

## **45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary History of the Salem Neighborhood Association Program 1972 - 2017**

Salem was the first city in Oregon to organize a Neighborhood Association Program, and among the first nationally. Over the last 45 years Salem has provided services to neighborhoods in keeping with our ongoing philosophy that "People who are affected by decisions of government deserve to be included in the decision-making process."

In the 1960s under the Johnson Administration a mandate was devised that aimed to increase citizen participation in local politics. In the 1970s, the State of Oregon started working on Statewide Planning Goals that included Citizen Involvement (Goal 1 of the Oregon Statewide Planning Goals & Guidelines.)

In July of 1971 the Neighborhood Planning Program was initiated and Northgate and Faye Wright were selected as pilot neighborhoods. Staff began meeting with neighbors and organized into "neighborhood planning organizations." On February 14, 1972 The City Council adopted the Neighborhood Planning Program Guideline Policy No. 1. Northgate Neighborhood Association in North Salem was recognized by the City Council on February 28, 1972 and the Faye Wright Neighborhood Association in South Salem was recognized by the City Council on April 24, 1972.

Since that time, there has been tremendous growth in citizen participation in civic affairs in Salem and in the number of City-recognized Neighborhoods Associations. In 1973, four more Neighborhood Associations were recognized, followed by one in 1974, two in 1975, five in 1976, one in 1979, two in 1980 that merged in 2013, one in 1986 and one in 1990. Currently, 18 neighborhood groups are officially recognized by the City of Salem. While the first neighborhood planning organizations were concerned mainly with land use issues, their present day counterparts, the "Neighborhood Associations," provide recommendations to advisory boards, commissions, and the City Council on a variety of topics, such as:

1. Land Use (zone changes, variances, subdivisions, zoning ordinances, etc.)
2. Street development, traffic control and circulation, and sidewalks
3. Parks, open spaces
4. Capital improvements
5. Others areas of interest and projects

City staff and the Council routinely route proposals on these and other subject areas to affected Neighborhood Associations for their consideration before taking action on these proposals. Salem's Neighborhood Associations have made it possible for local residents to have a greater influence over issues, programs and projects that affect their areas.

The purpose of neighborhood associations is not to create unnecessary barriers or hurdles for those proposing projects, but to be a way to include people in decision-making processes in order to reach a more inclusive and balanced decision. A neighborhood association provides a local forum in which residents deliberate on the issues which are important to them, and it provides a recognized vehicle for communicating their views to the City.

In 1977, Chapter 64 of the Salem Revised Code (SRC) – Neighborhood Program was approved by the City Council and it contains a section which allows for official recognition of Neighborhood Associations by the City. According to this code, the purpose of a Neighborhood Association is to “involve citizens in local government planning and decision-making as it affects the development of their neighborhood.” SRC Chapter 64 further states that the purpose is “to provide an effective mechanism whereby the citizens of the city sharing common neighborhood identity, goals, and concerns, may form organizations and become officially recognized as advisory bodies to the Council and to all boards and commissions engaged in community planning and development; and to provide a mechanism for citizens, through their neighborhood organization, to provide input to Council on livability and quality of life issues affecting their neighborhood.”

The most complete description of the purpose of each neighborhood association is found in their individual bylaws.

As noted in the introduction, City staff and Council routinely route proposals to affected Neighborhood Associations for citizen input. Salem Neighborhood Association participants serve as volunteers on committees, boards, commissions, task forces, and some have even gone on to serve as City Councilor, Mayor and/or State Legislator.

Salem's 18 Neighborhood Associations educate neighbors, formulate input on projects and issues, host candidate forums, and hold conversations with officials. Their door-to-door introductions and special events planned by the Neighborhood Associations have helped build community and solicit a broad range of neighborhood input.

Neighborhood Associations have created parks, bioswales, and community gardens; collaborated to provide sidewalk linkage; cleaned creeks and streets; beautified schools and properties in need; initiated projects that grew into Urban Renewal Areas and projects that have grown to be part of other City departments or organizations (Fall Leaf Haul, Neighborhood Watch, Neighbor-to-Neighbor, etc.), sewer line from South Salem to East Salem; and raised funds for other neighborhood needs. Neighborhoods USA presented Salem neighborhood volunteers with the Neighborhood of the Year Award in 1995 for the Buchner House restoration project in the NEN area (Northeast Neighbors) and Salem was twice named an All-American City; in 1982-83 due in part to the involvement of neighborhood volunteers in City projects including the Sunnyslope Neighborhood Association planting of the Croisan Scenic Way median and ELNA's work on Royal Oaks Park.

Over the past 45 years, Neighborhood Association volunteers have consistently devoted their time to Salem, and City staff support their efforts through the Neighborhood Association Program.

Many of the Neighborhood Association projects are now identified on a large map.

Compiled by Annie Battée, Neighborhood Services Counselor