

Background Information

Origins of Office of Neighborhood Associations and the East Portland Neighborhood Office

The Office of Neighborhood Associations (ONA) was created in the mid-1970s to support community involvement and community building across the City of Portland. ONA contracted with non-profit district coalitions to implement programming through neighborhood associations. This decentralized structure was intended to encourage the program to be community-driven and allow for each coalition area to adapt the program to best meet their area's communities. This community involvement through neighborhood coalitions and associations dramatically increased the amount of community input that reached City decision-makers. The East Portland Neighborhood Office (EPNO) was established in 1990, when about half the area currently served by the office was annexed to the City of Portland.

Changes to broaden participation and impact

By the 1990's it was recognized that ONA's neighborhood system was primarily serving homeowners. At this time, the bureau established the goal of reaching more broadly into the community, and the name of the bureau was changed to Office of Neighborhood Involvement (ONI). Since that time there have been various attempts to address this shortcoming to meet the City's goal of supporting the many other Portland communities in community building and civic engagement.

Most recently, the City's community involvement program was reviewed by then Mayor Tom Potter. This culminated with the adoption of Community Connect in 2008, which set goals and strategies that were adopted by the ONI program. One important outcome of the Community Connect process was the recognition that **neighborhood associations are both important and not the only way** residents of Portland come together to effect government decisions and build community. Funding was started to support a different approach to civic engagement, the Diversity and Civic Leadership program. This program now funds five programs that reach specific Portland communities; Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization, Latino Network, Urban League, NAYA Portland Youth & Elders Council, and Center for Intercultural Organizing.

EPNO has also begun to change. We have broadened our programming, partnering with different kinds of community groups and organizations. We continue to support the neighborhood associations while also working with groups that work differently. We strive to use an asset-based approach, meeting people where they are and supporting process that makes sense to them.

These changes are responding to the goal of increasing the number and diversity for people involved in the community. This will increase the community's voice for both people working within neighborhood associations, and for those organized in other ways. This new Advisory Committee is a step in this process. This change to create this more open and diverse advisory committee was made by the previous advisory committee of the East Portland Neighborhood Association Chairs Group.

The task of the EPNO Advisory Committee is to provide recommendations and advice on future program changes. You are both working on something that has been discussed for 20 years, and breaking new ground. Your advice is important for how we use our resources to support those already engaged and to engage people who have not been in the past; to better serve all East Portland's communities.