

## How to Reestablish a Neighborhood Association

There are various reasons a neighborhood association has become inactive or perhaps no longer exists. As a neighbor interested in reestablishing your neighborhood association, you may or may not have access to any of your former NA's history. If you do, there may be valuable elements that can be used and/or updated. If you do not, the upside is that you are afforded more latitude to rebuild your NA just as you and others helping in this effort would like it to be!

The main components of getting your Neighborhood Association back up and running is gathering input and ideas on what a cross section of neighbors would like your neighborhood association to be and to do and to identify and recruit a small group of neighbors interested in making this vision a reality.

This article outlines the basic steps required to restart an effective neighborhood association.

### **What you need to do to get started**

First, reach out to the President of the Wauwatosa Neighborhood Association Council (NAC). We'll find an agreeable time to meet with you, go over the status of your NA, and provide any past information on past NA structure and any contacts that may have been on a past NA board. We can also provide general information on what has worked and what to avoid while getting started, or you can read through any of the material on the Association Resources page.

Next, try to locate past bylaws and articles of incorporation. If you find those documents, they are usually fairly simple; read them to see if they need to change. You will need to incorporate again as a non-profit with the State of Wisconsin, but before you incorporate, it's best to have a general meeting of the neighbors.

### **Core Group Determines the Issues, Concerns, and Needs**

Call for a general meeting of the neighbors in your NA boundaries. Let them know why you're meeting and what you want to accomplish. Provide snacks and an easy accessible spot to meet to bring as many interested neighbors as possible.

Present your ideas for reestablishing your Neighborhood Association. Be honest and transparent if you are unsure of all of the next steps; let them know you will work together to get restarted.

It only takes a small core group of neighbors and friends to identify the areas of primary interest and concern in your neighborhood. Remember that every neighborhood association is different in their structure and their driving force. Some neighborhood associations started in response to one particular issue, such as improving neighborhood safety or organizing a more cohesive trick-or-treat. But most successful neighborhood associations, however, are more social in nature and are structured around

many different interests. Basing your organization around one concern or issue, while a convening force, does not always make for good sustainability. Once the issue or concern is resolved, your purpose may be gone.

A more general focus such as increased neighborhood connections, creating neighborhood events, activities or clubs, or even providing a more vibrant and welcoming neighborhood are purposes that have staying power!

No matter the approach you take, you will want to represent a good percentage of the people in your neighborhood. You may need to survey neighbors to see what their interests and needs are to get a feeling for how to begin. Even when you have your key reasons for creating a neighborhood, it is likely that you will not reach 100% agreement on how to proceed. Work to find general consensus on any of the issues you are interested in making part of your Neighborhood Association's purpose and identify how, as a group, you can begin to work on and support the decisions made. The outcome of this meeting is generally a core group that will take the next steps.

### **Core Group Homework**

After the core group defines the major interests of your residents, their primary function is to then act as a steering committee and help plan for the first Neighborhood Association meeting. The core group will need to do a number of important things in preparation for the first general neighborhood meeting:

- Draft your articles of incorporation. The State of Wisconsin has made it easy to incorporate online, following a set of simple steps. If the old articles of incorporation cannot be found, there are examples on the NAC website that you can follow to set them up. You will need a person who is willing to sign on as the President at a minimum. A VP, Secretary, and a Treasurer may be desired.
- You don't have to worry about applying for 501(3)(c) Charitable Organization status. If you spend time getting established now, work on advanced topics can happen down the road.
- Define a list of small "kick-off" projects that should be fairly simple such as a neighborhood block clean-up, meet-up at a local restaurant or a potluck fundraising event. The idea is to make it easy for the people who come to the first meeting to get involved.
- Create a list with contact names, phone numbers and email addresses and designate who in the core group should be in charge of this task.
- Designate someone in the core group to be in charge of recruiting neighbors to be general members of the neighborhood association.
- Reach out to the NAC for support along the way.

### **Planning the First Regular Meeting**

Once the core group has completed their "homework," you may want to decide on a date, time and location for the first regular meeting. Try to choose a date and time that is going to be convenient for the largest number of people possible. In terms of time, weekday evenings or a weekend day usually work the best. Schools, public libraries and churches make great locations for the meeting.

### Creating an Agenda

This first general meeting is very important in that its job is to lay the foundation for the organization. You should come out of this meeting with an agreement on goals and the interests of the organization. Below is a framework for what your agenda might look like at this first meeting.

1. **Introduction:** Introduce the core group and explain the purpose of the meeting. Also, everyone attending should introduce themselves and share where they live and what they would like to see happen in the neighborhood.
2. **Discuss the Issues:** Everyone attending should have a chance to voice their opinion and make suggestions. Be sure to limit each person's time, so as not to bog down at this point.
3. **Set Priorities:** Based on the interests discussed, prioritize one or two areas of interest and create projects.
4. **Create Tasks:** Break your project ideas down into a series of tasks and assign volunteers. If the work involves a lot of people, create a committee and assign a head.
5. **Create the Organization Structure:** You now have a chance to create a name and create a leadership team (ask those in attendance to approve the core group as a steering committee until elections are held). Rules for operation and elections can either be adopted at the first meeting or put off until the organization has more experience.
6. **Set a Date for the Next Meeting:** It is essential to agree on a date and time for the next meeting before adjourning.

### Getting the Word Out

Now that you have done all the groundwork for the first meeting, you need to publicize the event in a way to ensure the highest participation possible. Below are some tips to ensure high attendance:

Create meeting announcement flyers that include time, date and place. Distribute them to as many homes as possible, including apartment buildings in your neighborhood. Later on, if you create a webpage, or Facebook Group use it to communicate about anything planned for your NA.

### Tips for the Meeting

- Be prepared for a big meeting – lots of discussion and more ideas than you might have expected.
- Be prepared for a small meeting — low attendance is common for new organizations and if this happens, stay positive and enlist the energies of everyone who does show up.
- All ideas should be given fair consideration.
- Everyone needs to be treated with respect.
- No one should leave the meeting without a task, even if it is simple.
- Everyone should sign in. Collect as much contact information as possible, including email addresses.