



# ESTABLISHING A NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION



In the City of Troy, efforts are led by the Department of Planning and Zoning. For more information, send an email to [planning@troyal.info](mailto:planning@troyal.info). Our staff will respond to your request.

Please note that this information is not legal advice and not intended to be considered legal advice. It is just information from a variety of sources to get you started on your way to forming a neighborhood association. The City does not accept any liability associated with the formation of a neighborhood association, nor does the City form the association for you.

## What is a neighborhood association?

A neighborhood association is a geographically-based partnership to improve conditions in a neighborhood. It includes homeowners, renters, and landlords, as well as representatives from businesses, faith-based groups, non-profits, and schools. The members of the association should represent the entire neighborhood community and all of its issues and assets. Members get together to discuss issues and identify solutions to address those concerns. Through their work, members develop the stability, credibility, and political influence necessary to be an effective force in making a stronger neighborhood.

## Neighborhood associations provide:

- A forum for discussion of local issues.
- An opportunity for people to work together and make a difference in their neighborhood.
- Stability and credibility, which leads to an effective force for a better neighborhood.
- A chance for each member to contribute their unique talents and build individual skills.

## Questions to think about:

- Why do you think you should organize?
- Are there issues that need to be addressed?
- Is there support for these issues?
- How do you want to improve your neighborhood?
- How can an organized group of neighbors be more effective at change?
- What type of potential leadership is there within your neighborhood?
- What type of resources does your group/neighborhood have?

## Some specific goals of Troy Neighborhoods:

The following are examples of what Neighborhood Associations can be working on right now in Troy. The goals are developed by neighborhoods as a part of their Neighborhood Mission Statement.

- Strengthen neighborhood pride and identity
- Increased community involvement
- Development of effective neighborhood watch programs
- Better communication with neighborhood leaders
- Better communication with and involvement from landlords
- Improved property maintenance, especially at “problem properties”

- Removal/repair of abandoned buildings
- Development of affordable housing options
- Increased police presence: more patrolling, better response, and more meetings
- Decreased speed and better traffic enforcement
- Increased safety
- Decreased perception of crime
- Increased recreational opportunities
- Maintenance of existing parks
- Maintenance and replacement of street trees
- Decreased litter and weeds.
- Official representation and involvement in City government
- Development of businesses that provide services to neighborhoods
- Re-establishment of traditional neighborhood commercial centers

### **Why start a neighborhood association?**

Before you begin asking your neighbors to organize, they need to understand the reasons for starting a neighborhood association and what benefits it can provide. Some of the advantages a neighborhood association offers include:

- Provides an open forum for neighbors to discuss their concerns and goals.
- Encourages progress towards common neighborhood goals through organized meetings and an open exchange of ideas.
- Allows each individual neighbor to contribute to a collective voice, which, in turn, is a strong voice.
- Provides an effective communication link with City and County officials. In turn, the residents are able to actively participate in the broader city/county-wide decisions that impact their neighborhood.
- Increases awareness of policies and programs impacting the neighborhood.
- Prevents neighborhood decline through community organization.
- Provides a sense of security by establishing relationships between neighbors.
- Builds new relationships between neighbors through social activities. These social opportunities help bring people together and increase social capital.

### **Benefits of organizing a neighborhood association:**

- Have a real and lasting impact on neighborhood problems (ex: crime, traffic and parking issues, public space improvements, etc.)
- Foster an open dialogue between neighbors, police, and City/County officials.
- Share information and build trust among neighborhood residents through meetings, newsletters, and relationships.

### **Emphasizing the assets of residents:**

Perhaps one of the greatest benefits to establishing a neighborhood association is the opportunity for each of your neighbors to contribute their individual gifts and talents towards the betterment of the neighborhood. Becoming involved as an association leader, committee member, or volunteer helps members develop skills that improve the neighborhood, as well as their career and personal relationships. Involved residents and property owners know the neighborhood best and, therefore, their involvement is critical for a successful association.

When confronting a problem, an asset-based neighborhood looks first within and then outside itself for an answer. The neighborhood focuses on its assets, or strengths, rather than its needs and weaknesses. This reliance on the neighborhood's strengths to solve problems strengthens the neighborhood's identity and pride, while empowering individuals to believe in themselves and their neighbors.

### **In vibrant neighborhoods...**

- Residents are actively involved.
- Residents know and help one another.
- Residents have skills, knowledge, and resources.
- Residents are encouraged through effective organization.
- Residents have collectively identified their assets and needs.
- Residents have a collective vision.
- Residents are implementing plans to make their vision happen.
- Residents invest in the educational success of their youth.

### **So you've decided to form a neighborhood association...**

You've decided you want to start working toward positive change in your neighborhood. You have some ideas, but you will need a team to make a difference.

### **What are the next steps?**

1. Organize a core group of leaders in the neighborhood.
2. Plan a general stakeholder meeting.
3. Give the neighborhood a name.
4. Work together to conduct a neighborhood survey.
5. Establish the boundaries of the neighborhood.
6. Contact all of your neighbors and get the word out.
7. Host a kick-off meeting for the neighborhood association.
8. Continue meeting on a regular basis and work together to achieve the association's goals.
9. Register your Neighborhood Association with the City of Troy Planning & Zoning Department.

#### **STEP ONE – Organize a Core Group of Leaders and Identify Initial Neighborhood Issues, Concerns, and Needs**

Identify a small core group of neighbors to inventory the neighborhood and identify the primary concerns residents and property owners care about.

Every neighborhood association is different. Some start in response to a particular issue or crisis, such as specific redevelopment project, and are established to respond to targeted issues. Other neighborhood associations are more general in nature and are intended to increase communication and awareness. For example, the initial focus of some associations may be to host an annual block party in order to build camaraderie between neighbors.

In either case, the group should strive to represent all of the people and interests in the neighborhood.

After the core group defines the major issues facing the neighborhood, their primary function is to serve as a steering committee and help plan for the first general stakeholder meeting of the entire neighborhood. The core group will need to do a number of important things in preparation for the first general stakeholder neighborhood meeting:

- Define a list of small "kick-off" projects to get the momentum started. The projects should be fairly targeted and simple such as a block clean-up, letter writing/email campaign, a neighborhood-wide rummage sale, or a potluck fundraising event. The idea is to make it easy for the people who come to the first meeting to get involved and to generate excitement.
- Decide who you want to tell about your new organization, such as community newspapers, local government, churches, and other neighborhood groups. Create a list with contact names, phone numbers and email addresses. Designate someone within the core group to be in charge of managing this list. Contact SNP for a list of land owners and their contact information.
- Designate someone in the core group to be in charge of recruiting neighbors to be general members of the neighborhood association.
- Designate someone in the core group to conduct in-depth research about each of the major issues that have been identified for the neighborhood. It is important that the group understand the history of the important issues, so that you know what has already been done in the past and you don't repeat any previous mistakes. Talk to residents who have lived in the neighborhood for a long time, long-standing businesses, city officials, the alderman, the police department etc.

### **STEP TWO - Plan the First General Stakeholder Meeting**

Once the core group has completed their "homework," they should decide on a date, time, and location for the general membership meeting. Keep in mind that you want to choose a date and time that is going to be convenient for the largest number of people possible. Mid-week meetings during the evening or weekend meetings in the early afternoon usually work the best. Schools, public libraries, churches, and community centers make great locations for the meeting and will often be free of charge.

#### Create an Agenda (see the sample Agenda)

The first general stakeholder meeting is very important, as it will lay the foundation for the organization. The goal of the general stakeholder meeting is to generate agreement on the goals and issues that the organization will target. Below is a framework for what your agenda might look like at this first meeting.

1. *Introduction:* Introduce the core group and explain the purpose of the meeting. Also, everyone attending should introduce themselves, state where they live, and describe what they would like to see happen in the neighborhood.
2. *Discuss the Issues:* Everyone attending should have a chance to voice their opinion and make suggestions. Be sure to limit each person's time, in order to allow everyone the opportunity to speak.
3. *Set Priorities:* Based on the issues discussed, prioritize one or two areas of interest and develop projects around those points.
4. *Create Tasks:* Break your project ideas down into a series of tasks and assign volunteers. If the work involves a lot of people, create a committee and assign a head.
5. *Create the Organization Structure:* Establish a name for the organization and assign a leadership team (ask those in attendance to approve the core group as a steering committee until elections are held). Rules for operation and elections can either be adopted at the first meeting or at a subsequent meeting of the organization.
6. *Set a date for the Next Meeting:* It is essential to agree on a date and time for the next meeting before adjourning. This next meeting will be the first neighborhood-wide association meeting.

### **STEP THREE - Give the Neighborhood a Name**

Give the neighborhood association a name. The name may be based on the subdivision name, the history, a historic designation, a landmark, a nearby school, or a symbolic image. By researching the general background of the neighborhood, the group can install a sense of pride and motivation in the residents.

### **STEP FOUR – Work Together to Conduct a Neighborhood Survey**

Prepare a survey (a sample of one has been included within this tool kit) to gather input from the neighborhood on a variety of topics, including the boundaries of the neighborhood, issues/concerns, and future opportunities.

- Determine a preliminary boundary of your neighborhood, so that the group knows what areas to survey. Establish boundaries based on physical boundaries (e.g. main roadway) or natural boundaries (e.g. park, woods, or river). The group will need to define the boundaries based upon street names and block numbers. Check with the City of Troy to be sure the boundaries do not overlap with those of another registered association.
  - Keep the neighborhood manageable in size. The neighborhood should be small enough for members to pass out flyers door-to-door. For example, a neighborhood with twenty blocks might be too large to organize; four blocks may be too small.
- Get a Neighborhood Map
  - The City of Troy Department of Planning & Zoning can assist the group with the creation of a neighborhood map.
  - The City of Troy Planning & Zoning Department also maintains a city-wide neighborhood map. The map is available on the City of Troy website. This map can be a great place to start when determining names and preliminary boundaries. For a more detailed map with boundaries, please contact the Planning & Zoning Department. However the final boundaries need to be determined by the individuals within the neighborhood association.
- The best time for a survey is Saturday. The door-to-door survey will take approximate four hours to complete with teams of two people canvassing different parts of the neighborhood.
  - Other neighborhood survey efforts have found that people are most likely to be home between 10am and 2pm on Saturdays. However, we stress that each neighborhood is different, so select a time that will be the most beneficial to your neighborhood.
- Each team of two people should be assigned a designated area that represents a certain type of character within the initial boundaries of the neighborhood. For example, areas may be defined by different ethnic enclaves, businesses, churches, housing types, school zones, etc.
  - If a team finishes surveying their designated area early, they should provide assistance in another area. If a team cannot finish surveying their area within time allotted, they should highlight which areas were not surveyed when the group reconvenes at the end of the afternoon. The group should decide if they have a large enough sample of opinions to stop the surveying in that area or if they need to develop a strategy for finishing the area.
- Once the surveys have been compiled, the group will need to organize the answers in a format that can be analyzed and easily communicated to the neighborhood. Someone in the group should be responsible for the tallying of survey responses and reporting the results back to the group at the next meeting. Programs such as Microsoft Excel can be useful in this process.

### **STEP FIVE – Establish the Boundaries of the Neighborhood**

Based on the input from the steering committee, general stakeholders meeting, and survey, define the physical boundaries of the neighborhood. Keep in mind, the boundaries should include both sides of the street.

An example: “The Numeral Neighborhood includes each and every property in the City of Troy north of the centerline of 1<sup>st</sup> Street, east of the centerline of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, south of the centerline of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, and west of the centerline of 4<sup>th</sup> Street.”

### **STEP SIX – Contact All of your Neighbors and get the Word Out**

Now that you have done all the ground work for the first neighborhood-wide association meeting, you need to publicize the event in a way to ensure the highest participation possible. Below are some tips to ensure high attendance:

- Create flyers advertising your meeting, including the purpose of the meeting, as well as the time, date, and place. Distribute to all neighborhood stakeholders (residents, landowners, tenants, landlords, realtors, etc).
- Take your flyers door-to-door and canvass the neighborhood. (Remember: the Postal Service does not allow individuals to place flyers in mail boxes – it is illegal! Place flyers in between porch doors, in door handles, etc. Consider bringing some tape and/or rubber bands. Please do not allow the flyers to become litter.)
- Invite people in person. Nothing can replace the value of face-to-face communication.
- Request an article in the local paper announcing the meeting.

### **STEP SEVEN – Host a Kick-Off Meeting for the Neighborhood Association**

- Arrive early to set up the meeting area.
- Keep it short, interesting, and goal-oriented.
- Be prepared for a big meeting with lots of discussion and more ideas than you might have expected.
- Be prepared for a small meeting—low attendance is common for new organizations. If this happens, stay positive and enlist the energies of everyone who does show up.
- Prepare, hand out, and follow an agenda.
- Have a table set up to greet people.
- Ask people to sign-in at the meeting. This will serve as a contact list for future meetings and events (name, address, phone, email etc.)
- Offer refreshments and time for mingling. Allow everyone the chance to speak up.
- Discuss the association’s mission and by-laws (if the group does not make a decision at the first meeting, assign a deadline).
- Give everyone the opportunity to speak and consider all ideas.
- Treat everyone with respect.
- Set a date for election of officers (with term length in by-laws).
- If possible, recruit block captains and spell out responsibilities.
- Decide on an initial calendar of events (for all seasons; spring, summer, fall, and winter).
- End meetings with committee assignments to deal with the problems identified.
- No one should leave the meeting without a task, even if it is simple.

### **STEP EIGHT – Continue Meeting on a Regular Basis and Work Together to Achieve the Association’s Goals**

- Organize small groups around common interests (e.g. cards, carpentry, music, etc.).
- Offer programs or training in areas of interest or concern (e.g. community gardening, landscaping, etc.).
- Aim high: expect professionalism and accountability.
- Recognize and reward members routinely.
- Stress the positive whenever possible.
- Develop a strong sense of neighborhood loyalty.
- Develop a newsletter, distribute flyers, and start an email chain to encourage frequent communication.
- Have regular (at least seasonal) community meals (e.g. pot lucks, spaghetti dinners etc.).
- Be inclusive in all affairs, spread the responsibility. Ensure that anyone and everyone feels welcome.
- Use a survey to get to know the assets and interests of your neighbors.

### **STEP NINE – Register your Neighborhood Association with the City of Troy Planning & Zoning Department**

- Elect a member to act as the contact point for the Neighborhood Association.
- Registration is free! Once registered, the primary contact will be added to the Planning & Zoning Department’s public notice distribution list.
- Registration forms are available online at [www.troyal.gov](http://www.troyal.gov) under the Planning & Zoning Department
- Complete form, then email, fax, mail, or drop off to the City of Troy Planning & Zoning Department, PO Box 549, 301 Charles W. Meeks Ave., Troy, AL 36081, Fax: (334) 670-6078, [planning@troyal.info](mailto:planning@troyal.info).
- An email confirmation will be sent once the registration is processed.

### **Ideas for Programming**

The following list includes ideas that you may consider if you decide to form a neighborhood association. After getting to know your neighbors, base programming on their interests and concerns.

- Educate members about volunteer opportunities in the neighborhood.
- Organize a Neighborhood Watch Program.
- Form a neighborhood sports team(s).
- Offer parenting classes.
- Get involved in neighborhood beautification - clean ups, tree/shrub removal or trimming etc.
- Provide housing maintenance training.
- Offer violence prevention programming – focus can be on anger management, crisis intervention, mentoring, etc.
- Work together to improve the safety of parks and playground equipment.

**Strong neighborhoods make strong communities!**