just signed up for. Have a membership brochure explaining committees they can join, accomplishments, and future plans for the group and the neighborhood. You might want to make these printable only as needed. Getting a huge stack copied ahead of time may be wasteful when you decide to change

something in the future. Maybe keep ten to twenty on hand at every neighborhood meeting.

- **Launch membership drives at least two times a year**

The Membership Sub Group should be focused on making big pushes for sign-ups each year. Campaigns can be designed to include door-to-door appeals, attending block meetings, or sign-up tables at large neighborhood events. The sub group needs to ask existing members to get involved to increase the appeal factor to their neighbors. The more people they recognize, the more likely they will sign-up and get involved.

## Share Positive Stories Within the Neighborhood

- **Create newsletter to keep people updated with current events**

Newsletters are great for sharing the stories of the neighborhood and the organization. These stories shape the image people have of the neighborhood. Stories of clean ups, burglaries being solved, parties, and other events gives the reader the impression there are great people in the neighborhood. It also describes an organization they would like to become a member. It is in the best interest of the organization to use a newsletter or web site to inform the neighbors.

- **Consider email or website based media to control cost**

Printing a newsletter is very typical, however groups are realizing the cost can be very high as the circulation increases. Web based media can be a better choice in several ways. First, the cost is much lower than print media. Web based can be in full color which can be cost prohibitive with print. Another reason is distribution can be as simple as clicking a button or just making people aware of the web site.

- **Ask for members to contribute stories to allow for a variety of writers and stories**

To really make the newsletter, web site, or email work, interesting articles are a must. Avoid putting this responsibility on one person. Encourage others to write about things in the neighborhood and submit them to the editor. Even if the article needs to be cleaned up, it is better than having to write every article from scratch. The neighbors will actually enjoy reading articles from a variety of



## Leadership Builder

Section 3: Social  
*Continued*

people they know in the neighborhood. Writers will enjoy being recognized by their neighbors who compliment them on their article.

### Conclusion

The Social Committee has an important task that goes well beyond parties. Ultimately the committee works towards getting more people involved and to create a neighborly feel people can be proud of. Everyone wants a neighborhood where there is a sense of connection to their neighbors. They don't want a lot of people crowding them but when they meet up with people from their neighborhood; they want a feeling of familiarity. People want to belong to something. This allows the committee to recruit people and to get people involved.

Sharing of news, bringing people together, and making people aware of what the organization is working on makes everyone's effort come together. The Social Committee will be the most fun committee to be on, however it is still a sizable amount of work.

# 3

## Leadership Builder

### Section 5: Infrastructure

## Infrastructure

#### Current Conditions Activities Group Activities

2-3 people who will research and evaluate the current infrastructure conditions and needs.

1. Visit the Public Works Department to investigate how they rate or judge infrastructure conditions
2. Walk through the neighborhood to judge conditions first hand
3. Conduct surveys of neighbors to determine their views of infrastructure
4. Create map showing infrastructure conditions

#### Infrastructure Committee Strategy

Understand Current  
Conditions



Investigate the City's Plans



Educate Public



Determine if Any Action is  
Required by the  
Neighborhood



Take Action

#### City Planning Group Activities

2-8 people will meet with city officials to understand plans for the neighborhood infrastructure.

1. Meet with Public Works to ask about both short range and long range plans
2. Understand how decisions are made
3. Meet with council person to understand their role in the allocations and priority setting for infrastructure



# Leadership Builder

## Section 5: Infrastructure

It is not enough to have block captains, you will need to work with them to get the most out of everyone's effort.

### Introduction

There are many who believe streets, sidewalks, sewer and water services are the most important elements of a quality neighborhood. Without these elements in good order, the neighborhood will falter. Although there are other important issues involved in creating a quality neighborhood, these items do require attention.

Everything ages and infrastructure is no exception. There are times we take our eye off streets and sewers because they have a long lifespan. However, as we look at a deteriorated neighborhood we often see signs of age or distress in these categories. At some point they deteriorated due to lack of attention. The Infrastructure Committee can play an important role in preserving the existing infrastructure and influencing infrastructure elements in and around the neighborhood.

### Understand Current Conditions

- Meet with Public Works to understand how they evaluate the neighborhood's infrastructure

Infrastructure is a very expensive expenditure for a city to make and most involved know it can have a great impact on the community. The city therefore puts a great deal of attention to their infrastructure decisions. To take on the topic of infrastructure, the committee needs to understand how the city organization makes their decisions. Inviting a speaker from the Public Works department of your city is a good place to start. Even if you disagree with how you perceive the department's decisions in the past; listening to their reasoning may shed new light on the situation.

The City Planning Sub Group can take on this task to get the Infrastructure Committee moving. The sub group simply needs to call the Public Works Department and ask them for someone knowledgeable to address the group. Let them know you would like them to explain how the City provides infrastructure, and what is occurring in your neighborhood. It is customary to

provide a department three weeks notice before your planned committee meeting.

- Ask for a copy of any engineering plans showing conditions

Most large cities have maps of their infrastructure showing conditions or ratings of streets and possibly sidewalks. Ask the City Planning Sub Group to build a relationship with the Public Works/Engineering department. At some point they can ask for these maps and any plans for your neighborhood. These maps may not be readily available to the public so having a positive relationship with a staff person may be instrumental in getting copies of these items.

- Walk through the neighborhood making notes of any areas in need of repair

The Current Condition Sub Group should take their own inventory of the conditions of the streets and sidewalks. To capture the committee's findings they can either make a list of deficiencies using house addresses to pinpoint the location or use a map with colored markers to indicate problems they noticed. This can be used to determine if the committee's picture of infrastructure is different than the City's.

If there is a difference in your assessments, don't panic. Engineers evaluate infrastructure a little different than the average observer. What looks bad to you may only be cosmetic, with the majority of structure in good condition. Likewise, what you see as just a simple crack may be an indicator of something much more significant below. The idea is to get both the committee and the city staff on the same sheet of music.

## 3

**Leadership Builder**

Section 3: Infrastructure  
*Continued*

- **Report findings to Infrastructure Committee**

The two sub groups should make reports of their progress and findings to the Infrastructure Committee. The chairperson can lead discussion about the findings and determine if there is something requiring action by members of the committee. For example, a drainage ditch may be giving neighbors a hard time with flooding. The City may not see it as very important. The committee may feel it warrants taking actions to make the City aware of its importance. This could include talking about it with your council person or the director of Public Works.

### Investigate the City's Plans

- **Meet with Public Works to understand their plans for the area**

Looking beyond simple street repair and sidewalk replacement, the Infrastructure Committee needs to understand major projects for their area. This will include areas outside the neighborhood boundaries, but near enough to have an impact on the community. Examples include street widening, drainage, utility, and other physical projects impacting how the area is perceived or utilized.

- **Understand their decision process for rebuilding streets, sewer, and sidewalks.**

Understanding how the City evaluates streets and other infrastructure is a starting point for the group. The next step is to understand the review and decision process for which projects are selected. Sometimes this is done internally, while other cities involve the elected officials to weigh in on the matter. Some of the key information the group should have is “when does the process start” and at what point in the process could the group voice their request for improvements.

There is a good chance you are moving into un-chartered waters with the public works department. They may have never had direct input into their process by a neighborhood group. When you want to provide input, stress to them you

would like to have the decision makers hear your ideas. This is really all you can do. The effect may be they accommodate you because you are the only one asking. Another possibility could be they ignore your input altogether. The success of your committee will rest on the relationship you have with the city department. You can push for changes, but be sure to maintain a working relationship with the department. Working with your council person is also strongly recommended.

- **Report back to the Infrastructure Committee**

The City Planning Sub Group should report their findings to the Infrastructure Committee each meeting. If the sub group is at a standstill, the entire committee can have an open discussion about what they should do next.

### Educate Public

- **Organize public meeting if significant issues surround infrastructure**

If there is a big complaint or big plans by the city concerning the neighborhood, the Infrastructure Committee should make the public aware. One of the best ways is to invite a representative to a neighborhood meeting to share related information. In some circumstances, the topic may require a special meeting dedicated to the situation. In either case, the chair person of the committee will need to make a request to the neighborhood leadership for permission.

Once the location and time is agreed upon, the Education Sub Group will need to make sure the neighborhood is aware and the meeting agenda is designed to maximize the benefit. Writing a compelling invitation, distribution, and encouraging people to come are activities expected of the committee. Taking time to think through the agenda and format of the meeting will also fall on the committee. You will want an informative presentation from the speakers followed by a productive question and answer period. The agenda should include a committee member laying down some ground rules to avoid the question period from becoming just a gripe session.

There are times a meeting is not necessary, however people still need to be informed. Writing articles for the newsletter, website, or email blast can also educate the public. The Education Sub Group will play an important role in keeping the neighbors informed so misinformation is not being spread through the neighborhood unchallenged.

# 3

## Leadership Builder

Section 3: Infrastructure  
*Continued*

- **Make the committee’s findings available at neighborhood meetings**

The committee will be pursuing different infrastructure activities over time. Progress reports should be provided at the neighborhood meetings. Even if nothing is happening, a brief report lets the audience know your organization is still working on or monitoring the issue. Infrastructure changes do not occur over night. This committee will definitely be focused on the long term so keeping people informed is important.

### Determine if Any Action is Required by the Neighborhood

- **The Infrastructure may not require any involvement by the group if all is going well**

Unlike other committees, the Infrastructure committee may not need to meet very often if there is nothing being pursued. There may be long periods of time where there is no activity. The chair person should simply stay in touch with the organization leadership and call meetings when necessary. There will always be a value to having an organized informed group ready to meet if necessary.

- **If the infrastructure needs are not being met, the group may have to convince officials to increase improvements to the neighborhood**

For times when the concerns of the neighborhood need to be brought to the attention of public officials, the committee needs to take action. Earlier, the directions stressed creating relationships with city staff. Efforts should begin with those relationships and increase if nothing is happening. Asking staff to speak at neighborhood meetings to hear the concerns is another possibility for the committee to pursue. The committee should always make sure the council person is aware of the issue or the input. It may be beneficial to ask your elected officials to speak on the topic. This let’s the group know your representative ‘s position on the topic.

### Conclusion

The Infrastructure Committee deals with a great amount of forward planning, making it a little less exciting than others. There are some short term goals to be acted on such as potholes or increased street lighting. Most of the activity by the committee revolves around learning how the city operates and then voicing the neighbors concerned to the decision makers.

If there really isn’t any significant infrastructure activity required in your neighborhood, simply strip down the activity to something more appropriate. You may just send a couple of board members to the City to find out how things work. Each neighborhood has different needs. The infrastructure topic has a huge impact on the neighborhood, especially if there are visible needs.

# 3

## Leadership Builder

### Section 5: Housing

## Housing

#### Current Housing Conditions Group Activities

2-3 people who will research and evaluate the current housing market and conditions.

1. Meet with realtors and city officials to understand market
2. Evaluate neighborhood housing and compare to other areas of the city
3. Assemble facts and figures about real estate in the area.

#### Housing Solutions Group Activities

2-4 people will research what other communities are doing to improve housing conditions.

1. Research the topic on the Internet
2. Talk to local organizations involved in improving housing
3. Present viable options to the group in the form of a report

#### Housing Committee Strategy

Understand Current Housing Conditions



Research Possible Solutions



Take Action on Selected Solutions



Market The Neighborhood

#### Housing Marketing Group Activities

2-6 people will focus on marketing the neighborhood and properties for sale to the public.

1. Create web site that showcases the neighborhood and properties
2. Meet with Realtors known for working in the neighborhood
3. Promote the web site



# Leadership Builder

## Section 6: Housing

One of the most important topics of a neighborhood is the housing. Both condition and value of the houses is a concern in every neighborhood. People want to live in an attractive neighborhood and the image presented by the houses or apartments is a big factor. Homeowners/buyers need to see a healthy annual price increase. Bottom line, “will I get my investment back?”

The Housing Committee focuses on gathering the facts and choosing actions designed to stabilize and improve the real estate market in the neighborhood. You will find people are very interested in the outcome of this committee because they all have a vested interest.

### Understand Current Housing Conditions

- Interview local realtors to understand the market and their opinion of the neighborhood

Many neighborhoods are concerned of the quality, maintenance, and vacancy rate within their area; regardless if the pricing of the neighborhood is low, middle, or high. The best place to understand what the current market conditions are and how your neighborhood is perceived is a local Realtor. The Current Housing Conditions Sub Group should identify an experienced Realtor and invite them to speak with the group on these topics

The committee should ask the Realtor if sales are up or down for the overall city and then compare how sales in your neighborhood are doing. A hard question to hear the answer to is “how does the market perceive our neighborhood?” This question, if answered honestly by the Realtor may show you what to focus on to improve your neighborhood. You may find it useful to invite this person back several times a year to get updates.

- Evaluate the condition of the houses in the neighborhood

The Current Housing Conditions Sub Group should try to get a handle on the current conditions of the neighborhood’s housing. The Sub Group should try to rate houses on a street with a scale of 1-5 with five being the highest rating. Find the best house in the neighborhood and consider it a five. Identify the worst house and assign it a value of one. Give each house a separate score on maintenance and design using these houses as a measuring stick. Putting this information in a spreadsheet table can keep it orderly and easy to scan.

The committee may be able to approach the City’s mapping department with the project to see if the department could assist in the project by converting the spreadsheet to a shaded map for the group. This can be done, but it is not as easy as it sounds. This should be explored with the city staff before gathering any more data than a sample street. An extremely labor intensive alternative is to have the city print out a map showing parcel lines to be shaded in by hand.

With this information, the committee can decide to pursue strategies to address maintenance or housing design. The committee will also be able to determine if there are certain areas where housing problems are concentrated, calling for a focused approach. This is a time intensive activity and should only be undertaken if your group believes housing is a major concern for the neighborhood and the information would be helpful to address it.

- Research the property values of houses in the neighborhood

A great point to focus on as a Housing Committee is the price of homes. Knowing what the average increase in property values in past years can give important insight of the value of investing in the neighborhood. A healthy neighborhood shows some level of increase each year. This information should be shared with neighbors so they can understand what is happening to their

## 3

**Leadership Builder**Section 3: Infrastructure  
*Continued*

investment. The committee should also gather the same data for adjacent neighborhoods and the city as a whole.

The information gathered by the committee can shed light on the health of neighborhood. If your neighborhood is not keeping up with the surrounding areas, the committee should try to identify what the reasons are. In speaking with Realtors, they can give you their opinion. Their answers may not be entirely accurate; however they know what their buyers say when they bring them into the neighborhood. This method is not scientific, but can definitely steer the discussion in the right direction.

- **Review all the information and identify what are the most pressing housing issues for the neighborhood**

There can be many different issues affecting the housing in your neighborhood. The committee's job is to sift through all they have heard, assess the significance of each issue's impact, and determine which ones are the real culprits. It could be there are several boarded up houses scattered throughout, giving the image people are giving up on the neighborhood. It may be one street looks dismal and the community is forming their opinion on only the one street. There are deeper issues such as poor rating of the schools or high unemployment. Instead of launching a housing related solution, you may find a volunteer tutoring program or job fair is what needs to happen.

The important part is to sift through all the information the committee has gathered or heard to distinguish which is the most important. You will find people's attention picks up when you want to talk about how to improve their home value appreciation. If you can connect the dots in a clear manner, the neighborhood could take on a wide variety of projects such as clean-ups, paint-a-thon, landscaping and others to make a difference.

## Research Possible Solutions

- **Present conditions/issues to real estate professionals to get their ideas**

When you assemble all you know about the neighborhood's housing, a

discussion or solutions meeting needs to be called. It would be good to have several Realtors/brokers in the room when this happens. The group should have one or more members present the findings to the whole group and then facilitate a discussion of possible solutions. As solutions are discussed, be sure to solicit the input from the real estate professionals. They are not the final word, but their opinions could help shape solutions to be practical and have the biggest impact.

- **Research the issues on the Internet to determine how other communities have responded**

In addition to reporting the current conditions, examples of what other neighborhoods or communities have done should also be made. Using the Internet, the committee should search for solutions in other cities; present the basics of what people did and what were the results.

Looking on city web sites and in non profit news sources can provide a variety of approaches. Generally, you won't find exact solutions for your neighborhood, but you will be inspired by what you find. Another good idea would be to attend neighborhood conferences and workshops put on by national organizations.

- **Develop Solutions**

While researching the current conditions and gathering opinions, you will start to formulate potential solutions. The committee should create a running list of these while the research process is underway. Once the information has been analyzed and discussed, the committee chair person should hold a brainstorming session to put all the ideas on the table. These solutions should then be evaluated and separated into groups of levels of feasibility. Some level of fleshing out of each idea should occur and be written down. These ideas will be shared with the members of the neighborhood group once they have been refined.

## Present and Decide on Solutions

- **Hold public meeting to create housing strategy based upon the research of the committee**

Once the committee has started to formulate solutions, the ideas should be presented by the committee chair person at the larger neighborhood meetings. Getting comments from the audience can either help strengthen or shape the

3

## Leadership Builder

Section 3: Infrastructure  
*Continued*

solutions to a point where the neighbors can get behind them. There will be solutions requiring a great amount of support from the neighborhood so soliciting their input at this stage will be important.

- **Pursue agreed upon activities**

The committee should take in consideration what their fellow neighbors said during the solution presentation meeting. Based on their input, the committee should make adjustments and start to pursue the solutions. It is best to target “winnable” battles first. The easy ones may not be the ones with the most interest, however the chairperson should caution the group on taking on to big of a challenge in the beginning. It is highly recommended the group focus on one solution at a time.

### Market the Neighborhood

- **Create web-based marketing tools designed to inform potential buyers about the available housing and strengths of the neighborhood.**

Home searching is done largely on the web in these modern times. Beyond finding the right priced home, buyers also research the neighborhoods surrounding the potential home. Using the Internet, buyers conduct searches and visit sites having information about the area. Buyers look at quality of schools, crime rates if they can find them, and nearby amenities. The homebuyer also gets information from their Realtor, making them an important point of contact when it comes to promoting a neighborhood.

The neighborhood’s task is to find ways to promote themselves by having a web presence and promoting it to homebuyers and current neighbors. If done properly, the web based effort will paint an accurate picture of a stable and improving neighborhood. Often, the media will make a name for themselves at the expense of a neighborhood experiencing problems. They leave out the positives and focus on the negatives. Building a web presence provides the neighborhood an opportunity to show the positives.

Using a web site to accomplish this is a good start. Promoting it to neighbors and others can start to draw attention to it. Promoting the site where people are searching for information on your neighborhood could be very effective. Informing Realtors active in the neighborhood about your site could lead them to include it in the information they share with clients.

You should not underestimate the impact of sharing this web-based information with your existing neighbors. Your positive spin could lead to people changing their plans to move away or to encourage people they know to move to their neighborhood. This information could be crucial in getting people to stay and invest in their property because they believe in the neighborhood.

- **Work with Realtors to develop informative brochures to be displayed at open houses and other opportunities**

When people are selling their house, they often put a stack of flyers on the counter for prospective buyers to take one to remember their house. The committee could develop a full color brochure to provide home sellers to set out to inform people of the positives of your neighborhood. Sharing information about school ratings, nearby shopping opportunities, average home prices, and other information could tip the scales in the homebuyer’s decision.

### Conclusion

Many would say the housing stock of a neighborhood is at the core of a neighborhood’s health. Many people feel they can tell how a neighborhood is doing simply by driving through and looking at the houses. There is definitely some truth to this, however what matters here is the public’s perception. If they believe it is an indicator, then it becomes the gospel, like it or not. The Housing Committee is charged with finding ways to increase the public’s confidence in the neighborhood.

The committee can focus on physically changing the image by encouraging people to invest both time and money in their homes. Another effort is in educating both visitors and existing neighbors of the positives the neighborhood already has. It is easy for both parties to enter into a downward spiral of opinion, sometimes not based upon fact but other people’s perceptions. The committee serves to present the neighborhood in the best possible light.

By increasing the desire of people to stay in the neighborhood you are also creating an equal desire to attract new people. The committee will have its work cut out for it as it deals with aging housing stock, deficiencies that have crept in over time, and the public’s perception.



# Plan Builder

## Section 1: Introduction

Neighborhood plans are used to address distressed neighborhood or ones experiencing rapid change. They can dwell on the physical or social aspects of the area; a good plan addresses both. A distressed neighborhood is often the by-product of a variety of interrelated negative issues present in the neighborhood. When rapid change comes to a neighborhood, the impact can cause both positive and negative reactions within the area.

When multiple issues are present or forecasted, it creates a complex puzzle for neighborhood residents, elected officials, and city employees to figure out. A neighborhood plan brings this diverse group of stakeholders together to study, plan, and make recommendations. Without a plan, the situation lacks coordination and communication necessary for progress to be made.

A neighborhood plan is a document describing what a neighborhood wants to be and informs the reader on how to accomplish this. By addressing identified goals in critical topic areas, the neighborhood plan steers choices by stakeholders and actors within the designated area.

Plan Builder is part of a comprehensive approach to neighborhood improvement. It creates a document and process designed to focus the future efforts of stakeholders within a neighborhood. Those with an interest in the neighborhood will need to take proactive steps to reach their goal for the neighborhood. Plan Builder works at laying out a logical method based upon the author's experience in neighborhood organizing and planning.

Although designed for professionals with a background in traditional planning, anyone can read the book and gain insight on how to create a plan for their neighborhood. It should be noted the process of working with the neighbors is almost as important as the plan itself. The process will help recruit leadership and increase civic involvement by all involved. In the end, it is hoped the planning process pumps life into the stakeholders and leads to a renewed spirit within the neighborhood.



# Plan Builder

## Section 2: Before the Plan

Creating a neighborhood plan for an area in need is a great approach to making improvements. To spend scarce or large amounts of money and resources using a non scientific process could lead to disaster. However, neighborhood plans carry their own baggage in community development. There are many examples where plans were written but not followed. The communities saw little to no physical change as a result of the neighborhood plan.

Opponents to the idea of creating a neighborhood plan fear a lack of return on their investment of time. They want to know how the neighborhood plan will be implemented. If the planner can show how the plan will be acted upon, then the opponent will likely change to supportive or at least willing to go along for the ride. The planner will describe success as each partner in the process following the plan and then results will come. Sometimes this satisfies the opponents and sometimes it doesn't. In the end, there are still unimplemented plans and plenty of finger pointing. What went wrong?

There are two important forces required for a neighborhood plan to come to life: Drive and Resources. With no one driving the rejuvenation of the neighborhood, the plan will fail. A planner works best when they are guiding resources to have maximum impact in the neighborhood. Without resources, the people involved find themselves defeated before they get started.

### Drive

Before a neighborhood planner begins a plan, they should ask the question, "who is driven to see the neighborhood improve?" It could be the city organization, the neighbors, or an active non profit. The question is really what are people interested in doing. The planner should be working with leaders backed by a group demonstrating a willingness and desire to take action. If the planner has to create excitement at every turn of the process, the chance of success will fall rapidly.

### Resources

The second question the planner should ask is, "What resources are they putting at my disposal?" A challenged neighborhood will take an expenditure of resources.

There are neighborhoods where current city services and programs have not been utilized by the neighbors. Simply promoting the use of these underutilized programs may be effective; however this requires a marketing plan, not a neighborhood plan. If the client for the plan feels marketing alone will not improve the conditions, then the planner can count on the need for increasing resources beyond existing programs and services. There needs to be a commitment to spending more resources in the neighborhood from the beginning or at least after a neighborhood study is completed.

These basic questions will help the neighborhood planner understand how successful they will be in the neighborhood. If one or both of these forces is missing, the client should not have very high expectations of the neighborhood planning process.

### Leadership Required

For the process to be driven, there needs to be leadership. Neighborhood rejuvenation is not as easy as following a ten step plan. The organizations will not "just come together". Steps will not snap into place and produce glowing results. A neighborhood plan only provides the leadership with a logical course to steer the rejuvenation efforts. The rejuvenation process requires leadership to make adjustments when the landscape changes.

Leadership can come from the neighbors, politicians, local non profits, or the management of the city organization. Each origin will have pluses and minuses. The neighborhood planner cannot be the leadership for the rejuvenation of the neighborhood. At best, they will be the leader of the planning process, ensuring participation of the stakeholders and completion of the document. The neighborhood will require someone with a longer duration and personal investment.

### Expectations

The planner should have expectations of the different stakeholders.

# 4

## Plan Builder

Section 2: Before the Plan  
*Continued*

### The City

Great plans are not enough to rejuvenate a neighborhood. There needs to be commitment of energy and resources. From the City, the high ranking officials must be set on changing the status quo of a neighborhood. They need to be so motivated, they are willing to step out of the ordinary responses and offer increased resource allocation. The managers will need to meet on a regular basis just to talk about improving the neighborhood.

### Neighbors

Neighbors will need to be fed up with how things are going and willing to devote time and in some cases their finances to create change within their neighborhood. Their level of activity must reach a point where they are ready to take action, but want to know how to be most effective. There also needs to be a large number of people willing to commit to changing the neighborhood, not just two or three.

### Nonprofits

Nonprofits must be interested in taking on projects within the neighborhood. They need to have a desire to include projects in their work plan, seek funding, and devote internal resources to complete projects.

## Creating Interest

Not all of these groups need to be devoted to action in the beginning. The neighborhood planning process can create excitement leading these groups to take action. This puts a large burden on the neighborhood planner and the process. It will result in a need for the neighborhood planner to be engaged well after the plan is written to build and maintain momentum within the different organizations involved. Most planners are not afforded this luxury of additional time.



# Plan Builder

## Section 3: Neighborhood Planning Overview

Welcome to the world of neighborhood planning. Neighborhood planning varies considerably from traditional community planning in a variety of ways. The first major difference is the role of the community. Larger community plans have a tendency to treat the public simply as an input box in the process flow chart. Planners ask what they want for the larger community and then move on to the next step in the process. In neighborhood plans, the audience will likely take an active role in plan implementation. This changes the dynamic quite significantly.

When designing large plans, one has to avoid gathering too many detailed statistics to keep the focus on the big picture. In neighborhood planning, the more detailed the statistics are, the better the plan becomes. Neighborhood planning allows the planner to investigate issues more closely. This level of study is extremely important as the planner engages neighbors to discuss perceptions and realities. For example, if the neighbors claim there are too many rental properties in the neighborhood, the planner should know how many there are.

So what exactly is a neighborhood plan? In researching the neighborhood plans found on city web sites from around the country, the end products vary widely. Some cities' plans appear to be solely designed for city departments and mention no activity for neighbors. Others are simply community style plans written for a smaller area; lacking any specific steps.

### Definition of a Neighborhood Plan

A neighborhood plan is a document describing what a neighborhood wants to be and informs the reader on how to accomplish this. By addressing identified goals in critical topic areas, the neighborhood plan steers choices by stakeholders and actors within the designated area.

### The Actors

When creating a neighborhood plan, there are several actors; each with a role to play:

#### The Neighborhood Planner

What makes someone a neighborhood planner? What about a great neighborhood planner? These are good questions and hopefully this document will provide insight to these questions. A neighborhood planner needs to be a leader. They should not be a leader for the neighborhood, but for the process. A neighborhood planner will lead both individuals and organizations through a process most are unfamiliar with. The planner should make it clear their intentions are to take the neighborhood through a planning process and leave the neighbors in a better position than when they found them. The planner is not there to fix the neighborhood. This is the role for the stakeholders in the neighborhood.

A neighborhood planner must research, solicit, and sort through a wide variety of information about the neighborhood and make sense of it. The end product, the plan, must demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the neighborhood, the issues, and the desires of the stakeholders. Only then will the neighbors take the plan recommendations seriously. Because the planning process is as important as the plan itself, a neighborhood planner must pay attention to the details of the overall process.

The neighborhood planner needs to have people skills to draw out information and participation by the neighbors. Meeting facilitation skills are a must for the planner. The planner should be able to handle controlling the discussion of controversial elements of the plan. Control means to make sure the audience gets through the discussion and feels satisfied it has been thoroughly discussed.

To write the plan, the planner needs to be well versed in community building. This can come through experience or through research. The plan needs to be written by a person who feels it will make a difference. The planner must be confident in their

## 4

**Plan Builder**

Section 3: Neighborhood Planning Overview  
*Continued*

**Types of Neighborhood Plans**

Neighborhood plans fall into one of the following four categories:

1

**City-Based**  
What the City will do

These plans tend to ignore the role of neighbors and provide no guidance to residents wanting to get involved in their neighborhood. With these limitations, cities plan with limited funding, creating limited plans and fail to excite anyone.

2

**Joint Plan**  
Creates a unified plan where everyone is called upon to take action within one plan.

Joint Plans are difficult to get everyone's true commitment during the planning process. The neighbors, similar to city department managers, nod their head in affirmation of recommendations but do not believe anyone will hold them accountable to the action. They count on having excuses later letting them off the hook. Decision makers are duped into believing everyone will execute their actions listed within the plan. In the end, little of the plan is implemented due to lack of coordination and accountability.

3

**Neighbor-Based**  
What the neighbors will do and what they want the city to do

This is the extreme opposite of city-based plans. This time the neighbors have written a plan with little or no input from the city organization. The plan is more about what the neighborhood needs, but usually does not include true commitments from the city government. The city is then under no obligation to grant the plan's request with regard to spending, zoning, and services.

4

**Framework/Action**  
Provides a framework plan supplemented by separate action plans

This is the proposed method because it allows the actions to be separated. Groups must agree internally to items in their action plans. This creates more flexible plans for all groups without losing site of what the neighborhood wants accomplished. The plan is also easier adopt by city council when it doesn't contain the details or actions of other entities.



# Plan Builder

## Section 3: Neighborhood Planning Overview *Continued*

ability to understand the issues and make feasible recommendations. The stakeholders are counting on the planner for this and there is no escaping this reality.

The best neighborhood planners are those who can “go with the flow” of the group, while keeping them on a path to plan completion. Neighborhoods are messy places when it comes to creating order. A good neighborhood planner makes small alterations to the process as they encounter conflicting information. Neighbors will supply plenty of drama, tension, and chaos. Stakeholders will look to the neighborhood planner to be cool and calm during these times. Having confidence in their own abilities will help the planner prevail during these moments.

There are times it seems the neighborhood planner must be superman or wonder woman. There is a great deal of emotion found in neighborhood planning due to the size of the planning area being very intimate. What is being discussed or proposed is likely to have a more direct impact on the audience’s home or way of life than other planning efforts. The demands on the planner to deliver results when seeing the affected people sitting in front of them can be overwhelming. A good neighborhood planner will use this as inspiration to deliver the best plan they know how.

### Individual Neighbors

Within every neighborhood you will find people. They are often homeowners or renters within the area you are studying. Whether they are rich or poor, you can be assured they live busy lives. There are many demands being made on their lives and the planner’s effort is just the next thing pulling at them. Their attitude towards the neighborhood itself can vary greatly. Some have lived there longer than others. While some will have hope for the neighborhood, others will be looking for a way out. Most will care about the area, but will have a variety of reasons to not get involved.

This is the neighborhood population, like it or not. The neighborhood planner’s job is to get them to the table. The planner will not get everyone involved; not even close. The planner must approach the neighbors and give their best effort to bring people together. The reason: the untapped potential of the people can make or break the efforts to improve the neighborhood. The difficulty is many residents cannot see the potential in themselves or the neighborhood in the beginning.

There will always be at least a core of people who do realize the potential. Attracting this group will be a major objective for the neighborhood planner. When they show

up, the planner needs to recognize them for who they are and get them involved. They may or may not see themselves as leaders at this point. If all goes well in the process, they will step into the role of leadership.

**Their Role:** To inform, learn, and participate in the recommendations.

### Neighborhood Leaders

Within the neighborhood being planned, the planner will likely find existing neighborhood organizations. These may be block watches or larger neighborhood organizations. Their level of membership may be low or high. The important thing for the neighborhood planner is to recognize them, meet with them, and invite them into the process.

The neighborhood planner may find themselves turning up their nose at groups who appear to be very small. It is tempting to dismiss these groups and the people who describe themselves as the leaders. It would be foolish to overlook these leaders. There are times when getting neighborhood involvement is tough business. Sometimes, leaders of small efforts just need a boost from efforts such as a neighborhood plan to push them to the next level. Their group could take off after working with the planning process.

There is also an aspect of respect the planner should be aware of in neighborhoods. The very neighbors who fail to participate in these struggling groups will be offended if they don’t see efforts to involve these groups. When working in a neighborhood, the planner will have to make every effort to be inclusive. Having existing leadership involved makes it easier to attract the remainder of the neighborhood.

**Their Role:** To promote, inform, and lead their fellow neighbors in implementing the plan.

### Non profits

Non profits refer to officially recognized companies with funding to undertake activities within the neighborhood. They may be social service, housing, or economic development based. Non profits are considered an asset to the neighborhood; however, it is important to note they had a mission prior to the planner arriving in the neighborhood. The planner will have to understand their mission while working on the plan. There will be times their mission travels the same path the planner is laying out for the neighborhood. Other times, they will be acting in their self interest which may not be in the interest of the neighborhood.

Like any other living thing, they need to feed. To put it simply, they live off funding and accomplishments. Housing development organizations have to produce housing. Social service agencies have to assist clients. When including them in the

## 4

## Plan Builder

### Section 3: Neighborhood Planning Overview *Continued*

plans, the planner should make sure their role allows them to pursue the activity they were created for.

In most cases, they will be very interested in neighborhood planning efforts. They will be an attractive participant because they have funding, professional staff, and other resources. The planner should also remember they can easily overpower the conversation in meetings for the very same reasons. The planner should be careful not to align themselves too much with the non profits. Planners should try to maintain an image of objectivity to keep people from being turned off by too strong of relationships with any one faction.

**Their Role:** To use their resources and capacity to pursue elements of the plan the other actors cannot accomplish.

#### The City

The City organization offers a great amount of resources to the planning process. The downside is they can be difficult to get to change course. The biggest obstacle in working with city departments is the fact they are focused on serving the entire city. They already have set priorities and these may or may not deliver the services the planner wants for their neighborhood.

The neighborhood planner will have to work hard to understand how the overall structure and the individual departments operate and make decisions. Some cities may have already decided to expend above average resources in the neighborhood. This situation is very attractive for neighborhood plans because the departments already have a willingness to step out of the ordinary expenditure process. For cities not willing to forsake their existing methods, the planner will not appear to wield the full potential of the city's resources. This doesn't mean good things will not come from the plan.

**Their Role:** To provide resources and services only they control and have access to.

## The Impact of Organization

The state of organization within the neighborhood is an important factor and can change the planning process in a major way. Planning with an organized group of neighbors can make the planning process much easier and productive. Working in an

unorganized area takes more work but can also provide the best setting for neighbors to get organized.

The important thing to remember when working in a non-organized or low-capacity neighborhood is the more organized they get, the more capacity they will have to interact. When the planner addresses an unorganized audience and asks what they think the issues are, they will give a certain response. This response changes as they get comfortable with each other and gain more information. A neighborhood plan be completed and the neighbors starting to organize themselves after the planning process. Not long after completing the neighborhood plan, it will appear there are new or better defined issues before the group, not included in the plan. The reason: they were new to the planning process and were not fully engaged during the initial process.

The lesson for planners is to give attention to capacity building and organizing before they get too far into the neighborhood planning process. Instead of asking the group what they think are the economic development needs of their neighborhood, they should form a committee focused on economic development. The planner should provide them with back ground information and basic understanding of the topic, before asking them about their needs and desires.



# Plan Builder

## Section 4: Where Does This Lead: The End Product

People asked to participate in a neighborhood planning process want to know what to expect. The planner will be leading them through a process involving understanding the situation, developing possible solutions, and then a commitment of action from stakeholders. The neighborhood planning process will produce three types of documents designed to provide an understanding and a direction for improvement efforts. The documents will include a neighborhood study, neighborhood plan, and two or more individualized action plans for participating organizations.

### Neighborhood Study

The study document is meant to present the facts of the neighborhood. It will consist of tables, graphs, maps, and observations. The document will be non judgmental and will not make any recommendations. This document will serve as the base document for the neighborhood plan. It is designed as a stand alone document eventually becoming an appendix to the overall plan. The statements and recommendations of the neighborhood plan will be rooted in the findings presented in the study.

### The Neighborhood Plan

The neighborhood plan itself should be rather brief. The majority of the data analysis will be contained within the study document. The plan writer should include a short summary of the study findings. The remainder of the plan will be devoted to the vision, goals, and recommendations. The vision should be a statement of what the neighbors want for their neighborhood in the future. The goals will be a combination of what the neighbors want and what the professional planner feels the neighborhood needs to reach their vision.

Recommendations will consist of what people feel are possible solutions or ways to accomplish the goals. These ideas will be supplemented with concepts injected by the neighborhood planner through their research and personal experiences. The plan must be bigger than the output of any one single entity involved in the plan. If the plan only records the ideas and intentions of one group (neighbors, the city, or a

non profit), then there was no need to go through such an elaborate process. The planner will need to take the best of the proposed ideas, inject outside information, and then disseminate it in a way all parties can understand it.

### Action Plans

The actions of the involved groups are separated from the neighborhood plan for important reasons. The first, getting commitments of action from any organization is time consuming. Holding up the progress for one or more entities to make commitments is detrimental to the overall process. Second, the individual organizations need to decide and commit to actions based upon their own process, not through a new process dictated by the neighborhood planner.

The neighborhood plan needs to be approved by all involved. By separating the framework plan, all parties can approve it as a statement of what they want. When the planner adds in the actions of the individual organizations involved, a new dynamic is introduced. The planner will now be asking organizations to approve the actions of others. Regardless if this can be done, one cannot have the neighbors approving or disapproving the decisions of the city organization, nor can the city do the same to the decisions of a neighborhood group. All parties have independence from each other. The best a neighborhood plan can do is to steer their decision onto a common path through shared information and goal setting.

### End Product: What it Provides

Before the plan is written, the planner must visualize what the plan will provide the participants. The neighborhood plan will provide the following for the involved parties:

#### **Sound understanding of the neighborhood**

To remove confusion within the neighborhood improvement effort, everyone should be provided with the best information about the conditions, observations and opinions within the neighborhood. The planning process will provide a separate study document, the neighborhood study, to establish a common understanding

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## Plan Builder

### Section 4: Where Does This Lead: The End Product *Continued*

with the involved organizations. Each organization will have copies of this study to refer to when they are making decisions in the future.

#### **Clear identification of everyone's goals**

The neighborhood planning process creates a sense of unity within the organizations involved in the neighborhood. The process will produce a joint vision statement produced through a consensus building process. The vision statement along with the goals for the neighborhood can be referred to by the organizations when questions arise about whether future decisions will bring the neighborhood closer to the shared .

#### **Recommendations for how to accomplish the goals**

It is one thing to reach a conclusion on a shared goal for the neighborhood and another to understand how to reach it. The neighborhood plan will provide one or more possible ways to reach the goal. Organizations are free to engage in other activities if they believe it will help the neighborhood reach the plan's goal. The plan provides suggestions when the group is at a loss for what to do or is interested in alternative actions.

#### **Commitments**

The action plans will capture commitments from the participating organizations. Without commitments, there will be no actions. The neighborhood planning process provides an opportunity for groups to discuss what they want, how to accomplish it, and what efforts and resources must be committed to achieve the desires for their organization and neighborhood.

### How Will it be Used

Each organization involved in the plan process has their own way of engaging their missions. This will continue to be the natural order of things even after a joint planning process. The plan will be used to shed light on the issues, illustrate common goals, and provide strong direction to all interested parties. For organizations honestly engaged in the planning process, this will lead to course changes or reinforcement of their current plans. The neighborhood plan is a shaping tool, not a managing tool. Neighborhood planners can hope the process will bring unity and a common approach to a neighborhood, yet must recognize the independence of all involved.

#### **Advocacy**

Upon the completion of the plan, the neighborhood planner will have a role in promoting the neighborhood within the city organization. There will be times when the organization will focus on other needs of the city and the plan may be lost within the bureaucracy. By following up with the various departments, the planner will be able to help the city avoid losing focus. If the planner finds the city has moved on to other projects, they should reconvene the various departments to remind them of the commitments they have made. The planner should also share success stories and how important accomplishing the vision is to the community.

#### **As a Guide**

Being the leader of a neighborhood or non profit is difficult. There are so many directions to lead the organization in and many people pushing and pulling the leadership in different directions. The value of a neighborhood plan to the leader is quite high in times like these. The plan can demonstrate the organization already has a path to follow. Of course the plan will not be so detailed it provides day to day direction for the organization. It will provide a measuring stick to gauge new ideas.

When the membership or individual makes a suggestion, the leadership can ask a simple question, "how does this fit in with the activity we have agreed to already?" Asking how the activity will further their goals will help shed light on mediocre ideas unrelated to the mission of the organization. This is not to say everything the group does should be limited by the plan, but it is a logical place to start. If people start abandoning the idea during this initial discussion, it probably will not move forward.

#### **Investments**

If the plan is well written and illustrated, it can have a great impact on investment decisions, both government and private sector. Developers may see the interest of having a shopping center with a better selection of stores. The street department may shift spending over to bring the streets of the neighborhood up to an acceptable level. The plan serves as a "why should we spend in your neighborhood" document. This can be shared with realtors, officials, developers, and property owners. The concepts presented for the neighborhood could drive their decisions to select the neighborhood for their next project.



# Plan Builder

## Section 5: Preliminary Activity

When a neighborhood planner is assigned or selects a neighborhood, the first order of business is to understand the neighborhood. To accomplish this, the neighborhood planner will start with a visual assessment and then review easy to find information about the neighborhood. From there they start to gather information through interviews and field work.

### Visual Assessment

Visual assessment is a fancy way of saying “take a look at the neighborhood”. The facts and figures a planner encounters will mean more if they have a visual understanding of the neighborhood. The planner should start with a simple map of the area and plan a route for their walk. Large neighborhoods require splitting up the area walk into separate visits. The first time through a neighborhood the planner should go by themselves. Conversations with a walking partner may distract the planner from making observations. Issues of safety may require a partner; however the planner needs to remain focused on investigating the neighborhood.

#### What to Look For

This is somewhat difficult to answer. The neighborhood planner is looking for clues and indicators of possible issues. They are also attempting to get a feeling for variations within the planning area.

#### How marketable is the neighborhood?

Most neighborhoods a planner will be working in will be older. There is a difference between age and neglect. The planner should ask themselves if the residents are making efforts to make their properties attractive.

#### Safety

Are there bars on the windows? Beware of dog signs? Do the front yards have chain link fences? These are signs of high crime. If these are present the planner should be prepared to engage the residents on the topic.

#### Infrastructure

The planner should look for cracks in sidewalks and streets to determine if this will be a big issue. They should also watch for uneven sidewalks causing tripping hazards. If they see any signs of failed infrastructure, they should make a mental note of it.

#### Stability

Piles of household goods in front of houses may mean evictions and/or foreclosures are rampant or at the least common in the area. This type of visual sign will be on the minds of neighbors the planner will meet during their process.

#### People

Depending on the time of day and season, there should be people working in their yard or walking in the neighborhood. The absence of these at times when the planner expects to see activity could point to a lack of community or feeling unsafe by the residents. This could lead to people being reserved about talking to each other during the process.

#### Neighbor Interaction

When the planner encounters people in the neighborhood, they should engage them in conversation. The planner should let the neighbor know they are starting a neighborhood improvement process and would like to hear what they think of the neighborhood. This is very unscientific but very useful to shed some light on the neighborhood prior to engaging the whole neighborhood or even the leaders.

The planner should write a description of the neighborhood immediately after walking. They should make a short list of issues they feel will be important to the neighborhood.

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# Plan Builder

Section 4: Preliminary Activity  
*Continued*

## Previous Studies

In any city, there are a variety of plans designed to steer future development. Within these plans, there are sections providing background information of the area they cover. The neighborhood may have been previously planned and it will be highly beneficial to review any plan addressing the area. Some plans will cover the very same area while others may have a much broader scale. Some of the more interesting plans are ones written some time in the past because they will often predict future trends or were the basis for changes the planner now sees.

The neighborhood planner should review all of these documents to gain a better understanding of the neighborhood. Within these plans, light may be shed on upcoming improvements, issues such as traffic congestion or outdated sewer lines. The planner should think through the ramifications of these findings. At this stage, the planner should be simply identifying issues affecting the planning of the neighborhood. Later, the goals, objectives, and recommendations will be made with all the underlying issues in mind.

## Gather Census Numbers

Census numbers can provide a base of information for the reader to understand the neighborhood. The planner can find figures such as population estimates, education levels, and a breakdown of ethnicity. The problem with US Census numbers is they quickly become outdated and inaccurate because they are generated every 10 years. The planner should use them to provide the reader a general description of the neighborhood and to indicate any trends relevant to the condition of the neighborhood.

A gradually changing age demographic is normal; however the planner should look for an abrupt change in age of population. For example, when a majority of the neighbors approach the senior years it may be an indication of a major turnover from the aged to young families. This could greatly alter the demands put on the area recreation areas. This can also have an impact on the housing marketability of the neighborhood. There may be too many houses looking for buyers at a given time. A good majority of houses may be headed towards rental status if the housing stock doesn't appeal to the homebuyers.

There may not be a lot the planner can do with the census data because it doesn't indicate anything out of the ordinary or the area has experienced radical changes

since the last census. Still, they should try to work it into the study to help the reader understand the neighborhood.

## Department Interviews

Each department in a city organization will look at the neighborhood in question differently. When looking at a specific need or topic related to their department, they will have a very informed opinion. The neighborhood planner needs to solicit this input to fully understand not only the issues of the neighborhood, but also its role in the context of the bigger picture. It is easy to identify a broken up street in the neighborhood. It takes additional information to know how it ranks compared to other streets in the city. It may be one of fifty streets in poor condition throughout the city and not slated for rebuilding for another eight years. This is information one cannot gain simply by viewing the street; it comes from the relevant department.

### Relevant departments

Each city varies in department names and responsibilities. The planner should reach out to: Public Works, Police, Code Enforcement, Zoning, and the Planning Department. There are other departments affecting neighborhoods, but the planner may walk into meetings with them only to hear them say they don't have anything to share. In those cases, the planner should wait until they have a specific question to ask them.

For example, at first it doesn't look like the Legal Department has anything to contribute. Later after talking to Code Enforcement, the planner learns there are extremely high instances of overcrowding. They have sent many cases to the legal department for prosecution. This may lead the planner to the Legal Department to find out the realities surrounding the issue of overcrowding.

### Types of questions to ask

In many cases the simplest of questions can start a great conversation. Questions such as "are there any areas prone to flooding?" or "What kinds of police calls are occurring in the neighborhood?" will get the ball rolling. The planner should always ask questions related to the interviewee's area of expertise. They may provide information outside of their topic, but if asked unrelated questions, they will think the planner is wasting their time. When the person being interviewed discusses a possible issue for the neighborhood, the planner should ask if the department gathers any numbers or statistics capable of showing the issue or trend. This will be important later when the neighborhood study is being written.

### Additional objectives to focus on

The planner can expect to spend between thirty and sixty minutes in an interview. Although the answers will be useful; there is more at stake during the interview. This is the planner's time to build a working relationship with key staff people. If the

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### Section 4: Preliminary Activity *Continued*

planner doesn't already know the person they are interviewing, some effort should be put into bonding with them. The planner will likely need to ask them for more information later on. In some cases the planner may need them to come out and make a presentation to the neighbors. Having some level of connection with the staff person will be necessary in most cases.

To build relationships with departments, the planner should also listen to their needs. One may hear things like, "we need an evaluation of sidewalks done, but we don't have time" or "We patrol the area all the time, but we don't have any contact with the neighbors." To the experienced planner, these statements present an opportunity. The planner should avoid responding to these needs while in the interview. Instead, they should take time to think if they could benefit from assisting the department with their need. This could provide better information for the plan and earn the planner the appreciation of the department.

Using the sidewalk issue for an example, the planner should ask if the planning process can help the departments with their needs. It may be the planner will need the information about the sidewalks for their study; creating a joint interest. There may be a way to collect the information for Public Works if they are willing and able to train others to know what to look for. This type of relationship building is very foreign to most city departments. If the planner delivers assistance for a stated need they will be the Public Works Department's next best friend. It could pay off down the road in ways one can't imagine at the time. Bottom line, the neighborhood planner needs to build relationships.

## Neighborhood Groups

It would be nice if one neighborhood group represented the whole planning area neatly. This can definitely happen in the world of neighborhood planning. Often, the planning area covers two or more neighborhood groups within the boundaries. If this doesn't make it complicated enough, there can be areas not represented at all. When working with neighborhood groups the planner should remember: city hall politics are bad, neighborhood politics are nasty. The planner will need to treat everyone with respect and always operate in a cautious manner.

### Identify what groups are present

If the city has a neighborhood liaison, the planner should start there first. Other sources can be the police department's neighborhood policing unit or the mayor's office. They will have list of groups they have contact with. A neighborhood planner

is looking for groups both large and small. Prior to having the first public meeting, any neighborhood contacts the planner reaches will be extremely valuable.

The planner should feel free to call any of the contacts they uncovered and ask them for information about their group. If the phone call is going well, the planner should suggest a face to face meeting. Just like meeting the departments, one should build relationships with the neighborhood contacts. The most difficult segment to build relationships and trust will be the neighbors. They really don't have to talk with the planner if they don't want to and can afford to form negative opinions of them or the process if they want.

The neighborhood planner should make a good first impression. It takes so much effort to fix a negative opinion once it has been formed. Negative opinions can derail the planner's efforts during the planning process. Gossip can travel fast and one can find themselves on the outside of the neighbors' good graces very easily. Once the majority of neighbors turn their back on a person it is over. The planner can just pack up and leave at this point. On the other hand, if they make a good impression the planner will be eating homemade cookies and gaining many friendships.

### Review web sites, minutes, and materials

Some neighborhood groups and non profits are very capable when it comes to having a web presence. One can discover their web sites by looking on their printed materials or searching the Internet. Web site research can pay dividends if they are posting current stories about the neighborhood or their organization. Many groups post their minutes on their web site. These materials will give the planner great insight into their perception of the issues and their past activity. In rare cases, an organization may have gone through strategic planning efforts and have their vision for the future available.

### Get contact information

As mentioned earlier, the planner should make sure to assemble contact information for both the neighborhood side and the city departments. Later when they have had public meetings, the planner will need to ask follow-up questions to write the plan. The sign-in sheets will be a jumble of names and it will not be clear who to contact with questions. The planner should maintain a special contact list of people they interact with during the process.

### Set up initial interview

After assembling the list, the planner should review it determine who is important to meet face to face. The planner may have had some phone interviews with some of the list at this point. Now they need to be very intentional about sitting down with key players. The appointments should occur in a compact time period such as over

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### Section 4: Preliminary Activity *Continued*

the following two weeks. The planner will not want this step to drag on. They should get the interviews done and then move on.

#### **Summarize initial findings**

After gathering and reviewing the initial background information, the neighborhood planner should try to get a handle on how they perceive the neighborhood. This initial understanding will guide the planner as they plan the remainder of the process. Hot topics may require a special information session for the public with a knowledgeable speaker. More in depth research on a topic may be required.

#### **What should be the issues in the neighborhood?**

The burning question for the planner will be “what are the big issues for the neighborhood plan?” The planner should already be thinking on how to address the issues they uncovered. In the coming months, the planner will need to research these topics both from a local perspective and what other cities across the country are doing. The planner should keep in mind the issues may change as there is more public engagement. The planner will share the suspected issues with the neighborhood residents during the public input phase. The audience will help the planner to determine which issues will be addressed by the neighborhood plan.

#### **What field work will be needed to do to get the big picture?**

Now the planner has a small base of knowledge, what are the other things they want to know? Often, the ready sources of information do not provide much detail about the neighborhood in question. As they wrap up the preliminary research stage, the planner should list out additional information they would like to have to prepare the neighborhood study.



# Plan Builder

## Section 6: Plan Steering Committee

Not all neighborhood plans have a steering committee; however the good ones do. Not all efforts with steering committees produce good neighborhood plans; only the planning efforts with proper definition, roles, and involvement do. For some planners, having a steering committee of neighborhood residents is simply an item on their project to-do list.

Planners can easily make the mistake of thinking there is little the residents can offer or fear the difficulty there may be in working with them. These opinions can lead to avoidance or lack of engagement by the planner. The other side of the coin is to expect too much of them. The planner must find ways to truly engage the members of a steering committee so they add value to the plan, while avoiding slowing down the progress of the planning process.

### Why Have a Steering Committee?

Regardless of who writes a neighborhood plan, the first question people will have is how were the neighbors involved? Even when residents are writing their own plan, they will be scrutinized regarding neighborhood involvement. Were the different interests of the neighborhood engaged? This includes neighbors, businesses owners, property owners, and different ethnic groups within each category.

The next question confronting the plan writer will be how they involved the people. It is a difficult process to properly involve the different factions of a neighborhood, but people will ask it of the neighborhood planner just the same. If the answer is inadequate, the entire plan is dismissed. If the answer demonstrates it was done properly, then the planner has earned an enormous amount of credibility.

The steering committee can give the neighborhood planner an excellent sounding board for ideas and provide a great source of collective knowledge of the neighborhood. An engaged committee is also capable of directly contributing to solutions and innovative ideas for the neighborhood. Investing in the capacity and understanding of the committee members can pay-off handsomely later during the presenting of the plan to the public and in the implementation phase.

### Selection and Invitations

To create the committee, the neighborhood planner or the sponsoring organization will have to invite people to serve. There are many pitfalls a planner can encounter during this phase. The committee may represent only a small element or may all live in one corner of the neighborhood. The personalities of the selected members may clash. For success, the committee members should be selected based upon several different factors.

For unorganized areas, the neighborhood planner will need to assemble a well balanced group of stakeholders from different regions, ethnicities, and background. The following are things to consider when building the Plan Steering Committee.

#### Stakeholders

Within the neighborhood, there are several stakeholder groups: neighbors, business owners, property owners, churches, local government, and non profits. Members of these stakeholder groups usually have some skin in the game and can be quite attentive to the planning efforts.

#### Ethnicity

Within these stakeholder groups, there are various ethnicities. As the planner assesses the ethnic make up of the neighborhood, the need to have the different ethnic groups represented within the committee members may become quite important. Because the steering committee should not be too large, the planner will need to select people who represent two or more subgroups.

#### Background

The group should reflect the neighborhood professional backgrounds. If the neighborhood is mostly blue-collar, then a white-collar board may not be very representative; the opposite is equally true.

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## Plan Builder

### Section 6: Plan Steering Committee *Continued*

#### Relationships

The most difficult factor is the relationships between the members. There may be hurt feelings from previous activities making some unwilling to work with each other. There may be a level of bitterness just under the surface between possible members. The planner should try to discover relationship issues during the initial conversations they have with potential members. To accomplish this, the planner can mention some of the people on the list and ask if the interviewee knows them and what they think of them.

#### Organized Areas

For organized areas, the following should be considered:

<u>Source</u>	<u>Number of Representatives</u>
Neighborhood Groups <i>Two or three people per group</i>	Variable
Non Profits, CDCs, churches, social service providers <i>Either located within the neighborhood or serving the population</i>	Two
City Departments <i>Representatives from relevant departments</i>	Two
Citizens at large <i>People who have a strong interest in the neighborhood</i>	Two

#### Building Their Capacity

It is a great thing to assemble a wide range of representatives to guide the future of their neighborhood. Diversity is only the first step in creating an effective committee. The capacity to work together and to understand the planning process is just as important.

#### Committee Activities

Some people are used to working in group settings, while others find it very unusual and somewhat disturbing. The neighborhood planner should distribute a welcome packet with summaries of this section upon the first meeting. Verbally, the planner should then walk through the expectations of the committee's activities.

The planner should appoint a chair person for the first meeting. This person will be given the task of taking the group through the provided agenda. Committee members should be instructed to permit the chairperson to maintain order. The chairperson has the challenge of giving everyone an opportunity to be heard. At the end of the meeting there will need to be an election of a permanent chairperson for the remainder of the planning process. Anyone interested in serving as the chairperson should briefly state why they would make a good chairperson. Following the candidate discussion, a vote should follow.

Many times, no one will come forward, forcing the planner to convince their own selection to agree to being appointed. This is an important step because either way, it sets the pace for the committee. It demonstrates it will not slow down for indecision. The planner should always remember slow progress is one of the biggest fears of the committee members. An upbeat tempo should be demonstrated from the beginning.

#### Explaining the Process

Steering Committee members will need an understanding of the planning process so they feel comfortable participating. The committee members should also have a good grasp on what is going on because they may be explaining it to their fellow neighbors outside of the meeting.

Using a projected timeline of planning activities, the neighborhood planner should explain the different meetings and briefly present what the expected outcome will be after each event. The committee meetings should be represented within the timeline, demonstrating their opportunities to engage the planner during the process.

#### Understanding their Role

The neighborhood planner uses a series of public meetings to gather public input. In many ways, the information comes forward in a jumbled mess and needs to be sorted out following the meetings. A large audience is great for gathering input, but very difficult to maneuver through a discussion. The planner needs a representative sub-group of the neighbors to further discuss, refine, and to get clarity.

The steering committee is the group designed to play this role. Before and after each meeting, discussions will take place between the committee and the planner. This helps the planner from having a misstep in the planning process simply because they lacked the neighbors' insight. The committee members also have a responsibility to speak on behalf of their fellow neighbors. They may need to bring up what they have heard from others, even if they are not in agreement with the neighbors' conclusions or reasoning. This allows for the committee to inform the planner and to provide insight to whether the planner should be concerned about what is being said in the neighborhood.



# Plan Builder

Section 6: Plan Steering Committee  
*Continued*

## Assignments

If the committee members are going to truly be involved, they need to take on roles. The neighborhood planner can greatly increase their capacity to run public meetings and other efforts by assigning them tasks before and during the meeting. These assignments could include the following:

### Greeter

For committee members who are not ready to be up in front of the audience, they can serve as door greeters. Let them stand outside the building and greet people as they walk in. For the attendees, a proper upbeat greeting puts them in a positive mood and ready to actively participate. For the committee member, it gets them used to the people who are attending so later they can be comfortable taking on a more significant role during the meeting.

### Refreshments

Food or drink will not show up magically at a meeting. Depending on what is to be offered, the operation can be quite complicated. This creates another role for committee members to take on a role without speaking in front of the audience. It also prepares them to think about the logistics of a meeting.

### Opening remarks

This role can be the committee chairperson, or simply another committee member. The idea would be for the person to address the audience and prepare them for what will be on the meeting agenda. It is a way of educating the audience and getting people comfortable with what will occur during the event. A little bit of humor can be useful to warm up the crowd for the remaining speakers. This is a small part, but can demonstrate to the crowd the meeting is being partially operated by their fellow neighbors.

### Wrap up comments

This is a good role for the chairperson, because it will allow them to focus people on what was accomplished and foreshadow the future meetings. This also gives the impression the neighbors are heavily involved.

The appearance of the involvement of neighbors is not a gimmick to create a successful meeting. These roles are part of the capacity building opportunities

during the planning process. The idea would be for the neighborhood planner to leave the committee with a basic understanding of how to assemble and operate an effective public meeting. During the implementation of the plan, the committee will find themselves on their own; making any experience they gained during the plan process extremely valuable.

## Conclusion

The Steering Committee has a great amount of potential to create a strong relationship between the people and the finished plan. They can provide valuable information during the information gathering and the writing of the plan. Members of the committee can become active leaders in the overall neighborhood through gaining capacity and building relationships during the planning process.

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## Plan Builder

### Section 7: Research

The neighborhood study will be the basis for the neighborhood plan. The document will also be shared with the actors involved in the neighborhood plan. For the most part, no one will have seen such a concentrated summary of data for their neighborhood. This tool gives the planner credibility and favor in the eyes of the public. For the first time, neighbors and organizations will have detailed information about their neighborhood.

The preliminary data gathering was a good start; however it isn't enough to write the plan. For the plan to truly state the issues, the neighborhood study will need to support them. There needs to be a logical progression from what is presented in the study to the recommendations listed in the neighborhood plan itself.

#### Determine Additional Data Needed

As the planner wrapped up the preliminary data gathering, they started to list out additional information they would want for the neighborhood study. Now the neighborhood planner must figure out how to find this information or determine how they will gather it. Information will fall into the following categories: Visual, Verbal, and Research.

##### Visual

What can be ascertained by visually inventorying the neighborhood? If the planner wants an inventory of the physical condition of the housing in the neighborhood, they will have to do it themselves. The planner may want to recruit additional staff or assistance, but the process will be driven by the neighborhood planner.

An important point to remember during the data gathering is for the planner to think about how they will manipulate and report the information in the neighborhood study. If they plan to use a Geographic Information System (GIS) they will want to work with the GIS staff in the beginning to make sure they know how the information should be arranged for importing into the system. If the planner wants to present information in a table, then they should draw out the table before getting started. This will ensure the methodology will gather all the information needed later.

Examples of visual data to be collected

- House maintenance
- Vacancy
- Yard maintenance
- Sidewalk conditions
- Building materials

##### Verbal/Written Surveys

Getting input from the neighbors will require either a verbal or written survey. A written survey can be distributed during the public meetings of the planning process or a quick verbal survey can be administered to people as they leave a meeting. To get the input of more neighbors than attend the events, a door to door survey or random survey can provide a more complete picture of the neighborhood.

Time and resources will help determine the approach. Mailings cost money; however door to door efforts can be very time consuming. Random samplings may be the best approach to reduce cost and resource usage.

##### What can be learned from issuing a survey?

In neighborhood planning, perception is reality. The planner should know the perceptions of the neighbors. This is part of the issue identification process but can also provide more background information if designed properly.

##### Field Work

The gathering information in the field is a primary activity for neighborhood planners. Because the necessary level of detailed information does not exist, the planner must fill this void. There are two types of field work the neighborhood planner should engage the neighborhood in: Physical Inventories and Surveys. The planner will be seeking information for completing a study of the neighborhood. This information will be used to confirm or exclude issues for the neighborhood plan.



# Plan Builder

Section 7: Research  
*Continued*

## Physical Inventories

The physical inventory of the neighborhood is an important tool of the neighborhood planner. Completing an inventory can help clear-up preliminary findings regarding issues in the neighborhood. For example, if the neighbors said vacant housing was a big problem in the neighborhood, then field work can clarify if this is truly an issue. The planner should look through their notes and find questions which will be verified by physical inspection to include in their field work.

The inventory will be completed by reviewing each property and gathering information the planner deemed necessary. This may include vacancy, type of building structure, sidewalk conditions, and house maintenance. Although this seems very labor intensive, the process moves quickly once the categories and criteria are set. Categories should be limited to six to ten items to be inspected by the planner.

For each category, a simple scoring method should be established both for judging the property and for entering the results into the worksheet. Using a number scoring system to rate a property is preferred; 1= Good, 2 = Average, 3 = Poor. The scoring method should also be coordinated with the person responsible for creating the GIS mapping. It is recommended the planner use the field work sheet on one street and then submit it to the GIS staff to make sure the maps will work out as planned. It is tempting to skip this step, but better to discover a mistake in the field work sheet in the beginning and not 2,000 houses later.

Walking the neighborhood is the only option. Driving in a car will not give the neighborhood planner the feel for the neighborhood. Windshield surveys are for other types of planners, not neighborhood planners. There are also additional items to note in the neighborhood beyond the data the planner is prepared to gather. Walking in the neighborhood can also create impromptu conversations with neighbors. This can further increase the planner's understanding of the neighborhood.

In the end, the field work should produce a spreadsheet representing each property within the planning area. Each property will have an evaluation score for each of the planner's criteria. This spreadsheet will then be sent to the GIS staff person to import it into GIS, allowing for custom made maps.

## Surveys

In neighborhood planning, opinions are very important. The crime statistics may indicate there is not a crime problem in the neighborhood; however the perception may be different. During the research and planning activities, the real situation should be discovered. It may be people are not reporting crimes out of frustration or the neighbors have an unfounded perception. Either way, the planner must start with the opinions to see what it reveals.

Surveys are the logical activity to determine the opinions of the people. There are a variety of approaches to administering surveys. The following are approaches suitable for understanding a neighborhood:

### Quick Street Surveys

Use: Quick issue identification      Study Usage: No

This survey is used with people gathering at street meetings. The survey should be designed to be very brief with only a few questions on it. The purpose is to get a quick assessment of what people believe to be the issues. This will help organize the planner's approach to the neighborhood in future meetings. The results may not be useful for the study unless there is a very large response at the meetings.

### Meeting Surveys

Use: In depth problem understanding      Study Usage: Yes

Surveys distributed during a neighborhood meeting can be more extensive, allowing the planner to ask questions from different angles to better understand the issues. This will provide results for the purpose of inclusion in the neighborhood study. If the meeting has a low turn out, the planner must be careful using this within the study because it may not be a true reflection of the neighborhood population.

### Meeting Exit Surveys

Use: Quick issue identification      Study Usage: No

Quick surveys given to people as they leave a meeting could provide an updated measurement of how people feel after hearing a presentation of facts. This could be important when the meeting content counters the opinions expressed in earlier interviews. The survey could determine if people still believe the topic is an issue for the neighborhood. The survey should be quick to fill out and provide an opportunity for neighbors to express how they felt going into the meeting and afterwards. This method is not very scientific but could let you know if education of the neighborhood will change their perceptions.

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## Plan Builder

Section 7: Research  
*Continued*

### Door to Door Surveys

Use: Neighborhood wide issue understanding      Study Usage: Yes

The most useful survey is the door-to-door survey. It is also the most time and resource intensive. You will not get all the households to respond but the completion rate will be very high. The downside is the amount of work can be overwhelming. If there are existing neighborhood groups, they could help administer the survey. There are times college students could help in the effort if there is a university nearby.

With such a large effort, the design of the survey instrument is very important. There are books and web sites designed to provide insight in proper survey writing. If the planner has to create the survey, they should get input and feedback from several other staff members or professionals. There is simply too much work involved to use a poorly worded survey instrument.

### Random Surveys

Use: Neighborhood wide issue understanding      Study Usage: Yes

The neighborhood planner can use a random system to select a limited number of households to participate in the survey. The surveys can be mailed or administered by knocking on the door. The randomness is a very important factor. The selection has to be truly random and not influenced by the appearance of the household, relationship to other survey addresses, or other factors. For example, the planner could export a spreadsheet of all possible addresses and number them. Then they could select every twenty households as the participant in the survey. This will take away any bias the planner may have. The planner should never select their survey recipients while they are out in the field. It will be too easy for the planner to let what they see influence the random selection.

### Zoning

The zoning of the area needs to be evaluated. The first step is to secure a zoning and land use maps. The planner should compare the two to determine if there are major conflicts between the zoning and the actual use. This step can catch current problems and may need to be addressed by the neighborhood plan. The zoning should also be compared to known trends for the region of the city. For example retail development may be increasing rapidly in the area, creating retail pressure on

the residential areas of the neighborhood. The opposite could also call for a review of the zoning if there is high vacancy of retail in the region. Some properties may need to be down-zoned to encourage more residential development.

The study will need to have facts and figures about the zoning regardless if there appears to be an issue. Amount of square feet of each zoning district is a good start. Additional information may be how many rezoning applications have been filed in the last five to ten years. By reviewing the annual numbers, trends can be identified.

### Flood Maps

Flooding can be a big factor in a residential neighborhood. Even though there may not appear to be an issue, the planner should check to see if the neighborhood is included in a flood zone. There are times when it looks like a small creek bed is present in the neighborhood during most times of the year; however during heavy rains it carries high volumes of water runoff. By checking FEMA's flood maps, the planner can avoid being blindsided in a public meeting.

### Building Inspection Data

The number and types of permits drawn each year can reveal a great amount about the neighborhood. Foundation repairs, additions, kitchen remodels, and other types of home improvement can show the health of the housing stock. It can also show the levels of reinvestment by the property owners. Looking at the trend over time can show an increase or decrease in the neighborhood's health.

### Review of Notes

During the preliminary research, potential issues may have been discovered. The neighborhood planner should review their notes and follow up on any red flags. If there is a potential issue, the planner should make sure their research provides support information. If research shows the issue is not as predominant as the people think it is, then research should be done to show the difference between reality and perception.

## Steering Committee Involvement

The planner may want to include the plan steering committee in the process. Their role should be appropriate and there should be a goal of capacity building of the committee members. Surveys could be an ideal use of the committee. In this example, the members should be involved in designing the instrument, determining the audience, and actually administering the survey.



# Plan Builder

## Section 8: Compiling the Study

It is not enough to have block captains, you will need to work with them to get the most out of everyone's effort.

The neighborhood study can serve as a stand alone document or as the appendix to a neighborhood plan. It does not provide any solutions, nor does it imply there is any reasonable chance of improving the situation. The study simply informs the reader of the neighborhood's status at the time of the study.

The following is the basic structure of the neighborhood study document:

### Introduction of the Study

When the study is complete, the neighborhood planner will provide a concise introduction of the findings of the study. The summary should provide a very brief reason for the completion of the study and the methods used to gather the information.

#### Statement of the Issues

Based upon the information the neighborhood planner has gathered, a listing and brief explanation of the identified issues should be presented. This should be a numbered/bulleted list and have a short paragraph after each issue.

#### Additional Introduction Information

The introduction should also include short summaries on the topics of location, population, infrastructure, and housing. The reader needs to have an understanding of these characteristics to further put the introduction into context.

Upon reading the introduction, the reader should have everything a quick understanding of the neighborhood. The remainder of the study is intended to provide more in depth information regarding the identified issues.

### Neighborhood Survey Results

It is assumed the neighborhood planner would conduct some type of survey within the neighborhood. In some instances, the city or another organization may have performed a relevant survey in the neighborhood prior to the planning period. These results should be presented in this section of the neighborhood study.

Although it is tempting to insert as much information from surveys as possible, it is more important to present information relevant to the issues identified by the planner. For example, the planner may wish to make a statement regarding the number of people who feel trash is an issue in the neighborhood. The supporting numbers should be presented in this section. The planner may not wish to include the results of a question about stray dogs, because few people thought it was an issue.

Information should be presented in tables, graphs, and/or charts. Each graphic should be accompanied by a paragraph regarding the important points of the information being presented. The planner should avoid making any value statements regarding the neighborhood. The reader will be able to connect the dots and determine what the information says about the neighborhood.

#### Examples of Survey Information

1. Number of people who feel safe in their neighborhood
2. Percentage of people who plan to remain in the neighborhood over the next ten years
3. Satisfaction level of neighbors towards street conditions
4. Percentage of people who feel the housing in the area is affordable

### Inventory Results

One of the great things about collecting physical information about a neighborhood is the ability to combine the results with GIS mapping. By tying the information from an address on the spreadsheet to a parcel on a map, GIS allows for a graphic presentation of the information. The viewer can then see the strengths and weaknesses of the neighborhood in a geographic illustration.

There is still a place for information to be presented in tables or graphs, but the GIS map is definitely the best choice. Each map or table should be accompanied by a narrative. The narrative should point out the key findings illustrated with the graphic. For example, the ABC neighborhood has a high concentration of vacant

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## Plan Builder

### Section 8: Compiling the Study *Continued*

houses in the north west corner. There is no reason to insert the planner's recommendations at this time such as "Realtors should make more efforts to market this area". Let the facts tell the story at this point.

#### Maps

In every study there are the standard collection of maps showing boundaries and location. Using GIS and readily available data, the planner can include maps shaded by property values or other information. In the neighborhood study, one or more maps should be included to point out the geographical relationship of different issues. Sometimes it can be done with just one map; however if it becomes crowded another map should be used.

The issue base map should simply have the street pattern and names on it. Don't try to include the different shadings from the other maps; keep it simple. The issue map should point out where issues are occurring such as "people not taking care of there property". The map should have a label and an arrow pointing to the general area where it is occurring. Another issue may be traffic congestion on a major thoroughfare. Create a label for this as well and point it out on the same map. Positive things should also be pointed out such as "area with high property values". The reader should get the major points of the findings by simply looking at the map.

#### Land Use

Land use planning is the mainstay of the urban planning profession. To leave land use planning out of a study or plan would be ludicrous. The big question is how involved the planner should become. The answer lies in the initial analysis of the neighborhood. If there seems to be encroachment by one land use into another, then land use will be a major issue, requiring in depth study and recommendations. If comments from the people you interview indicate increasing development pressures on the neighborhood, greater study will be needed.

Examples of development pressure may include changes in traffic patterns, nearby property value increases, or new attractions being built in the area of the neighborhood in question. If a neighborhood does not make their desires known before these pressures arrive in their region of the city they will be at a distinct disadvantage. The neighborhood plan must address the existing conditions, what the community desires, and what the city organization feels the community needs. Therefore, the neighborhood study should summarize the current conditions.

Many neighborhoods are not experiencing any of these changes. Development may be stagnant in the area, or the neighborhood is almost completely residential. This lack of development may be an issue just based upon the unmet needs of the neighborhood. The planner may not know it is an issue during the study phase, therefore a basic amount of land use review should be included in any neighborhood plan.

#### Land use by acreage

The planner can say a lot about a neighborhood by discussing how many acres of different land uses. Inserting a table about the break down would be a good start. If any land use is growing in recent decades at the expense of another land use, the trend should be illustrated in the land use section of the study document.

This information is just the start if land use is a big issue for the neighborhood. Additional information such as amount of square feet, ownership, and building height may be needed. It is up to the planner to determine how thorough the information should be. There may not be enough time to complete an intense study of land use. This action may become a recommendation in the neighborhood plan later when writing the plan.

#### Public Input

During the studying of the neighborhood and the public meetings, many issues will be brought to the attention of the neighborhood planner. Information from the public input meetings will not be made available until after the public input meetings are concluded. This will result in the neighborhood study not being complete at the time of the public meetings. The complete document should be ready in time for the plan review public meeting, or earlier. At the end of the process, the neighborhood study should document all legitimate concerns, regardless if there is a way to solve them.

A legitimate issue is an issue raised during the process the planner can verify in some way. This could be with agreement from other neighbors, visual inspection, or research. Each one will be addressed or dismissed through the process.

#### Issue Review

The issues will be listed with some additional explanation in the neighborhood study. If the issue or request is simply not achievable, then this should be pointed out in this section. For example, a request for a community center to give youth something to do in the neighborhood may not be feasible because there is already one in close proximity. Because the recreation department stated it is not financially feasible to put another one so close, the idea should be dismissed. Because this request may be popular with other residents, the response should be documented within the study



# Plan Builder

## Section 8: Compiling the Study *Continued*

along with the reason it is not being considered and it will not move forward in the planning document.

Another example of an issue may be numerous houses with tall grass. This too will be documented in the neighborhood study and will then be discussed in the neighborhood plan. The reader should first see evidence of issues in the neighborhood study, then see it addressed in the plan, with the possible solutions listed. If an issue doesn't get this far, an explanation should be included in the documents at some point.

### **Commercial Review**

The commercial areas of a neighborhood are very important to the neighbors who rely on them for services and products. The retail, office, and industrial areas are also important to area visitors. Well designed commercial attracts people; the opposite drives them away. The neighborhood study should provide information regarding the commercial viability of the area.

### **Evaluation by cluster**

Within residential neighborhoods, the commercial areas stand out easily. Often, the neighbors have provided names for the different nodes based upon street names or historic area names. The planner should provide a review of these commercial clusters. Comments should include appearance, vacancy, local/national ownership, and overall impression of the cluster.

### **Inventory of commercial/industrial**

The names and types of businesses in the neighborhood should also be collected and presented in the study. This information becomes helpful when discussing local businesses with neighbors. The neighbors are often unaware of all the businesses in their neighborhood. This is especially true when there are numerous strip malls with many tenants; businesses have a tendency to blend together. The inventory allows for a more informed discussion of the commercial assets and needs of the neighborhood.

### **Traffic count**

The traffic count can be very important to a neighborhood. The street department often collects this information and has it available for future planning of street reconstruction, improvement, or resurfacing. Commercial businesses rely heavily on

traffic for customers. A discussion of the traffic counts can demonstrate the attractiveness for commercial land use. It can also show a low demand for commercial and could lead to recommendations to decrease the amount of commercial zoning.

### **Photos**

Pictures say a thousand words. The neighborhood planner can try their best to describe a commercial area while avoiding saying anything insulting. The better option is to simply insert pictures, letting the photo tell the story. The pictures should be accompanied by limited narrative to provide additional information to the audience about what they are looking at.

## Residential Review

Using the information gathered in the field and from other sources, the neighborhood planner should provide a street by street description. The first step is to determine sub-areas of the overall neighborhood being planned. The planner will use these sub areas to divide the street descriptions in a way the reader can mentally place them in the neighborhood.

One way would be to divide the neighborhood into the underlying subdivisions. Even if these names have long been forgotten, at least a formal name is used. Research on the subdivision can also help to explain aging or housing patterns in the neighborhood. Another method is to visually inspect the neighborhood for obvious changes in the physical neighborhood and then add some type of name for the sub area. Using street names can be the least objectionable method to introduce new place names to the neighbors. If nothing else, divide the neighborhood into four equal parts and refer to them by a number.

The residential review will allow the planner to point out specific issues on a street and provide a context for the reader to evaluate the issue. For example, the planner may note Yellowstone Street has two vacancies. Additionally, the street has a below average score on house and yard maintenance and the property values are lower in this area of the neighborhood. The sum of this information will tell the reader Yellowstone may require direct attention if it is the only street to have such a description.

The information should be arranged by sub-area, with each street of the sub area listed with bulleted information. The information notes high-lights or low-lights of all the factors being used to judge the neighborhood. A summary table could be used to show comparisons within the sub-area. It is also helpful to include several pictures within the sub-area description to provide the reader a visual representation of the housing and conditions. The planner should avoid trying to use all negative pictures. Some positive pictures should be included. The neighbors who read the

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## Plan Builder

Section 8: Compiling the Study  
*Continued*

plan will know when the document describes their neighborhood in an unfair manner and will resent it.

### Summary

The last item in the study is the summary. This will be a recap of the main points discovered in the study. The neighborhood planner should avoid talking about how the neighborhood should address them. The neighborhood study should be written as a neutral document, focused only on the facts of the neighborhood. The study will then be seen as a tool for all involved organizations to use as they attempt to understand what is occurring within the neighborhood.



# Plan Builder

## Section 9: Public Engagement

The purpose of public engagement is to ensure the base information is correct, gather new insight, provide the plan with the neighborhood's vision, and review recommendations. Beyond the plan, the engagement process itself has the potential to spur public participation and interest in the area. When neighbors are gathered together for a common interest, there is a presence of excitement and hope. This can lead to people taking action.

### Outreach Methods

To get a good representation of the neighborhood to participate in the planning process, the planner will have to strategically approach the stakeholders to extend an invitation.

#### Stakeholder groups

Public engagement requires engaging a wide variety of stakeholders. The definition of stakeholders is "anyone with some skin in the game". The neighborhood planner is looking for people, who live within the boundaries, own property, pay rent, and/or rely on the attractiveness of the area for their business. Some of the people mentioned have already been identified as actors; however they may not take an active role in the planning or improvement process. Regardless of their activity level, all stakeholders should be approached and given an opportunity to share their insight of the issues. They should also have the opportunity to give comments on the proposed plan.

#### Methods

The planner should create a generic list of these stakeholders and generate how they can best reach each subgroup. For some, receiving a mailing may be an adequate method to make them aware of the meetings. For others, door-to-door outreach may be more effective. Posters in public areas may reinforce the message for some receiving other methods of invitations. Sharing the information with key people in

the community may help the word spread and allow the planner to benefit from their circle of influence.

The planner should use the list of stakeholders and contact methods to create a marketing plan. Available funding is important in designing the marketing plan. Postal mailings are expensive while door-to-door outreach is time and energy intensive. The planner should start with the least expensive approaches and build from there.

The purpose of the outreach is not to get everyone possible to attend the meetings and be involved. Instead, the purpose is to increase awareness to allow the maximum number of people to participate. Success is accomplished when the majority of the neighbors are aware of the process and a sizable number of people chose to participate in some fashion. The ultimate goal would be a large number of people representing a broad cross-section of the neighborhood.

### Outreach Meetings/Activities

Prior to starting the public input process, the neighborhood planner will need to create awareness. Utilizing a series of small street meetings throughout the area, the neighborhood planner will inform the neighbors of the coming activity.

- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| Objective:   | Create awareness of the neighborhood planning process and increase participation in public meetings.   |
| Promotion:   | Several locations throughout the neighborhood will serve as street meeting locations. Flyers will be distributed within a three block radius of the meeting location, inviting the neighbors to the nearby meeting.  |
| Description: | At the neighborhood meeting, additional handout information will be distributed with a simple explanation of the planning process. Roles will be defined and the end product will be described. The neighborhood planner will answer questions and ask those attending to fill out a survey and provide their contact information. |

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**Plan Builder**

Section 9: Public Engagement  
*Continued*

**Success:** Success will be the gathering of contact information and a large attendance at the Kick off meeting.

**Materials:** Flyers, neighborhood planning brochures, short survey

This approach addresses several objectives. The first purpose is to increase the attendance at the first public meeting, or kick off event. By engaging them on their block within their comfort zone, they are more likely to attend the larger meetings. When the immediate neighbors are talking to the neighborhood planner in a casual setting, it creates an ideal opportunity to gather information. Using a short survey to find out what is important to them provides the planner with more awareness of the unforeseen issues within the neighborhood. The third purpose would be to promote the neighborhood planning process and to make people aware of it.

The neighborhood planner should approach the small meetings as casual conversations and be relaxed. Any time a neighbor makes an important point, the planner should be seen writing it down. This encourages people to participate because they see someone is really listens to them and their input is important.

**Steering Committee Meeting: Kickoff**

The neighborhood planner should gather the members of the neighborhood plan steering committee together prior to the Kickoff meeting. The planner would recap past activities and then discuss what would be the next activity.

**Recap:** The neighborhood planner will explain why the committee was formed, who was selected, and discuss the overall planning process.

**Next:** The planner will discuss the upcoming Kick Off meeting by reviewing the agenda. The committee will be clear about what will occur at the meeting and what the next meeting will be.

**Kickoff Meeting**

The kick off meeting will be the first large scale public meeting for the neighborhood. The location for this meeting and the ones to follow is important. Having the meeting within the boundaries of the planning area is crucial. If the meeting is held outside the area the turn out will be much less than within the neighborhood. School gyms/cafeterias make good first choice locations. Recreation centers are also attractive; however other activities may need to be halted such as basketball or dance classes. Too much noise and the meeting will fall apart before it gets started. Churches and other facilities are good second choices.

**Objective:** To introduce the neighborhood planner and inform the audience of the process

**Promotion:** Mass mailing, flyers, small meetings, neighborhood residents’ word -of-mouth

**Description:** Prior to the start of the meeting, neighbors will be given a marker to place on the map, indicating where they live or work. The meeting will begin with introductions. A presentation will be made with handouts explaining the benefits of the neighborhood plan process. Attendees will be asked to fill out a brief survey regarding assets and issues of the neighborhood.

**Success:** The number of people attending the second meeting

**Materials:** PowerPoint of the neighborhood planning process, large neighborhood map, sign-in sheets with a spot for email addresses

The neighborhood planner should be more formal in this meeting and should share some of their initial findings. It is important to simply wet their appetite at this point. Too much information in the first meeting will decrease the value to coming to the next meetings. The planner should make them hungry for the next meeting.

The planner will describe the process and the roles of all the stakeholders, to include the city departments. Expectations will be presented of the process and the stakeholders. The planner must be clear in describing what the planning process is and what it is not. The issues facing the community will not be overcome simply by holding several public meetings. When opportunities are identified to improve the neighborhood, the stakeholders must be willing to take action. Without action, the plan process will not be successful. One can have the instructions to a model airplane, but if the person does not assemble the contents of the box, they will not have the finished product.

The survey should be somewhat different than what was used at the street meetings. With a more captive audience and more time, the survey can be longer and more thorough. Before creating the survey instrument, the planner should return to their wish list of things they would like to know about the neighborhood. This could help generate some questions for the survey.

At the next meeting, the planner will be breaking down the audience to focus on issues grouped by common themes.

**Steering Committee Meeting**

The next activity will be to lead the Plan Steering Committee on a walk through the neighborhood. The neighborhood planner would gather the members of the neighborhood plan steering committee together prior to the Neighborhood Walk.

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# Plan Builder

## Section 9: Public Engagement *Continued*

The planner would recap past activities and then discuss what would be the next activity.

**Recap:** The neighborhood planner will discuss the previous Kick Off meeting and answer any questions and discuss any comments regarding the event.

**Next:** The planner will describe how the Neighborhood Walk will work. The committee will receive more in-depth instruction than what will be presented to participants the day of the event. The planner will also explain how the information from the Neighborhood Walk would be used in the writing of the plan.

### Neighborhood Walk

The neighborhood planner would take the steering committee for a tour through their neighborhood. The group would look for a variety of items in the neighborhood. This would be a repeat of the process the planner performed during the preliminary evaluation of the neighborhood. This can be found in Chapter 4: Visual Assessment.

**Objective:** To teach the committee how to read their neighborhood and gather their field assessments.

**Promotion:** Committee mail/email list

**Description:** The planner would lead the committee through different areas of the neighborhood asking them to make notes of things they see, either an asset or issue. At different points, the group will stop and the planner would ask them to summarize what they just experienced. At the end of the exercise, a brief meeting would be led by the planner to capture what people thought of their neighborhood and to hear directly from the participants if their perception of the neighborhood changed.

The planner will gather the information from the walk and put it in a useful format.

### Steering Committee Meeting

The neighborhood planner would gather the members of the neighborhood plan steering committee together prior to the Public Input Meeting. The planner would recap past activities and then discuss what would be the next activity.

**Recap:** The neighborhood planner will distribute the summary of what was discovered during the neighborhood walk. The committee will discuss the findings.

**Next:** The planner will work with the committee to understand what to expect from the Public Input Meeting. The committee will also be told what will be done with the information after the meeting and what their role will be both in the meeting and afterwards.

### Public Input Meeting

A very important part of neighborhood planning comes from the input provided by the neighborhood residents, business owners, and property owners. This information is used to add substantial insight beyond the data and observations of the neighborhood planner. The input meeting is designed to take a large public meeting and make it intimate enough where people feel free to talk.

**Objective:** To confirm known information, gather new insight, and prioritize issues.

**Promotion:** Mail/E-mail to current and past participants, flyer campaign

**Description:** Following a brief recap of activity, the audience will be divided into four break-out groups. There will be four staff members prepared to lead discussions of four separate topics: Safety, Housing/Property Appearance, Infrastructure, and Economic Development. Each discussion leader will specialize in only one topic and will rotate every ten minutes between groups. The facilitator will be very direct in soliciting input from the group regarding the topic. The staff person will spend most of their time recording without engaging in conversation other than to keep the discussion moving and on topic.

In the end, the goal will be to have captured what people think are the issues under each topic. The facilitator will present facts discovered while assembling the neighborhood study as a starting point. The group will discuss whether the information is accurate in describing their neighborhood and if there is additional information the facilitator should know regarding the topic. When the time is up, the group will be introduced to the next facilitator and topic.

After providing input to the neighborhood planner and staff, the neighbors will be asked to form a vision statement. The neighborhood planner will lead the audience to first understand the type of statement needed for the plan. The audience will then focus on statements describing what they want their neighborhood

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## Plan Builder

### Section 9: Public Engagement *Continued*

to be like in ten to 20 years. This process will not develop a finished vision statement, but will provide the neighborhood planner the rough ideas describing the desires of the neighbors.

**Success:** Success will be when the neighborhood planner has plenty of input from the audience regarding the issues and a vision statement.

**Materials:** 4 colors of flyers, comment cards, colored voting cards

As the meeting facilitator, it will be tempting to put a code enforcement staff person as the facilitator for the topic of housing appearance. It is highly recommend the planner avoids this situation. Code enforcement is a very good example. Instead of the discussion being what their concerns are, the group will begin to grill the enforcement staff about particular violations. The event then becomes an out of control complaint session. The better approach is to put the code enforcement staff person in charge of discussing economic development instead. This prevents the temptation for the staff to try to solve problems or respond to concerns.

Another pitfall the meeting organizer should avoid is the steering of the group by the staff person. The idea is to get raw information about the topic out of the group in a very brief period of time. The economic development staff may try to influence what is said by the group. This sort of steering can be avoided by simply putting a sharp staff person in charge. The planner should instruct the facilitator to get the conversation moving and to keep it on track. If the conversation comes to a stop or gets off track, the facilitator should provide them with an observation/fact from the study document and ask the group to confirm or deny the findings.

#### Vision Statement Development

Forming a vision for the neighborhood is an important step in the plan development process. The planner needs input to develop a vision statement the neighborhood can agree with. To lead the audience in the task of generating a vision statement, the planner must realize they will not be able to fully develop the actual statement while in the public meeting. Instead, they will gather as much material as they can to help them later when they are writing the plan. The planner should review the Plan Writing chapter to understand what they need from the audience.

The following is one way to gather input for a vision statement::

#### Generate Key Words

Ask the audience to provide a single word describing the neighborhood they want to live in. This should produce words such as: nice, calm, beautiful, safe, and attractive.

#### Describing the Future

Ask the participants to describe what they feel the neighborhood of the future should be with regard to

- Appearance/Image
- Housing
- Commercial/retail
- Infrastructure
- Public Safety

People will be given a chance to stand up and make a one sentence statement. The audience will respond by raising a voting card to indicate they agree with it. The planner will judge the number of people supporting the idea as either full, three-quarters, half, one-quarter, or none.

- We want people to take care of their yard.
- I want to walk down the sidewalk at night and feel safe.
- The neighborhood would be quiet.
- The stores would offer merchandise and services we want.
- We don't want any retail or business areas near us.
- We want bike paths.

#### Identity

The audience would be asked the question, "What do you want to be known for by people throughout the city?"

People may say:

- A great place to buy a house
- Good house prices
- Our beautiful park

#### Asset Enhancement

The audience will be asked, "What special characteristic should be strengthened, highlighted, enhanced in the future?"

People may say:

- Our pond/park should be made to be a showcase for the whole city to know about.
- Our beautiful yards will be the talk of the town

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# Plan Builder

## Section 9: Public Engagement *Continued*

- Our business district will be the center of a lot of activity
- We should have an annual festival where everyone comes out and attracts a lot of people from outside our neighborhood.
- We should have organized block parties like the ones over on First Street.
- We should expand the weekend farmer’s market to attract a larger crowd.

In the end, the neighborhood planner will have gathered insight into how people feel about the different topics of the plan. This is their opportunity to let the planner know what is going on in the neighborhood and to confirm or deny the observations of the planner. The neighbors will also have the opportunity to find common ground with their neighbors as they discuss the topics. This starts to really bring home the idea the neighbors have similar views and an interest in seeing things change.

### Steering Committee Meeting

The neighborhood planner will work with the committee to further refine and improve the rough draft of the vision statement produced during the public meeting. In this setting, the planner will be better able to work with the comments from the steering committee to create both a well worded vision and one reflecting the thoughts and desires of the neighborhood.

- Recap: Discuss summary comments from the different input groups and vision statement from the previous public meeting
- Next: Plan topic meetings for more in depth discussion of issues as grouped in the previous meetings.

#### Topic Meetings

Each topic discussed in the Input Meeting will have a separate workshop designed to solicit solutions and insights into the issues surrounding the topic. The meeting will be facilitated by the neighborhood planner with additional resource people in attendance.

- Objective: Set goals and find solutions to issues facing the neighborhood, organized by topic.
- Promotion: Mail/E-mail to current and past participants as a reminder
- Description: The neighborhood planner will facilitate a meeting with concerned neighbors regarding a related group of issues such as Public Safety

or Housing and Appearance. The planner will arrange for other staff and resource people who are directly related to the topic to participate in the meeting. Additional information from the study and previous meetings will be shared. The meeting is designed to produce topic related goals and possible solutions for the planner to include in the neighborhood plan.

Success: A list of possible actions is created in response to the issues of the neighborhood.

Materials: The neighborhood study results, maps, newsprint, markers

The format of this meeting should produce some very good material for the plan, but it can also set the stage for action. For example, the group on Public Safety discusses the need to get a crime watch started with block captains on every street. The planner will take this suggestion and find a way to include it within the plan. The neighbors however may be excited about taking on the recommendations. The police department has shared some insights about crime prevention and the group might be starting to take some form.

The planner should realize this is an opportunity to get neighbors to address the issues of public safety beyond just talk. The planner should ask whoever is interested to form a Public Safety Committee. The committee would continue to learn more about creating a safe neighborhood and organize a response to the safety needs of the neighborhood. This is a great opportunity to form a committee and the planner should encourage it. There is more about committees later in this chapter.

The meeting should begin with introductions of the facilitator and guest speakers. The facilitator should be the neighborhood planner, but it could be a person knowledgeable about the topic. A brief presentation of what was discovered on the topic so far should be made by the planner. This should include a summary of the comments from the Input Meeting. The facilitator should then bring the guest speakers up to discuss the information and ideas they may have to address them. Once they have had an opportunity to speak, the facilitator should then solicit ideas and comments from the audience.

The planner is looking for recommendations to include in their plan. They don’t need all the details of an idea discussed, but they are looking for concepts with merit. No conclusions or commitments need to come out of this meeting and it would be premature to expect them at this time. The planner should take the ideas back to the office and review them before deciding they are suitable for the plan. This will be a difficult meeting to facilitate, but the reward will be worth the effort by the planner.

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## Plan Builder

Section 9: Public Engagement  
*Continued*

### Steering Committee Meeting: Review of Plan Items

The neighborhood planner will meet with the committee to review the rough draft of the neighborhood plan. The committee should see how the process they have participated in produced the vision, goals, and action recommendations contained within the plan.

**Recap:** The planner will present the compiled information from the previous meetings and discuss how it was used to create the neighborhood plan.

**Next:** The planner will discuss how the elements of the plan will be reviewed by the public and what role the committee will play.

When the information from previous meetings has been reviewed, the planner will write the neighborhood plan. Upon finishing the rough draft of the plan, the plan contents will be arranged for public review. The planner will call for a public meeting to seek comments, corrections, and identify any missing elements.

**Objective:** Receive input on the neighborhood plan

**Promotion:** Mail/E-mail lists of past participants

**Description:** The meeting will begin with a brief presentation of the core elements of the plan. The planner will then direct the audience to visit the four stations representing the plan sections to review the proposed sections of the plan. At each section there will be handouts of the section, appropriate maps, and a staff facilitator who will encourage the attendees to share their comments. An announcement will be made of when the final plan will be made available and where it will be located.

**Success:** General consensus of the plan items

**Materials:** Handouts, maps, comment cards

The planner will want all the comments they can get before declaring the plan ready. They also want to make sure they have exhausted all efforts to include as many of the stakeholders as possible. Even the best plans can be sunk if people complain they didn't have adequate opportunity to provide input. This concludes the public input process of the planning process. There is more work to do under the creation of action plans and the implementation of the plan.

### Committee Forming

Following each separate topic meeting, there will be an opportunity for the formation of a committee related to the topic. For example, after the neighborhood planner hosts the topic meeting regarding Public Safety, a Public Safety Committee could be formed. The question for the planner and the organizations involved is "should it?" The answer lies in whether there is strong interest in the topic and plenty of ideas of how to address it.

The second issue for forming a follow-up committee is who will chair the committee and will it be a committee of one of the participating organizations. Ideally, the neighborhood would be represented by one large neighborhood group. If so, the organization should form a committee under their name. An area represented by several groups could form a joint committee with each other. Bottom line, if the committee is needed, let it form in whatever fashion is necessary.

Staffing by the neighborhood planner can occur if the organization paying their salary wants to devote their time to the effort. This would be a significant commitment; however it could lead to significant accomplishments. Another approach would be for the city organization to assign an appropriate staff person for a limited time, based upon the topic of the group.

### Engaging Committees

When a committee is formed around a topic such as public safety or housing & appearance, there are some necessary steps it must take. The first is to elect a chair person and then the members need to find out more about the topic. Ultimately, the idea would be for a topic committee to be both an authority on the topic and provide leadership to the neighborhood organization when the topic comes up. This committee approach is discussed in greater detail in the Neighborhood Builder Manual.



# Plan Builder

## Section 10: Government Engagement

It is not enough to have block captains, you will need to work with them to get the most out of everyone's effort.

Of all the actors, the local government will be the one with the most resources and services to approach the neighborhood. The city still has limitations and will always be hampered with the responsibility of maintaining the entire city, not just the one being planned. It is important to utilize their resources and services in a strategic way. The neighborhood plan provides the city with an assessment of the needs and general statements of what is needed. The next step is for the neighborhood planner to facilitate the creation of an action plan, detailing the city's response to the plan. Facilitating the decision process is not as easy as it may seem, given the structure and set procedures of the city organization.

It is typical for plans to call for general actions by the city; actions are often vague and lack detail. These can be easily ignored by city departments and generally lead to no action. Other plans attempt to be very specific with cost estimates and time lines reaching well into the future. These plans make the mistake of looking too far down the road while trying to maintain detailed projections of both time and money. These too are often ignored because in many ways, the plan is trying to be more precise than the current management systems covering the rest of the city.

The alternative is to create a document designed to follow the natural order of resource allocation the city currently uses. For example, when deciding which streets are reconstructed, the city will have a selection process. In general, one or more staff members review evaluations and requests; creating a priority list. Based upon the budget, the group presents the highest priority streets along with estimates for the coming construction seasons. This information finds its way to upper management who further tweak the list and present it to the city council for approval.

Many planners will want to find a way to circumvent this process by suggesting the recommendations of their small neighborhood plan take precedence over not only the proposed list of streets but the very process itself. Ignoring the existing system will only lead to defeat, hard feelings, or both.

In this instance, the neighborhood planner must call a meeting with the initial group of people evaluating the streets to discuss the infrastructure needs of the

neighborhood. This takes time and energy, but if the plan writer wants results they have to do things right. Obviously, if the neighborhood and the plan are priorities of the city manager/council, the identified needs may rise to the top. All of this will not open the floodgates of funding and resources; however it will provide your request a fighting chance.

### Existing Work Plans and Processes

Within the city, there are certain departments who create work plans affecting various neighborhoods. Usually it will be departments who spend money on public improvements such as the streets department or water department. Other departments have work plans; however the activity is not directly related to the neighborhood planner's project area. Before talking with departments about what they can do for a neighborhood, the planner should review any relevant work plans. This can provide useful information prior interviews.

Work plans can tell the planner several things to include: volume of projects, what their priorities are, and possibly the amount of resources they have at their disposal. For example if the street department has ten street projects in this year's work plan, chances are this is the average number of streets they rebuild each year. So, if the neighborhood has ten streets in need of rebuilding, it may be overly optimistic of the planner to expect all the neighborhood's streets to be paved in one year. It may be optimistic to expect even one street rebuilt in the coming year given the needs across the city.

The work plans can also tell you what the department has already committed to. These items, once confirmed during your interview with the department, can be included in the action plan. Additional commitments will require working with the departments after explaining the needs of the neighborhood.

### Documenting Actions

When meeting with departments, the planner should make them aware the action plan will document the items they agree too. The planner should describe the action

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## Plan Builder

### Section 10: Government Engagement *Continued*

plan to them and explain how they will need to include ensure any agreed upon actions are incorporated into their department's work plan.

### Yearly Revisions

The planner should explain to departments that each year, a meeting will be called annually to review progress and to determine what new commitments can be made.

### Questions

#### **What is the department currently planning for the neighborhood?**

The action plan should include anything already planned or in process. Asking a department representative this question will provide easy answers. The planner will want some details to include in the plan such as time line, costs, and what the expected benefit would be to the neighborhood or community.

#### **“Which identified needs do you feel the department can address?”**

The planner should share a list of the neighborhoods needs related to the departments' responsibilities. This is where the planner tries to guide the city into providing additional spending and services to the neighborhood than would have happened naturally. In many ways, this is the whole point of the neighborhood plan activity. This is difficult territory and the planner needs to be politically astute to attract more attention and resources to the neighborhood without angering the department staff.

#### **“What actions can the department commit to in the first year?”**

The staff may be able to indicate what they would like to address in the neighborhood; however budget constraints, lack of personnel or other realities can prevent them from making commitments. At this point, the neighborhood planner is trying to get commitments of action within the realm of the department's discretion. For example, the code enforcement department may agree to focus on the neighborhood for one week during the year to increase code awareness. This would be within the manager's discretion because it doesn't require any new funding or permission from higher up. Asking for a dedicated code enforcement official for the neighborhood may be outside of their operational parameters. Items such as this are not suitable for first year commitments.

#### **What actions can the department pursue in year two and three?**

The neighborhood planner should be looking for general commitments to pursue the unaddressed list of neighborhood needs. These will be listed separately in the action plans as “items to be pursued”. In this step, the planner must respect the natural order of the organization. The task at hand is to put items on the department's radar.

There is no sense in asking for commitments on long range items unless they were already in their long range work plans. Departments have many requests for service and have no real choice but to stick with the established selection process. The planner should realize they cannot fix structural procedures of a city with a neighborhood plan. The shortcomings of a neighborhood plan can point out the need for internal improvement to the people in high positions.

#### **“What is needed to address the items you can't commit to?”**

The most common response will be “more funds”. In some cases, the response may be the need for action by another department or outside group. For example, the police department may point out they need pressure from code compliance or building inspection to rid the neighborhood of suspected illegal activity. The street department may need the community development department to move up a sewer project on their priority list before they can rebuild a street.

The “more funds” issue is more difficult. Every department can always use more funds. If the neighborhood being planned is a high priority for the city management and public officials, they will need to move some discretionary funding around in the budget so the departments have something to work with. Another method is for the city management to set new priorities for the existing department's funding to ensure more of present funding is spent in the neighborhood. If none of these occurs, the planner is left to simply request departments work within their own discretion to address the needs of the neighborhood. The neighborhood planner should have a good understanding of which of the scenarios is present at the time of the neighborhood plan process. This will not change the neighborhood plan, but will greatly affect the content of the city's action plan.



# Plan Builder

## Section 11: Plan Writing

It is not enough to have block captains, you will need to work with them to get the most out of everyone's effort.

The neighborhood plan should be a very direct document, avoiding the useless overflow of background and interesting facts discovered in the process. The neighborhood study will provide a great amount of data and background. Most people want to focus on what the plan proposes and will become frustrated if they have to sift through pages of background information and existing conditions to reach the plan recommendations. As they read the plan they will want some assurances a proper procedure was followed and the plan writer has a firm understanding of the neighborhood. This will be accomplished by providing brief summaries and making references to the neighborhood study for more information.

The following are the main sections of the proposed plan format. Neighborhoods vary in their issues and complexities so it should be understood the plan format should change accordingly.

### Executive Summary

For the neighborhood plan, the narrative should be very brief. The reader already knows it is a neighborhood plan and does not need details about the process or the description of the neighborhood. The executive summary requires a brief narrative and then provides the reader with the neighborhood topics followed by the goals for each one. By reading the goals, the audience will have a good idea of the needs of the neighborhood and the direction the planner is suggesting for the neighborhood.

### The Vision Statement

During the Public Input meeting, the audience was asked to provide comments to shape the vision statement for the neighborhood plan. This information was recorded and the planner was given the task of interpreting the comments and crafting a vision statement. The vision statement should reflect the desires of the neighborhood stakeholders and describe what the area should become. The entire neighborhood plan will be built off this statement so it is critical the planner puts a great amount of effort into it to get it right.

Goal statements should be designed to either accomplish the vision or to remove barriers preventing the vision from being realized.

The planner may be concerned the vision statement sounds generic or predictable. The reason for this is most neighbors want the same for their neighborhood regardless of where they live. These common desires need to be recorded in the vision statement. There will be differences brought out during the public meeting and therefore these unique points should also be reflected in the vision statement. Whether the vision statement sounds simple or complicated, it is still a reflection of what the people want in their neighborhood. The vision statement will be useful when people ask what the neighborhood wants to be. It is best if the neighborhood has their desires already on paper.

### Sample Vision Statements

1. The Blue Jay neighborhood will grow to become a safe quiet neighborhood that provides homebuyers a safe investment atmosphere. The neighborhood will be known for their shopping center serving antique shoppers and tourist.
2. The Lansdowne neighborhood will be a vibrant multi-cultural neighborhood where young families will raise their children in modest priced homes served by beautiful parks. The neighborhood will be known for large two-story homes with beautiful landscaping.
3. The South Hampton neighborhood will be a trendy neighborhood catering to the needs of young professionals and artists living in historic homes. The neighborhood will be known for the nightlife in the entertainment district located along Nelson St.
4. The Sunny Dale neighborhood will provide an affordable alternative to working class families seeking mid-sized homes. The area will be known for the first class soccer fields located in the heart of the neighborhood.

These are only a few samples of possible neighborhood vision statements. They can be longer but the planner should avoid writing a page-long vision statement. The

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## Plan Builder

### Section 11: Plan Writing *Continued*

planner should feel free to tweak the format of the vision statement to better meet the local needs of the neighborhood. In the end, the planner must use the information gathered from the public input meeting to express the future image of the neighborhood as seen through the eyes of the neighbors.

During the plan writing, the planner will have to break the vision statement down into somewhat specific goals. Recommendations will be made to guide actions to attain the stated goals. The importance of the vision statement is very high due to the reliance and relationship of the other elements of the plan.

### Introduction

The introduction is the opportunity to establish which neighborhood is being described and the location. A locator map should be inserted into this section. The map should show the location in relationship to the remainder of the city. The second objective of the introduction will be to describe the planning process. The process description can be brief, unless there is a value to the audience to know more detail. For example, if the area is under development pressure or there is a controversial issue within the neighborhood a more detailed process description may be necessary.

### Study Highlights

The neighborhood study will contain a great amount of observations and facts. Of these items, the neighborhood planner should bring forward the important issues to be addressed by the plan. The study highlights should recap the information related to the issues to be addressed. For the neighborhood planner, this section serves as a bridge between the completed study and the goals of the neighborhood. The planner should only share what is important to support the plan; not simply interesting facts. For example, telling the population’s education level in the study highlights may be unnecessary if nothing in the plan addresses it.

### Goals

Goals will be the first thing the plan presents regarding how they the neighborhood will achieve the vision statement. Goals will be written in relationship to the main topics of the neighborhood plan: Housing, Public Safety, Infrastructure, Appearance, Organization, and Economic Development.

### Relationship to the Vision Statement

All goals should be supportive and lead the neighborhood to the vision statement. The neighborhood planner is responsible for crafting the final version of the vision statement and goals. The planning process should collect the input of the neighbors and build a consensus of what the visions statement and goals should be. The planner should make it clear the work done in the public meetings will be further refined to meet the needs of the neighborhood plan.

The previous sections of the plan are rather academic and simple to get a handle on. The goal setting section will take time to do it right. Often, plans focus on the negative issues facing the neighborhood. The theory is once these negative issues are removed, the neighborhood will be better. This is absolutely right!

However, why aim for better when you can be great? The neighborhood planner must look beyond the demands made by the public and the data to see where the neighborhood should be headed. Demands for more police patrols, better animal control, and more lighting should be interpreted as a desire for “safe streets where people can openly enjoy the use of their property and the neighborhood”.

It is not the goal to have more police protection. This idea can muster a great amount of public support in a neighborhood meeting and make people grumble back at their home; however people then determine success as only achieved when they get more police patrols. This may or may not be the complete answer. Having a more attractive goal to focus on will deliver more long term success and will not blind the neighbors to other alternatives as they present themselves.

### Example:

Vision Statement: The Blue Jay neighborhood will grow to become a safe quiet neighborhood that provides homebuyers a safe investment atmosphere. The neighborhood will be known for their shopping center serving antique shoppers and tourist.

### Topic Housing

- Goal A: Houses will be well maintained by the property owners and tenants.
- Goal B: Homeowners will update their homes to remain attractive to new homeowners

Using the vision statement, the plan writer will then develop goals under each of the main topic headings. In this case, the planner was writing goals for the Housing section of the plan. The goals should either speak directly to the vision statement or be supportive of the statement. By having a goal of well maintained property, the goal speaks to “provides homebuyers a safe investment atmosphere”. If houses

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## Plan Builder

### Section 11: Plan Writing *Continued*

were not well maintained based upon the planner's research, this must be addressed to accomplish the vision statement.

The second goal may have come from the neighborhood planner's interview with a realtor who stated the reason why the housing is turning into rental is because it doesn't appeal to today's homebuyers. During the public meetings, people said if people would spend some money on their property, they would enjoy their home more and not move. The planner brings these two view points together in Goal B.

## Recommendations

After the vision statement and goals are in place, the reader will want to know how the plan proposes to reach them. Some neighborhood planners approach this by putting the whole responsibility on the public input process. They only present solutions produced in the public hearing or committee process. The argument is the planner should not try to force solutions on the participants.

The Plan Builder approach calls for the neighborhood planner to put forward the best ideas to accomplish the goals identified by the neighborhood. The recommendations are simply what can be done to address the problem. The recommendations are not directly pointed at any particular group or individual. This allows the neighborhood plan to be accepted by the participating groups not as what they will do, but simply what needs to be done. The action plan process is where commitments are made. All involved groups simply choose from the list of recommendations or propose their own activities to accomplish the plan's goals. Therefore the planner can make informed recommendations and not worry about forcing ownership of the solutions on the different actors.

### Researched Ideas

The issues identified in the neighborhood plan will require a mixture of existing and new ideas. The neighborhood planner should research what other communities are doing with similar problems. The most immediate source of ideas will be similar communities in the region. The planner should attempt to contact planning departments and non profits to find out how they have approached similar issues. The planner should also search the Internet for mention of the topic or similar cities likely to face the same issues.

During the research, the planner may find solutions being attempted in other communities. Here are some truths the planner must struggle with when they evaluate the idea:

1. Just because a city is trying the approach, doesn't mean it is working.
2. People usually embellish the success of their program so it appears they are succeeding.
3. Many professionals will leave out the trials and tribulations they encountered during their process, making it seem like it was smooth sailing.

Sometimes ideas succeed or fail based upon the personalities, skills, and motivation levels involved. What works elsewhere may not work in your community. What fails elsewhere may work in your neighborhood.

So how can the neighborhood planner determine what should be suggested in the plan? The planner must evaluate the ideas and apply logic. They should focus on feasibility, required resources, knowledge, and level of effort. "Will it work here?" is the final question. If it looks feasible, then it should be included as a recommendation in the neighborhood plan.

The neighborhood planner should realize any recommendation included in the plan may be selected by a participating organization in their action plan. Before a planner puts a recommendation in the plan, they should think through how it could be done and where to get additional information. The planner could re-contact the resource to get more details and insights. If the source of the idea is close by, an information tour could be arranged to inform the people wanting to take on the task.

The planner does not need to know everything about the action, but should be able to lay out a general approach to accomplish the task. This will be helpful as the neighborhood planner assists organizations in selecting actions for their group.

### Personal Experience

Most neighborhood planners have worked in other neighborhoods or in jobs related to some of the issues the neighborhood is working through. The planner should utilize this knowledge and include ideas from their experiences in the plan recommendations. This knowledge base is unique and valuable to each neighborhood planner. Their experiences must be incorporated into the plan if they are relevant.

### Brainstorming – Neighbors

Soliciting solutions from neighbors can be part of the formal public input process or informally gathered from conversations and comments made during public meetings. The neighborhood planner is looking for feasible solutions proposed by the very people who live there each day. The neighbors have the distinct advantage of having

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# Plan Builder

## Section 11: Plan Writing *Continued*

a better idea of what will work and won't work. The planner should incorporate viable ideas within the neighborhood plan.

### Brainstorming - City

Getting ideas from the staff of the city is an equally viable approach. Department heads have a lot of experience and may have some ideas. Line staffs are out working with the issues related to their department and could also produce some ideas on how to correct the situation in the neighborhood.

In all cases of suggested ideas, the neighborhood planner will likely have to put some work into them to make them more feasible. However, the additional ideas and possible directions to pursue can greatly add to the overall list of solutions; making for a better plan.

## Summary

The summary is as the title says. The document will need to have a summary, reiterating the goals of the plan and the need for the involved organizations to work together to make the neighborhood what the goals indicate.

## Appendix

The appendix will contain the neighborhood study and other materials the planner didn't feel fit within the format of the neighborhood plan.

## Beyond the Basics

There are additional plan elements not covered in the basics presented here. The planner can go beyond the format and content described so far. The neighborhood planner will find these additions to the plan rely on either their own skills or those of the people they are surrounded by. The following are additional considerations for a neighborhood plan:

### Photos

Pictures say a thousand words. The neighborhood plan should be a condensed document and using pictures to replace boring text can actually reduce the space needed to convey the message. The content of the pictures is very important and by spending a little time planning out what is needed before and during the process will be beneficial later in the plan writing.

Pictures of people in meetings are the single most important category of picture to capture during the process. Almost every other type of picture can be captured during or after the planning process. Getting action shots is hard to remember when you are in the thick of running a meeting. Later, when the final document is being put together, people in action shots will make the plan come to life. Pictures add a certain amount of creditability to the plan. The planner must remember to have someone taking pictures at public engagements.

### Artistic Renderings

With the help of an artist or architect, a plan can really take off with the addition of illustrations of what the future may look like. For neighborhoods where a declining commercial area or vacant land is a concern, showing how the plan's proposal could change things can enhance the plan dramatically. Not all neighborhood plans will require this.

The skill level of the artist is key in adding this requirement. If the planner does not have access to this skill, they will have to rely solely on words to paint the picture in the mind of the reader. This is no easy task.

### Social Needs

In challenged neighborhoods, there will be a lot more needs than simply the physical. Unemployment, homelessness, expensive housing, day care, and other needs are very real and should be addressed by the neighborhood plan. Most planners will shy away from this because it sounds more like social work. In many ways it is; however this is where the planner should turn to others for assistance.

Finding a well rounded social worker with knowledge of existing programs and needs of the area will make the work much easier. The social needs of a neighborhood are no different than any other need. If there is tool such as a program or a solution among the people, it should be included in the neighborhood plan. Asking social service agencies to join the process will lead to the planner being able to incorporate social solutions in the end documents.

### Advanced Statistics

Using the information from the resident surveys and the physical inventory, the neighborhood planner will be able to generate basic charts and graphs. If the neighborhood planner has access to a statistical program they will be able to generate a more sophisticated analysis of the information. This will lead to a deeper insight of the neighborhood.

### Desktop Publishing

Taking time to create an attractively designed neighborhood plan will have several benefits. An attractive layout can lead to more stakeholders actually reading the



## Plan Builder

Section 11: Plan Writing  
*Continued*

plan. It can also provide confidence to the neighborhood leaders as they pursue implementation. This is more of a psychological effect than reality, but it does make a difference. Adding some “eye candy” to the headers and footers can improve the appearance. Adding borders around images can also make the document better.

The biggest gain by putting the plan together in a desktop publishing program is it gives the author more presentation control. With this added flexibility, the neighborhood planner can use design elements to accentuate certain contents of the plan to make them more memorable to the reader. A well laid out plan will be easier to understand. This is especially important when the audience is not used to technical documents.



# Plan Builder

## Section 12: Plan Approval

It is not enough to have block captains, you will need to work with them to get the most out of everyone's effort.

Often referred to as the “approval process” by planners, the process of getting others to accept the plan is extremely important. The ultimate acceptance by a city organization is to adopt the plan into the city's comprehensive plan. In some cases, the more important acceptance is really by the neighbors and the involved departments. The neighborhood planner should be prepared to take the plan as far as they can for approval. The higher the approval within the organizations, the more likely people will take action based upon the plan. For the city organization, the highest level would be the city council. For neighbors, approval by their board and agreement to move forward with an action plan would be considered a success. Sharing of the plan with the membership is equally important. Non profits boards should vote to accept the plans as their approach to the neighborhood.

### Approval Within the City Organization

To understand the approval process within the city organization, the planner must know where to start and what some of the obstacles may be. There is a definite order of getting a neighborhood plan approved. It is important to get the plan approved at the highest level possible. Reaching the city council level of approval is ideal; however not every plan needs to earn this level of approval to be a success.

#### Planning Department

Neighborhood plans originate out of the Planning Department. Even if the neighborhood plan is written by a third party consultant enlisted by the neighborhood itself, the plan must pass the review of the Planning Department. Their approval/buy-in will be crucial as the planner sells the plan to the other entities. The best way to do this is for the neighborhood planner to share information with the department at key points in the development of the plan.

The second important point step is to make sure the plan agrees with the city's other plans, namely the comprehensive plan. If there is going to be a major conflict, the neighborhood planner must set aside time and have a strategy to either alter the comprehensive plan or to adjust the neighborhood plan accordingly. Changing the comprehensive plan will not be taken lightly; however if there is a legitimate conflict

between the plans, then a proposed change should take place within the Planning Department.

The neighborhood planner should call for a meeting of the planning staff and share the progress and direction the plan is going at the following times:

- Neighborhood Study Completion
- Summary of comments gathered at public meetings
- Rough draft of neighborhood plan

Once the rough draft of the plan is presented, the department can be updated with copies of the plan. At this point, the neighborhood planner has made them aware of the elements of the plan , gathered their input and made appropriate changes. Within the Planning Department, the most critical people to seek approval from will be the staff assigned to the comprehensive plan and the department director. These positions will receive the final plan document when completed.

#### City Departments

The city departments need to support the plan if they are expected to take action. Approval of the neighborhood plan does not commit any department to actions, so one would think it would be easy to get their approval. The action plan, developed after the neighborhood plan, is where department commitments will occur. The department head who reviews the neighborhood plan will read between the lines and see the implied responsibility of their department. They will be concerned with how things are worded within the plan and will look for unreasonable recommendations or false assumptions in the study or the plan.

A reasonable statement may be “Streets with a low condition score should be rebuilt”. An unreasonable statement may be “All streets should be rebuilt to meet the highest condition level”. This last statement gives the audience the impression each and every street will be rebuilt. The department head would point out these statements raise unrealistic expectations of their department. They will likely agree to streets with low scores will be rebuilt, because they most likely already have a



# Plan Builder

## Section 12: Plan Approval *Continued*

similar policy. As long as the plan doesn't put deadlines for street improvements, the department should be ok with general statements. This same thought process will apply to other reviewing departments.

The neighborhood planner should present the following information to other departments:

- The neighborhood study
- The rough draft of the neighborhood plan
- The final draft of the neighborhood plan

### City Council

Maybe the highest level possible for plan approval is for the city council to recognize it and approve it. Many neighborhood plans do not get this far for various reasons. If the plan does not call for significant changes to how the city organization operates in the neighborhood, this level isn't very important. However, if the plan calls for increased city spending in the area or significantly increasing staff involvement, then this approval becomes more important.

Using the groundswell of support gathered while sharing the plan with departments and neighbors, the neighborhood planner should prepare a formal presentation. The city council's time will be very limited, so the presentation should be brief and share simply the highlights. The presentation should also discuss the community involvement so they can rest assured it was not simply the ideas of a few people. The big questions the city council will have are:

- Were the neighbors involved?
- Are the department heads on board?
- What exactly does the plan ask of the council?

The neighborhood planner's presentation should address these questions at a minimum.

### Approval Within the Neighborhood

The amount of effort needed to inform the neighbors will depend on how involved they have been throughout the process. Using committees and public meetings will result in a greater awareness of the plan effort. The community will be able to respond quickly to the planner's document. They will also have voiced concerns during the process and may not have anything to say during the approval process.

If the plan process was poorly attended and did not involve the neighbors much, the planner will have their work cut out for them. A low-level involvement could allow new people to attend the presentation meeting and raise new issues. Without a high participation of the neighborhood prior to the presentation, the plan will be hard to defend in these circumstances. The neighborhood planner should make sure high participation provides a solid basis for the plan contents.

In Chapter 8, the public engagement section of this manual describes a public meeting for presenting the plan to the neighbors. The planner should focus more on the elements of the plan and not the study unless there are questions about the validity of the assumptions. The most difficult part of the neighborhood approval process is to explain the recommendations contained within the plan are simply recommendations. At the time of the plan presentation, no organization has officially agreed to do any of the recommendations. The planner must also explain the next step will be for organizations to adopt the plan and then complete their own action plan to document steps they will take to reach the plan goals. This is where the rubber hits the road.

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## Plan Builder

### Section 13: Action Plan Writing

#### Action Plan

An action plan is a compliment to the neighborhood plan. Each participating organization should complete their own separate action plan. The action plan lays out what the organization seeks to pursue to accomplish the goals of the overall neighborhood plan. To decide this, the organization should hold internal meetings to select what activity they want to engage in. With the city organization being one of the most influential groups, their action plan is instrumental to the overall planning activity.

#### Leadership

After choosing to accept the neighborhood plan as a viable document designed to improve the neighborhood, the organization leadership should then meet to discuss the ramifications of the plan. The plan was written as a statement of what is present and what needs to be done. Without significant action by the organizations and the individual neighbors, the plan will never lead to any substantial improvement. The leaders of the organizations will need to identify what activities their group will engage in to further the plan.

During the planning process, the members of the group most likely identified reasonable opportunities for their participation. Maybe there was a neighborhood clean-up or an education effort the group could take on. The neighborhood plan will provide a whole list of activities for everyone to consider; however not all will be appropriate for a particular organization. The real challenge is to decide which actions will contribute the most to the future of the organization and their mission.

Determining the appropriateness of an action is easier for groups who have already focused on their mission and determined how they will operate. For example, a housing development organization may have already determined they will only develop new single-family homes. They won't consider rehabbing housing or building multi-family. They would review the suggestions of the plan and determine what fits their objectives. They may find the plan is arguing for new housing in the south west corner of the neighborhood. This could lead them to adjust their

property acquisitions to this location. Therefore, the plan is shaping their activities, but not making them step out of the role they have determined for their organization.

A neighborhood group may have a more difficult time. They often will not have predetermined what type of activity they want to engage in and therefore have a clean slate. But what activities will benefit their organization the most? Strategic choices should be on the minds of the leadership. The group can take on a neighborhood clean-up, but they should not become known as the group who simply cleans up trash. There should be a progression of the types and frequency of activities for the organization. Leadership should review what their capacity is and where they want it to be in the future. A gradual progression of projects and activities will build the necessary capacity in a natural way.

The leadership can sift through the list of possible activities and narrow down the possibilities in the beginning. To be truly democratic and inclusive, the membership should be involved in the discussion of the short list of activities. One idea is to have a neighborhood meeting where each remaining possibility is presented by a leader of the organization, sharing the pros and cons of the activity. The membership could then weigh in on the choices and provide insight for the leadership. At this point, the leadership can choose to make the choices or to put it to vote, depending on the bylaws or the desires of the governing board.

It is important for everyone to realize the selection of activities means the organization will have to take action. Committees will be formed, event planning will take place, and results will be produced. The leadership should take action to get things rolling once the activities are selected. At this time, the activity should be broken down and steps should be put on paper. This is where the action plan comes into play.

The action plan should provide the people engaged in the activity some guidance on how to accomplish the task. The neighborhood planner can assist with this by asking questions, sharing past experience, and putting things in a logical order. The action



# Plan Builder

## Section 13: Action Plan Writing *Continued*

plan should provide a basic “how to” for the selected actions. In the absence of a neighborhood planner, the leadership should create their own action plan.’

### Facilitating

In an ideal world, the neighborhood planner who wrote the neighborhood plan would assist the organizations in writing their action plan. Whether it is the neighborhood planner or simply the organization leader, the approach is the same: Get people to focus on what they want to do and describe how they will do it.

Using a public meeting to get the input from the members of the group is a good place to start. The planner should start with a list of activities the leadership felt met their criteria and ask members of the leadership to present them to the audience. The planner’s job is to keep the process moving while recording comments from the crowd. The facilitator should also ask probing questions of their own to get the type of input needed to complete their action plan. In the end the planner should determine what items are more important to the organization so they can later prioritize the activities in the action plan.

### The Writing of the Plan

Following the facilitation of the organization’s input, the action plan writer should begin sorting through the gathered information. Using the input, the planner should then create the action plan. For efficiency, the approval of the plan will now rest with the leadership of the organization. The planner would now direct any questions or clarifications towards the governing body of the organization. The action plan will consist of an executive summary, introduction, relevant goals, actions, timeline, future actions, and conclusion.

### Executive Summary

The summary should address the organization’s intentions in the neighborhood. There may be some references to the goals of the neighborhood plan; however it should not duplicate the ideas put forward in the neighborhood plan.

#### Introduction

The introduction should recap the involvement of the organization in the planning of the neighborhood. It should also explain the internal process used to produce the commitments contained within the organization’s action plan.

#### Relevant Goals

Within the neighborhood plan are many goals and proposed actions. Each organization completing their own action plan will select items related to their interest and responsibilities. The goals and actions the organization selects should be listed in the action plan under Relevant Goals. This provides the reader a summary of what parts of the plan the organization has agreed to pursue.

There may be items contained within the neighborhood plan related to the organization yet not included in the action plan. This indicates the organization has not agreed to address the goal or activity at this time. Later on, the organization may agree to more items when funding or their priorities change. This allows the neighborhood plan to say what needs to be said and organizations to only agree to what they feel they can manage.

#### Actions

This section will elaborate on each selected action of the neighborhood plan. A brief introduction paragraph should be provided followed by the goals and actions. Under each action, the neighborhood planner will provide the steps necessary to complete the action listed. For each step, specific details will be provided such as time frame, funding required, lead/contact person, and responsible department. A narrative should be included to describe how the steps will work together to accomplish the action and overall goal. For the city organization, the steps should also be included in the appropriate department’s work plan by the manager approving the department’s participation.

#### Timeline

A chart should be included to visually demonstrate the timeline for the action plan items. Most of the activity will occur in the first year of implementation. In some cases, organizations will be able to make limited commitments to actions in the second and third year.

#### Future Actions

The action plans should include the items organizations agree to pursue in the future, but cannot make commitments regarding the actual steps required. There is no guarantee these items will be addressed, but it paints a picture of what the future actions might be.

#### Conclusion

Within the conclusion, the planner will discuss an annual review process where progress will be checked and new commitments for the following year will be made. The neighborhood planner will have the responsibility to reconvene the organization’s representatives to review the needs of the neighborhood.

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## Plan Builder

### Section 13: Action Plan Writing *Continued*

#### Action Plan Approval

Once the writer has put the plan down on paper and has shared it with the leadership, the plan must be presented to the body of the organization. The action plan must be presented by the leadership. It is important the leadership brings the plan forward as a signal to the membership it has merit within the organization. Hearing from the people they respect and identify with, the audience is most likely to accept and approve the action plan. Furthermore, the audience must believe their leadership has reviewed the plan and believe the group can implement it.

Action plans are much more about specific action than neighborhood plans. During a presentation of a neighborhood plan, it is easy for the audience to sit back and nod agreement. The neighborhood plan is somewhat ambiguous and individuals do not easily see their role. An action plan speaks closer to the expectations of the people within the group. The audience will see a call to action for themselves and their neighbor. Immediately, they will want to know if the request is valid and is what they should be doing in the big scheme of things. At this moment is when the entire process the neighborhood went through is important. The audience members will see the process was thorough and the actions they are discussing are based on logical conclusions. The planning process and the leadership's endorsement will provide the confidence to the audience allowing them to agree to the stated actions in the organization's action plan.

Upon agreeing to the action plan, the leadership will have to take steps to get things moving on the first item in their plan. They should immediately elect a project leader to begin the steps outlined in the action plan related to the activity. This demonstrates the sense of urgency to the membership. People in general want to see energy, heavy involvement by others, and have an understanding of the end goal. The leadership should take this into account whenever they are calling their membership into action.

The neighborhood planner should present this process to the leadership and coach them on how to present the action plan to their membership. It is good to acknowledge the action plan was written by the planner, but the presentation and discussion needs to be led by the leadership.



# Plan Builder

## Section 14: Implementation

With the completion of the Neighborhood Study, Neighborhood Plan, and two or more action plans, the planning process will be completed. Implementation relies on each organization taking ownership of their action plan and pursuing it. This is no easy task and often there are significant roadblocks. In an ideal situation, the neighborhood planner remains engaged with the neighborhood, providing assistance to the organizations involved.

The largest impact a neighborhood planner will have in implementation will be with the organizations with low capacity for getting things done. This could be the neighbors, newly formed non profits, or similar groups. There is definitely a role for the neighborhood planner to play with the city organization and higher capacity groups; however the biggest bang for the buck will be with the least sophisticated. City organizations and similar organizations are quite capable of taking a concept and turning it into reality. They are not as reliant on the skills of the neighborhood planner. The planner can definitely provide some assistance, but their impact will be nominal.

### Capacity Building

The neighborhood planner should evaluate the capacity of the organizations and compare it to what they want to do. If a group already appears to be able to accomplish all the tasks indicated in the neighborhood plan and their action plan, then the importance of capacity building is not very high. If this is not the case, then an evaluation will reveal weaknesses.

The neighborhood planner or the organization leader should consider the following steps to improve the organization's capacity

- Arrange for speakers who have skill/knowledge on a topic to present to the group with the goal of teaching the audience more about their topic.
- Focus on improving the capacity of a very select group of current/potential leaders.
- Start with small tasks and allow the capacity of participants of a committee to grow naturally.

- Provide coaching to the leaders instead of just taking over and doing something for them.
- Give encouragement along the way to create an atmosphere where efforts are appreciated.
- Look for formal training workshops to invite/send members to increase their skill/knowledge

### Committees

Action plan completion calls for the organization to get organized. Most actions identified by the group will require a group effort. The organization will need to form a committee to pursue the completion of the selected action. The neighborhood planner/leader can best assist the committee by providing them general directions regarding the committee structure and how to operate. Ensuring the committee has a well thought out agenda can make a big difference. The agenda should be structured to make progress on the steps outlined in the action plan. The chair should be coached to stay on the topic. There are many tangents related to their topic, but to be effective, the chairperson needs to keep members on task.

Within the Neighborhood Builder book, is a section titled "Organization Builder". This section provides additional insight to operating committees. It would be useful for the leadership and planner to read it for further direction. Committee work is very important to the neighborhood planning process.

### Success of the Overall Plan

As with most plans, implementation is the key to success. Neighborhood plans have a distinct disadvantage because they include a variety of organizations and individual citizens as action takers. This makes implementation a very difficult undertaking. With many stakeholders involved, there needs to be one group responsible for following up with the organizations.

The group or committee needs to have representation from each of the organizations involved. This creates buy-in from all the organizations and adds legitimacy to the committee. The Steering Committee used during the planning

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## Plan Builder

### Section 14: Implementation *Continued*

process could be utilized for this in some circumstances. The appropriateness is based upon whether the steering committee has representatives from all the organizations who have chosen to create an action plan in response to the newly created neighborhood plan. If one or more organizations lack a member serving on the committee, then additional members may be added to provide proper representation.

#### **Role of the Committee**

The purpose of the group is accountability and to provide progress reports to those involved. Any additional responsibilities or tasks will simply impede them from making progress in these important tasks.

#### **Committee Members**

The committee should consist of representatives from the different organization's participating in the planning process. There should be two members from each organization with some possibility for additional members if justified. The neighborhood planner is only responsible for making sure the group follows the agenda and accomplishes their mandate of completing the plan. The planner is definitely a resource to the group, but should not take a true leadership role.

Each member is responsible for understanding what their organization has agreed to do and the content of the overall neighborhood plan. Their role is to ensure their organization is making progress and to communicate between their organization and the implementation committee.

#### **City Staff Involvement**

If the neighborhood planner is a city employee, then there are two roles for city staff: facilitator and committee member. The neighborhood planner plays the role of facilitator. Their task is to keep the committee focused on the agenda and answer questions when they arise. The committee member positions should be filled by department representatives most likely to be applicable to the issues of the neighborhood.

#### **Meeting Format**

The committee should meet every quarter to discuss progress. Review of the past minutes should not be taken lightly and be the start of every meeting. Each member should present the progress their group has made on their action plan. The member

should then report on any assignments they individually took on from previous meetings. Committee discussion should occur between reports.

During the discussion, the group will need to talk about a organization's progress and obstacles. The discussion may lead to committee members offering assistance to the effort. These commitments of action should be recorded in the minutes and followed up a the next meeting. Committee accountability will be instrumental to the success of the implementation of the plans.

Following these reports, the committee should then review upcoming activity milestones included in the action plans. Representatives should share any concerns or needs their organization may have regarding the upcoming activity. The tone of the meeting should be of encouragement and problem solving.

At some point on the agenda, the neighborhood planner should recap the main objectives of the neighborhood plan to assist the committee in remaining focused on the big picture when discussing activities. It is important not to lose focus on the destination determined by the neighborhood plan. This should not require more than five minutes and should occur before the updates if possible.

## Tracking Progress

The neighborhood planner will ultimately be responsible for reporting the progress of the plan. Accomplishments of the participating groups should be listed in a report completed every year. The report should demonstrate what progress was made in the current year and what was accomplished in the previous years. The planner should also review the plan and identify what is not being accomplished and include a narrative explaining why it has not come to pass. Recommendations of how to accomplish these unmet goals should be provided by the planner. It could be an organization needs more resources, expert help, or simply encouragement. The need or the proposed solution may no longer be valid and require amending the plan. If the revision is minor in nature, the planner should wait until there are a substantial amount of changes to plan to update the plan.



# Plan Builder

## Section 15: Beyond Writing the Plan

Plan Builder provides a structured approach to neighborhood planning. By following the steps, the neighborhood planner will produce a thorough plan for a neighborhood. However, there is more to the work of a neighborhood planner. Traditional planning is founded on research and document writing. Neighborhood planning is based upon the same, but varies due to expectations. Often expectations call for the planner to go beyond research and document writing.

Neighborhood planners are assigned an area based on the fact the area is currently in great need of help or will be in the near future. The politicians will have expectations something will be done if the neighborhood planner is sent in. Most politicians are not impressed by the completion of a plan and will not include this in the list of positive accomplishments. They want something to visibly change or be able to detect a change in the mood of the public.

Neighbors have their own expectations, although they are similar to those of politicians. They are even less impressed with the plan document and want to know exactly how things will change. The public is looking for a ten step program, when finished, will reveal a new and improved neighborhood. The planning process fires up the crowd and motivates them to take action towards what they want. All eyes will fall on the planner to tell them what to do.

The challenge to the neighborhood planner is to find ways to spur action before, during, and after the writing of the plan. This calls for the planner to deviate from the path of traditional planners. Traditional planners can sigh in relief as they complete the plan designed to be pursued over a ten or twenty year time frame. Neighborhood plans are required to produce noticeable changes sooner. There is no relaxation until their supervisor pulls them out of the neighborhood kicking and screaming. There is a certain connection between the planner and the people of the neighborhood. Neighborhood planners usually want to stay in the neighborhood as long as possible.

If a neighborhood planner is to remain with a neighborhood after the completion of the plan, they must be totally focused on producing action based upon the plan. As groups take on the steps of their action plan, they need to provide support designed

to help the group achieve their objectives. The planner will seek out barriers to the participating groups and will then do their best to remove them. This takes a variety of forms such as educating, coaching, smoothing relationships, and making recommendations to overcome the obstacles.

This is no easy task and not every planner is cut out for it. Not every supervisor is willing to engage a neighborhood in this manner. If they are not, the planner's time should end shortly after the completion of the action plans. If there is great importance put on the success of the neighborhood, someone should be assigned to continue to work with the neighborhood, well after the completion of the plan.

### Attitudes

Attitude plays a big role in neighborhood planning and implementation. The neighborhood planner needs to have a positive attitude based upon the belief their process will lead to positive change. Organizations' attitude can be greatly improved when they are joined by others to take on the difficult task of turning a neighborhood around. They often feel they are alone in the effort and will become more energetic as they hear other organizations and individuals stepping up to make a difference.

The attitude of individuals can be all over the map. Some attitudes are positive while some are very angry and pessimistic. The planner cannot control these attitudes; however they can create an atmosphere where they can be made more positive. There is always anger in neighborhoods because many have not been able to understand how and why their neighborhood has changed over the years. They of course will have suspicions and part of the reasons figured out. Solutions, however, will be few. The easiest coping mechanism will be to blame the city organization and want to hold them accountable.

It is difficult to sort this out while engaging the public during a planning process. The planner will most likely not be successful if they try to take these attitudes head on. Instead, they should try to acknowledge the animosity toward the city and try to get people to be focused on the future. Along the way, people will gain a better

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## Plan Builder

### Section 15: Beyond Writing the Plan *Continued*

understanding of the working of the city and relax somewhat on their stances. The best way to do this is to find ways to have city staff working side by side with the neighbors to identify and solve issues. There is a natural process involved in neighborhood planning to address attitudes, however the planner should not try to make it one of their objectives. If people think this is one of your goals, they will become more suspicious of why the planner is working with them.

### The Final Word

Neighborhood planning is a very dynamic process designed to have a significant impact on a neighborhood and the neighbors who live there. Without action from the different actors in the neighborhood, the plan will provide no value. The neighborhood plan process must gather support and promise of action from the organizations and individuals involved in the neighborhood. The city organization plays a very important role, but will need complimenting actions from the neighbors and non profit organizations.

The neighborhood planner must play a dynamic role in the process of pulling everyone together. They cannot afford to operate like a traditional planner. The neighborhood planner weaves a complicated web of resources, knowledge, and relationships to assist a neighborhood to it's fullest potential. It is not for everyone, and there will definitely be some better than others. The Plan Builder process attempts to describe a clear path for a neighborhood planner to follow. The method can be altered at any point, but the intent of the process should never be dismissed.