

Organizing Action Teams and an Action Plan

At the Summit, break-out groups were formed around each of the components described in the Vision/Preferred Scenario, and they discussed activities that could be undertaken to achieve the strategies. An Action Team for each of the Vision components now needs to be organized (Housing Action Team, Business Action Team, etc.). Each Team would ideally consist of 15 to 20 members. These Teams have to take the lead in translating the Vision into action.

The purpose of an Action Team is to develop a specific Action Plan that it will implement to achieve a part (component) of the Vision.

The Action Teams will determine whether your neighborhood planning efforts remain “on the shelf” or are actualized.

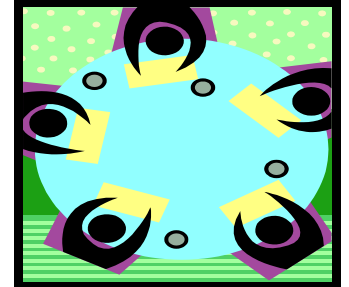
Action Team co-chairs and possible staff assistance should have been identified and recruited by the Leadership Team. Now it is up to the co-chairs and staff members to prepare for the first meeting of their Action Team.

- Identify additional people who could serve on the Action Team. Make sure you have included the people from the Summit who signed up for the Action Team. Serving on an Action Team will be a good way for residents to get involved in their neighborhood. What neighbors can you recruit?
- Does each Team reflect the diversity of the neighborhood? Are important segments of the population represented: renters, business owners, etc.? Who has expertise in the issues to be tackled? Recruiting Action Team members may be difficult, but it will be well worth the effort.
- Set the meeting date and send notices to all Action Team members with the date, time and location. A brief agenda could also be included.
- If funds allow, creating a notebook for each Action Team member is a nice touch. Members will be able to keep minutes of the Action Team meetings, a roster of Team members, etc. You can put background information in the binder, also - a summary of Neighborhood Survey results, the history of the neighborhood planning effort, relevant news articles, etc. The notebooks also convey a sense of importance for the members and the task at hand.

First Meeting

It is important that the Action Teams hold their first meeting soon after the Summit so that neighbors and residents will realize that action is going to take place and that their participation at the Summit was not time wasted.

At its first meeting, Action Team members may be reluctant to commit to doing much. They might want to take a “wait and see” attitude. The meeting agenda may consist of the following items:



- Welcome and thanks for their participation.
- Introductions.
- Review briefly the neighborhood planning process so that everyone has the same background and understanding of what has happened.
- Review the strategies for your component that were decided upon at the Summit. This would be a good time for discussion on the strategies. Action Team members should add new strategies, if appropriate.
- The Team should also review the Action Steps that were brainstormed at the Summit and add any new ideas to that list.
- At some point, the Team members must decide what Action Steps they will take. This decision can be made through discussion and consensus or through the more formal process of dot voting.
- Complete the form found in Appendix K or something similar. This becomes your Action Plan.
- Do Team members know of others who might be interested in joining? This would be a good way to expand Team membership.
- Set the date, time and location of the next meeting.

TIP: It may take an Action Team a meeting or two to be ready to vote on Action Steps to take. Some teams may require background information on the Action Steps that can be taken (such as traffic calming); other Teams may be ready to vote and take action immediately. Work with your Team at the pace the members are most comfortable with, as long as progress is being made. Team members must buy into the Action Plan before they will put energy into accomplishing it.

Implementing the Action Plan

In the next year, a lot of work needs to be done as each team undertakes the agreed upon activities in the Action Plan. It is important to make as much progress as possible in achieving each Action Plan. Your neighborhood association must be willing to expend extra energy to make sure something is being accomplished.


Accountability

Each of the Action Teams must feel accountable for the completion of its Action Plan. Holding a Summit approximately one year after the first summit can reinforce this. At this Summit, the Action Teams would each present the activities they undertook over the past year and the steps they plan to take in the near future. The power of accountability should not be underestimated. It is essential for achieving neighborhood empowerment and for building trust between the residents and other stakeholders and the neighborhood association.

Continuous Planning

Planning for the future is never finished. You will always want your neighborhood's activities to be guided by the Vision. It is imperative to keep your neighbors involved in the planning for the future.

The last major phase of the neighborhood planning process is to incorporate the land use parts of your neighborhood plan into the city's Master Plan. It is the responsibility of the Board of Directors of your neighborhood association to make sure this happens. This important step gives you the most assurance possible that your neighborhood will be redeveloped in accordance with the dreams of its neighborhood stakeholders and not by outside influences. The next chapter explains a process for achieving this.

 **LAND MINE:** It is important to have many perspectives represented within your Action Team. However, everyone should generally agree with the Vision and want to take action to achieve it. Do not recruit people who will be obstructionists. They will sabotage this implementation phase of your planning process.

Coordinating with the Master Plan

It is important to try to coordinate your neighborhood planning efforts with City Hall. Your planning efforts provide an opportunity for your organization to develop a good working relationship with your city planning department, your city council representative, and other governmental units. Good cooperation from City Hall can facilitate the development and implementation of your Neighborhood Plan.

If your city has an updated Master Plan, it should provide a framework for neighborhood redevelopment. It is important for the Leadership Team to know what the Master Plan says about your neighborhood (and the surrounding neighborhoods) so that you can coordinate your plan with the city Master Plan. You will also want to make sure that the plans pursued by your Action Teams are done in accordance with the principles and direction given by the Master Plan.

Some cities with Master Plans have a process whereby the parts of your neighborhood plan that deal with land use and the physical infrastructure can be incorporated into the Master Plan. This is usually done through an amendment process. It will then be very difficult for anyone to come into your neighborhood and try to do a redevelopment project that is contrary to your plan. Once your neighborhood plan is in place, it can become the city's plan for your neighborhood. This broader base of support and recognition for your neighborhood plan gives more assurance that everyone will have to pay attention to it.

It is also important to obtain a basic sense of other official city documents that affect your neighborhood. At the top of this list would be the zoning ordinance, which is a legally binding document that is, in many situations, stronger than the city's Master Plan. The zoning ordinance determines what private owners and developers are legally able to build or do in your neighborhood. Issues covered could range from governing the size of newly built family housing to regulating whether adult entertainment or junkyard businesses are allowed. If you determine that current zoning laws could be harmful to your neighborhood, a legal process is in place to ask for amendments or to require approval of potentially harmful land uses.

Other official documents that could affect your neighborhood that you would want to know about include any parks and recreation plans, redevelopment or enterprise zone plans, or consolidated housing and community development plans that have been

formally adopted. As noted below, setting up a good communications system is an excellent way to find out about such documents.

If your city does not have an updated Master Plan, that should not stop your organization from doing neighborhood planning. In fact, your Neighborhood Plan could be a first step in a citywide Master Planning process. It is still important, however, to communicate your planning intentions to City Hall and seek the city's cooperation.

Communicating with City Hall

So, whether your city has a Master Plan or not, keeping the city informed of your efforts is very important. If you have not already contacted your city planning department, do so now.

Explain your neighborhood planning process and ask what steps your neighborhood association should take to coordinate with the city and its Master Plan. And be sure to keep your city council members informed of your planning efforts also.

Neighborhood planning can help to forge a new relationship between neighborhood associations and City Hall. Both entities have expertise in areas that the other needs. A partnership relationship built on mutual respect can result in a win-win situation for your neighborhood and the city as a whole. Whatever the quality of the relationship between your organization and City Hall, it should not affect neighborhoods vigorously pursuing the development and implementation of their own neighborhood revitalization plans.

“Neighborhood organizations act as a stabilizing force in a neighborhood by bringing people together to address problems. Once they are recognized and seen as legitimate, such organizations tend to act even more reasonably. The point being made here is that when neighborhood organizations are looked on as a full partner in the planning process, they do act as responsibly as any other entity in the city.” *

Resources/References

*Jones, “N-hood Planning: A guide for Citizens and Planners,” p.5.

