

# CITY OF ASTORIA NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS

## HOW TO ORGANIZE

Often groups first organize because of a sudden crisis in their community. Other groups get started for different reasons. Whatever motivates you, there are a number of things to consider before you begin.

- \* **Every group differs.** Don't have preconceived expectations what this group will look like or act like based on your experiences with other groups. Let this group evolve based on the needs of the group and the issues.
  - \* **Consider the neighborhood and its residents.** Who lives in this neighborhood and what are the concerns? As an organizer, be sensitive to the needs of your fellow residents.
  - \* **A Neighborhood Association serves the needs of the residents and reflects their interests.** As needs change, so should the direction of the organization. If the association does this, it won't be hard to get members.
  - \* **Appeal to the self-interest of people.** When people are threatened by a particular issue or problem, they tend to be easier to organize. However, ongoing commitment is important to the survival and credibility of your association.
  - \* **Utilize volunteers.** Neighborhood Associations are grassroots organizations that depend on volunteer help. When people volunteer, enlist their services in a timely and satisfying manner.
  - \* **Not everyone wants to participate.** Neighborhood Associations are participatory organizations, but don't assume that all neighbors are interested all the time. People may want to get involved or express their opinion through another avenue.
- \*\* **REMEMBER: A better community is clean, safe, and a pleasant place to live. This shouldn't be a hard idea to sell.**

## FROM IDEA TO ORGANIZATION

### A Step-by-Step Guide

From "a good idea" to a formal organization, here's a step-by-step guide to organizing a Neighborhood Association. If your neighborhood is already organized, review this information. If not, use this checklist as a reference until your formal organization has been completed.

- \* **DEFINE YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD BOUNDARIES:** Where does your neighborhood end and adjacent areas of town begin? What are the major streets, highways, etc. that define the boundaries of your neighborhood? What are the boundaries of nearby Neighborhood Associations? Prevent overlapping boundaries when you define your area.
- \* **BECOME FAMILIAR WITH YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD:** Look around your neighborhood and talk to people. Find out what problems exist. It helps to look at your community in terms of its needs and resources. Later you can focus on specific projects. In the meantime, you'll have a list of things you can do and people who can help.
- \* **CONDUCT A NEEDS ASSESSMENT:** A survey, informal or formal assessment of your neighborhood can help you decide what issues need attention. Needs assessments can take place at your first meeting, through a door-to-door survey, or through a planning process. Some questions to be answered through an assessment include:
  - \* Are the streets littered? Adequately lit?
  - \* What transportation problems exist, such as dangerous intersections, speeding traffic or inadequate bus service?
  - \* Are there abandoned buildings? Or unused vacant lots in the area?
  - \* What are the needs of the small business owners in your area?
  - \* Is there an ongoing problem with land use or zoning?
  - \* Is there a crisis issue in your area? A crisis is the most common cause for organizing because it presents a direct threat to personal interest. Use this emotional response to get people involved quickly.
- \* **RESOURCES:** Identify the "components" of your neighborhood:
  - \* Who are the neighborhood leaders? Get their names, addresses and telephone numbers.

Leaders are people who are outspoken, concerned or articulate about problems.

- \* What institutions and business groups exist in your neighborhood? What similar problems concern the businesses as well as residents of your area?

- \* **TALK TO YOUR NEIGHBORS:** Talk to people about your concerns. Find people on your block, in churches, synagogues, at schools, in stores. For many people this is a difficult first step. Don't be afraid or embarrassed. Most people would love an opportunity to talk about the problems they see in their neighborhood. On rare occasions, you may find someone who is not interested in talking. If that's the case, thank them anyway and find someone else who is eager to talk to you.

- \* When you approach neighbors begin by telling them your ideas for organizing a Neighborhood Association or for issues for the association to tackle.

Why you see the need (i.e. transportation problems, crime prevention.

Why a Neighborhood Association would be a good thing in your community (the benefits of many people working together).

- \* Ask them if they are interested. What are some of the problems they see in the area that a Neighborhood Association could deal with?

- \* Exchange names and numbers. Get organized by keeping a notebook or clip pad with names and addresses.

- \* If they are interested, tell them that you will call soon about a meeting to discuss their ideas with other neighbors.

- \* Call a meeting one to two weeks later. If you wait too long, people will lose their enthusiasm for your idea.

- \* With only a few people (4 to 6), you have a core group that can start planning for your first neighborhood meeting.

- \* **GET A SMALL GROUP TOGETHER TO DISCUSS YOUR CONCERNS:** You can't organize or reactivate a Neighborhood Association alone. You need to get together a core group of people who will be the organizing committee with this group, decide on issues that are most pressing, most extensive and the most easily solved. Discuss the need for an organized group to deal with these problems. Also, talk about how to get other people involved. Once you have a small group, set a date to get together. At this time begin to plan for a first general meeting of neighbors.

- \* **HOLD AN ORGANIZING COMMITTEE MEETING:** Now that you have a core group together, plan for a first meeting.

- \* Plan a strategy for getting people to come to the first meeting.
- \* Plan how to present the issues as this group sees them.
- \* Tell why you see the need to organize a neighborhood group.
- \* Tell what your group hopes to accomplish.

Decide what you will discuss at the meeting as well as a strategy for getting people to come. Remember, this is just a planning group. At the first general meeting there will be people with different ideas. To be a successful Neighborhood Association, you must be open to all people and their concerns.

- \* **PLANNING YOUR FIRST MEETING:** Use this outline to plan your first meeting. Cover all areas listed below. Assign tasks. Make responsibilities clear. At the end of your meeting, review who is assigned to each job. Make sure that everyone understands what needs to be done. When you finally hold that first meeting, it is most important that it be well organized and runs smoothly. A well-run meeting is the beginning of a successful Neighborhood Association.
- \* **Decide what kinds of things you want to discuss with the larger group:** At your planning meeting discuss with the group your ideas for starting a Neighborhood Association. Allow time for all the neighbors at this meeting to share their thoughts. Also at this planning meeting discuss how you will present your ideas to the larger group at your first general meeting. How can you get people at the general meeting to give input and share ideas? Some possible questions (for your planning group as well as the larger group at the first meeting) include:
 

What do you want/need to organize a Neighborhood Association?

What are some of the common problems in your neighborhood that you think your Neighborhood Association can help solve?

Is there a crisis situation, explain the situation. What are the issues involved? How might it affect the livability of your neighborhood? What are some strategies the neighborhood can use to address the problem?
- \* **Find a place to hold the meeting:** Try to estimate the number of people you expect at your first general meeting and then look for a meeting space to fit that number. Possible sites include:
 

Schools, churches/synagogues, community colleges, private homes (some people feel best meeting in private homes, others adamantly discourage it).

When arranging for a meeting place, ask if there is a cost (how much?) and if you need a permit. Schools and colleges may require a permit. Contact the school's administrator or principle.

- \* **Plan what will happen at the meeting:** To be successful, it is important that this first meeting run smoothly. To ensure its success, discuss the following:

What are the roles of the organizers? What roles should the planners take during the larger first meeting? This may include:

- \* Facilitating the meeting (decide who will do this)
- \* Presenting well thought out ideas and projects
- \* Encourage participation from newcomers. Don't present just your ideas as the final decision for the group at large. They are only options.

Allow people at the meeting to feel that their ideas and input are welcome.

- \* Have something tangible to discuss. If not, others will not have much faith in your group to make things happen.

- \* **The meeting agenda.** The most important aspect of running a meeting is having a solid, well planned agenda. Basically, an agenda is a listing of the topics and the order in which they will be discussed. Items on the agenda include:

- \* Introductions of people present
- \* Purpose of the meeting (why you are interested in forming a Neighborhood Association)
- \* Areas of concern to planning members.
- \* Time for socializing (this can be done at the beginning or end of the meeting)

Decide at the planning meeting who will type and make copies of the agenda. Remember to collect the names and addresses of those attending. Set a date for your next meeting.

- \* **Publicize your meeting.** The best planned meeting can be successful only if you have people attending. The way to get people to attend is by publicizing. You don't have to be a great artist or writer to do successful public relations. Just remember to include all pertinent information in your publicity: What, where, when and why. If possible, include a phone number for people who have questions about the meeting or are interested in future meetings but can't

make this first meeting. Neighborhood Associations must comply with Oregon's Public Meetings Law.

- \* **HOLDING YOUR FIRST MEETING:** This is your first general meeting of neighbors. the original planning meeting was only a stepping stone to this meeting. Now's the time for your dreams and hard work to become reality.

- \* **Publicize the meeting.** Use flyers, newspaper announcements or feature articles to draw attention to the problem and the reason for the meeting.

- \* **Invite City staff** to the meeting to explain what services are available to organized neighborhoods and to share suggestions for working together successfully.

- \* **Minutes:** Decide who will take the minutes.

A copy of the minutes of all meetings should be kept. Buy a notebook. The City can keep them on file for public access.

A summary of the first meeting could be later used as a handout or as the basis of a Neighborhood Newsletter.

- \* **Speaker or not?** Local speakers are available to come to your Neighborhood Association. They could be active members from other Neighborhood Associations or staff members from City government or other agencies.

The decision to invite a speaker is up to the planners. If you feel that a speaker is not necessary, don't invite one. A speaker may be a good addition to a meeting involving a particular issue, or to get more neighbors interested in meetings.

- \* **Getting people involved:** As the organizer of the first meeting, you should try to make people feel as comfortable as possible. When people feel wanted, they are more likely to work with the Neighborhood Association. The following suggestions might be used at all Neighborhood Association meetings:

- \* **Provide refreshments.** It doesn't have to be anything special. Volunteers can make cookies, or if local merchants donate refreshments, be sure to publicly thank them, or put a tag on a platter noting who donated the food.

- \* **Name tags.** Have stick-on tags or tags and pins at the front entrance. Ask people to make a name tag.

- \* **Questionnaire.** To encourage participation from new people, a survey of interests is often helpful. The following page provides a sample of the kinds of questions you could include.

- \* **Set up the next meeting:** Don't let people leave one meeting without knowing about the next meeting. Decide:

When will it be held?

Where?

How will it be advertised? (Who will be responsible)

- \* **DEVELOP YOUR ORGANIZATION:** Write Bylaws, elect officers, and develop an action plan. this includes all the technical and legal areas of concern to Neighborhood Associations. Don't be overwhelmed with the bureaucratic business. You can appoint a committee to do the work. Often groups have members who do this professionally and will be able to get it done in no time! This is a necessary evil in assuring the long-term success of your Neighborhood Association.

City staff can help you draft or update Bylaws as well as provide additional assistance in the development of your association.

## DEVELOPING THE ORGANIZATION

A good working relationship among members will ensure the success of your neighborhood association. Since most of the contact between people comes at meetings, conduct them to encourage participation and success.

Successful meetings depend on two elements:

- \* The **structure** of the meeting or how it is run.
- \* The **content** of the meeting.

This section will tell you how to set an agenda, the role of the chairperson, and what to do before, during and after the meeting. Also included are tips on how to make group decisions, parliamentary procedure, how to chair a meeting and other skills important for better meetings.

If your neighborhood association is having a problem with interpersonal dynamics at meetings or meetings that go on and on yet do not seem to be productive, you need to learn some tips on how to improve things. If your meetings run smoothly now, it still may be helpful to incorporate these ideas into your meeting to prevent some of the problems that exist in many organizations. **REMEMBER, A HEALTHY, HAPPY NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION IS THE MOST PRODUCTIVE.**

## HOW TO HAVE A GOOD MEETING

There is a lot to think about when conducting a meeting. Use this checklist as a guide to help you conduct meetings more effectively:

- \* Start on time.
- \* State the purpose of the meeting clearly on the agenda.
- \* State ideas positively and show their relation to the overall issue.
- \* Watch the pace - keep it moving.
- \* Find background information ahead of time or invite resource people to come to the meeting.
- \* Get everyone to contribute
- \* Get points of view by questioning or restating as you go along.
- \* Make frequent summaries during the discussion.



- \* Stress cooperation, not conflict.
- \* Assign tasks and delegate responsibility as the meeting proceeds. See that they are recorded in the minutes.
- \* Guide the meeting from problem to solution.
- \* Wrap up the meeting:
  - Summarize the decisions reached.
  - Point out differences not yet resolved.
  - Outline future actions, next steps to be taken.
  - Set deadlines and review task assignments.
  - Set the next meeting date, time and place.
- \* Evaluate the meeting.

## **RUNNING SUCCESSFUL MEETINGS**

Use these checklists when planning and running your meetings:

### **Before the Meeting**

- \* **Set Goals:** With the people on your planning committee, determine what you want to accomplish during the meeting. This should be clearly defined for all participants and included in your agenda.
- \* **Review the minutes of your last meeting:**
  - Who was assigned which task?
  - Are they prepared to make a report?
  - Where does the report fit on the agenda?
  - How much time is needed for individual presentations?
  - What issues were left unresolved?
  - On what issues are you now prepared to make decisions?
- \* **Collect information:** Collect all new information which has been received by the committee. Put this in outline form so all committee members have the information in front of them during the meeting.
- \* **Resources and information:**
  - Do you need additional information or a resource person to help you meet your goals?
  - Where can you get the information and how quickly?

\* **Send out meeting notices and include:**

- Date
- Time
- Place
- Purpose

\* **Set an agenda:**

- Write the agenda before the meeting. Make changes only with the consent of the group. Make enough copies for all attending the meeting.
- Set a predetermined ending time.
- Set a time for each agenda item to get through all the information on your agenda.

\* **At the Meeting**

- \* Keep the information items brief and relevant
- \* Discuss decision items at a time when most group members are present.
- \* Know the limits of the group's decision making authority.
- \* Committee reports should recommend action with clearly stated proposals.
- \* Present financial information with written copies for everyone.
- \* Involve everyone who attends the meeting. Often newcomers are not recognized or taken seriously and then don't return to future meetings. Have them introduce themselves before they speak, or introduce everyone at the beginning of the meeting.
- \* Use visual aids as much as possible. This includes charts, graphs, posters, etc. Visual aids give groups something to focus on during a discussion.
- \* Establish the next meeting time and place. People should walk away from the meeting knowing when and where they will meet next.
- \* Hand out new task assignments. Be clear about who is doing what and what is expected of that person.
- \* Allow time for new business so that all participants have an opportunity to bring up issues.

- \* Minutes are to be taken at all meeting and should include:
  - The person attending and their capacity
  - A summary of all items presented and discussed and the action to be taken.
  - A record of all decisions made, including a record of votes taken.
  - The votes on plans made, tasks assigned, etc.
  - All items which are referred to committees or to future meetings.

Minutes may be kept on file at the Community Development Department and must be available to anyone requesting them.

## EVALUATION

To improve the quality of your meetings (and ultimately the effectiveness of your neighborhood association), it is a good idea to evaluate what happened at the conclusion of your meeting. An evaluation is simply a way to get people to say how well they think the meeting was conducted. In other words, were the tasks you set out to accomplish finished in an orderly and productive manner? Will people come back and participate again?

When you ask people to evaluate a meeting, listen to what they are saying and incorporate their ideas in future meetings. Do not ask members how to improve the meetings and then not attempt to make the changes suggested. Even if everyone agrees on how to make improvements, don't be surprised if it takes time to change old habits.

There are two simple ways to evaluate the meeting:

- \* **Oral Evaluation:** Go around the room and ask everyone to comment
- \* **Written Questionnaire:** Prepare a simple questionnaire that you pass out at the conclusion of the meeting. Have everyone complete the form.

Use the following questions to guide your evaluation:

1. Did you follow the agenda?
2. Did the meeting take longer than expected?
3. Were minutes taken?
4. Did everyone leave satisfied?

## PREPARE AN AGENDA

An agenda states the purpose, time and goals of a meeting. It outlines each topic to be covered and may designate an amount of time allotted to each subject. You may also list who is responsible for each topic and the type of action needed to help clarify the goals and direction of the meeting.

When possible, send out your agenda in advance so people know what is expected of them and what will happen at the meeting.

- \* Keep the agenda in the shortest form possible
- \* Keep your meetings as short as possible. After about ninety minutes people get tired and restless and their attention span grows shorter and shorter.
- \* Plan the agenda to mix items of importance. Don't save big decisions for the end, when people are tired or have left the meeting.
- \* List each item. You may include who is responsible for the presentation, what kind of action is needed (when appropriate) and the time allotted.
- \* At the opening of the meeting, ask for additions to the agenda.
- \* Include an ending time for the meeting.
- \* Get group approval for the agenda before you start the meeting.

## ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL MEETINGS

The two things you do most at any given meeting are speaking or listening to others speak. Both of these are important skills that everyone involved in group work should master. They are key elements for successful meetings.

### Speaking

People who are the most respected members of a group are often also the best speakers. This does not mean they are the most educated. They are, however, able to get an idea across to a group of people without dominating the meeting or rambling on and on.

Here are tips to help you improve your group speaking ability:

- \* **Know what you want to say**
- \* **Keep it short**
- \* **Speak clearly**

- \* **Practice**
- \* **Be concise**
- \* **Eye contact with people**
- \* **Avoid distractions**

## **Listening**

Listening to others has become a forgotten art. However, a successful neighborhood organizer knows how to really listen to others' concerns, not just the words being spoken, but what those words mean. This is a skill that takes practice and hard work. Do not get caught up in your own ideas that you dismiss what someone else is saying without really listening. The guidelines below will help you to become a better listener.

- \* **Listen for the unfamiliar**
- \* **Lean to concentrate**
- \* **Rephrase important points in your own words**
- \* **Be fair when you disagree**
- \* **Pay attention to details**
- \* **Shun preconceived ideas**
- \* **Consider the source of what you hear**
- \* **Listen unemotionally**
- \* **Want to listen**
- \* **Do not interrupt**
- \* **Avoid getting hung up on words**
- \* **Ask clarifying questions such as:**
  - Do you mean...?
  - Are you saying that...?
  - Could you be more specific...?
- \* **Avoid endless discussions or arguments about unsolvable items.**

## THE CHAIRPERSON

Every meeting needs someone to facilitate the proceedings. This person is the key to the success of the meetings and the organization. Usually the Chairperson is the neighborhood association president or ranking officer, but sometimes volunteers will be asked to Chair a committee or task force. It is most important that this person be non-partial. The Chairperson **never** monopolizes the floor or dominates the discussions. The Chair keeps the meeting running smoothly while allowing participation and is the person who makes sure that people keep to the agenda and the task, both in content and timing, if necessary.

Tips to make the job of chairperson easier:

- \* **Introduce yourself** at the beginning of the meeting. Do not assume people know who you are. If there is time and the group is a reasonable size, have the others present introduce themselves as well.
- \* **Review** the agenda and establish ground rules.
- \* **Direct the discussion.** Keep people on the topic. When issues are brought up that are irrelevant, remind them that there will be a time for new business. If people are repetitive, recap the information that has already been shared. If a decision needs to be made, call for a motion.
- \* **Facilitate voting and decision making.** Never assume there is agreement until it is put to a vote.
- \* **Do not abuse the power of the chair.** Do not ignore those who want to speak and don't monopolize the floor because you are the Chair. A Chairperson facilitates discussion and does not dictate decisions. A Chairperson should remain neutral. If you want to speak, you may call on yourself, temporarily step out of your role as the chair, then say your piece. Return to your role as the Chairperson. **Do not** continue to speak when your turn is finished.
- \* **Mediate arguments when they arise.** Remain impartial and fair. Give each side a chance to state their point of view.
- \* **Review what has to be done.** Review all discussions, decisions made, and the tasks to be assigned. Make sure that people leave the meeting with a clear understanding of what decisions have been made and which tasks are to be done by whom.
- \* **Be organized.** Use a watch and follow the agenda.
- \* **Follow up** after the meeting to encourage members to get things done and help them when necessary.

The Chairperson must be familiar with the associations Bylaws and Robert's Rules of Order.

The following summary will help you determine when to use the actions described in Robert's Rules.

- \* **A main motion must be moved, seconded, and stated by the chair** before it can be discussed.
- \* **If you want to move, second or speak to a motion**, stand and address the chair.
- \* **If you approve the motion as it is**, vote for it.
- \* **If you disapprove the motion**, vote against it.
- \* **If you approve the idea of the motion but want to change it**, amend it or submit a substitute for it.
- \* **If you want advice or information to help you make your decision**, move to refer the motion to an appropriate quorum or committee with instructions to report back.
- \* **If you feel that they can handle it better than the assembly**, move to refer the motion to a quorum or committee with the power to act.
- \* **If you feel that there is more urgent business to be considered so action on the pending questions should be delayed**, move to lay the motion on the table.
- \* **If you want time to think the motion over**, move that consideration be deferred to a certain time.
- \* **If you think that further discussion is unnecessary**, move the previous question.
- \* **If you think that the assembly should give further consideration to a motion referred to a quorum or committee**, move the motion be recalled.
- \* **If you think that the assembly should give further consideration to a matter already voted on**, move that it be reconsidered.
- \* **If you do not agree with a decision rendered by the chair**, appeal the decision to the assembly.
- \* **If you think the matter introduced is not germane to the matter at hand**, a question of order may be raised.
- \* **If you think that too much time is being consumed by speakers**, you can move a time limit on such speeches.
- \* **If a motion has several parts, and you wish to vote differently on these parts**, move to divide the motion.

## DEVELOPING A WORK PLAN

All organizations should develop an annual work plan. Meeting goals and planning events, recruiting volunteers and strengthening the organization will be easier if you take some time to outline your expectations and objectives, and then make a plan for meeting those goals.

You should also make a work plan for individual projects to help everyone stay focused and on target. Here are some questions to answer in developing a work plan:

What is the purpose of doing this project? If this is an annual work plan, review the purpose of the organization, then define goals for the year.

Is there a need for it?

What resources are available to help the neighborhood association meet these goals?

Has any other neighborhood association tried this activity? Can they be contacted for help?

What are the tasks involved for the project?

How much time will be needed?

Will money be needed to do this? Does the neighborhood association have funds?  
How can you raise needed money?

Are enough volunteers available to do the work?

There are unlimited activity options for neighborhood associations. Developing a work plan can help you to decide which ones are most important to your neighborhood. There are many ways to address neighborhood problems and issues. The more open you are to finding solutions, the more successful your group will be in meeting your goals. Be creative and open to new ideas as you plan your work.



## CREATING THE FORMAL STRUCTURE

Neighborhood association volunteers work on an endless stream of projects and commitments. The last thing that anyone really wants to think about is the legal and fiscal requirements of your neighborhood association. They are often tedious and confusing. This section will help unravel some of the complexities of these requirements.

Your neighborhood association should be organized in a way that best suits your needs. There are certain things that all neighborhood associations must do (like writing bylaws). However, you do not need to take on more fiscal/legal responsibilities than are appropriate for your organization.

For example, if you are a small neighborhood association that deals with small sums of money, you **do not** have to incorporate and/or apply for nonprofit tax exempt status. You could simply write bylaws, apply for an assumed business name, receive a tax ID number, open a checking account and you're in business.

Since neighborhood associations are not required to organize in any one particular way, there are a number of options open to your organization. There are some options you may want to consider and some that would not work for your group. Again, do what is best for your neighborhood association.

### Things you must do:

- \* **Write Bylaws.** To be recognized as a legitimate neighborhood association by the City, you must have bylaws on file with the Community Development Department.
- \* **Public Meetings and Public Records Laws.** Recognized neighborhood associations must abide by the laws regarding public meetings and public records.

### Things you should do:

- \* **Bookkeeping.** Even if you are dealing with small sums of money, you should set up a bookkeeping system.
- \* **Assumed Business Name.** The least you should do as a neighborhood association is to apply for a business name. This protects your identity as the "Whatever Neighborhood Association".
- \* **Tax ID Number.** Like a Social Security number for your neighborhood association, this number is necessary to open a bank account.

## Things you might want to do:

- \* **Incorporate.** You can incorporate with the State as a nonprofit corporation. This is necessary if you intend to apply for a nonprofit, tax exempt status. Corporations must comply with a number of legal and fiscal requirements, some of which are outlined in this section.
- \* **Apply for tax exempt status.** The Internal Revenue Service allows neighborhood associations to apply for a tax exempt status.
- \* **Apply for bulk mailing permit.** The post office offers a special rate to nonprofit, tax exempt organizations.

Some research may be necessary before you decide which of these optional actions you need to take on. The size of your organization, level of activity and amount of money you have are among the factors that determine the best status for your neighborhood association.

## BYLAWS

Bylaws are the "rules governing the internal affairs of an organization". They are the constitution of your organization that establishes the legal requirements for the group. Bylaws govern the way you must function as well as the roles and responsibilities of your officers.

To be recognized as a neighborhood association by the City of Astoria, you must have bylaws written and adopted by your group and on file with the Community Development Department. They are, therefore, an essential element to organizing a neighborhood association. Bylaws are also an integral part of the process for obtaining tax exempt status by the Federal government.

While most people see writing bylaws as a tedious, difficult procedure, they can be of great benefit to a new organization by helping members clearly define and understand the purpose and procedures of their neighborhood association. Bylaws should also be reviewed periodically. This will help orient new members to the purpose and processes of the organization. Reviewing bylaws will ensure that the bylaws continue to meet the association's needs and other legal requirements.

This section includes a list of what information to include in your bylaws and a detailed outline to use in writing your bylaws. Also included is a sample set of bylaws, which can be used as the basis for your own bylaws or simply as a guide.

Remember, bylaws are the governing set of rules for your particular neighborhood association. It is, therefore, important to think about the needs of your group and then tailor your bylaws to meet your needs. Be as specific as possible, yet allow for flexibility within your organization. Take this process seriously. Your bylaws will be with your neighborhood association for a long time.

## **BYLAWS**

### **I. PURPOSE**

Name of Organization  
Purpose of Neighborhood Association

### **II. MEMBERSHIP**

Membership qualifications  
Membership Voting

### **III. DUES**

### **IV. MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS**

General Membership Meetings  
Special Membership Meetings  
Agenda  
Quorum  
Participation  
Procedures

### **V. BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Number of Board Members  
Terms of Office  
Eligibility for Board Service  
Duties of Board Members  
Election of Board Members  
Board Vacancies  
Duties of Board Officers  
Board Meetings  
Emergency Powers  
Termination for Nonattendance

### **VI. COMMITTEES**

### **VII. CONFLICT OF INTEREST PROCEDURES**

Definition

Declaring the Conflict of Interest  
Abstention from Voting

**VIII. GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES**

Eligibility to Grieve  
Complaint Receipt  
Final Resolution

**IX. PROCEDURE FOR CONSIDERATION OF PROPOSALS**

Submission of Proposals  
Notification  
Attendance  
Dissemination

**X. PUBLIC MEETING/PUBLIC RECORDS REQUIREMENT**

**XI. BOUNDARIES**

**XII. NON-DISCRIMINATION**

**XIII. ADOPTION AND AMENDMENT OF BYLAWS**

## LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Many neighborhood livability issues are related to traffic and land use impacts. It is very important for neighborhood associations to understand some basic principles of land use planning and transportation. Information in this section will help clarify the issues, concepts and terms associated with planning and traffic management. In addition, step-by-step guidelines for various types of planning cases are outlined to explain the process and opportunities for citizen input. This will give you a better understanding of the issues involved and the steps you need to take to work on these issues.

Because of the complexity of the planning process, this section is **not** intended to be a complete, detailed description of the laws governing planning and the technical requirements needed to work with City departments. If you find yourself involved in a land use or transportation issue, use this information to familiarize yourself with technical terms and the processes, but contact the City of Astoria Community Development Department and/or Public Works / Engineering Department to get help with more specific requirements.

### WHY IS PLANNING IMPORTANT?

Civilizations have always engaged in planning. Orderly growth and development do not just happen-there needs to be planning in order to ensure that necessary services such as streets, sewers, and water will be available, and that parks, residential areas, industrial and employment centers will compliment and not conflict with each other. Town squares and plazas are historical examples of planning for the development of a city around a central area. Over the years the focus of planning has grown. Today planning involves not only the physical aspects of land development but also considers the processes that create growth and how the results of an action may impact existing conditions. Because of the possible effect planning decisions can have on a neighborhood or the city, citizens and neighborhood associations are involved in the planning process.

Neighborhood associations can be involved in pro-active efforts such as neighborhood planning, receive notification and information about proposed actions in their area or express views and concerns to elected officials through the hearings procedure. Neighborhood associations that understand and use the processes are able to have a strong role in planning.

### THE PLANNING COMMISSION

The main agency for planning oversight in Astoria is the Astoria Planning Commission. The Commission advises the City Council and other agencies on planning issues and acts as a review body in certain land use cases. The seven Commission members are appointed by the mayor and serve without pay in four-year terms. The Planning Commission:

1. Recommends and make suggestions to the City Council and to all other public authorities concerning:

- a. The laying out, widening, extending and locating of public thoroughfares, parking of vehicles, relief of traffic congestion;
  - b. Betterment of housing and sanitation conditions;
  - c. Establishment of districts for limiting the use, height, area, bulk, and other characteristics of buildings and structures related to land development.
  - d. Protection and assurance of access to incident solar radiation; and
  - e. Protection and assurance of access to wind for potential future electrical generation or mechanical application.
2. Recommends to the City Council and other public authorities, plans for regulating the future growth, development and beautification of the City in respect to its public and private buildings and works, streets, parks, grounds and vacant lots, and plans consistent with future growth and development of the City in order to secure to the City and its inhabitants sanitation, property service of public utilities and telecommunications utilities, including appropriate public incentives for overall energy conservation and harbor, shipping and transportation facilities.
  3. Recommends to the City Council and other public authorities plans for promotion, development and regulation of industrial and economic needs of the community in respect to industrial pursuits.
  4. Advertises the industrial advantages and opportunities of the City and availability of real estate within the City for industrial settlement.
  5. Encourages industrial settlement within the City.
  6. Make economic surveys of present and potential industrial needs of the City.
  7. Studies the needs of local industries within a view to strengthening and developing them and stabilizing employment conditions.
  8. Does and performs all other acts and things necessary or proper to carry out the provisions of ORS 227.010 to ORS 227.170, ORS 227.180, and the Astoria Development Code.
  9. Studies and propose such measures as are advisable for promotion of the public interest, health, morals, safety, comfort, convenience, and welfare of the City and of the area within six miles thereof.
  10. Recommends to any person or public authority with reference to the location of buildings, structures or works to be erected, constructed or altered by or for such person or public authority. Such recommendation shall not have the force or effect of a

law or ordinance, except when so prescribed by the Development Code, by the laws of the State of Oregon or by City ordinance. Any person or public authority having charge of the construction, placing or designing of buildings or other structures and improvements may call upon the Planning Commission for a report thereon.

11. The Planning Commission shall also have all powers which are now, or may hereafter, be given to it under the general laws of the State of Oregon.

## **WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?**

Comprehensive City planning looks to the future of the City and provides for the community's orderly and systematic growth. A Comprehensive Plan sets forth the City's goals for growth and the maintenance of quality living conditions and establishes objectives and policies that will accomplish these goals. This enables each future decision to be placed with the larger context of the public need. Rather than a confusing and haphazard conglomeration of conflicting land uses, by following a Comprehensive Plan Astoria can grow to become a well-designed, smoothly functioning city. Comprehensive Plans are required by State law for all jurisdictions in Oregon.

Before a Comprehensive Plan can be adopted, extensive studies are conducted to determine:

- \* The physical, social and economic characteristics of different areas of the city.
- \* The suitability of these areas for particular uses.
- \* Current land uses.
- \* Trends in population, needs and land uses.
- \* Projected needs of new and growing businesses and industries.
- \* Scenic, historic and natural resources.
- \* Projections for school, hospital, park, fire and other service needs.
- \* Future traffic needs.
- \* Soils, topography and other physical characteristics in order to plan for different types of structures and conservation of natural features.

Once these studies are completed, a series of goals, objectives and policies are established. These are the guidelines that are used for all future planning decisions.

- \* **Goals** cover all aspects of urban living. They are formulated after careful investigation of the needs of the City and of the growth trends in each district of the city. Goals take

into consideration what the citizens themselves want for a better urban environment. Goals establish an ultimately desirable state or situation. They may not be completely achievable. However, what is important is the direction they set.

- \* **Policies** are more specific principles that must be followed in order to meet previously determined goals. Policies may be achievable in the future but not in less than a decade or more.
- \* **Objectives** provide specific direction to agencies, citizens and the business community.
- \* **Programs** are developed to implement policies and objectives.

Astoria's Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1979 and readopted in 2010. Land use decisions made by governing bodies in Astoria must conform to the Comprehensive Plan. Copies are available at the Astoria Public Library, City Hall, and on the City's web site at [www.astoria.or.us](http://www.astoria.or.us).

## **WHAT IS ZONING?**

Zoning is the limitation of certain kinds of buildings and uses of land within an area. Zones ordinarily have restricts on the size of lots, the height of buildings, the placement of buildings on lots, density, required parking, and the specific uses that can be made of the buildings and lots. Typical zoning ordinances separate residential, commercial and industrial areas from each other. The Development Code is the guidebook to zoning regulations in Astoria.

### **What Effect Does a Zoning Ordinance (Development Code) Have?**

It is a violation of the law to build on or to use land in a manner that is not allowed in the zone. Zoning regulations are not just guidelines for land use; they are the **law**. Regulations are enacted by the City Council after a public hearing and with the advice and recommendation of the Planning Commission.

### **What Safeguard is There Against Unfair Zoning?**

Zoning ordinances will not be upheld by courts if they are arbitrary or unreasonable or if they cause unnecessary hardship to a property owner. Zoning ordinances were originally intended to protect property values by preventing certain offensive or "nuisance" uses of land. The theory was that if certain uses were allowed in a residential area, they would make the neighborhood undesirable to live in and thus drive property values down.

### **Is Zoning Contrary to the Ideals of Individual Freedom Found in the Constitution?**

Zoning has been tested against the Constitution. The United States Supreme Court upheld the test of zoning to state governments (and thus local governments authorized by the state).



Zoning is, therefore, recognized by the courts to be legal and not against the rights of the individual. However, this authority means that the restrictions placed on an area must be reasonable, must be based on public need or interest and must be equally applied to all landowners with similar situations in an area.

### **What If I Want to Use My Land in a Way Not Allowed in the Zone?**

Zoning is not always flexible enough to meet all the desires of Astoria's residents. Exceptions may be made to allow for other land uses not specified by the code. Without exceptions to zones, Astoria would need to have a much more complex zoning code, which would result in widespread confusion.

There are three categories of exceptions to a zone:

- \* Variances
- \* Non-conforming use
- \* Conditional use

**Variance.** A variance is needed when the use is allowed by the zoning, but some flexibility of development standards is needed to build on a particular site. Variances may be granted from sign, setback, building placement, lot coverage or other requirements.

**Example:** Because of a steeply sloping backyard, a house must be placed closer to the street than would ordinarily be allowed by the code.

**Conditional Use.** A Conditional Use review is needed when the use is different from the main uses allowed in the zone but might fit in with the primary uses in the zone. Special conditions are usually imposed on the proposed use so that there will be a minimal effect on the surrounding area. Conditional uses for each zone in Astoria are listed in the Development Code. Such uses are discretionary. They may be denied if they are found to damage the character of the area.

**Example:** Part of a home in a residential area would be converted to a use as a day care facility to benefit residents of that area.

**Non-conforming Use.** If an ordinance is passed to change a zone, there may be some uses which will now be considered "non-conforming". The City cannot forbid these non-conforming uses if they were in existence and were legal prior to the adoption of the new zone. However, the City can and does forbid enlargement, expansion or change in the use unless approved by a special review.

**Example:** A grocery store built in 1945 in a residential area, prior to residential zoning, is a non-conforming use.

**Zone Change (Amendment).** If neither a variance or a conditional use permit will meet an individual's needs on a particular site, the alternative is to seek a Zone Change (Amendment). The change must support the Comprehensive Plan and adequate public services must be available in order to be approved. The burden of proof is on the applicant.

**Example:** In order to build an apartment (multi-family), the developer wants to change the zoning from R-1 (Low Density Residential) to R-3 (High Density Residential).

## CATEGORIES OF LAND USE PLANNING

There are two classes of processes that occur within the general category of "planning". They are categorized by the effect the outcome would have on planning policy.

- \* **Quasi-Judicial:** This involves pieces of property that come into review without having broader policy implications. The particular property owner in question requests one of the various kinds of land use reviews. It may affect the properties surrounding the property in question as well as the neighborhood and business associations in the vicinity.
- \* **Legislative:** When a request doesn't affect one particular area but, rather, concerns many areas or the adoption of a general policy or regulation, a different set of processes are involved. In this case, neighborhood associations, business associations and various environmental groups are notified. People who request notification on a particular issue are also notified on the impending action.

Neighborhood groups are often contacted to respond to either a quasi-judicial or legislative plan, or to participate in developing policy and plans. These opportunities to be pro-active about land use planning require a commitment of time, but neighborhoods are able to have concerns addressed as plans are developing.

## THE LAND USE REVIEW PROCESS

### Procedures

The Community Development Department and Planning Commission encourage citizen participation in land use cases by providing formal notification and access to the decision-making process:

1. When a land use application is received, the Community Development Department notifies all property owners and neighborhood association representatives within a

specific distance from a particular property. Notice of the land use action will also be advertised in the Daily Astorian prior to the hearing date.

2. The notice contains a description of the change requested, the property's location, due date for a response and the Community Development staff person to contact.
3. Once you receive notification, call together your neighborhood association board and hold a meeting on the issue, or discuss it at a regularly scheduled meeting. Be sure your association follows its own bylaws regarding meeting notification, consideration of proposals and voting.
  - \* Before the meeting: Find out details of the request and what the neighborhood associations needs to do to be involved.
  - \* At the meeting: Explain the relevant zoning law, any existing neighborhood land use plans that may have an impact on the case, identify requirements for the site which the proposal must meet, identify areas of concern. Consider potential impacts and reasons for any objection. Vote if necessary and send response back to the Community Development Department. You may also attend the hearing and testify on behalf of your neighborhood group.
4. In all cases, Staff will make a written recommendation to the Planning Commission based on their professional opinion regarding the merits of the proposal in relation to the Development Code and responses from neighborhood associations, various agencies and the general public. Staff reports are available for review and can provide helpful information about the basis for the decision.
5. Using the staff report as a guide, together with public comment and testimony delivered at a public hearing, the Planning Commission makes a decision whether or not to grant the request. Notification of the decision is sent to all those who participated in the hearing, whether in person, in writing or through a representative.
6. Decisions can be appealed within 15 days. If an appeal is filed, the case is heard by the City Council.

A decision of the City Council may be further appealed to the Land Use Board of Appeals (LUBA) within 21 days of the decision.

**Any questions relating to land use and development issues should be directed to the City's Community Development Department.**

## TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

Transportation and traffic problems are perennial issues in our cities and neighborhoods. Citizens continually request assistance for relief from traffic impacts. These requests range from a plea to help eliminate a dangerous intersection to roadways that need repairing. Some of the problems can be addressed quickly. Other situations take years of planning and analysis before results can be seen. Your chances of addressing transportation issues in your neighborhood are better if you understand the processes and policies that guide transportation planning in the city. Learn to use these processes and work with your neighbors and City staff.

The City Engineer and Public Works Director are available to address routine traffic and transportation concerns. Citizens may contact city staff by phoning the Public Works Department. Requests are evaluated and possible remedies reviewed after staff visit the site and collect data needed to investigate the concern. For routine requests, this is the most expeditious way to have your needs identified. If the traffic problem is not easily remedied, it may require more research to determine the solution. The Astoria Traffic Safety Committee may review traffic issues to assist in the solution to potential problems.

Land development proposals (such as plans for a new business that is expected to increase traffic significantly) often raise issues that require a joint effort between the Community Development Department and the Public Works Department. As with all land use issues before the Community Development Department, there is a process that involves citizens and neighborhood association.

## OTHER COMMISSIONS

For the most part, neighborhood associations are involved with planning problems that are land use or transportation related. However, you may find your neighborhood association working with other commission or city agencies on issues affecting your neighborhood.

### HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION

The Historic Landmarks Commission is also a seven member commission, appointed by the Mayor for four year terms. The Historic Landmarks Commission:

1. Enforces the Astoria Development Code requirements relating to the protection of Historic Properties (Article 6);
2. Studies, determines and, where appropriate, designates those properties and areas of the City of Astoria which are worthy of consideration for receiving a designation of historic landmark or historic district;
3. Recommends the adoption of rules and regulations for adopting and maintaining historic landmarks, and historic districts;
4. Serves as an advisory board concerning historic buildings and sites to the City Council, Planning Commission and other public or private agencies on matters relating to preservation of such buildings and sites;
5. Prepares information and materials for the purpose of assisting persons and property owners in conforming to the intent and purpose of Article 6 (Historic Properties) of the Astoria Development Code.
6. Promotes the historic, educational, cultural, economic and general welfare of the public through the preservation, restoration, and protection of historic landmarks.

**\*Note:** Questions can be directed to the Community Development Department. The Community Development Department can provide free design assistance to citizens concerning the exterior alteration to historic properties.

### DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE

The Design Review Committee is a five member committee, appointed by the Mayor for four year terms. The Design Review Committee reviews construction permits within the Gateway Master Plan area for compatibility of design within the Plan area.

**\*Note:** Questions can be directed to the Community Development Department.