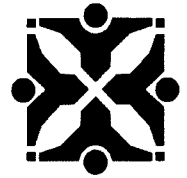


City of Columbia

701 East Broadway, Columbia, Missouri 65201



Agenda Item Number: REP 5-15

Department Source: City Manager

To: City Council

From: City Manager & Staff

Council Meeting Date: December 1, 2014

Re: Citywide Neighborhood Organization

Documents Included With This Agenda Item

Council memo

Supporting documentation includes: None

Executive Summary

This report addresses Ward 1 Council person Chadwick's request to research how to organize an unified body for all neighborhood associations in Columbia. Umbrella neighborhood organizations are found in two main configurations: as an official commission of a city, or as an independent 501c3. Both configurations offer advantages and disadvantages that depend on the community, the number of active neighborhood associations, and the desired mission for the organization.

Discussion

Umbrella neighborhood organizations exist mainly in two forms throughout the country: as an official city commission or as an independent organization often set up as a 501c3. The makeup of each of these configurations varies in membership, mission, meeting frequency, and structure.

Official City Commission

Official city commissions that represent all neighborhood associations go by many names and serve different purposes from city to city. Duties for these commissions include: acting as a liaison between the City and neighborhoods, reviewing CDBG projects and funds, advising and reviewing neighborhood service programs, and bringing neighborhood issues to the attention of staff and council. Some commissions' members are a mayor's appointments, while other cities ask neighborhoods provide a representative. All commissions require that members live in the neighborhood they serve and be members of their neighborhood association. Smaller commissions tend to meet monthly, while larger groups (those that have a representative from every association) usually meet quarterly. An example of a commission in Missouri comes from the Neighborhood Commission of Gladstone, MO (Kansas City suburb). The commission consists of six citizen members appointed by the mayor and council for three year staggered terms. They are responsible for considering ways and means to enhance the lives of residents by facilitating and encouraging community awareness of and participation in neighborhood activities.

City of Columbia

701 East Broadway, Columbia, Missouri 65201



Independent Organizations/501c3

Neighborhood associations in many cities have banded together under umbrella organizations outside of city government. These organizations are typically set up as a 501c3 that is supported by membership dues, donations, and grants. They vary in size, budget, and effectiveness but all have close ties to local governments, agencies, and service providers. Cities with such organizations include: Des Moines, IA; Austin, TX; Fort Worth, TX; Sunnyvale, CA; Trenton, NJ; Marion County, IN; and St. Louis, MO. Many of these organizations are fairly old (1970's) and well established. They typically have a mission similar to city commissions, but many seem to host more diverse activities and coordinate with a greater diversity of organizations than just the city government.

Advantages and Disadvantages

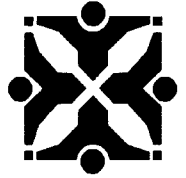
There are several advantages that could be ascribed to either an official commission or an independent organization. A city commission can be more readily available to respond to staff and council request than a group independent of the city government. A commission can also be perceived as an ingenuine voice for neighborhoods, because of its proximity to the city government and the appointment of members by council. A city commission is also limited to the resources it is provided and not as able to pursue innovative ideas and outside funding opportunities. An independent organization can be very powerful at giving neighborhood associations a voice and leveraging local resources for projects if it has an active membership. Any organization whether independent or commission will wax and wane as hot topics change and strong leadership comes and goes.

Currently the Office of Neighborhood Services offers numerous neighborhood building programs and opportunities for neighborhoods to come together. The Neighborhood Leadership Program provide four sessions from January to March that provide training for existing and aspiring neighborhood leadership. Neighborhood Congresses provide a forum for neighborhood associations to come together and provide input on various city issues and plans. The Neighborhood Mini Grants provide up to \$250 to recognized neighborhood associations for various projects (websites, newsletters, and block parties). Other ONS programs that support neighborhoods include: Neighborhood Cleanup Program, Neighborhood Library, and additional training opportunities. ONS also has a full time staff member dedicated to supporting neighborhoods.

Staff recommends that however neighborhood associations in Columbia would like to proceed the process should be driven by them and not staff. The Office of Neighborhood Services believes that any kind of umbrella organization could be a great asset for the community, but that for it to be successful there needs to a real drive coming from the associations to create it. City staff is happy to help aid in the process, but feels that a successful formation of any group will require buy in from numerous neighborhood associations.

City of Columbia

701 East Broadway, Columbia, Missouri 65201



Suggested Council Action

Informational

Legislative History

N/A



Department Approved



City Manager Approved