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A Guide to Establishing a Neighborhood/Block Association

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Neighborhood/Block Associations

Many residents take the responsibility upon themselves to care for their neighborhoods by organizing an association. These associations bring neighbors together and help to maintain and uplift communities. They advocate for safer streets, work to beautify neighborhoods, cultivate a sense of community among residents, and much more. The associations empower neighborhoods and neighbors to take action on a number of issues and concerns. Well organized and established associations are often considered the voices of the community and are recognized by elected officials, government, and business people.

Guide to Establishing a Neighborhood/ Block Association

This Guide to Establishing a Neighborhood/Block Association has been designed to help you organize your neighborhood. It will show you the basic steps to get the association up and running. To get a better understanding, it is suggested that you visit several well established neighborhood/block/tenant associations. Their experience and advice can be a big help in getting you started. Upon organizing, please be sure to announce your new block association to the Mayor's Office, Newark People's Assembly and your local Council Office.

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What is a Neighborhood Association?

A neighborhood association is a group of neighbors working together to make their neighborhood a great place to live. It makes decisions on common problems by bringing neighbors together to share ideas and find solutions to address neighborhood concerns and interests.

Why Organize?

Where we choose to live is one of the most important decisions we make. It impacts where our children will go to school, how long it will take us to get to work, the kinds of food we have access to, and the neighbors we may depend on. When purchasing or renting a home, we expect a living environment that makes us feel safe, comfortable, and at peace. When you know your neighbors and look out for each other, you are enhancing your quality of life and that of your family, your neighbors, and the neighborhood.

Establishing a (voluntary) neighborhood association (tenant, block, or district) is an effective way to bring neighbors together to:

- Address common concerns and needs.
- Create a sense of community.
- Celebrate why they have chosen to live there in the first place.

The benefits to having a neighborhood association are:

1. Getting to know your neighbors and looking out for each other.
2. Creating a sense of community where neighbors know each other and feel safe.
3. Protecting two of your largest investments – your family and your residence.
4. Making the neighborhood safer.
5. Creating a unified voice and serving as an advocate for the neighborhood.
6. Ensuring stronger and consistent two-way communication among neighbors and between the City of Newark and the neighborhood.
7. Establishing a partnership and neighborhood influence with the City of Newark.
8. Recognizing common ground and interests and deciding what needs to be done.
9. Working together to address neighborhood needs and wants, including neighbors participating in decision making that guides neighborhood actions.
10. Enhancing resiliency to natural disasters or emergencies impacting the neighborhood.
11. Utilizing neighbors' experience, skills, abilities and talents to enhance the neighborhood.
12. Hosting social activities for the neighborhood that build neighborhood unity.
13. Before you begin asking your neighbors to organize, you have to convince them of the benefits, reasons, and value of forming a neighborhood block association. Some of the key points are that district/block/tenant associations:
 - Facilitate meeting the neighborhoods common goals.
 - Empower neighbors to help control what happens in the area
 - Provide the neighborhood with an effective communication link with government officials and other influential groups.
 - Help members take part in the decision making that directs the neighborhood's actions.
 - Can plan social activities for the neighborhood.

Step 1: Organize the “Neighborhood”

Various factors help a neighborhood to gain a sense of identity and a reason to organize. To get started you will need a group of committed neighbors from the neighborhood/district/block/tenant occupied building that will be represented. The number of people needed will depend on the size of the area you want to organize. Some examples of groups to be represented are:

- Homeowners selected to represent each block or street
- Apartment building owners, managers, or tenants
- Small business owners

When you have the commitment from 5 to 10 people, set up a meeting at a comfortable location, such as a local community venue or someone’s house. Do this quickly before your participants lose interest. Explain to the potential committee members what you have in mind and what you want them to do.

Keep the neighborhood advised of the activities of the newly formed association through communication tools. At this point do not be concerned about having a general meeting of all the people in the area.

Organizing a Neighborhood Association:

1. Set up an organizing committee by recruiting three to four neighbors who are interested and can devote the time to help organize the association. This committee will work with the “Neighborhood Relations” team in organizing the association.
2. Contact Newark People’s Assembly at 973-733-3265 or email NewarkPeoplesAssembly@ci.newark.nj.us to inform the office of your intent to create an association, current status of the interest group, and to give contact information in order to be included in correspondence.
3. The Neighborhood Relations team will help the organizing committee to:
 - a. create a written statement on the need and purpose of the neighborhood association.
 - b. define the proposed boundaries of the association.
 - c. host 3 meetings to establish the association.

Meeting 1 - an introductory meeting where the neighborhood attendees vote on whether to have an association. It is important that this meeting be structured to help neighbors get to know each other and addresses a specific concern that will encourage neighbors to attend the meeting.

Meeting 2 - focuses on establishing bylaws, officer positions and committees, voting on the association name, mission or purpose and the boundaries of the association, when and how often to meet and other associational items.

- **By-laws:** The City of Newark encourages associations to adopt and adhere to bylaws. Bylaws function as an agreement between the association and its membership and outline how the association operates. Following bylaws will provide continuity and consistency in the operation of the association. Newark People’s Assembly can provide samples of other association bylaws or you can go to Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised Chapter on Bylaws. Be sure to purchase the most current edition of Robert’s Rules. A new edition is published every ten years in the following year of the U.S. Census.

Meeting 3 - focuses on the election of officers and voting on bylaws to include purpose/goal, officers, meetings, committees, etc..

Meeting 4 - Now your association is on track for success. Remember the Neighborhood Relations team will continue to assist the association with your needs and requests.

TIP: Organize your neighborhood association to include the young and the old, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.

Step 2: Developing a Block Association Plan

The health and vitality of a neighborhood depends on the ability to plan now for the future. If a neighborhood is viewed as a permanent home for families and businesses and as a continuing investment, then steps need to be taken to address changes that will occur. A neighborhood plan is a guide that provides a framework for future decision making.

A neighborhood plan contains broad statements about what the residents would like to have happen (goals) and principles they would like to see followed (policies). It also contains suggestions for strategies on how to reach said goals.

Step 3: Establish Boundaries

An important step at the beginning of a neighborhood plan is to determine its boundaries.

Once boundaries have been determined, a complete list of property owners and tenants should be obtained. The list should be kept current throughout the process and allow every neighbor to be involved. To get a complete list, you may need to go door to door.

TIP: Do not include too large an area when designing your association boundaries.

Step 4: Delegating Responsibilities and Cultivating Leadership

The following are examples of possibilities:

Review Neighborhood goals: The draft of the neighborhood plan should be reviewed and changed as you continue to form.

Review and Evaluation: The progress of the plan must be monitored and evaluated on a regular basis to ensure its success. Periodic evaluation should be done to measure success, identify problems, and suggest improvements in the program.

The importance of qualified leadership is often overlooked as a neighborhood/district/block/ tenant association develops. Strong leadership gives an organization:

- Guidance
- Stability
- Continuity from year to year
- Motivation to take action

- Unity of Purpose

Part of your role as an association organizer is to identify and develop leaders. The task of recruiting and developing leaders has to be an ongoing activity through the life of your neighborhood association.

Officers/Board of Directors

(Voluntary) associations are managed by a (volunteer) board of directors consisting of officers and at-large board members elected by the general membership. The most common officer positions are president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, sergeant at-arms and at-large board members. The Newark People's Assembly (NPA) suggests keeping the board of directors between five to seven members, including the officer positions. An example of roles and responsibilities can be provided upon request by NPA.

The purpose of the board is to provide leadership, vision and management of the association. The board directs the work of committees at the direction of the association membership. It is the members that give the board its authority to manage the association.

TIP: Some general points to keep in mind are:

- Your contribution to the neighborhood is your skill and ability to organize. Therefore, try and delegate other responsibilities like event planning.
- You should search continually for many "potential" leaders, not just one or two.
- Identify people who have the time to devote to the work of the association.
- New leaders may develop as the problems and concerns of the association change. Keep your organization open and flexible enough to bring new members and leaders in.
- Look for individuals who have shown that they:
 - Want to succeed and want the organization to succeed
 - Communicate well with people
 - Can motivate people to take collective action
 - Are knowledgeable about the neighborhood, its people, and their interests
 - Have an allegiance to the neighborhood and the association
 - Know how to share power

Meetings

Meetings should be productive and pleasant. While meetings do not always have to be strict and formal, it is recommended that some order be kept. If you have never organized a meeting before, *Robert's Rules of Order* is a great resource to familiarize yourself with meeting basics such as agendas, meeting minutes, and voting. Remember, meeting minutes serve the very important function of recording the business of the meeting and continuing progress at the next.

The following is a guide:

- Decide on a convenient time and date to meet by consulting with your core group and neighbors.
- Develop a well-planned agenda for the first meeting.
- Determine a method of follow-up reminders for the neighborhood. Follow-ups may be done via phone calls, letters, flyers, email, group chats, etc.

- Find a centrally located establishment that is familiar to the neighbors. Try and estimate the expected attendance of the meeting. The room should feel comfortable but not so large as to make people feel lost.
- Set up the room for the meeting in advance. Tables and chairs should be in place.
- Display any handouts near the entrance or at individual seats.
- The room temperature should be comfortable.
- Set up refreshments only if it will enhance the friendliness of the meeting and not interrupt it.

TIP: Develop agendas for the meeting and limit meetings to an hour (if possible). Regular meetings are good, but too many burns out the volunteers.

Committees

Organizations accomplish their work through the dedicated work of committees. The tasks and the type of committees depend on the overall purpose and structure your neighborhood association. The types can generally be divided into two major categories.

Internal Affairs	Neighborhood Affairs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By-Laws • Events • Executive Board/ Officers • Fundraising/ Finance • Marketing/ Public Relations • Meeting Arrangements/ Hospitality • Membership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Services and Resources • Economic Development • Housing Conditions • Neighborhood Cleanliness & Upkeep • Neighborhood Relations- Safety & Security

TIP : Figure out what issues are important in your neighborhood. To maintain active, productive, motivated members on the committee:

- Have a committee meeting prior to the monthly meeting to prepare an agenda.
- Encourage members to participate in the block association and committee planning process.
- Define and discuss the goals and objectives of the committee.
- Provide the reasons for the actions to be considered by the association.
- Make meeting time and committee work as productive as possible.
- Help members develop communication skills.

Standing Committees are established to do the work of the association at the direction of the Officers and Membership. A standing committee is a permanent ongoing working committee that may be outlined in the association's bylaws.

The association may form ad hoc committees to tackle a specific issue, task or project. An ad hoc committee is dissolved after it has completed its objective or purpose.

Serving as a committee chairperson or a member is a great way to ease into an association leadership role. Committees help share the workload for the association and enable members to get involved in issues and projects that they are passionate about. It is not the role of the association officers and board members to do all the work of the association; the committees are the workhorse of the association.

Hold association membership meetings or a combination of meetings and activities at least quarterly (four times a year). Many associations have enough projects and activities to meet monthly, others meet every two months (six times a year), some quarterly (four times a year) or others meet twice a year.

TIPS: Communication Tools

Spread the word. Share what you are doing. Here are a few ways to get the word out:

- Word of mouth. - Tell friends - Tell neighbors
- Neighborhood association newsletter
- Set up a webpage
- Share meeting announcements with NPA
- Neighborhood surveys via: - Flyer - Phone - Door to Door

Neighborhood Association Activities

- Establishing communication among neighbors throughout the neighborhood (ie. Registering with neighborhood apps, creating social media accounts, participating in surveillance camera networks, etc.)
- Clean up and beautification projects in partnership with the City of Newark.
- Establishing and enhancing Neighborhood Watch in partnership with the Newark Police Division and promoting crime prevention.
- Planning, coordinating, and implementing social events, block parties, National Night Out programs, walkers club, holiday festivities, etc.
- Identifying and resolving neighborhood issues and concerns.

Finances

Over the course of time, every neighborhood association accumulates money for one reason or another. The association needs a management system for these funds.

1. **Obtain a Tax Identification Number:** A tax identification number is a federal tax number that is filed with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) The number enables the bank to report the earnings of the associations account to the IRS for tax purposes. You can get an ID number from the IRS. If you don't have a tax ID number, or feel it is not necessary, you can open an account with a member's personal social security number; often the secretary's. The person whose number is being used is liable for paying taxes on the interest income reported by the bank to the IRS. This means that the money in the account is considered the personal money of the ID holder and taxes must be paid as if it is additional income.
2. **Obtain information on Fees and Charges:** Research the fees and charges assessed at different banks. Some have better programs than others. Banks may waive service charges to organizations that provide a necessary public service. The decision to waive the charge is at the discretion of the individual bank. If the

organization is non-profit and is eligible for a non-profit account, there may be no charge for the service the bank is offering. You, however, must take the type of account offered by the bank.

3. ***Obtain important document:*** If the organization is non-profit, you must bring a copy of the Articles of Incorporation stamped “filed” by the Corporation commission. If you are not a corporation, bring a copy of your by-laws or minutes from your first meeting. You must also state the names and titles of everyone who is authorized to conduct business for the organization. Personal identification such as a driver’s license, passport or even a credit card is necessary to open any account.
4. ***Obtain signature cards:*** Signature cards must be signed by the secretary of your neighborhood association along with anyone else who will be signing on to the account. You will also need a director’s signature. (An officer of the corporation or designated director)

Dues

There’s a need to charge enough to maintain the association. It’s up to the association to decide what financial resources it will need to manage the association. It will cost money to operate your association. Your association expenses will be based on the mission, goals and projects of the association. Examples of new association expenses are:

- Incorporating the association with the State of NJ.
- Setting up and managing an association website.
- Copying of marketing and meeting flyers, agendas and other materials.
- Office supplies (name tags, notepaper, binders, folders, etc.)
- Event and meeting supplies (food, paper products, decorations, etc.)
- Other/ miscellaneous expenses based on goals and projects.

If you chose to have dues versus relying on contributions and donations, the easiest way to determine what the membership dues should be is to create your budget first, and then divide the total expense budget by a realistic number of members you think will join the association.

For example, the association creates an annual budget of \$500 and there are 300 homes/properties within the association boundaries, so your membership goal may be 15 percent of all the homes, which is 45 dues paying members. To determine the annual dues, divide \$500 annual budget by the 45 membership goal, which equals \$11.11 per household. We suggest rounding this amount to \$12 to \$15 per household or member.

How can the City help organize a Neighborhood Association?

The City of Newark is very committed to supporting our neighborhood associations. Through the Mayor’s Office and Newark People’s Assembly, the city provides several services to support you as a neighborhood leader and to help with the sustainability of your association. Think of the NPA team as the city’s concierge, here to assist and guide you with your neighborhood association or individual requests and connecting you to the right city services to address your interests and needs.

