

INTRODUCTION TO THE SUPER NEIGHBORHOOD PROGRAM

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01. Origin of Super Neighborhoods.

Super neighborhoods were introduced by Mayor Lee Brown as a cornerstone of his neighborhood oriented government aimed at problem solving on a manageable scale at the local level. The program was modeled after a similar program in Portland, Oregon, nationally recognized for a strong commitment to public engagement familiar to Mayor Brown from the early years of his career when he served as sheriff of Multnomah County, Oregon where Portland is located.

02. Why Are Super Neighborhoods Needed?

Residents typically focus attention on issues that impact narrowly defined communities, often a subdivision or home owners' association, without considering conditions in surrounding areas or the city at large. Mayor Brown created Super neighborhoods to encourage residents of adjacent areas to work together to identify, prioritize, and address needs of broadly defined communities. Super Neighborhoods were intended to form a manageable framework for civic engagement that is both efficient and economical. The Super Neighborhood program's existence is codified in Chapter 33, Article VIII of the Houston City Code.

03. Map of Super Neighborhoods.

The Planning Director divided the city into a network of 88 super neighborhoods, each of which groups together contiguous communities that share common physical characteristics typically bounded by a physical feature such as a bayou or thoroughfare.

04. What is a Super Neighborhood Council?

Each Super neighborhood operates via a council or SNC, an organization of stakeholders such as civic clubs, HOAs, tenant associations, chambers of commerce, non-profits, educational and faith-based institutions. Super neighborhood councils serve as forums for stakeholders to interact with elected and other officials, discuss issues, develop improvement plans, build consensus and prioritize needs. **SNCs are NOT super civic clubs.** They are organizations of organizations, and individual residents' participation in civic clubs, tenant associations, and HOAs is essential to the success of super neighborhoods.

05. Are there Guidelines for Forming a SNC?

The city has created guidelines and a four-step process for organizing and forming a SNC following submission of an application to the Mayor's Citizen's Assistance Office.

The First Step to forming an SNC is to identify and elicit participation from stakeholders. Stakeholders include groups like civic clubs, HOAs, tenant associations, non-profits, and community development corporations. Other neighborhood entities such as businesses, schools, churches, and hospitals are encouraged to participate in SNCs through umbrella organizations and coalitions rather than as single entities. Where there are none, one can be formed and a representative elected to serve on the SNC. This will encourage enhanced cooperation and collaboration between similar groups. To be recognized as an SNC, the organizers must demonstrate that identified stakeholders were given ample opportunity to participate and that no interested stakeholder was denied participation.

The Second step to forming an SNC is to agree on an organizational framework. For example, the SNC may choose simply to adopt Articles of Association. As others join, they too would agree to the Articles of Association. A more structured approach would be to agree to file formal Articles of Incorporation to create non-profit corporation and to seek non-profit status.

The third step is to formulate and adopt bylaws. Bylaws should address the following issues: (1) the right of any stakeholders within the super neighborhood to be represented, either through new or existing organizations; (2) the manner in which council seats and voting authority is assigned (for example, each stakeholder organization may hold a seat on the SNC); (3) the manner in which SNC meetings will be conducted; (4) the method by which residents will participate in council activities and be informed of decisions; (5) the method for assuring that all council activity is conducted in open meetings where all residents may observe discussions and participate under defined circumstances; (6) a declaration assuring that participation is not limited by the imposition of fees either by the council or by the participating organizations; (7) a prohibition against exclusion of any individual or organization based on race, creed, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or national origin.

06. Setting Goals.

The fourth and final step is to develop a Super Neighborhood Action Program or SNAP for submission to the city and official recognition. SNCs create a broad-based neighborhood forum where residents and stakeholders meet to discuss issues affecting their community and develop action plans to address them. All SNCs aim to facilitate safe, healthy, complete communities that offer residents ready access to housing, goods, and services need to ensure a good quality of life. Actions identified in the SNAP can be implemented through various means, including via established city programs such as Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).

07. Formal Recognition at City Council.

The City Code ties the SN program to the Planning Department, since 2011 when the Department of Neighborhoods (DON) was created, the Mayor's Assistance Office has tasked staff members to support the SN Program. Once the four steps are completed and the application for accepted by the city, a recognition ceremony occurs at City Council.

08. Active SNCs and SNAPs Create Value.

Active SNCs with SNAPs create value by (1) Identifying needed improvements; (2) Educating, informing, and providing institutional memory; (3) Articulating shared visions for future development; (4) Helping to prioritize public investment; (5) Facilitating completion of long term projects; (6) Encouraging consensus to ease public decision-making.

09. Super Neighborhood Alliance.

Each recognized SNC is authorized to participate in the Super Neighborhood Alliance ("SNA"). Sec. 33-322 of the City Code states that "the alliance is an advisory board to the mayor and city government on community matters and its purpose is to provide a mechanism for bringing together the voices of the individual super neighborhood councils." The City Code also provides that the SNA shall present a written annual report, and shall advise and make recommendations to the mayor and city council on the priorities for neighborhood projects from SNAPS.

10. SNA Priority Issues.

Issues on which the SNA has either offered advice or shared information in recent years include: Mobility (participating on the Walkable Places Advisory Committee, the Houston Complete Streets Coalition; and submitting comments to proposed amendments to Chapters 33 and 42 of the City Code to facilitate revision and implementation of Houston's Master Bicycle Plan), **flooding and drainage** (submitting comments to amendments to Chapter 19 of the City Code governing flood plain management, participating in the city's Redevelopment and Drainage Task Force, and passing a Resolution for Mitigation of Flooding), **infrastructure** (proposing revisions to the Infrastructure Design Manual aimed at improving storm water management), **crime, homelessness** (participating in passage of amendments to Chapter 21 of the City Code aimed at addressing encampments and aggressive panhandling), **housing** (participating on the Complete Communities Steering Committee), **beautification, historic preservation, creation of quiet zones, and nuisance abatement.**

11. Meeting with City Officials.

The SNA facilitates opportunities for members of all SNCS to interact with the mayor, city council members, and department heads to advance priority issues identified by the SNA as well as by individual SNCs.

12. Questions.