**Recommendation for Neighborhoods Commission**

**DATE:** May 15, 2013

**TO:**  The Honorable Mayor Chuck Reed and Members of the San Jose City Council

**FROM:** City of San Jose, Neighborhoods Commission

**SUBJECT:** Recommendation for Neighborhoods Commission

Dear Mayor Reed and Council Members,

Following Council’s direction from October of 2012, this recommendation positions the Neighborhoods Commission within the larger context of overall Board and Commission re-structuring and is the result of extensive study, discussion and review at four regularly scheduled Neighborhoods Commission meetings and three public study sessions, the latter of which were guided by a trained facilitator. Additional input was collected by discussions at District Neighborhood Leadership Group meetings, Neighborhood Association meetings, and individual emails and conversations. The resulting recommendation was then discussed and approved at the May 8, 2013 meeting of the Neighborhoods Commission.

We feel that this Pilot Program has shown that there is a vital and unique role for the Neighborhoods Commission. As a valued resource for both the City and Community we respectfully ask to be made a permanent component of San José’s future. We recommend that the following be considered as a revision to the pilot program in order to make improvements that better serve our Neighborhoods and the City.

In recognition of its inherent value to the Community, the Neighborhoods Commission has been extended twice by unanimous Council action.

**Executive Summary**

The purpose of this recommendation is to propose to City Council and Staff the structure, role and function which the Neighborhoods Commission should take on once it is made a permanent body.

The Commission shall serve as a conduit for communication between the neighborhoods, City Council, other Commissions and City staff on issues, programs and projects that have a long-term horizon and that impact the quality life in the neighbor­hoods.

In this role, the Commission serves as a strategic thought partner for Council and staff, while articulating another level of advocacy for neighborhoods. It provides information from Council, City Staff and other bodies to the neighborhoods and, in turn, reflects the voices and needs of the neighborhoods for consideration in the City’s decision-making process.

We propose that the Commission be made permanent incorporating the following changes:

* A reduction in the number of Commissioners to 20;
* A Caucus selection process where:
  + Community members select the Commissioners
  + It is the responsibility of the Commission to facilitate it; and
  + The Commission works in conjunction with the City to ensure it is broad and equitable.
* A work plan focused on the Budget, Public Safety, Transportation, policies affecting neighborhood Quality of Life and communications and outreach.

**BACKGROUND**

The Neighborhoods Commission is an outgrowth of the Strong Neighborhoods Initiative (SNI) Project Advisory Committee and the product of a collaborative effort between the City and the community. Since its formation, it has worked on longer-term, city-wide policies and procedures affecting neighborhoods and their quality of life. As a pilot program, the Commission has occupied a unique space in the civic landscape and made distinct contributions according to its charter to increase community involvement, civic engagement and outreach. In doing so it has been a model for participatory Democracy.

Representing the City’s neighborhoods, the Commission has worked with City Staff in revising the City Trees Policy, provided a venue for discussion and feedback of policies such as “Social Host” and has been instrumental in conducting outreach and providing input around the budget and community-related service provision. In addition, it has been an active participant in Public Safety matters, advocating for Community Policing and a comprehensive definition of the term to include all City Services which contribute to it.

**VISION, MISSION AND ROLE OF THE** **NEIGHBORHOODS COMMISSION**

**Vision –** To integrate the voices of all neighborhoods into the City of San Jose’s decision-making process and achieve collaborative and lasting improvements to neighborhood quality of life.

**Mission –** To advise City Council and staff regarding issues, policies, courses of action and programs affecting neighborhood quality of life and to support and advocate for San Jose neighborhoods through community participation, communication, partnerships and shared accountability.

**Role** - The Commission shall serve as a conduit for communication between the neighborhoods, City Council, other Commissions and City staff on issues, programs and projects that have a long-term horizon and that impact the quality life in the neighbor­hoods.

In this role, the Commission serves as a strategic thought partner for Council and staff, while articulating an additional level of advocacy for neighborhoods. It provides information from Council, City Staff and other bodies to the neighborhoods and, in turn, reflects the voices and needs of the neighborhoods for consideration in the City’s decision-making process.

**FUNCTION OF THE NEIGHBORHOODS COMMISSION**

The Commission’s core activities are focused on Communications, Outreach and Civic Engagement. Further, the Neighborhoods Commission “fills the gaps” by focusing on issues, programs not addressed by other Commissions and Boards (i.e. transportation, public safety and budget and finance).

To this end, the Commission’s core activities include but are not limited to:

1. Discussing and making recommendations on issues affecting the quality of life in the City’s neighborhoods as they relate to issues may include:

1. Items on the City’s “Top Ten” issues list which impact neighborhoods; and
2. Those issues raised by the neighborhoods (e.g., the interface between existing neighborhoods and the envisioned Urban Villages and Main Streets; changes to the City’s sign ordinance; and impacts of planned changes to the City’s parking policies).

2. Providing a venue for two-way communication between the City and the Community:

1. Conduct forums for City Council and City Departments to elicit neighborhood input on issues, programs, projects, proposals, new policies, service delivery changes, etc.;
2. Continue to facilitate neighborhood groups and individuals raising issues and express their concerns, hopes and needs and regularly report these to the City Council and City Departments; a
3. To work with other City Commissions and Boards (e.g. joint meetings, presentations and, etc.).

3. Supporting and promoting inter-neighborhood communication, utilizing a range of different venues and modalities (face-to-face, online, etc.).

4. Enhancing knowledge and develop expertise within the Commission on city-wide polices, issues, etc. and City Council and City Department priorities.

**STRUCTURE OF THE NEIGHBORHOODS COMMISSION**

1. Number of Commissioners and Composition
2. There will be 2 Commissioners representing each of the 10 City Council Districts and 1-2 alternates from each District.
3. In the case where there are more than 2 Commissioners *currently* representing a District, the selection process will determine which Commissioners are selected as Commissioners and which is selected as an alternate.
4. Alternates will be kept informed on the issues being addressed by the Commission so that they will be able to be sworn in quickly by the City Clerk when a vacancy occurs.
5. During regular meetings, a quorum is constituted by half of the membership of the Commission.
6. Selection Process

Through the process of Community input into restructuring of Boards and Commissions, community members were adamant that and vocal about maintaining the selection of Neighborhoods Commissioners by way of the Caucus Process.

1. Candidates for the Commission are solicited over a designated period starting one month before the selection caucus, using a variety of media.
2. Prospective candidates apply through the normal City Commission process (e.g., on-line application and vetting by the City Clerk). The qualified candidates are then notified by the City Clerk or his/her designate
3. Commissioners and alternates are selected by a caucus in the Districts they represent.
4. When a vacancy occurs and there is no alternate, a caucus is convened in the respective Council District.
5. Working with the staff of the respective Council District, the person staffing the Commission convenes the caucus.
6. Delegates comprising the caucuses will be as follows:

* At least three (3) representatives from “Neighborhood Groups” (as defined in Planning Outreach Policy 6-30): “a group or organization that is representative of its specific neighborhood, and whose primary purpose is the improvement of that neighborhood. The neighborhood group is self-identified and provides an annual update of its’ contact information to the City. Additionally, for the purposes of this process, a Neighborhood Group must be registered with the City of San José, be acting in good faith to meet the criteria outlined above, and be composed of multiple members from different households in its geographic area.”
* A neighborhood group must formally designate their delegate to the Commission’s City staff liaison a minimum of seven (7) days in advance of their district neighborhood caucus.
* No individual delegate shall represent (or cast a ballot on behalf of) more than one neighborhood group in the district caucus.
* A delegate must reside in the district in which he or she is casting a ballot on behalf of a neighborhood group.
* Candidates are encouraged to be present at the caucus and may not have “stand-ins” speak on their behalf.
* Candidates are required, as part of their application process, to prepare and submit beforehand a written statement of up to two hundred and fifty (250) words explaining their candidacy, skills / experience, and prior service to the community.
* One of the former Commission members or a member from another district will facilitate the caucus.

1. During the caucus, the facilitator will present the Candidates, facilitate the question and answer period and the actual voting process itself.
2. During the caucus in the respective District(s), two candidates will be selected to serve as Commissioners for that District. One-two alternates for that District shall also be selected. The Caucus committee shall determine the best voting process to be used to select the candidates and alternates.
3. Candidates may serve on the commission regardless of their residency status.
4. Terms of Commissioners
   * 1. Commissioners will serve a maximum of two 4-year terms,
     2. After seated, the Commission shall determine the appropriate ways to stagger terms for the purpose of continuity.
5. Meetings: number and location
6. The number of general meetings will be ten (10) per year. The general meetings will occur either at City Hall or at a pre-determined location in the respective Council Districts (the latter in order to facilitate the participation of representatives from neighborhood groups, organizations, leaders and residents).
7. The Commission’s Executive Committee will meet prior to each general meeting.
8. Other committees designated by the Commission will meet as often as necessary. Commissioners bringing knowledge, skill or interest-specific assets to a subject before the Commission will be encouraged to serve on subject-specific committees to develop the work product defined by the majority.
9. Outreach and Communication
10. Commissioners will learn about the issues that are important to the neighborhoods within their respective Districts. One of the key mechanisms for doing this is to attend neighborhood meetings with existing groups and organizations, such as the District Leadership Groups. Commissioners would be expected to talk informally with neighborhood leaders and residents to gather information about issues, accomplishments and concerns.
11. Commissioners will be accountable for serving as communication conduits between the neighborhoods and the Commission.

**Conclusion**

We thank the City Council or the opportunity to participate in the development of the Neighborhoods Commission, the Pilot Program and in helping shape its future direction over the past few years.

We hope that the Council accepts our recommendations and our willingness to continue a dialogue that results in the development of a permanent Neighborhoods Commission.

Finally, we thank the City for facilitating the meetings required to produce this recommendation and its continued guidance in shaping the Commission.