

## **N.B.T. Recommendation to Neighborhood Groups on a Community Engagement Concept to present to City leadership.**

### **BACKGROUND**

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In 2013, the City of Riverside Community Development Department through the Neighborhood Engagement Division began the process to develop neighborhood visions for the 26 identified neighborhood areas in the City. This was originally labelled “26 in 26” and soon developed into the “Our Riverside, Our Neighborhoods” initiative.

The first action developed was the creation of the “Neighbor Fest” outreach events to five (5) areas of the City to introduce the process of community driven engagement between local neighborhoods and city government using the principles of A.B.C.D. (Asset Based Community Development).

This process brought together a number of neighborhood advocates not just for the Neighbor Fest events, but to meet, review, study, and share what was going on in their areas in the City. This group is an advocate for the process of becoming educated on the issues, communication and connecting neighborhood and community leaders, and then advocating for meaningful change on issues impacting our neighborhoods

This group is informally called NBT (**N**eighborhood **B**rain **T**rust / **N**o **B**ig **T**hing).

### **ACTION**

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Several Downtown neighbors began a study of local traffic / mobility issues as a result of the current Community Outreach process by the City on several transportation projects: PPZ (Preferred Parking Zones) around Mt Rubidoux, Brockton Avenue “re-striping”, Active Transportation Projects (ATP) grants, and Redwood and Pine Traffic Circles. This group included members of NBT. They brought these concerns to one of the NBT meetings. Community outreach was identified as a process that needed to be addressed not just on transportation issues, but on all projects and policies that affect our neighborhoods.

A small group took on the task to study this issue and to come back to the group with their findings and a recommendation

## **FINDINGS**

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NBT could not find a policy, procedure, or process that was uniform in City Planning for community outreach. It is primarily a box to be checked off. The exception is where funding and legal requirements have a public notice condition for outreach to a specified geographic area to land owners, residents and business owners.

We found the City's outreach was primarily to groups and organizations who were favorable to an item by staff. Communication and outreach to others who may have a different viewpoint were minimal at best.

It appears there is a rush for approval by local groups, due to the fact that outreach is held at the end of the process vs from the beginning and throughout a project's planning phase.

We believe staff is working with the best intention to act on improving City services, but there appears to be a culture of "we are the professionals" and that community engagement may be an impediment to taking action. Recent community meetings held on utilization of former redevelopment properties in the City is an encouraging sign that the City is moving towards a more inclusive and timely outreach.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

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NBT members believe that government needs to be transparent, accountable, responsive, and inclusive. We also believe that this is the direction where our current City Manager is leading his team at City Hall.

We are equally committed to ensure that the process of engagement maintains and follows a respectful and civil dialogue between our elected officials, city staff and the public. This is a responsibility we all share in this process.

It is in this spirit that the proposed Community Outreach Concept was developed by NBT. There are no specific steps yet, but it contains the aspirational language we need to have to start the process.

NBT members at the August 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting voted to take this Concept paper back to their respective neighborhood groups, for their review and approval in their September or October meetings.

NBT members will also be reaching out to other groups for their feedback and approval. This will also be taken to our representatives with the Neighborhood Engagement Division for their input.

Our goal is go from this community engagement concept to a best practice with procedures that is put in place in all City departments. We look forward to a policy that informs, educates and works with the community to improve neighborhood quality of life in an open, transparent, and inclusive process.