

**CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA  
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA**



Agenda Date: February 16, 2010

Action Required: Report Only

Presenter: James E. Tolbert, AICP, Director  
Maurice Jones, Assistant City Manager

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**Title: Neighborhood Advocacy**

**Background:** There have been discussions by Councilors recently about the need for greater neighborhood advocacy. Several questions or suggestions have been made that staff has explored in some detail. The questions/statements are presented in the following section in bold with staff responses following.

**Discussion:**

- **A key step is to establish a full-time position for a Neighborhood Advocate to help strengthen the voice and participation of neighborhoods in the decisions that affect them. The City of Portland, Ore., has a Director of Neighborhood Involvement which provides a good model to explore (Promoting a culture of civic engagement by connecting and supporting all of Portlanders working together and with government to build inclusive, safe and livable neighborhoods and communities). Establishing a Neighborhood Advocate for Charlottesville could be done through the realignment of a current position or by filling a previously vacant existing staff position.**
- **The City should encourage volunteers to work for the City in neighborhood advocacy, historic preservation and other areas. Sources for volunteer help**

**include AmeriCorps, student interns, student community service participants, non-governmental organizations like the Historic Society and skilled retirees.**

There are three alternatives outlined to address this concern.

1. Add the position to the City Manager's Office to serve under the direction of the Assistant City Manager. Since the original intent of the ACM was to increase services to the neighborhoods, it seems to make sense that this position could work closely with him to enhance neighborhood services. Much has been done since the creation of this position to increase our response to the neighborhoods but demands are ever increasing and other duties have divided the time of the ACM. This support position would allow an even greater response to the neighborhoods as well as allow concentration on civic engagement efforts like the Dialogue on Race and improved service through the implementation of the Efficiency Study.
2. Reorganize in the Department of Neighborhood Development Services to create a position to lead a team that focuses on neighborhood issues. This could create a structure that could work to both improve neighborhood services and eliminate some of the confusion related to the role of NDS. We propose to bring on a Neighborhood Involvement Manager and set up a team that would include this position, the CDBG Coordinator, the Housing Leader and the Front Desk personnel along with Property Maintenance Inspectors.
3. Recreate the position of City Clerk to provide this service. In this way, the position would be directly responsible to the City Council.

No matter where the position is located, the duties would include the following:

- Coordination of activities with neighborhoods.
  - Newsletter
  - Web Sites and Social Networking
  - Maintain Neighborhood Contacts
  - Attendance at Meetings
- Recruit and encourage volunteers to organize and serve the neighborhoods. Although many offices use interns this could be expanded to use more volunteers.
- Manage the Neighborhood Leadership Institute

- Serve as an organizer to coordinate the efforts of citizens.
- Many others to be determined as the role grows.

A very rough description of this job and its duties is attached.

Based on models received from other areas, it is also recommended that we reorganize the “Neighborhood Strategy Team” under the direction of this position. This can go a long way towards coordination of City-wide efforts to serve neighborhoods.

There are many models to review when setting up a program. Examples are attached. The Portland model is probably the most comprehensive. An overview is attached.

We see goals of a “Neighborhood Involvement” effort being similar to ones from Portland or James City County.

#### Portland

- Increase the number and diversity of people who are involved and volunteer in their communities and neighborhoods.
- Strengthen neighborhood and community capacity to build identity, skills, relationships and partnerships.
- Increase community and neighborhood impact on public decisions.
- Provide tools and resources to improve neighborhood and community livability and safety.
- Provide accurate information and responsive and effective services to community members and organizations.

#### James City County

- Empower citizens through training, information sharing, and use of resources.
- Facilitate direct linkages between neighbors and their government.
- Foster independent problem solving and sharing of assets within and among neighborhoods.
- Involve all community assets in expanding and sustaining safe and healthy neighborhoods.

- **The name of the Department of Neighborhood Development Services should be changed to reflect the focus on serving neighborhoods and their residents, not just on facilitating development.**

We agree with this assessment and have two suggested alternatives. If there is a neighborhood advocate position created somewhere other than NDS, we suggest Neighborhood Development Services be changed to Planning and Development Services. If the position is located in NDS then we suggest the department name be “Community Development” with the previously mentioned “Neighborhood Involvement” division.

- **City departments should initiate more local, neighborhood-based, meetings to inform residents of proposed projects in their neighborhoods and take effective measures to inform residents in advance of the meetings.**

Many departments regularly meet with citizens and citizen groups on issues. While staff is open to additional productive meetings there are already an incredible number of meetings attended by staff. See attached list of meetings with neighborhoods/citizens over last two years.

- **Our Neighborhood Associations have the potential to help residents to speak out and to be heard on issues that concern them. Some of our neighborhoods have strong and active associations, while others have inactive groups or none at all. The City might offer resources, such as reimbursement of mailing costs, or the use of copy machines and mailing lists, etc. to neighborhood associations that hold regular meetings and have elected officers, or whose leaders participate in leadership development activities.**

We agree that this would be one of the responsibilities of the advocate position. Funding could come from the dollars provided in the Capital Improvement Program for “neighborhoods”.

- **The City should encourage and support the Alliance of Neighborhoods in its efforts to organize in areas of the City currently without active neighborhood associations.**

- **The City should support and build upon the efforts of the Public Housing Association of Residents, Quality Community Council and other organizations working to strengthen the voice of people in lower-income neighborhoods.**

Agreed that this would be a duty of the Advocate Position.

- **The City should take steps to improve responsiveness to citizens by making city government more user-friendly and accessible. The City website should post up-to-date plans for neighborhood projects and any changes to the plans should be highlighted. Current minutes from the Planning Commission, the Board of Architectural Review and other groups whose work impacts neighborhoods should be posted. An easily-accessible telephone directory for City staff should be posted on the website as well.**

The City added a neighborhood connection portion to the website about a year ago and did two outreach efforts to association to assist and participate with limited success. There are spaces available for calendar but would take the active participation of the association or a designated liaison here at the City to be comprehensive. The City is currently working on a redesign of the home page to create a section called “Cville At Your Service” which is more like a toolbox for citizens to communicate and order services. In addition there will be a page on the website that connects Citizens to all meetings and minutes (where available). There is also a move underway by the Communications Department to connect with the new cvillecalendar.com in a greater partnership that would assist in this effort.

- **Current neighborhood association officers and contact information should be listed, along with events and projects sponsored by neighborhood associations. There is currently a “neighborhoods calendar”, but it’s blank. The “Neighborhood News” section has only one article for 2009, and had only one the last year. Many of the Neighborhood Association contacts are years out of date. The Neighborhood Capital Improvements page was last updated in 2007. Minutes for the BAR were last posted in September 2008. More recent agendas have notes typed into them, but are not listed as minutes on the website.**

Work has already been initiated to make improvements in this area. Specifics underway or planned include:

- Please see response above for additional details on this concern.
- Ric Barrick will be responsible for the master list of neighborhood association contacts. He will keep “one” list up to date. All others will send him changes as we get them.
- NDS is recruiting to get someone to do the minutes for the Planning Commission, BAR, BZA with the requirement that the minutes be posted within five (5) days of the meeting.
- NDS is working on requiring all plans in electronic format so they can be posted immediately.
- We propose to update the “Neighborhood Connection” publication to better inform our citizens and offer it electronically.
- Communications Office is updating the telephone listings.
- A new website was created and outreach was done to the neighborhoods with few choosing to participate. Possibly more outreach through a position could increase the number.

**Budgetary Impacts:** The costs to create a neighborhood advocacy position would range from \$50,000 to \$70,000 per year for a salary, benefits and some supplies/support. There is a position vacant in Neighborhood Development Services that could be used so that a new position does not have to be created.

**Recommendation:** Staff recommends that if City Council desires to proceed with the position of Neighborhood Advocate, that it be created in the City Manager’s Office to serve under the direction of the Assistant City Manager with all the duties and responsibilities outlined above in this memo.

**Attachment:** Draft Job Description  
 Neighborhood Meeting Attendance List  
 Various City Neighborhood Efforts