

The Neighborhood Association Council of Wauwatosa

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." — Margaret Mead

The Neighborhood Association Council of Wauwatosa truly illustrates Margaret Mead's words in action. A desire to strengthen Wauwatosa's sense of community and quality of life began with a very good idea and just a few people. Eventually, hundreds of residents participating in a neighborhood-centric leadership initiative would positively touch thousands of lives.

In 1992, the non-profit civic organization Wauwatosa Tomorrow launched a project to establish neighborhood associations in the City of Wauwatosa as a grassroots effort. The concept was built on the premise that three neighborhoods in Wauwatosa with active associations were particularly strong in identity and community-spirit. These neighborhoods were the Washington Highlands established in 1918 and Sheraton Lawns and Wellauer Heights, both established in 1950. Interestingly, many people in Wauwatosa in the early 1990's proudly contended they lived on the "best street" in the city, but those areas of the city with associations actually identified themselves living in "the best neighborhood in the city."

Wauwatosa Tomorrow's Neighborhood Association Project was initially organized by its Community Character Committee, chaired by Alice Krebs (Distinguished Citizen of the Year, 1998). The committee's extensive research in 1992 showed the positive impact of neighborhood associations on residents' quality-of-life, particularly in Pacific Northwest cities like Seattle and Portland. After a year of discussion and planning, Wauwatosa Tomorrow held the first public meeting in August 1993 to introduce the concept of establishing grassroots, resident-initiated neighborhood associations. In the meeting, attended by 50 city residents at the Wauwatosa Historical Society's Kneeland-Walker House, attendees learned that neighborhood associations are a unifying structure and benefits residents by:

- Keeping neighborhood traditions going
- Welcoming newcomers
- Energizing neighborhoods
- Bringing neighbors together while planning and attending events or interest groups
- Encouraging involvement in the larger community
- Promoting a safe neighborhood environment
- Educating people about the community and the workings of city and county government

With a unanimously positive response to the presentation on neighborhood associations, the meeting's attendees enthusiastically returned to their neighborhoods armed with information on the benefits of forming associations. The project was launched! With residents looking to proactively strengthen their neighborhoods, four neighborhood associations formed over the course of late 1993 and 1994: Pabst Park initiated by Linda Janis and Eileen Bussler; Historic Heights led by Alice Krebs; Parkway Estates led by Patricia Ziperski; and Swan Park led by

Margaret McGowan. Impressed by this community initiative, the Wauwatosa Savings Bank Foundation generously provided seed money to many of the new associations.

To support the fledgling organizations, in the spring of 1994 Wauwatosa Tomorrow began holding bi-monthly meetings. In the winter of 1994, the group solidified and formalized as the Neighborhood Association Council (NAC) with Denise Lindberg serving as first NAC President and Chair of the Neighborhood Association Project Committee, developing a “how-to kit” and chairing dozens of meetings in neighborhoods throughout the city.

In 1995, five more associations formed, and steadily over the ensuing 15 years, neighborhood associations continued to develop and the majority of Wauwatosa residents now live in an area of the city where a neighborhood association exists. Participation is voluntary, and the rewards are plentiful in getting to know neighbors through the formal, existing structure that a neighborhood association provides. Thousands of people are positively impacted by the dedication of many individuals who have stepped forward to lead their neighborhood association boards and committees.

In 2005, a NAC Board formed and received 501(c)3 non-profit designation from the IRS. The NAC Board draws from past presidents of neighborhood associations, enabling the NAC to address more citywide quality-of-life initiatives. NAC meetings served as a sounding board for associations to share ideas, discuss concerns, and stay informed. In addition, community initiatives have taken root and grown out of the NAC, such as the Hoyt Park issue (2005) which led to opening of the TOSA Pool at Hoyt Park (2011), the All City Read program (2013) and the pending Tosa Connects program (2025). Over the years, the NAC Board offered regularly scheduled all-neighborhood association meetings, planned trainings and workshops, provided assistance with new neighborhood development, and introduced new annual all community events, and more. The NAC continues to evolve to best serve the local neighborhood associations.

The Neighborhood Association Council exists to:

- Provide opportunities to share ideas, successes & concerns among all Wauwatosa neighborhood associations.
- Provide community groups and governmental representatives an additional forum for sharing information of interest to neighborhoods with its residents, particularly about quality-of-life issues.
- Keep the city’s neighborhood associations “connected” and communicating with each other.
- Edit and publish the city-centric NAC eBlast with timely information on upcoming events, programs, activities, meetings & more
- Support neighborhoods in all stages of establishing and/or growing a neighborhood association.
- Promote neighborhood associations in Wauwatosa, making them a visible and attractive aspect of life in Wauwatosa.
- Create and provide All City events that benefit the entire community

- Share in and enjoy the spirit of community experienced in our individual neighborhoods.
- Establish and steward valuable community committees focused on issues important to neighbors such as Safety Liaisons, Senior Ambassadors, and School Liaisons
- Promote a sense of belonging, welcoming, and inclusion within neighborhoods throughout Wauwatosa

Wauwatosa's neighborhood associations impact many, and the NAC serves as an umbrella organization that exists to provide the resources, support and opportunities that each neighborhood association needs to form, grow, and thrive. In Wauwatosa there is no doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens have changed (and continue to change!) their corner of the world, neighborhood by neighborhood, helping to make Wauwatosa a great place to live, work, shop and play.