

Super Neighborhood Alliance

Minutes of Virtual Meeting Held 14 December 2020



Guests

Sallie Alcorn, CM At-Large 5
Julia Retta, Staff for CM Dist C
DiDi Chavis, Staff for CM Dist K
Nicholas Ton, HHD
David Abraham, Rice Univ

Jack Valinski, DoN
Rhonda Sauter, DoN
Gwendolyn Goins, HHD
Guilmate Pierre, HHD

Super Neighborhood Representatives

Ricky Miller, SNC 05
Philip Salerno, SNC 05
Mark Klein, SNC 12
Leigh Killgore, SNC 14
Mark Williamson, SNC 15
Jeff Baker, SNC 17
Michael Huffmaster, SNC 18
Stacie Fairchild, SNC 22
Mike VanDusen, SNC 22
Kay Warhol, SNC 24
Doug Smith, SNC 25
Barbara Quattro, SNC 25
Sandra Rodriguez, SNC 27

Kathie Easterly, SNC 28
Terry Cominsky, SNC 31
Cheryl O'Brien, SNC32
Sylvia Rivas, SNC 36
Cindy Chapman, SNC 37
Becky Edmondson, SNC 37
Stephen Polnaszek, SNC 38
Linda Scurlock, SNC 40
Juan Antonio Sorto, SNC 49,50
Keith Downey, SNC 52
Kathleen O'Reilly, SNC 66
Tomaro Bell, SNC 83
Scott Cubbler, SNC 84

Meeting convened at 6:30pm.

I. Introductions of Guests and Members

II. November 9, 2020 General Meeting Minutes

Draft minutes were accepted as presented. Motion to approve: Keith Downey; seconded: Tomaro Bell; no nays.

III. Presentations

- A. Chair Sorto introduced Nicholas Ton, with the Houston Health Department (HHD), to give a presentation about COVID-19 community outreach. The Better Together outreach program was presented, with goals of 1) community saturation, education, and empowerment of individuals to better deal with COVID-19. The department is focusing on communities that have been underserved in the past, by targeting known community leaders and educating them regarding effective community outreach.

An outreach team formed in the Houston Health Department to perform grassroots engagement of neighborhood organizations, churches, and business centers. This outreach achieved a 5% positivity rate in vulnerable neighborhoods before the holiday season. At the time of the SNA meeting, positivity has gone up to >10%.

Nicholas presented a super neighborhood map, showing the number of active cases in the week ending 12/8. Juan Sorto commented on a news report that 1 in 7 Houstonian have been infected with the Corona virus. Gwendolyn Goins, with HHD, stated that the most effected SNs are in the darkest blue color. Silvia Rivas asked if the presentation material would be made available

to SNA members; the answer was yes. Stacie Fairchild asked about the source of the statistics. Nicholas stated the stats are gathered and maintained by the Texas Medical Center. He next showed a super neighborhood map, showing the number of fatalities in the week ending 12/1, and a daily graph of the number of new cases in Houston for the last 30 days and since April. These graphs showed a peak in the summer months, and a spike during the holiday season.

Nicholas next talked about the symptoms typically exhibited when infected by COVID-19. It was further mentioned that some infected people are asymptomatic, but can still spread the virus. This is why it is important for people to get tested to confirm they are not asymptomatic carriers.

In closing, Nicholas reviewed the four actions the City is promoting to limit the spread of COVID-19: 1) wear a mask correctly, 2) wash hands frequently, and to not touch your face with unwashed hands, 3) maintain 6 feet of space between you and others in a public place, and avoid crowded places, and 4) get tested frequently.

The follow-up Q&A indicated the mapped statistics were well received. They showed some underserved areas have a higher infection and fatality rate, which is why HHD is focusing on certain neighborhoods to make residents better aware of the steps they can take to minimize the rate of infection. Keith Downey asked if there were difficulties in contact tracing in minority communities. Nicholas indicated that some members of minority communities may not have Internet access or smart phone that could facilitate contact tracing.

Michael Huffmaster asked about the success of contact tracing in the Houston area. Guilmate Pierre, HHD, stated that many people do not accept phone calls from unknown people, and this hinders successful tracing. She mentioned that HHD has more than 300 people conducting contact tracing, and that some large organization are performing their own contact tracing. Tomaro Bell asked if test results were being returned quicker than earlier in the summer. Guilmate indicated the average results time was 3 days.

- B. Juan Sorto introduced Dr. David Abraham, with Rice University, to make a presentation on Super Neighborhood Sustainability. Dr. Abraham has been working on identifying sustainability indicators for cities. Seventeen sustainability goals have been identified, including elimination of poverty, achieving equity, better education, infrastructure, and climate action.

A concept was offered that defined a neighborhood as a basic building block of communities; that a community is made up of multiple neighborhoods, and that a super neighborhood can define the boundary of a community. Furthermore, an ideal community is about 160 acres, and has a walkable radius of about ¼ mile.

Dr. Abraham suggested that it may be time to adjust existing super neighborhood limits and/or create new super neighborhoods, as provided for in Chapter 33 of the Houston Municipal Code. A history of annexation in Houston was presented. Since Houston super neighborhoods were created, changes in demographics of some super neighborhoods and population density may suggest splitting some super neighborhoods and changing their boundaries.

Feedback from some city council members is that the council districts may be too large to adequately address community needs. The super neighborhoods may be better sized to help their constituent neighborhoods. Dr. Abraham suggested the SNA draft a strategic plan in 2021, as a follow-up to the SWOT Analysis done in 2019. The 2020 decennial census will cause a change in census tracts, and could provide for adjustments in super neighborhoods.

A methodology was next presented on how to statistically rank super neighborhoods in Houston, which can define how to best invest in distressed communities. A table of the 10 worst ranked and 10 best ranked super neighborhoods was shown.

In closing, Dr. Abraham suggested: 1) updating super neighborhood boundaries, consistent with the decennial census, 2) noted that 150,000 new Houstonians do not live in a super neighborhood, 3) council districts will be updated soon, and 4) super neighborhoods should be adjusted to fit a community identity; not just the number of residents.

Scott Cubbler asked if an analysis has been done to assess the returns gained from investments already made in communities. Dr. Abraham indicated that little analysis has been done in this area.

Tomaro Bell thanked Dr. Abraham for making the presentation and expressed an interest in working together to make the super neighborhoods better.

Stacie Fairchild and others asked to see the ranking list of all super neighborhoods and how the criteria was processed to create the rankings.

IV. Old Business

- A. SNA Executive Elections Search Committee Report (Tomaro Bell) – The committee is comprised of Scott Cubbler, Cindy Chapman, and Jane West. The slate to be presented for election is: Juan Sorto, President; Philip Salerno, VP; Mike VanDusen, Secretary. The election will occur during the January 2021 general meeting, to be held January 11. Juan noted that the meeting will be broadcast on HTV.

V. Open Comments

Stacie Fairchild reiterated that the email address for the Super Neighborhood Alliance is snacoh@gmail.com, and the Facebook page is [Houston Super Neighborhood Alliance](#), which is updated often with community information.

Rhonda Sauter stated the Department of Neighborhoods is working to update the super neighborhood website, and make each super neighborhood appear uniformly. The department is asking each super neighborhood to provide current officer information, along with contact information.

Tomaro Bell noted that Juan Sorto participated in the trial study for the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine.

Leigh Killgore, SNC 14, expressed thanks to the alliance for their support in the effort of TIRZ 12 to annex additional land in her super neighborhood.

Tomaro Bell stated her neighborhood was opposing a sexually oriented business in her neighborhood, and asked for support for their petition of opposition.