

To: Council

From: Chris Chandler

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Neighborhood Programs

In thinking about ideas for a “neighborhood program” for Los Alamos County, I researched a number of different communities. These programs may fall under the Planning Department, Community Services, or even the Mayor’s office. (Seattle has a Department of Neighborhoods. Of course, Los Alamos is not large enough for that.)

I also spoke to Brian Bosshardt and Paul Andrus and learned about programs they each have been responsible for implementing. As one would expect, the various programs are both similar and different in scope and emphasis, and I am sure that they have been built incrementally over time. Below is a summary of the types of initiatives that are included in many neighborhood programs:

- Neighborhood Associations (NA) – Many communities have an enabling ordinance that describes the process by which a group of residents can formally establish a neighborhood association. Many cities offer assistance: providing model bylaws and a neighborhood “tool kit” and sometimes active encouragement of NA formation. There is often a neighborhood coordinator or point of contact with the city. Vibrant neighborhood associations not only benefit the residents within that particular geographic area but also support larger city goals. Examples of roles that associations can play:
 - ✚ NA’s can serve as valuable support to the Community Development Department and other county organizations, such as Public Works. NA’s are often supportive of code compliance efforts, both as advocates for enhanced enforcement and sometimes as organizers for clean-up parties. (e.g. an elderly home owner may need assistance clearing weeds; or if the Public Works Department needs to use a staging area in a neighborhood, the NA could be consulted about the location and parameters of operation)
 - ✚ NA’s are often recognized as parties for purposes of rezoning, special use applications etc. In cities that have some form of Early Notification process, NA’s are included as an organization that must be notified. This process includes the NA and affected parties in discussing the implications of new development or special use on a property. It enables the staff and applicant to understand and address neighborhood concerns before the formal hearing.
 - ✚ Neighborhood Watch programs – or other Police Department initiatives - could be coordinated. Speeding issues/ other enforcement problems (dogs, vandalism) would be aired and addressed on a neighborhood basis.

✚ Some cities have a Neighborhood Academy for NA leadership: learn about county government, our branding and marketing efforts etc. NA's could become feeders to our Board & Commissions, Brand Ambassadors etc.

✚ Neighborhood Grant & Recognition Programs

- Code Compliance/Enforcement - Code enforcement has become more of a county priority. By including it under Neighborhood Program, we are framing issue in a more positive light – it's about neighbors respecting their neighbors' quality of life.
- Housing Renewal Program
- Mortgage Assistance
- Vacant houses
- Affordable Housing
- Walk the Neighborhood with a Councilor
- Graffiti abatement

There has been a heightened awareness of the need to improve the quality of our neighborhoods, particularly the older ones. Our focus has largely been on enforcement and compliance. These are of course necessary tools in a neighborhood program; but it is not enough. A comprehensive approach is necessary to foster a sense of place, neighborhood engagement and pride.

When a NA program is effectively implemented, a synergy develops: the city supports neighborhood activities and Neighborhood Associations improve understanding among its members about the city's plans and programs. A shared vision for the community is fostered.