



October 21, 2009

South Seattle Crime Prevention Council
Attention: Patricia Paschal
SSCPC Executive Committee
Seattle, WA

Dear Ms. Paschal:

Thank you for contacting me regarding an update to the ten recommendations made by the City Auditor in the June, 2009 report. I agree with many of the Auditor's recommendations and understand why the SSCPC is interested in an update. Following are things that we have been actively working on towards improvements, and yet, we acknowledge there are many other improvements that can be made. All of us at the Department of Neighborhoods (DON) look forward to working with City Council and the Executive in continuing to strengthen neighborhood engagement.

In response to the recommendations which state specific changes should be made to clarify roles and governance (Recommendations 1,2 3, 6, and 7) DON would like to work collaboratively with the District Councils, the CNC, the City Council, and the Mayor's Office to develop any changes versus us mandating changes. Our desire is to work with all of these groups in designing and implementing changes to the roles, structure and governance. We agree that the clarification of roles and responsibilities as well as use of the terms "sponsorship" versus "support" is necessary for any standardization across Councils and the sustainability of District Councils.

DON believes the District Councils and the CNC to be key groups of the many constituencies in neighborhoods who give voice to the strengths, needs and desires of daily life in Seattle neighborhoods. We believe it is important for the City to ensure accessibility for all individuals and groups to represent themselves or specific constituencies. As you mention in your email, the approach taken to update the three neighborhood plans allowed new, different and diverse voices to be heard. We would like to continue using approaches which support the kind of access provided through the Neighborhood Plan Update model and not rely on one group to represent the many views of a neighborhood.

Please consider the following an update to the audit; listed are specific actions in place prior to or developed after the audit:

Recommendation #4 - Require that standards are met if district council and City Neighborhood Council responsibilities include rating and ranking City grants.

- DON ensures diversity by appointing members to the Capital Review Committee and the Neighborhood Matching Fund (NMF) Citywide Review Team (CRT).



- NMF staff and Neighborhood District Coordinators have been encouraging more applications from diverse community groups to increase equity of resources allocated to community-building projects.

Recommendation #5 – Avoid characterizing the district councils and City Neighborhood Council as representative bodies

- Through the Neighborhood Leadership Training funds and NPU outreach, DON has supported the identification of individuals from historically under-represented communities who are able to facilitate access to new, different and diverse voices. These “new” voices representing diverse communities are serving their communities in many roles, some of which are on Board, Commissions or Advisory bodies. Some have moved on to provide broader resource and information access for their communities with NMF support, like the individual that developed a resource guide for Muslim residents that is being widely used. Still others are organizing new groups in their communities to address localized and specific issues, such as groups who have provided emergency preparedness education and organizing.

Recommendation #8 – The City should explore ways to help district councils and the City Neighborhood Council reduce and/or manage conflict at meetings.

- DON has been offering facilitation resources for Councils in conflict. These include offers to fund consultants to a) assist in facilitating difficult discussion items, and b) consulting to support District Councils in developing their own capacity to facilitate difficult discussions. Only one District Council accepted these resources in the hiring of a consultant. Currently we are offering a consultant to work with District Councils to identify their unique organizational development needs and support in meeting those needs. Only a few have accepted.
- NDCs have been trained in mediation by the Dispute Resolution Center; however, with NDCs roles differing between Councils according to the desires of those Councils, all may not fully utilize their training.

Recommendation #9 – The City should clarify the level of staff support it will provide to district councils, the City Neighborhood Council, and other groups.

- NDCs are required to develop annual work plans with some consistency across districts. As 2010 work plans are being developed, NDCs are working to develop more consistency across districts, ensuring a standard of expectations across the City. Once the standard expectations are identified and confirmed, training will be required to ensure employees have the capacity to meet the expectation and operate at or above the standard.
- The Department of Information Technology is working to include more web hosting resources to community groups and is working with DON to include District Councils.
- DON, through the NDCs, updates the community-wide mailing/distribution list quarterly.

Recommendation #10 – The Department of Neighborhoods should improve its compliance with the State’s document retention laws by retaining district council documents that come into its possession.

- DON began working to update its retention schedule as of the fourth quarter of 2008. The clarification of the terms “sponsor” or “support” as it relates to District Council documents will allow DON to move forward in fully clarifying our role and updating our records. We look forward to working with District Councils, the CNC, City Council and the Executive in better defining the City’s roles in retaining District Council records.

Again, and in summary, DON is very interested in working to define, clarify, or change the current structure, roles, and governance relationship of the District Council system to the City. The participation and support by all groups listed in the body of this letter will be necessary to assist communities in making this form of civic engagement fulfilling, effective and successful into the future.

Sincerely,



Stella Chao
Director

cc: Seattle City Council members

Bruce Harrell
Jeanne Godden
Richard Conlin
Sally Clark
Tom Rasmussen

Jan Drago
Nick Licata
Richard McIver
Tim Burgess

SSCPC Executive Committee

Mariana Quarnstrom
Angie Tomisser
Bridgette Maryman
Dan Fink
Doug Cargill
Grover Haynes

Jenna Walden
Pat Murakami
Ray Akers
Susan Pichereau
Yalonda Gill Masundire

Mayoral Candidates

Joe Mallahan
Mike McGinn