

Recommendations  
of the  
Mayor's  
Neighborhood Governance Task Force

*A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR RENEWING THE STRENGTH OF THE  
NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING ASSEMBLIES*

Planned Submission to Mayor Peter Clavelle  
and the Burlington City Council  
September 13, 1999

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**MAYOR'S NEIGHBORHOOD GOVERNANCE TASK FORCE**

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

In his annual State of the City Address of April 6, 1998, Mayor Peter Clavelle included a commitment to reexamine Burlington's original forum for citizen participation, the Neighborhood Planning Assemblies (NPAs). He said, "... we must seek means to strengthen our democracy, to increase voter turnout, and unleash the potential of our NPAs and neighborhood associations."

Following up on this commitment, the Community and Economic Development Office invited a group of representatives from Neighborhood Planning Assemblies, various neighborhood associations, the City Council Community Development Committee and City Departments to become the Mayor's Neighborhood Governance Task Force. The goal was to engage in a productive dialogue to develop outcomes that ensured that the needs of our citizens are met by our neighborhood governance systems in Burlington. During a series of ten meetings beginning in February 1999, this group examined the issues currently facing the Neighborhood Planning Assemblies. In particular, this Task Force focused on the effectiveness of the Neighborhood Planning Assemblies and the systems that guide them.

After much discussion, this group agreed that the Neighborhood Planning Assemblies still play an important role in keeping neighbors connected to both each other and the City. To renew their strength, a comprehensive effort will require the time, resources and energy of residents, City Departments and elected/appointed City officials.

## **II. PROBLEM STATEMENT, GOAL AND OBJECTIVES**

The Neighborhood Planning Assemblies were created in 1982 to "...help provide citizens with information concerning City programs and activities; help obtain citizen views of City needs, and help provide citizens with an opportunity to participate in making recommendations with respect to governmental decisions, including the allocation of revenues." \* Throughout the past four years, many questions have been raised by citizens, Neighborhood Planning Assembly Steering Committee Members, City Department officials, City Councilors and staff from the Community and Economic Development Office, concerning the effectiveness of the Neighborhood Planning Assemblies and their current ability to accomplish the above mission.

With a few exceptions, NPAs have:

- experienced a significant decline in participation and a lack of interested Steering Committee members;

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\* Burlington Aldermanic Resolution, September 1992, Neighborhood Planning Assembly Member Handbook

- experienced a lack of support from and trust of the City and the Community and Economic Development Office;
- lost a sense of the mission, authority and the systems which govern the NPAs;
- questioned their purpose and role in a climate of emerging neighborhood associations and single-issue groups working to address neighborhood concerns.

The goal of the Mayor's Neighborhood Governance Task Force was to issue recommendations to the Mayor and City Council for the implementation of an effective citizen participation plan and related governance structure.

Specifically, the objectives of the Task Force were:

1. To determine in what ways the NPAs in their current design are effective vehicles to meet the original goals as stated in the City Council resolution creating them. To determine the role that other neighborhood groups and organizations play in meeting the original goals stated above and their relationship to the NPAs.
2. To explore options, alternatives and initiatives for an effective, City supported neighborhood governance system.

### **III. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The recommendations presented below are the result of six months of work of the Task Force. Using a consensus decision making process, the Task Force agreed on a comprehensive strategic plan to reinvigorate the NPAs. The recommendations are structured according to three different areas of need identified by the Task Force:

- A. *Improve systems, communication and relationships* with the City, between NPAs, and with other neighborhood groups. The Task Force examined opportunities for Wards and neighborhoods to share specific interests and combine forces on specific issues. The group identified the need for greater communication with and connection to City officials (both elected and appointed) to the NPAs. Finally, it is agreed that Neighborhood Planning Assemblies need greater access to financial and other resources in order to rise to their full potential.
- B. *Publicity, education and outreach* in order to increase attendance and truly represent the diverse issues, attitudes, and people of our Wards.
- C. A comprehensive *orientation and training* plan for Neighborhood Governance Leaders, which includes both NPAs and neighborhood associations.

## **A. SYSTEMS, COMMUNICATION AND IMPROVED RELATIONS**

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### **1. Allocate a budget to each Neighborhood Planning Assembly**

#### **Rationale**

Neighborhood Planning Assemblies have traditionally been a source of funding (through CDBG funds) for neighborhood projects. This has always been a point of interest for residents and pride for the Neighborhood Planning Assemblies in allocating the funds. It has often created interest in serving on the Neighborhood Planning Assembly Steering Committee. The Neighborhood Planning Assemblies want CEDO staff support and resources to carry out Neighborhood Planning Assembly activities and outreach. The Neighborhood Planning Assemblies' budget amount would be the same for each Ward. Some items in the budgets would have fixed costs, such as the cost of CEDO support (staff/minutes/mailings) and some training. Other budget areas such as outreach and activities would be more flexible depending on how each Ward chooses to address diverse issues.

#### **Objectives**

- 1) Increase and empower Neighborhood Planning Assemblies' ability to fund meeting and outreach activities, such as publicity, translation services, child care, accessibility, food, transportation, supplies and facilities.
- 2) Increase Neighborhood Planning Assemblies' involvement in allocating limited resources.
- 3) Have Steering Committee members trained in budgeting.

#### **Strategies**

- 1) The Neighborhood Planning Assembly Steering Committees, at the Annual Training meeting (see *Orientation and Training, pg 11*) will coordinate with CEDO to formulate budgetary needs to present to the Mayor.
- 2) The Mayor and City Council will provide a base budget for each Neighborhood Planning Assembly. This budget will include line items for CEDO staff time, meeting expenses and small neighborhood projects.
- 3) At least one Steering Committee member from each Ward will receive budget and fund-raising training annually.

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## **Assessment**

- 1) Improved recruitment and less turnover of Neighborhood Planning Assembly Steering Committee members.
- 2) Increased sense of responsibility and self-determination by Neighborhood Planning Assemblies.
- 3) Neighborhood Planning Assembly Steering Committee members will feel confident in setting each Neighborhood Planning Assembly's yearly budget.

## **2. Create an annual Citywide "Calendar of Events"**

### **Rationale**

A need exists for a system that leads to more effective, efficient, and coordinated Neighborhood Planning Assemblies, yet does not reduce their autonomy, spontaneity, and ability to quickly respond to and monitor important neighborhood issues.

A calendar of agenda items for each scheduled Neighborhood Planning Assembly meeting encourages Steering Committees to strategically plan for the year and be better prepared for each Neighborhood Planning Assembly meeting. The calendars would also provide needed dates for making rational decisions regarding the need for joint Neighborhood Planning Assembly meetings or single-issue meetings. Additionally, a yearly calendar could also serve as a communication tool with the neighborhood if it is sent out in August. Sharing calendars among Neighborhood Planning Assembly Steering Committees will provide needed data upon which decisions for collaborative actions can be made.

During the month of July of each year, a meeting will be held of at least one representative from each Neighborhood Planning Assembly. At this meeting, each Neighborhood Planning Assembly will present its **Calendar of Events** for September 1999 through June 2000. This calendar will be a general month by month listing of scheduled agenda items. Calendars will be discussed as well as implications for joint meetings among Neighborhood Planning Assemblies or "Town Meetings" on selected topics.

### **Objectives**

- 1) Gather ideas from other Neighborhood Planning Assemblies for potential agenda items, and to determine possible linkages among Neighborhood Planning Assemblies that might lead to collaborative efforts. These efforts might take the form of regularly scheduled or scheduled as needed; joint meetings among two or more Neighborhood Planning Assemblies, task forces to deal with selected issues, "Town Meeting" type forums to deal with important topics and the unexpected. The directly effected and involved Neighborhood Planning Assemblies must approve proposals emerging from this meeting.

- 2) Use the calendars as communication tools by sending them to residents and other interested parties.

### **Strategies**

- 1) A meeting time and place are agreed to. Each Neighborhood Planning Assembly presents its calendar at the meeting. Calendars are discussed and the implications for joint Neighborhood Planning Assembly meetings or "Town Meetings" analyzed. Proposals for further action, if any, are constructed and later presented to Neighborhood Planning Assemblies for approval, rejection or modification.
- 2) Each Ward's finalized calendar will be distributed to residents and other relevant entities.

### **Assessment**

- 1) Were the above strategies carried out? Meetings will be evaluated using the "Plus/Delta" method, which bases feedback on what worked well and what we might change in the future.
- 2) Attendance at meetings will increase due to better avenues of communication.

## **3. Strengthen ties to City Commissioners**

### **Rationale**

There is currently a lack of communication between city commissions and the Neighborhood Planning Assemblies. Commissioners typically do not attend Neighborhood Planning Assembly meetings and do not use the Neighborhood Planning Assemblies to inform citizens about issues. Clearly, Neighborhood Planning Assemblies are outside the loop in the appointment process.

In an ideal city, every commission would have equal representation from each Ward, however in practice this approach is unrealistic for the following reasons:

- It is difficult to find volunteers willing to serve on some commissions and a requirement that there be equal representation from each Ward would exacerbate this problem.
- What would happen if a commissioner moved from one Ward in the city to another Ward in the City?
- A need to find qualified and willing candidates outweighs the benefits of having equal representation.

Additionally, the city charter specifies that commissioners be appointed by the City Council, not the Neighborhood Planning Assemblies. Despite these issues, we believe that Ward representation and communication with the public through Neighborhood Planning Assemblies can and should be improved.

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### **Objective**

To increase public awareness of commission appointments, Ward representation on commissions, and commission activities and issues.

### **Strategies**

- 1) Create a check box on the commissioner application form that states: "Have you made a presentation at your Neighborhood Planning Assembly meeting expressing why you desire to serve on the commission." \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No
- 2) Answering "yes" is **not** a requirement to be appointed to a commission, but is given weight in the decision process, particularly for competitive positions.

### **Measures of Success**

- 1) Increased presence and participation of commissioners at Neighborhood Planning Assembly meetings.
- 2) Increased public awareness of commission issues.
- 3) Increased applications for commissioner posts.

### **Assessment**

- 1) One year after implementation Neighborhood Planning Assemblies will report an increased presence and participation of commissioners at Neighborhood Planning Assembly meetings.
- 2) Two years after implementation there will be a 25% increase in applications for commission positions.
- 3) One year after implementation, 50% of commission applicants will have checked the "yes" box. Two years after implementation, 75% of new commissioners would have checked the "yes" box.

## **4. Strengthen ties to neighborhood associations and other neighborhood groups**

### **Rationale**

Neighborhood groups take on many forms. They vary in size, frequency of meetings, organizational structures, a high level of geographically concentrated citizen participation, and are issue oriented. These groups are an important element of grassroots politics because they get people involved and strengthen bonds within communities. Neighborhood groups typically have a level of organization that is something in between organized official government entities and unorganized individual citizens. Local government should know what is going on within these groups in order to be responsive to the needs of the citizenry.

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### **Objectives**

- 1) Address the concerns and opinions of neighborhoods.
- 2) Encourage a high level of citizen participation in governance.
- 3) Nurture forms of government that inspire the citizenry and make them want to participate.
- 4) To guard against one neighborhood interest dominating other neighborhoods or a Neighborhood Planning Assembly.
- 5) To increase communication between neighborhood groups and City government.

### **Strategies**

- 1) Invitation to neighborhood association leaders to sit on Neighborhood Planning Assembly Steering Committees.
- 2) Inclusion of neighborhood association leaders in Neighborhood Planning Assembly training
- 3) Invitation from Neighborhood Planning Assembly Steering Committees to neighborhood association leaders to include neighborhood association issues on Neighborhood Planning Assembly meeting agenda.

### **Measures of Success**

- 1) Increased presence and participation of neighborhood association leaders and members on Neighborhood Planning Assembly Steering Committees and at Neighborhood Planning Assembly meetings.
- 2) Increased neighborhood association knowledge of Neighborhood Planning Assembly systems and functions
- 3) Increased neighborhood issues on Neighborhood Planning Assembly agendas.

### **Assessment**

- 1) One year after implementation Neighborhood Planning Assemblies will have one neighborhood association leader on each Steering Committee.
- 2) 20% of neighborhood association leaders will participate in Neighborhood Planning Assembly training
- 3) Neighborhood Planning Assembly Steering Committees will receive agenda items from neighborhood associations on a monthly basis.

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## **5. KEEP THE NAME "NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING ASSEMBLY"**

### **Rationale**

Neighborhood Planning Assemblies should have a name that reflect who they represent and what they do in words that people understand and don't have to abbreviate. While technically the organization represents a Ward, many people don't know what a Ward is. A **Neighborhood** is similar to a Ward and is a good word to use. **Planning** is some of what the Neighborhood Planning Assemblies do but not all of it. **Assembly** is an accurate description of the type of gathering intended. The problem lies in that the term Neighborhood Planning Assembly is so long that people like to abbreviate the term down to the meaningless letters NPA. Calling these groups NPAs is bad marketing because it has no meaning for the public at large.

### **Conclusion**

A fear of starting from scratch to educate the public as to meaning of a new term leaves us stuck with the name Neighborhood Planning Assembly. However, it is agreed that the term NPA is to be avoided, particularly in communication to the public. Meeting notices should read **Neighborhood Planning Assembly**, not NPA.

## **B. PUBLICITY, EDUCATION AND OUTREACH**

### **Rationale**

In order to meet the purposes of the Neighborhood Planning Assemblies, a more thorough and well-organized outreach and communication effort is crucial. Publicity will help to communicate and educate the key stakeholders in each Ward, especially the residents, about the existence and function of Neighborhood Planning Assemblies and about issues facing the neighborhoods, the Wards and City. An outreach plan is also necessary in order to engage key stakeholders who are currently underrepresented in the Neighborhood Planning Assemblies.

### **Objectives**

- 1) To publicize the existence and process of operation of the NPA system.
- 2) To connect individuals and groups throughout the City of Burlington into the system of local governance, increasing attendance and participation.
- 3) To educate the public about how to participate in local governance through the Neighborhood Planning Assemblies.

### **Strategies**

- 1) **E-mail:** CEDO will institute e-mail as a regular component of all communications with key Neighborhood Planning Assembly stakeholders. E-mail will be in addition to, but not a replacement of, the current mailing list.

- 2) **Citywide Neighborhood Planning Assembly Steering Committee Meeting:** CEDO will coordinate a meeting of all Neighborhood Planning Assembly Steering Committee members to be held twice a year, to foster communication between all the Wards and share ideas for publicity and outreach. This will be linked to the calendar preparation and training meeting (see recommendation A.2., pg 5 and Orientation and Training plan, pg 11).
- 3) **Citywide Mailings:** CEDO and the Neighborhood Planning Assemblies will institute annual or biannual mailings to City residents through their electric bills to inform the citizens of the actions of the Neighborhood Planning Assembly as well as the issues. This will be linked to the calendar preparation and training meeting.
- 4) **Building better communications between Neighborhood Associations and Neighborhood Planning Associations (see recommendation A.4., pg 7):** Neighborhood Planning Assembly Steering Committees will invite neighborhood associations to become a part of the Neighborhood Planning Assembly process on a regular basis through inclusion in all communications, invitation to meetings and participation in all ward events.
- 5) **Better media connections:** CEDO and the Neighborhood Planning Assembly Steering Committees will keep the media informed of the upcoming Neighborhood Planning Assembly events. CEDO and Neighborhood Planning Assembly Steering Committees will post a regular press release to major news outlets. Public Relations and media training will be incorporated into the annual training plan (see pg 11).
- 6) **Give Neighborhood Planning Assemblies a budget (see recommendation A.1., pg 4):** To institute increased communications and feedback mechanisms between all Neighborhood Planning Assembly stakeholders, funds will be needed to underwrite mailings, surveys and other vital outreach programs.
- 7) **Create informal forums for citizens:** The Neighborhood Planning Assembly will institute a series of social gatherings in the individual Wards for the purpose of informing the residents of the Wards about important issues facing the Neighborhood Planning Assemblies and the City. The purpose of these forums is more informational and social in nature.
- 8) **Creation of a yearly calendar (see recommendation A.2., pg 5):** CEDO and the Neighborhood Planning Assemblies will create a yearly calendar which will schedule ward meetings, Steering Committee meetings, and city and community events well in advance for planning purposes.
- 9) **More visible public posting of Neighborhood Planning Assembly meetings:** Neighborhood Planning Assembly Steering Committees will publicly post notice

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of upcoming meetings within the wards either via signage in well-traveled locations within the ward or in other forms of media.

- 10) **Annual feedback:** CEDO and the Neighborhood Planning Assembly Steering Committees will distribute an annual survey to individuals, organizations and neighborhood associations in order to increase the input from both regular Neighborhood Planning Assembly attendees and underrepresented groups. The survey will be used to refine and support needed changes in the operation of both individual and the collective Neighborhood Planning Assemblies.
- 11) **Invite youth volunteers to participate:** Information on Neighborhood Planning Assembly meetings will be distributed to local schools, colleges and universities.

### **Measures of Success**

- 1) Average attendance at NPA meetings increased by at least 20% per year.  
Mailing list size increase by at least 20% per year. (To be tracked by Ward and by City)
- 2) A 20 % increase in the awareness of the NPA respondents.
- 3) Each NPA Steering Committee and residents will submit between one paragraph and one-half page clearly and simply describing the level of success experienced by that NPA and resident in publicity, education and outreach. This report will include an interpretation of each of the quantitative measurements mentioned here.

### **Assessment**

- 1) Increase in attendance at combined NPA meetings by 20%.
- 2) Increase in number of people on mailing list by 30%.
- 3) Increase in awareness of the mission of the NPA by 20% as measured by an annual poll.

## **C. TRAINING PLAN**

### **Rationale**

The effectiveness and efficiency of neighborhood governance (NPAs, NAs, etc.) is highly contingent on the level of relevant training received by the leadership of these bodies. For these entities to work well, leadership needs knowledge of the policies and systems, which guide the individual organization, and an understanding of the structure and functioning of state and local government. Additionally, leadership will benefit from skills related to meeting facilitation,

group dynamics, grant writing, and much more. The need exists to orient new leaders and build upon the training opportunities that are currently available in the community. Although the scope and breadth of the training that can be offered may be limited by available resources and the time and dedication of Neighborhood Governance Leaders (NGLs), it is important that a comprehensive training plan is developed.

In order to maximize neighborhood governance effectiveness, City Department officials, City Council, Commissioners, and School Board members also must have basic knowledge of these same systems and policies and must be aware of the formal and informal responsibilities that they have to the neighborhood governance organizations. Orientation and training therefore, must also be required of City Department Heads and those City employees who regularly deal with neighborhood issues, and strongly encouraged for elected and appointed representatives to City Council, Commissions and School Board.

### **Objectives**

- 1) NGLs will have the basic knowledge and skills that will enable them to be effective leaders.
- 2) City Department Heads, City employees working with neighborhood issues, City Council, Commissioners and the School Board will understand the basic policy and systems, recognize the value of neighborhood governance (NPAs and NAs), have information necessary to maintain communication and solve problems, and utilize neighborhood governance to its fullest.
- 3) All NGLs will have the opportunity to access advanced relevant training beyond the basic orientation/training package.
- 4) NGL training needs will be determined every two years at an annual meeting of Neighborhood Planning Assembly Steering Committees.
- 5) Based on NGL input, CEDO and NGL representatives will develop and coordinate the training plan.

### **Measures of Success**

- 1) Each Neighborhood Planning Assembly Steering Committee Member will complete a basic orientation and training program upon beginning their term of service. NA leaders will be invited, encouraged and welcome to attend. Success will be measured by attendance and by a passing grade on a relevant, self-administered quiz. Certificates of accomplishment will be awarded.
- 2) Each City Department Head and his/her designated staff will complete a basic orientation on neighborhood governance structure and their specific roles and

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responsibilities. Newly elected City Councilors, School Board members, and newly appointed Commissioners will also complete this orientation. Success will be measured by attendance and by a passing grade on a relevant quiz.

- 3) Each year CEDO will prepare and distribute to NGLs a list of relevant and locally available training. Additionally, CEDO will initiate and coordinate the development and implementation of many of these training opportunities. Where possible, success will be measured by attendance and by a passing grade on a relevant, self-administered quiz. Certificates of accomplishment will be awarded.
- 4) Every two years at a joint meeting of NGLs, training needs for the following two years will be articulated, listed and prioritized.
- 5) A committee of one CEDO person and two NGLs will coordinate the training program. Their success will be determined by evaluations by participants of each training and every two years by the "pluses" and "deltas" awarded at the joint meeting mentioned above.

### **Strategies**

- 1) An annual orientation (scheduled according to needs expressed by NGLs and by SC election calendar) for newly elected Steering Committee members and all interested neighborhood association leaders and members will include:
  - Intro to City Government and historical and current Burlington neighborhood issues.
  - Overview of the policy and procedure for NPAs. This will include roles and responsibilities of the Steering Committee members.
  - An introductory meeting facilitation workshop conducted jointly by professional staff and seasoned NGLs.

A packet or workbook will be compiled to compliment/accompany this orientation and will be available for any new NGLs or other interested parties throughout the year. Ongoing questions or new issues related to City government and policy and procedures could be addressed through the addition of training time set aside in each joint NGL meeting.

- 2) City Department Heads and City staff will be required to attend an orientation, which will be held annually. This orientation may be held jointly with the NGL orientation mentioned above. Newly elected City Councilors, School Board members, and newly appointed Commissioners will also be strongly urged to attend. It should include:
  - Intro to City Government and historical and current Burlington neighborhood issues
  - Overview of the policy and procedure for NPAs and neighborhood governance, including roles and responsibilities of the each specific office

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A packet or workbook will be compiled to compliment/accompany this orientation and will be available for any new City staff or elected/appointed official throughout the year.

- 3) Twice annually, CEDO will compile and distribute a list of relevant training opportunities currently available free or at low cost including the Leadership Development Series (Public Safety Project), Non-Profit Development Series (United Way), etc. Based on needs and priorities identified by NGLs and staff resources available, additional training may be offered in advanced meeting facilitation, agenda development, grant writing, fundraising, conflict resolution, building a vision, multicultural awareness, community organizing, state and local government. These advanced workshops will be optional for all NGLs.
- 4) The first Orientation plan will be approved at the first bi-annual meeting of the Steering Committee and updated every two years at a joint meeting of NGLs. Additional changes will be based on evaluations from participants at the end of each Orientation workshop. The advanced training series will be first developed based on survey responses from NGLs and will be evaluated and updated every two years at a joint meeting of NGLs.
- 5) A committee of one CEDO staff and two NGLs will develop and coordinate the Orientation plan. This same committee will develop a survey to begin planning the advanced training series.

#### **Assessment**

- 1) At the end of the first year of training, 80% of the NGLs will have attended and passed the orientation.
- 2) At the end of the first year of training, all City Department Heads and Neighborhood staff, all City councilors and School Board members and 60% of Commissioners will have attended and passed the orientation.
- 3) The quality of the training programs will be determined by written and private feedback for participants. A 70% approval rating will be the minimum needed for an item to be considered successful. An attendance rate of 60% for the optional workshops will indicate success.
- 4) Assessment will be whether or not the meeting was held and the extent to which objectives were achieved.
- 5) A review panel composed of NGLs will review the "pluses" and "deltas" and issue and evaluation report based upon these feedback items and any other relevant material.

