

District Councils In St. Paul

September 2004

St. Paul Issues Forum

<http://www.e-democracy.org/stpaul/>

=====

This is a rough transcript of the district council discussion that took place in the St. Paul Issues Forum in September of 2002. Much work remains to be done in polishing and possibly editing this transcript. Some posts may be out of order or incomplete.

This is the most up to date version as of 4/15/04

=====

Tim Erickson
tim@politalk.com
Hamline / Midway Neighborhood

The adventure that I would like to share with this group, has to do with an impromptu breakfast that I had in Los Angeles about two weeks ago with a group of community activists who were very eager to hear about Neighborhood Councils in St. Paul. One of their members, Jon Shaughnessy, subscribed to this group looking for information about what's happening in St. Paul and may jump in and ask some questions himself.

According to my new friends in Los Angeles, St. Paul is kind of a national model for neighborhood councils. Is that a surprise to anyone?

They were very interested in the details about how our system works, how successful it is, how our neighborhood councils communicate with one another, and how a list like this might facilitate inter-neighborhood communication and political activity.

Given that I ain't an expert on this, despite being a 30+ year resident of St. Paul, my interest has been peaked and I'm going to be asking some questions and doing a little research. I know some of the superficial basics, but my knowledge is very shallow.

I'll share what I find out with this list, but hope that much of the information will come to me via this list.

I think that this is a pretty important topic and of interest to most of the members of this list.

CITY HISTORIANS: Lets start with the basics, what are the roots of our neighborhood council system? Did they arise out of any sort of crisis?

In Los Angeles, they were a response to the Riots following the Rodney King incident.

I look forward to your responses, private and public!

Erik Hare hare@tcfreenet.org <http://tcfreenet.org/people/hare>
Irvine Park, West End, Saint Paul, Minnesota, USA, North America, Earth

In the begining, Saint Paul was without form. And God said, "Let there be WSCO!" And there was WSCO. And God saw that they were kind of a pain in the backside.

No, seriously, the first Councils were West Side Citizen's Organization, started by Jim Scheibel and a bunch of others, the Fort Road Federation, and the Merriam Park one (whose name changed?). People were tired of getting stupid things like Urban Removal crammed down their throats, and in Merriam Park there were I-94 effects and on W7th there were I-35E effects.

Along the way, Bob Sylvester wisely decided to try to co-opt these organizations, and created the District Council system. They were "integrated" into the city, although in many cases with slightly different boundaries. The ones where there was already an active organization were instead co-opted by the locals.

There is a lot more, but suffice it to say that it is NOT government, and that's the key to success. The less quasigovernment an organization is, the more effective it is.

But understanding the history explains a lot of things, such as why it was necessary for the "Old Boyz" to relentlessly slander Scheibel and drive him out, why some Councils act the way they do, and of course Bob Sylvester's big switch (to the Republican Party).

I await the old-timers to give the details.

Jon Shaughnessy for NCM (Neighborhood Councils Movement)
310/477-7566

Dear St. Paul,

As per an invitation from Tim Erickson to do so, I would like to ask about what is happening in St. Paul, the history of your councils, and/or how effective that they are. I hope I am being perfectly on topic.

I also expect to get a different answer from each person who answers these overly broad questions, as well as no answer at all from anyone in St. Paul who can not afford both a computer and an e-mail account (in addition to food and shelter for his or her family).

My interest has many motives, chief among them a 10/1/02 deadline to produce 100,000 "NEW-LA" (Neighborhood Empowerment Wisdom - Los Angeles) magazines so we can begin to cross the "digital divide" that bedevils any sincere attempt to bring communities and cities together.

Sherman Eagles
St. Anthony Park

Well, I'll take a crack at my version of history. I was there, but of course memory is selective, we all see things through our own personal political bias, and this was 27 years ago. I suspect a few others on this list can help correct me and fill in holes.

I think the district councils were born out of two related situations - the fear that cities were quickly dying, and the opportunity to get money to try to address that fear.

You have to remember the context of those years. There was a period in the early 70s when the future was pretty dark. Assassinations, bombings, riots, Watergate - the mood was pretty dismal. Unlike the current situation, government was not cutting, at all levels it was looking for how to intervene to get things under control.

Urban renewal in the 1950s and 60s had left large vacant tracts, or large poorly built housing projects that served to concentrate the poor and isolate them from the remaining parts of cities that still contained the more affluent. And we had also destroyed large parts of poorer neighborhoods by running freeways through

them. In the mid 60s, the federal government tried to address some of the problems of urban renewal by creating a program called the Neighborhood Development Program (NDP). This program required that cities identify areas for renewal (project areas) and create plans with input from the people living in the area. Federal funding required this "citizen participation" and there were federal dollars available to pay for it. Now this wasn't perfect, but it did give people living in the area a reasonable chance to influence what was done, and to have their own organizations (called Project Area Committees or PACs). There was a lot of competition for these funds, nothing unusual there, and St. Paul was very effective in getting them. In fact St. Paul got more money than Minneapolis and most other urban areas except for the largest handful.

Then we get to the 70s, cities have repeatedly erupted in violence, and there are continuing demands for the government to do something, so the federal government decides to pass this hot potato back to the locals by replacing the NDP program with Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). Basically the feds said "here's some money, use it to make things better." There was still some minimal requirements for citizen participation, but since control was in the hands of local elected officials, the CP requirements were minimal. But St. Paul officials had been looking for a way to get neighborhoods better organized for some time - there were numerous reports and "blue ribbon" studies that had been done. The reason they wanted this organization - I believe (after all this is all just my opinion of things) - was to try to stop or at least slow down the flight of the middle class to the suburbs. If people felt they had some influence over what was happening in their neighborhood, then the city may be going to hell but they didn't need to move out just yet. So St. Paul saw an opportunity to use some of the federal CDBG money to help create organizations that might be helpful in keeping the middle class in the city. And since the amount of the CDBG grants was based on what the cities were getting from the NDP program, St. Paul was getting a lot more than most cities (my memory is that St. Paul was 4th in total dollars after New York, Chicago and LA - I'm a little fuzzy about this - but St. Paul was way up there). So the city put together a plan for establishing funded neighborhood organizations all across the city.

This was not uniformly applauded. There were a lot of people working in neighborhoods that felt that taking any government money was a terrible idea. But the old PAC neighborhoods were well organized and still had funding (and 2 or 3 staff people each) and saw this as a way to survive after the end of the NDP program and their dedicated dollars (this one I'm sure of - I was a staff person for one of them at the time). I don't know who came up with the details of how to get this started - It may have been Bob Sylvester, but there were others who are just as likely - but the idea was brilliant. Put out a call for anyone interested to come and help develop a plan for a city-wide network of citizen participation organizations. Tap the highest visibility person of color in St Paul to lead it (Bill Wilson, who was then state Human Rights Director). And have the results delivered to the city council for action so they can be "adjusted" if they are too far out of line. And it worked. People came, they divided into smaller groups to work on different parts of the proposal, and met 2 or 3 times a week for what seemed like months to come up with something that was largely adopted by the city council. I chaired the group that worked on the number of areas and boundaries. We ended up proposing 15 districts with widely varying population. A few boundaries were changed and of course downtown really didn't want to be together with the West Side and Summit Hill didn't really want to be with Summit-University and they had the political clout to get their own districts, but in all the results were generally what we proposed. The PAC areas were happy and were the first ones to get city recognition and funding. This caused a little discontent when the larger, unorganized neighborhoods finally got around to getting organized - it seems there wasn't too much money left for them. But that story can wait - this email is way too long already.

????

when the larger, unorganized neighborhoods finally got around to getting organized - it seems there wasn't too much money left for them. But that story can wait - this email is way too long already.

Sherman has hit the nail on the head and I will follow up on this in an e-mail tomorrow when I have all of

the numbers in front of me. But, there is still a huge disparity in the funding per-person between the District Councils. The system for funding hasn't change much in 27 years (a minor tweak in 1990) and currently the highest funded district gets \$6.50 a person and the lowest \$1.51. The highest funded districts are the most affluent with the fewest minorities and the lowest are some of the poorest with the highest minority populations.

Tim Erickson
Hamline Midway
tim@politalk.com

At 1:25 AM -0400 9/6/02, chuckrepke@aol.com wrote: The system for funding hasn't change much in 27 years (a minor tweak in 1990) and currently the highest funded district gets \$6.50 a person and the lowest \$1.51. The highest funded districts are the most affluent with the fewest minorities and the lowest are some of the poorest with the highest minority populations.

This is VERY interesting and a bit disturbing. One of the things that I was unable to help my new friends in Los Angeles out with, was any information on how our district council system is funded. I simply have no idea how it works.

Can anyone share more information (including Chuck, when he gets time)?

The Hamline Midway Council (District 11) had two full time staff, when I first had contact with them in about 1993. They had a "community organizer (?)" and "office manager (?)".

They now list 3 full time staff and 2 part time staff on the mast head of their newsletter. I think that they are able to manage such a large staff (is this large?) because of grants that they have acquired on their own. Does anyone know about this?

Does the funding discrepancy that Chuck mentions include alternative sources of funding - or is this funding from the city?

--Barry Madore
Payne Phalen / East Side
District 5 Community Planning Council

>> Does the funding discrepancy that Chuck mentions include
>> alternative sources of funding - or is this funding from the city?

I believe that Chuck is referring to the money allocated by the city to each Planning Council. But, the success of any particular Council is really tied to its ability to raise additional funds. City funding is quite minimal. Most of the funding Councils' receive is raised through local foundations and is project related (diversity issue organizing, youth programs, etc.). Fundraising, in fact, is the number one priority and activity for most Council executive directors.

Staffing is pretty minimal at most Councils. District 5, for which I have the most information currently, employs an executive director (fundraising, publicrelations, administrator), a community organizer (block club organizing, community organizing), and a youth director (youth organizing and programs). This is pretty typical.

The volunteer boards of the councils need to be quite active. Since the Councils have the responsibility (as part of their agreements with the city) of being the liaison between the City Council and the neighborhood citizens in terms of zoning and other planning issues, the Boards typically have committees to do neighborhood hearings and provide recommendations to the City Council. District 5 has a CPED

(Community Planning and Economic Development, I think) Committee which handles zoning and planning issues; and NAC (Neighborhood Action Committee) which handles problem properties, crime prevention, and other block-club-like issues.

District 7 when I lived there and was active in their Council had almost the exact same committee, board, and staffing structure.

Where some Councils diverge in activity level is in districts where there are fewer other active community organizations. In Frogtown District 7 for instance, there was a block club organizing group (Thomas Dale Block Clubs), an economic development organization (Frogtown Action Alliance), and a housing development organization (Greater Frogtown CDC). So, the district council did not have the responsibility or need (for the most part) to be the leader in dealing with the issues these organizations handled. District 5 has the ESNDC (Eastside Neighborhood Development Corporation) which works on housing and economic development issues, and other private social service organizations. In other neighborhoods, the district council is the main and only active community organization and has to try to fill a wide variety of functions.

And again, this is where the financial situation becomes key. With private philanthropy being the main source of funding, district councils must be very flexible and creative in order to get the funding they need (I won't get into charitable gambling operations for fear of losing any objectivity I may have). Very often (for better or for worse) councils must create programs that fit the funding trends rather than the other way around. The same is true for all nonprofit organizations to some degree. They must also be very aware of what other organizations are doing and how they are funded. Funders often (intentionally or not) play organizations against each other (i.e. "We are denying you your request because we gave to Y organization this year to do the same thing..."). Collaborations become vital to avoid this nickel and diming but are difficult as turf problems emerge and politics can get nasty.

So, I've rambled on about funding and ignored much of what fuels many community organizations: neighborhood politics, board in-fighting (or cohesion), lack of diversity on boards in diverse neighborhoods, staff burnout, lack of citizen support and buy-in, etc. I guess we can tackle that next along with the success stories...

Bill Connors
Former President
Macalester-Groveland Community Council

You need to look at the funding on a program by program basis. One of the planning districts in St. Paul is divided among three boards, and each of these three boards receives the same amount of city crime prevention money as a whole district elsewhere, so the district with the three boards receives tripple the funding.

The Macalester-Groveland Community Council has three full-time staff people. I think if the council's funding were limited to that which it receives from the city (by the way, the community councils are private, not-for-profit corporations that receive payments from the city for performing contract services and pay rent to the city if they lease space in a rec center; they are not part of city government), we would only have 1.5 FTE staff. The other funding for our staff comes from our contract with a waste hauler to provide curb-side recycling in the neighborhood and possibly from grants for organizations like Macalester College's High Winds Fund. But most of the grants sharply limit the amount that can be spent on staff, or completely prohibit using it for staff. The community councils could implement a lot more programs with grants from foundations if the city would increase funding for staff to administer the programs.

Chuck Repke
Executive Director

District 2 Community council

As Sherman explained when the district council was established the city recognized the community organizations functioning in the neighborhoods at the time. Most of the established organizations existed in small easily defined communities. In the North End and East Side where there was less active communities they were arbitrarily divided into 5 large district councils.

Since 1990 all districts have received a minimum allocation of \$30,000 plus additional funding based on poverty and population of the district. In 1990 that was \$510,000 given out equally and \$100,000 based on population and poverty. Plus a little extra to those districts who were getting more than \$30,000 before the formula and didn't get any population bonus (hold harmless). Since then there was a small percentage increase in 1994 and 2001. Current funding ranges from \$36,061 to \$48,260.

Now the fairness question. There are 31,519 people living in Payne/Phalen - district 5; there are 6,076 people living in Saint Anthony Park - district 12. District 5 is 500% larger than district 12 and gets only 20% more funding. The City allocates \$1.53 for every resident in district 5 for citizen participation but allocates \$6.44 for each resident in district 12! If district 5 were given the same level of funding as district 12 gets they would have gotten a grant of \$202,082.39!

The unfairness of the funding formula would be understandable if the higher level of funding were based on some social issue like poverty (harder to get active) or diversity (need for translators) but there are 14,656 people of color living in district 5 higher than any other district in the city and there are only 1,094 people of color in district 12 (one of the lowest). The figures for poverty are just as much out of wack at last count district 5 had 11,179 people below 200% of poverty the highest in the city.

I am sure you will here rebuttals that the "established neighborhoods" deserve to have at least a minimum of \$30,000 to keep an office open. But, there is something wrong with a system that rewards the highest income neighborhoods and punishes the poorest.

FYI - District 5 is once again looking for a new C.O. Any one looking for a challenging job give them a call.

Dave Thune

(helped Karen Christopherson write the citizen participation guidelines was on the PAC as well as the Federation)

All of the recently posted district council histories are generally accurate, but here are a few other facts...

Possibly even a little before the PACs were created to guide urban renewal in economically depressed neighborhoods, Ramsey Action Programs (RAP) began underwriting the assistance of nationally known grassroots organizing groups to bring real, trained organizers into neighborhoods. In the 1970's West 7th, it was an affiliation with Tom Gaudette - a retired Whirlpool executive - who had been recruited and trained by Saul Alinsky in Chicago.

The efforts paid off and a strong organization - the West Seventh Street Federation was born. The philosophy was to organize around issues to not only solve the issue, but to build community leadership. Roberts Rules, committee structures and board development seminars were rarely discussed. In fact all of our board members were technically vice-presidents - it was so much more impressive! The group was strong and soon was often at odds with the newly formed Project Area Committees (PACs) who were staffed and generally controlled by the city and HRA bureaucracy, often to rubberstamp Urban Renewal demolition programs.

It was several years later that the city (Larry Cohen and Bob Sylvester mainly) determined to create a system of "recognized district planning councils" as "citizen participation".

Some other organizations around the city, but especially the Federation balked at becoming a "recognized" district council, even though with the recognition came a small amount of funding.

After much wrangling over whether the PAC or the Federation should be "recognized", the Federation prevailed at a very large community meeting and the neighborhood opted for no district council and no city money. A later compromise set up a "Communications Center", not as a council, but a neighborhood communications vehicle to receive city funding. Sandy Pappas (now our state senator) shared its first staff position! Several more years later, the Federation agreed to become a recognized district council, but has always been wary of being coopted or coerced by the city with a threat of pulling the \$ if they weren't good little neighbors.

Chuck is right about the funding formula for different councils, however the first pass set up community organizations within pre-existing and self described neighborhoods. Every neighborhood got enough for appx one organizer and some expenses. Since then each neighborhood has either progressed and expanded and or got money from other sources, or simply stayed in a rut. Also, each neighborhood has different needs - some need housing development, others just need to watch over land use decisions. There is going to be no formula that fits all needs - sorry chuck, but just population, or just income won't give a true picture of needs... not that i don't think you guys on the eastside need more money... :-). Sounds like a good discussion to have between all the district councils - why let politicians make choices for you? Organize 'em!

That's all for now...

Chuck Repke
Executive Director
District 2 Community Council

Pasted is the letter that I delivered today to the City Council and Mayor.
There are three XI attachments.

September 6, 2002

City Council President Bostrom
320B City Hall
15 West Kellogg Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Dear Council President Bostrom
And Councilmembers

I am requesting that the District Council funding formula be discussed by the Council during this years budget deliberations. The Mayor has proposed to maintain current levels of funding for the District Councils but does not address in the budget what that means for each District Council. It is my opinion that the funding formula for District Council is unfair and under-funds some of the poorest and most diverse districts in the City.

History

When the District Council system was established, the City recognized the community organizations functioning in the neighborhoods at the time and formalized its relationships with them. Most of the established community organizations existed in small easily defined communities. On the East Side and North End, the communities had been less organized and were arbitrarily divided into only five large district councils.

Purpose

The value of the district council system to the City and the title of the grant that funds the system is "Citizen Participation", each of the district councils contract with the City to provide those services to the City. The contract requires that there is a scope of work that details what services will be performed and how they will be accomplished. Most of the contracts are pretty similar. They detail types of neighborhood meetings that occur or community functions that will more involve neighborhood residents.

Funding

Since 1990 all district councils have received a minimum allocation of \$30,000 plus additional funding based on the population and poverty of the district. For fiscal year 1990, \$617,381 was given out in contracts to the district councils, of this \$510,000 was given out equally to the districts. \$100,000 was divided based on the population and poverty of the districts and the rest was given to "hold harmless" those districts who had been receiving more than \$30,000 a year and did not reach their prior year funding after the population and poverty figures were added. In 1994, the process was done again using the new census data. Once again, the smaller districts were "held harmless" then \$510,000 was given out equally and \$142,337 was divided based on population and poverty and \$16,380 was used to "hold harmless" the small district councils. Since then all districts received a 3% increase in 2001. Citizen Participation funding for the district councils ranges from \$36,061 to \$48,260.

These figures, and all others, do not include monies allocated for crime prevention activities. The district council often, but not always runs crime prevention grants. In some district council areas there are more than one organization that has a crime prevention grant. We will assume that these grants are designed to deal with crime in specific areas and not a part of what is considered "Citizen Participation," activities since the funding is separate.

Issue

The question is; is it fair to continue to distribute the money relatively equally to communities that are nowhere equal in population?

For example, there are 31,519 people living in District 5, Payne/Phalen and 6,076 people living in District 12, St Anthony Park. District 5 is 500% larger than District 12 and receives only 20% more funding. The City allocates \$1.53 for each resident in District 5 for "Citizen Participation" but allocates \$6.44 for each resident of District 12. If District 5 had been funded at the same level per person that District 12 is they would have received a grant of \$202,982.36. One might view this level of funding as a little steep.

The unfairness of this inequity between district councils would be understandable if there were some underlying social issues that lead to the higher funding levels for the smaller district councils. Since the purpose of the grant is to encourage "Citizen Participation," one could understand increased funding for areas of high poverty or diversity (language barriers etc). In fact the reverse is true. There are 14,656 people of color in District 5, higher than any other district in the City. There are 1,094 people of color in District 12. The poverty figures (using 1990 data, 2000 isn't available) are much the same. District 5 had the highest number of people at 200% of poverty 11,179, while District 12 had one of the lowest.

Argument

Pro - Funding equity

The district council system has been in existence for twenty-five years and funding has never been equitable. One could argue that the neighborhood of Hazel Park in District 2 or South Como in District 6 could look radically different today had either one of them had the same \$600,000 of funding that St. Anthony Park has enjoyed over the last twenty years. All three of these neighborhoods are roughly the same size yet only St Anthony Park receives its own allocation.

Today, only 30% of the district council funding is distributed based on the population or poverty level of the contracting district council. The purpose of the funding is "Citizen Participation." That goal implies that the City has a desire to encourage all citizens to participate in their government and that monies are used to communicate with the citizens. Those districts that are larger have increased costs in the basic functions of communications. It costs more to mail information to 30,000 people than it does to 6,000 people. It is reasonable for the City to base its contract on the number of citizens that the district council is attempting to have participate. This would be the most equitable process and a pure contract for service. At current levels, that would entail a contract for service of \$2.51 for each resident in the area serviced by the contract.

Understanding that all things are not equal in the real world, a truly fair system of funding might be weighted by the poverty levels or diversity of a neighborhood. It is true that low-income individuals tend to be less involved in community affairs and may need additional outreach efforts. It is also true that diverse communities frequently require the need of translators. Considering those factors a fair system could be one where 75% of the funding was based on population and 25% of the funding was based on the poverty levels and ethnicity of the neighborhood. This would be largely equal on a per person basis and would dramatically increase the amount of funds targeted at low-income and diverse populations from the current funding formula (\$45,000 vs. \$180,000).

Anti - Funding Equity

Those who oppose the change will argue that the system has worked well to this point, so why change it. They will also argue that it is unfair to their neighborhoods to dramatically reduce their level of funding, and that by changing the funding system you are pitting one neighborhood against another. The main argument of course is that you will be totally unable to staff a community council whose funds have been reduced to \$15,000 per year. They will argue that Summit Hill Association, and the Saint Anthony Park District Council and others, have done good work and deserve to be able to continue on at the same level of funding. They are "well established" neighborhoods and should not be forced to discontinue their operations. At minimum, funds in the pool should be increased so that they could be once again, "held harmless."

Rebuttal

The system has worked well because the East Side and North End have not complained about the funding imbalance for the last twenty-five years. The East Side and North End district councils are all coalitions of several distinct neighborhoods (you will notice ten neighborhoods listed on my letterhead). They have been forced to work together based on lines that were drawn twenty-five years ago. They have been forced to receive lower funding levels because of the high base that is given to each district council and limited amount of funds distributed based on size.

If a district council could not function at a reduced funding level strong consideration should be given to merging smaller district councils together. A combined Como/St. Anthony Park District Council would still have a population smaller than six of the existing district councils. A combined Macalester-Groveland/Summit Hill district council would have a population only slightly larger than the Highland District Council.

Funding Options and Impacts

1. Funding district councils totally by population
2. Funding 75% population, 25% poverty
3. Funding 75% population, 15% poverty and 10% ethnicity

Recommendations

Funding option three (75/15/10) creates the fairest process for distributing Citizen Participation dollars. It eliminates an inequity that has existed for twenty-five years. It would substantially increase the funding for district councils in the areas of the highest minority concentration and poverty without directly increasing the City's budget.

It would possibly encourage some of the smaller district councils to merge into larger councils. The combined population of the Como, Hamline/Midway and St. Anthony Park district councils is 30,333. The population of Payne/Phalen is 31,519. This year those three districts received \$116,934 and Payne/Phalen, with the highest numbers of minorities in the City received \$48,260. Under a 75/15/10 plan those northwestern neighborhoods would receive \$69,859 (twenty thousand more that District 5 had operated under) and Payne/Phalen would receive \$84,212.21.

I know that this issue will be controversial and that Council Members will feel obliged to protect there own neighborhoods, but I urge the Council to consider the basic fairness that Citizen Participation is suppose to symbolize. Our funding formula should facilitate all citizens to participate and we should not view neighborhoods that were well organized in 1975 as more significant to the City than any other neighborhood.

Sincerely,

Chuck Repke
Executive Director
District 2 Community Council

Cc District Councils
Mayor Kelly
Bob Hammer

Joe Nathan

My recollection is that the District Council system came in under one of Latimer's early initiatives, as a way to get more people in neighborhoods involved in making important decisions.

Bobbi Megard

Nope, it was Mayor Larry Cohen with help from Bob Sylvester and Dave Hozza.

Sherman Eagles
St. Anthony Park

Since I stopped my previous recollections with the establishment of the district council system, let me continue a little bit regarding funding. I am writing this on Friday after reading a few of the responses, but won't be able to post it until Saturday, so perhaps some of this has been covered by others.

When the number of councils and their boundaries were established, there were two substantial debates. One was between using identifiable neighborhood boundaries (and so unequal size) or using political boundaries (which would have resulted in districts of equal size). The other was about how many districts there should be (the proposals ranged from 4 to about 50). Smaller neighborhoods like St. Anthony Park (which actually considered itself two neighborhoods, North St. Anthony and South St. Anthony, with quite different characteristics) which is physically separated from all other residential neighborhoods wanted their own district, while some other neighborhoods felt they would benefit by the larger numbers that came

with combining several distinct neighborhoods into a single district. And of course we could all count. We knew about how much money would be available. Having districts organized along political boundaries was thrown out after much discussion because of fear that the district councils would be controlled by politicians. Lots of little districts clearly would mean that none of them would get enough money to have staff. So over many meetings we worked to a compromise, proposing 15 districts that varied greatly in population. In St. Anthony Park's case, there was serious discussion of combining with Como Park and with Merriam Park. After a lot of debate, it was decided that neither would work well. The fact that there were a lot of people at the meetings from St. Anthony Park was clearly a factor in the outcome. Was this intentional by the St. Anthony park folks? Of course - there were many discussions of strategy. This was all about people debating vigorously what would be best for their own neighborhood.

I believe that, as is often the case, the characteristics of the district council system that provide its greatest strengths also result in its greatest weaknesses. The system that was adopted allowed each district to organize differently and to identify what the problems were that it would address. This allows each district council to be unique and to focus on its particular problems. So as each district organized, it put together a proposal for how it would organize, what it would do, and how much money it needed. The districts that already had funded organizations were able to do this quickly and were clear about what they needed. The districts that didn't have the history of funded citizen participation took longer and were less clear. The result was that they got less money. Not fair perhaps, but remember that if the city had not had the NDP areas, it would not have had the CDBG money to do city-wide citizen participation. It is also fair to note that some areas (at least one on the East Side) had turned down an opportunity to be an NDP area. The uniqueness of each council has resulted however in a failure to develop a common vision for the entire city and an unwillingness to work together, which has - in my opinion - greatly reduced the potential effectiveness of the councils.

One time when some of the councils did work together was to address the funding inequities. I don't remember the year exactly, but it was earlier than 1990, perhaps 1985 or so. The issue of unequal population and unequal funding was being raised by some districts that were feeling like they were being treated unfairly. About the same time, the city was having budget problems. City council members who supported the district councils let it be known that if there was continued fighting between councils about funding that the entire citizen participation system was at risk. It was too easy a target when money was short. A majority of the district councils got together to try to devise a way to allocate available money that would address the fairness question and would be supported by the city council. Of course, the districts getting the most money weren't too happy about the prospect of losing it. So the solution had to be to make the funding more fair without going so far that the districts losing money would fight so much that the whole thing would collapse. The biggest argument about fairness was of course the population differences. But just allocating the money by population would have meant that a few large districts would get most of the money and about half the councils would not have had enough funding for even a part-time staff. This clearly wouldn't be acceptable to a large number of districts. Another complicating factor was that some districts, and some of these were large districts, were not eligible for CDBG money. I have neglected this part so far, but basically, the city could spend CDBG money anyway it wanted so long as the areas where it was spent met certain criteria the federal government imposed, primarily related to poverty. In order to do citizen participation city-wide, the city council had added some general fund money (yes - your local property tax dollars) to the funding for the district councils. The areas that had been NDP projects were all eligible for CDBG, some of the other districts were not. This complicated how to distribute the money, especially if you tried to use population. So we talked about why we all thought we needed money, and tried to figure out how to quantify those characteristics. We had to make some compromises, there just wasn't data on some of the things we thought were important. But we ended up with a funding formula that started with a base amount that all districts would get, enough for an office and a part-time staff person, and added money based on three characteristics; population, income and housing condition. Three of the districts that had been organized since before the district council system would lose money, and the larger districts would get more. A majority of the districts supported the new formula (only one of the three that would lose money supported it - St. Anthony Park). In itself, this formula would probably not have saved the district council system, but it did give the supporters on the city council enough so that they (led by Bill Wilson, I believe) were able to add some more money to the base amount going to all councils so that the three districts losing money really didn't lose much and everyone else got more. Inequities are of course

partly dependent on where you are viewing the issue from, but I think it was generally agreed that the formula made the funding fairer than it had been. It was a good compromise, in that no one was completely satisfied. I think the formula was later adjusted, perhaps this was what Chuck remembered in 1990.

I don't know enough about what each district is now getting to judge how fair the distribution is. I think that it is more complicated than Chuck suggests, and it depends a great deal on what you think is the purpose of the district councils. I think that you need to look at the entire system, what it collectively does for involving people as full citizens, and not just at each individual district.

As others have pointed out, this is all about just the funding that comes from the city. Most, if not all, the district councils get funding from other sources. Districts from areas with the greatest need "should" be able to get more of this funding. As I said before, I believe that it is unfortunate that the unique nature and fierce independence of each district results in our competing with each other more often than we cooperate.

Bob Burrell
Prosperity Heights, District 2

(final question from longer post)

Finally, as past member of a site council, I would like to know if the Board has requested a study or made an information request regarding the effectiveness of these councils. Are parents, teachers, and community members really making tough budget, curriculum, and strategic choices for each building? Does the Board have a benchmark to evaluate, assess, and quantify site council accountability?

I hope this posting generate some meaningful discussion on school accountability

Rob Fulton,
Highland Park

Bob Burrell's questions are excellent. They are the questions that should be put to the School Board now and at election time. Some of the issues will be difficult to measure. Some of the measures could well be anecdotal.

For example, last year I was one of the co-chairs of the Highland Park Junior High School site council. We did make the tough decisions about the budget. We decided that it was more important to lose a teaching position and an administrative intern position than to eliminate the after school programming. But the real effort that I was most proud of was the way parents on the site council worked with 360 Colbourne to turn around a project to add two science labs to the building.

The story: A proposal had been included to build a two story addition to the west of the current building to add four classrooms including two science labs. The capital plan included something over \$800,000 for the project. When the preliminary costs were looked at, the two story addition was going to cost more than that allocated in the budget, thus 360 said the project couldn't go forward. Several parent members of the site council took on this issue; met with school facility folks; met with staff of the school; met with the site council and what will open later this fall is a one story addition with two new science labs and a smaller classroom for special ed along with additional storage space. An energetic site council was able to negotiate with 360 for the changes to make this project happen.

I'm sure there are lots more of these "stories" in the various site councils that would allow us to evaluate them re: parent/staff empowerment.

Rob Fulton,
Highland Park

I was involved in creating neighborhood councils in the City of Allentown in 1975-76. The requirement for cities to do this came out of the Community Development Block Grant which was part of Nixon's efforts to reduce federal control over dollars. In this case, cities were to receive one block grant of dollars to replace a variety of federal programs. Each city was responsible for setting up "citizen participation" mechanisms as to how these dollars were to be spent in their community. Allentown, like Saint Paul, decided to develop neighborhood councils that covered the entire city and to provide some funding to assist these entities in creating the participation of citizens in their neighborhoods. One of the wonderful aspects of Saint Paul is that these entities still exist and still have power in their neighborhoods. While they may vary in their strengths and abilities and in how well they "represent" their neighborhoods, they still give Saint Paul a unique flavor of local politics.

Chuck Repke
Live in west seventh
work on the East Side

>> The fact that there were a lot of people at the
>> meetings from St. Anthony Park was clearly a factor
>> in the outcome. Was this intentional by the St.
>> Anthony park folks? Of course - there were many
>> discussions of strategy. This was all about people
>> debating vigorously what would be best for their own
>> neighborhood.

Excellent point by Sherman, those neighborhoods that were well organized in 1975 and who got the notion that having a community organizer was a good thing, were able to dictate the boundaries and funding that we have operated under for 27 years. Had Hazel Park or So. Como or Lower Payne been well organized 27 years ago we might have seen a fairer distribution of resources, but as I have said 27 years ago the North End and East Side weren't well organized and regularly were out numbered on the At-Large City Council 6-1. As you recall normally the break down on the Council was 6 West of Lexington and one East.

Again, using District 2 (where I work) as an example, we are a mixture of ten named neighborhoods. Heck we are so big they can't come up with a name and have used "Greater East Side" when forced into one. There are three lakes in the District each with a neighborhood around it as large as St. Anthony Park. Had each one of those neighborhoods been organized 27 years ago, and had \$600,000 worth of funding, they might have had their own Art Fairs and we might have a different view of there livability.

But, no one is going to add a million dollars to the City budget. So Saint Anthony Park and Summit Hill, are neighborhoods and So. Como, Holmcroft, Beaver Lake, Battle Creak, Swede Hollow, Rail Road Island, Lake Phalen, Hillcrest, No Dale, Rice Street, Mounds Park and West Minni aren't neighborhoods. As the neighborhoods in District 13 saw, the City's response to Districts attempting to break into smaller neighborhood groups is to then split there allocation. They split roughly the same amount that the other two small neighborhoods get on their own.

So, my point remains, if the purpose of this CONTRACT for service, with INDEPENDENT non-profits, is to provide the same service, Citizen Participation, what is the basis for that contract being over \$6 a person in one area of the city and \$1.50 in another part of the city? Where else would a contract for service be let and there not be some explanation for a disparity in dollars? I want the seven council members to at least look at the fact that they have not reviewed this in 12 years and the last time they did, that council never aired to issue publicly.

I believe that the 31,000 people who live in Payne/Phalen should have an allocation the same as the 30,000

people who live in St. Anthony Park, Como and Hamline/Midway. And, from a need for service, who could argue that the neighborhood with the highest concentration of minorities and poverty in the City shouldn't get at least equal treatment when it come to dollars to support Citizen Participation?

Hoping for an opportunity for the council to discuss this...

Sherman Eagles
St. Anthony Park

Chuck has clearly pointed out that there is a difference in the amount of funding per resident in different district councils. What he has not done is to make the case for why the funding should be based on residential population. Why not the physical area of the district? District 12 is nearly as large as District 2, and the three districts that Chuck mentions are combined at least twice the size of District 2. Or why not the number of jobs in a district? Shouldn't there be an opportunity for businesses to have representation? One third of the members of the St. Anthony Park district council come from the business community, illustrating the fact that many of the issues that the District 12 council provides input on have to do with the commercial interests in the district. Or how about the number of government entities that the district council has to interface with? District 12 shares borders with Minneapolis, Lauderdale, Falcon Heights, the U of MN, and the State Fair. Plus it is in two different watershed districts. Projects and planning in all these other entities impact the quality of life for people who live and work in our district. We are currently trying to get a joint planning activity going between St. Paul, Minneapolis and the state regarding traffic in the University Avenue/ Hiway 280 area, where new developments in both St. Paul and Minneapolis are being planned without (in our opinion) adequate analysis of the combined overall impacts on traffic and streets.

Fairness is just not as simple as straight residential population.

Tim Erickson
Hamline Midway
tim@politalk.com

Can some folks talk a little bit about the relationship between the city and the district councils?

- 1) What (if any) are the formal links? Is there a designated staff person in the Mayors office?
- 2) What (if any) influence does city hall have on the day to day operations of district councils?
- 3) Does city hall listen to and respond to District Councils?

I assume that different folks will have different answers. Please share your thoughts. I look forward to hearing from both city hall and the district councils.

Chuck Repke
Live in West Seventh
Work on the East Side

>> Why not the physical area of the district? District
>> 12 is nearly as large as District 2, and the three
>> districts that Chuck mentions are combined at least
>> twice the size of District 2. Or why not the number
>> of jobs in a district? Shouldn't there be an
>> opportunity for businesses to have representation?

>> One third of the members of the St. Anthony Park
>> district council come from the business community,
>> illustrating the fact that many of the issues that
>> the District 12 council provides input on have to do
>> with the commercial interests in the district.

Sorry Sherm but I'd be interested in taking a map reading class with you. District 2 stretches from Johnson Parkway on the West to Mc Knight on the East and from Larpentuer on the North to Minnehaha on the South. District 5 and 6 are also huge. Sorry District 12 and 16 are have a small population and a small geographic area, what they have and what has counted is a LARGE VOTING POPULATION. White middle class neighborhoods vote and they can show up at a council meeting at a moments notice. They make phone calls and they know how to influence elected officials. They know how to participate in civic affairs and the get the most money per person to do it. The system is backward but understandable. What Mayor would propose that funds be reduced from the two areas of the city that vote the highest? What is so funny about this is that it is the dollars that are earmarked to get citizens to participate with!

Doesn't the irony strike you? The City gives out money to nonprofits to involve the citizens in civic/government affairs and the areas that it gives the highest amount per capita are those who have the highest percentage of voters. I doubt that my efforts will be successful but I have to see the justification and parochialism from the council explaining how and why this system works.

Again this is not a business development grant or a joint powers board grant, these are "citizen participation" funds. The money is to activate the citizens in the government process. So number of jobs or physical size or number of churches or number of lakes (District 2 has three so it should get three time the money?!) shouldn't make a difference. Citizens should make a difference.

Bill Connors
Macalester-Groveland

>> 1) What (if any) are the formal links? Is there a
>> designated staff
>> person in the Mayors office?

There is no one in the mayor's office or anywhere else in city government charged with being the liason between the district councils and the city. It is my understanding that someone in the Planning and Economic Development Dept. used to have that responsibility, but that was eliminated years back in one of the downsizings of the department.

>> 2) What (if any) influence does city hall have on
>> the day to day
>> operations of district councils?

None that I know of. The district councils are not part of city government. The only thing I am aware of in this category is that one district council's choice of a community organizer greatly displeased the mayor and city council, and after it was intimated that this district council might lose its contracts with the city because of their choice, the employment offer was rescinded and a new community organizer was selected.

>> 3) Does city hall listen to and respond to District
>> Councils?

Under their contracts for citizen participation with the city, the district councils are supposed to gather input on certain zoning, land-use planning, and licensing issues and forward recommendations to the appropriate city agency, most often the Zoning Committee of the Planning Commission. How much weight those recommendations carry varies, I suspect, from planning commissioner to planning commissioner. I have

observed open hostility from some Zoning Committee members towards the recommendations of district councils and the input of individual citizens who have had the temerity to show up at Zoning Committee public hearings to express their concerns.

Roxy Foster
resident of Hayden Heights neighborhood
District 2

I would like to float an idea with you all. Would there be anyone interested in joining a couple of efforts in citizen participation?

I am purposing merging some school site council efforts with local district councils.

Rational-

1. Resources could be leveraged for education and training around decision making.
2. Parents and others involved with site council work could transfer skills gained to their community council.
3. Collaboration may really get sparked between schools and community.
4. Public participation efforts could add up to make sense to more people in the community.

If anyone is interested in talking more about this idea. Please contact Roxy Foster- resident of Hayden Heights neighborhood-District 2 and Managing Partner of the Council for Civic Parent Leadership.

Mary C. Zanmiller
West Seventh Community
St. Paul, MN USA

Site councils were instituted because research findings suggested that increased parental involvement, the mobilization of community resources and the democratization of school government relations were key factors contributing to increases in student academic achievement.

Brionna's reference to "The practice of principals taking over the agenda and decision-making powers on site council meetings seems to be fairly common place," resonates with the comments I have heard from neighborhood parents.

I have heard that individual schools were told what "school reform model" they were to implement. Repercussions from the implementation of these "models" (beyond what the student is locked into for the rest of their lives) include continued significant resource allocation for staff training, material purchases and other expenses that are budgeted to the individual school.

Given the research, site councils were a good idea. The potential of site councils to contribute to increased student achievement was co-opted by the administrations use of site councils for bureaucratic maintenance.

UMJoe's story of Hmong parents being shut out of the site council process is about the politics of race. The City of St. Paul has a history of exclusion by race and class and it seems that St. Paul continues this tradition by using race as a criteria in the competition for education resources and political power.

Given the nature of the budget crisis the issues of site councils (as currently misused), school reform models and the way race is used to influence access must be addressed.

Derek Tonn
Resident of Macalester Groveland, District 14

I am new to the "chat", but I'll throw my \$0.02 into this discussion.

>> 1) What (if any) are the formal links? Is there a designated staff person in the Mayors office?

There used to be a staff person at the city assigned to work with District Councils. However, that position's funding was cut several years ago (either before or during the Coleman administration). This has hurt many district councils to at least a moderate degree (some neighborhoods more than others). It has also helped some of us in a way, as it has "forced" us to get to know our representatives in PED, Public Works, etc. a lot better. Our "formal links" are now with a variety of different departments and individuals, and I think my neighborhood (Macalester Groveland, D14) has done an excellent job evolving into a top-notch organization representing the roughly 22,000 individuals, business owners and non-profits in our district.

>> 2) What (if any) influence does city hall have on the day to day operations of district councils?

The city funds a majority of our operations, but its day-to-day contact and influence (in my opinion) is minimal. That is not to say that relations are strained or unhealthy. Not by any means! Rather, the city seems to let the Community Council do its job: communication, organization and decisions at a neighborhood level which represent the best interests of our district as a whole. That, and they generally support the decisions or findings of our organization at the Planning Commission and City Council, as they know that we have "done our homework" before arriving at a Yea/Nay vote. As long as we have a healthy two-way line of communication when issues arise, everything seems to work well. There have been "exceptions" during the past few years, but things have worked pretty well for the most part. We also have both City Council representatives (Jay Benanav and Pat Harris) and/or their staff regularly attend Community Council meetings, further improving the flow of information to and from the city.

>> 3) Does city hall listen to and respond to District Councils?

Yes. I have been a Board Member of my Community Council for the past 4.5 years and an Executive Committee member of the Council for the past 3.5 years. During that time, we have had a number of major issues arise which required action/input from a variety of city departments. 90-95 percent of the time, the city has done an excellent job providing us the assistance when we request it. We sometimes have to go "digging" a bit for what we need. However, they have been asked to do more with less, just like we have during the past 8-10 years. We regularly have representatives from PED, Public Works, the Planning Commission, STAR Board, NEC/Eureka, City Council and/or the Mayor's Office in communication with our organization when dealing with issues at Board or Committee levels.

My personal comment (not representative of the interests or opinions of District 14) is that District Councils and the individuals and organizations they represent will only get as much positive return out of the process as the amount of effort they put into it. If an organization struggles with recruiting Board members, achieving quorums for meetings, creating and maintaining active and vibrant committees, communicating with City departments/officials, etc., then it will struggle to succeed. No amount of funding or "handholding" from City Hall would change that fact. It all starts with your Board and Staff. If you do not have a Board or Staff who feels committed and passionate about their District Council and its duties, the organization will struggle ten times out of ten.

Are we going to be proactive in working with the City, preparing well- thought and well-researched, logical arguments for supporting or opposing various issues, or shall we simply "react" every time an issue rears its head, feeding city officials and petitioners with a stream of emotional comments and outbursts? I could be wrong, but I believe that logical and rational decisions that use the city's own statutes, zoning code, PED/Planning Commission criteria for recommending approval or denial, etc. is the much more effective way to go.

The biggest potential threat to a vibrant District Council system in Saint Paul is ourselves, not City Hall.

That is my opinion, anyway. If we are doing our "jobs" well (other than paid staff, we are all volunteers), then District Councils should be around for a long, LONG time.

Tim Erickson
List Manager
Hamline Midway Resident
651-643-0722

I think it interesting that the site council and district council discussions seem to be merging somewhat around the issue of participation by low income, immigrant, and other non-voting blocks of individuals.

Unfortunately, it is the inherent weakness of a participatory democracy, that those who most often need government services tend to have the least knowledge and skill about the processes by which to get those services.

It is not surprising to me that a group of Hmong parents who march into a site council meeting with \$25,000 in recommendation might not get a positive response. Site councils and district councils are political bodies and success within those bodies does require some political skill and patience.

This is unfortunate, but it seems to me to be a fact of life. One that as community activists we need to constantly be aware of and work hard to address.

The failure of the system is not that a group of proposals worth \$25,000 didn't get accepted, but that no one in the system went out their way to work with the group of Hmong parents and get them involved in the system long term.

Change doesn't happen overnight and if one expects to influence a community council or a district council, regardless of ones race, one must take a longer term perspective. Frustrating but true.

What are site councils and community councils doing to help immigrant and low income populations get into and stay a part of the process?

What are we doing on this list to bring these voices into the dialogue?

I think a lot about it, I worry a lot about it, but I have done very little to address the digital divide in this group. So who am I to talk?

Any ideas?

Just something to think about.....

1) What (if any) are the formal links? Is there a designated staff person in the Mayors office?

The Citizen Participation Coordinator used to office out of PED. There was mixed feelings about the office. In the beginning, for new organizations, the staffer was helpful in sorting out where to go for what. Sometimes though, there was a feeling that the Citizen Participation Coordinator was in danger of becoming a defacto gatekeeper - which was not good. Neighbors who know the key department folks do better than those who rely on a staffperson OR a city council member to do it for them.

The other complaint was that the coordinator was becoming an overseer - requiring timesheets to be submitted by organizers over and above the basics necessary for federal \$ justification, and telling District

Council Board members that they could not have lawn signs in front of their own homes because they were semi-official elected representatives (I hit the roof on that one)...

Many of us feel that if district councils need a coordinator, the dollars could still come from cp funding, but they should hire one to work for them collectively, independent of the city.

2) What (if any) influence does city hall have on the day to day operations of district councils?

In my opinion, some district councils are still way too reactive to city hall instead of having their own agenda regardless of the opinions of bureaucrats or politicians. I have seen some neighborhoods afraid to take positions which might jeopardize their city funding

3) Does city hall listen to and respond to District Councils?

Yes. When the District council is representative of a wide spectrum of a politicians constituents, you better believe that they are responsive. Politicians respond well to fear. Contrary to what the local newspaper promulgates, the political strength of neighborhoods and district councils does not overpower the influence of downtown business interests - it only makes the playing field a bit more level.

By the way, Chuck is correct that there are gross inequities in funding. In fact, federal dollars cannot be used to fund citizen participation in wealthier neighborhoods, hence property tax dollars are used to fund these councils instead of CDBG dollars. One solution would be to use the general fund. as an equal base citywide, and then supplement every eligible neighborhood with a dollar amount based on population and need from the federal dollars (giving a larger proportion of \$ to neighborhoods with more critical needs). Unfortunately, when I was on the council, there were elected officials who would have liked to cut all district council funding and we were only able to add conservatively to the funding.

dave thune

Can we talk?

1. L.A. City Council as a body has always opposed neighborhood councils (NCs) every way they could, in the most adversarial ways thinkable, albeit legal.

2. A few individuals stand out (but never added up to 8, the magic number in a council of 15):

A. Joel Wachs, working in NYC now, championed NCs before and after running for mayor in 1993, 1997 (maybe not, he's nominally a Republican, and the incumbent Richard Riordan was a moderately liberal Republican), and 2001. He fought the good fight and believed in the goal, keeping hope alive as long as Greg Nelson, his chief deputy and perpetual campaign manager kept the home fires burning. Call him "True Believer".

B. Mark Ridley-Thomas, still in office and still true to his civil rights roots, was the first to implement NC's, slicing his 8th CCD (City Council District) into four neat quadrants for organizing purposes almost as soon as he took office (in 1991 or 1993 ??). Implemented some, if not all principles of good NCs and financed it out of his discretionary funds. Call him "The Pioneer".

C. Cindy Miscikowski, still in office just a few blocks north of me on Butler Ave. (her WLA field office is on Corinth) always believed in the principles, and won her seat in the 1997 runoff thanks to a pledge to start two NCs if elected, as part of the push for NC's in the Charter Reform strategy. She helped organize the Brentwood and Encino (or Van Nuys) Community Councils in 1997-8 and both will become the NCs for their areas all in good time. Call her "The Quick Study".

[Full disclosure: I was paid to work against her in the 1997 primary and for her in the victorious 1997 general election. "NCs" won twice, Cindy won once - a long and separate story.]

Enough for now, gotta fix breakfast here in 6:30 a.m. PDST La La Land

24/7

Jon Shaughnessy for NCM

310/477-7566

Permission to use any and all of the above words hereby granted by Jon Shaughnessy.

All right Chuck, you win on the number of lakes criteria. How many Superfund clean-up sites do you have in your district? How many industrial sites that have measurable toxic discharges into the ground water?

Unless we think that all districts have exactly the same problems and are doing exactly the same work, then any way we divide up the pie will be arbitrary to someone.

I would prefer to spend the effort trying to figure out how to work on problems together rather than who is the "fairest" of them all.

Sherman Eagles
St. Anthony Park

You are right Sherm that I don't have superfund sites, but district 1 has Pig's Eye and the West Side Industrial park is a huge mess and they both have an Airport to contend with and they don't get anywhere near the funding from the City that Saint Anthony Park and Summit Hill do.

The formula isn't fair and it isn't fair because those neighborhoods that were well organized 25 years ago made damn sure that the at-large elected City Council considered them neighborhoods. There is no reason that the 6,000 people on Railroad Island/lower Payne aren't a "real neighborhood" except that they weren't as organized as the other "real neighborhoods." You name the problem and they have it... except they have one problem that the neighborhoods that get the money don't have - low voter turnout!

What was the name of the grant again... oh yes, Citizen Participation. The more active you are the more you get.

Chuck Repke
Former President District 9 West Seventh Federation (who loses money in a fair formula)
E.D. District 2

Here is a good question on this voting day:

=====

One of the questions that came up in my discussions with the folks from Los Angeles, was how we select or elect our neighborhood councils.

I know that in my own neighborhood, you have to be a "member" of the Hamline Midway Coalition, to vote for board members. Becoming a member is very easy, much like registering to vote. You simply fill out a form saying that you want to be a member.

However, I don't think that you can become a member on voting day (If I'm right, that means - NO election day registration).

Do all of the district councils have similar election procedures?

How do you vote in your council? Or do you vote at all?

Just how democratic are our district councils - and is this good or bad?

How representative is your district council (if not, then why)?

Tim Erickson

At WSCO (District 3), anyone who lives or works on the West Side and attends the annual meeting is eligible to run for the Board, vote for new Board members, and vote on any other issues at that meeting.

Gloria Bogen
West Side
Geb1018@aol.com

The Macalester-Groveland Community Council (District 14) has an annual business meeting at which board members are elected. Anyone who is a resident of the district is entitled to show up that evening and vote for residential board members. Anyone who owns a business in the district is entitled to show up that evening and vote for the business board members. Anyone who is affiliated with an educational institution (there are three colleges/universities that are within or border the district) can show up that evening and vote for educational institution board member. Anyone who is affiliated with a religious institution in the district is entitled to show up that evening and vote for the religious institution board member. There is no requirement to pre-register. Board members are elected for two-year terms, so only half of the board positions are up for election each year. If vacancies occur during the year, elections to fill vacancies occur at regularly scheduled board meetings, and the same eligibility rules apply. Derek, please correct me if I have any of this wrong.

Bill Connors
Macalester-Groveland

At WSCO (District 3), anyone who lives or works on the West Side and attends the annual meeting is eligible to run for the Board, vote for new Board members, and vote on any other issues at that meeting.

You used to be able to vote at the Hamline Midway Coalition office, any time during the day of the election. I think that they have even tried mail-in ballots.

Can anyone confirm this?

In District 3 and District 14, do you have to go to the meeting to vote or are there other means?

Can anyone talk about what a good turn-out in a District Council Election is? I'm guessing that participation is limited to less than 5% of residents (is this correct)?

Tim Erickson
Hamline Midway
tim@politalk.com

In District 3 you have to be present to vote (but not to run to be on the Board). We have no "absentee" voting or other options. Many times folks don't decide to run until they get to the annual meeting, especially when there are more seats available to fill than actual candidates who expressed an interest in running prior to the meeting. This happened last year and a couple of people volunteered to "run" for the board to fill out the slots. We didn't have an "election" last year because everyone who "ran" was elected. As far as participation, last year (November, 2001) there were around 75-100 citizens present at the annual meeting at Joseph's. Since there are just over 16,000 citizens on the West Side (2000 census) and, allowing for children, our turn out was WAY below 5% of adult residents.

Also, all of our seats on the Board are District-wide - we don't have special seats for business or education people, nor do we have seats assigned to different areas of the district, as some do - which might actually encourage contested elections. While we have had actual elections in the past, there has seemed to be less interest in the past few years. However, that is very cyclical (and has been since I first became involved with WSCO) and you never know what issue or interest lights the fire under more people to get them excited and interested in serving on the Board. We'll see how we do this year (November 14, 2002).

Gloria Bogen
West Side - WSCO board member (on and off) since 1986
Geb1018@aol.com

only residents of a grid are eligible to vote for the grid representative - the first year I "ran" for the board just one other member of my grid showed up and she was there "running" for the board also - at first I thought there would be a quick but spirited campaign with issue statements and personal backgrounds so that the existing board members could choose between us but only she and I could vote - we were very unceremoniously told to flip a coin - no speeches there was business to conduct - I lost the coin flip but persevered and two years later was elected when I was the only grid resident to show up - what's that saying about showing up? - my first and to date only election to quasi public office - what a rush. Brian

Bates - Mac/Groveland

In district 12 we elect resident members to the district council for 2 year terms, so we are electing one-half of them each year. Half of the residential members are elected from the North St. Anthony neighborhood and half from the South St. Anthony neighborhood. Candidates apply and a picture and brief statement are published in the neighborhood newspaper. Any resident can vote for candidates to represent their neighborhood on the designated election day at polling places in each neighborhood. Write-ins are allowed and we also have absentee ballots. Business members (1/3 of the council) are appointed by the Midway Chamber of Commerce for 1 year terms.

There is not great turn-out, probably 2-3%, as long as people are generally happy with (or unaware of) what the council has been doing. Every once in a while there will be a controversy and the numbers voting will increase - just for that one election.

Sherman Eagles
St. Anthony Park

Complete information for Dayton's Bluff (District 4) may be found at
<http://www.daytonsluff.org/councilelections.html>
Turnout from my subdistrict,(D), is usually about 2%.

Allen Clausen
Mounds Park

Hi Tim,

There are many ideas one can have regarding how to get low-income, immigrant and other nonvoting blocks involved. We could create multi-language e-democracy, translators and every public meeting, transportation for those who cannot get to public meetings.

All of these ideas are only window dressing to being inclusive if we have not built relationships with each of these communities. In order to have a voice in the public arena there is an unspoken expectation by those already involved that each person comes to the table with internal knowledge of public concepts.

Somehow they know how the game is played or have learned how the game is played before they get into the game. Most community leaders have an unspoken cultural belief about democracy. A belief that when someone attends their first caucus, becomes a citizen or are born on US soil these public concepts are inherited in some way. Traditions passed down from families, schools, faith based communities, etc.

The question that needs to be asked to lead to action on this issue is, "What is the self interest of these communities to become involved?"

The only way we find out is to step out and ask the question, find enough common ground to build trusting relationship. Then learn and teach from each other.

For what it is worth!

Roxy Foster
Hayden Heights- District 2

When people are integrated into a community, they feel that they are welcome and that they belong, they will participate in community governance. Create access, cultivate a welcoming supportive community and honor the individual's gifts and talents and they will participate. Be prepared -- the participation may bring something different than the status quo.

Research findings suggest that participation is not about knowledge and skill about the process, transportation or child care, participation is about belonging and seeing that your contribution is welcome and respected.

peace,
m@ry

Mary C. Zanmiller
West Seventh Community
St. Paul, MN USA

O.k. - we have heard about the history of District Councils, allocation of resources and voting models.

Let's hear what people think about how they work ... are the voices of the District Councils representative of the people that live in the respective district? ... has leadership and participation turned over in the previous 25 years? ... do people living and working throughout district's entire geographic area benefit from

the investment or only certain areas within the district? ... what other criteria could be used to evaluate the performance of the District Council's?

peace,
m@ry

Mary C. Zanmiller
West Seventh Community
St. Paul, MN USA

Yes, Brian is correct that I left out the part about District 14 being divided into grids, with one residential board seat allocated to each grid. As Brian wrote, only residents of a particular grid can vote for the residential board member representing that grid. Sorry that I left that out.

But we also have four "at large" residential board members, and any resident of District 14 who shows up at the annual meeting can vote for (or run for) the at-large residential board members. The business, educational institution, and religious institution board members also are "at large," in the sense that they represent their constituents in the whole district, not just a part of it.

Bill Connors
Macalester-Groveland

Thanks to everyone for participating in this District Council discussion. Several people have told me how interesting it is and how much they have learned. I promise not to push this topic into next week, but I won't do anything to stop it either.

However, I would like to hear what folks have to say about Mary's questions. They are VERY IMPORTANT questions.

Let's hear what people think about how they work ... are the voices of the District Councils representative of the people that live in the respective district? ... has leadership and participation turned over in the previous 25 years? ... do people living and working throughout district's entire geographic area benefit from the investment or only certain areas within the district?

I've heard from some folks, off-line, that in some districts the council tends to be dominated by residents from a particular street or area than is not at all representative of the district as a whole. Highland Park has been mentioned, dominated by residents of the River Road, and the Summit Hill neighborhood, dominated by residents of either Summit or Lincoln Ave, with complaints about Grand.

How much is your district council dominated by a particular interest group? How representative is it of your neighborhood?

My own sense of the Hamline Midway neighborhood is that geographically we are pretty well represented, we do use a grid system for elections. However, in terms of ethnic and economic backgrounds, I don't think that our council is very representative. This is not a criticism of those who participate, for I think that they are aware of this problem and trying to address it. But it is a difficult issue to address.

In terms of leadership, I believe that there have been changes in the leadership and participation in the Hamline Midway neighborhood, and that the new blood had a positive effect.

I say all of this, as an outside observer who has not been very active or close to the council in the past.

Please feel free to add to or correct any of the info above!

Tim Erickson
Hamline Midway
tim@politalk.com

Just a comment on voting at district councils... these are not elections to public office, these are elections by members of a non-profit corporation for the board of the non-profit. Every district council is a private non-profit they are not part of the government. In district 2, for example it defines the members of the non-profit as everyone who lives and works in District 2. Therefore all of those folks are eligible to vote in the elections for members of the board of the nonprofit... like share holders in a for profit. Most district hold there elections at the annual meeting and require that someone show up having at least some interest in the process in order to vote for the board.

Turn out varies greatly from district to district 2% of district 12 showing up would be 120 people 2% of district 5 would be 620 people. I doubt that District 5 has ever had 2% at an annual meeting.

Larger District Councils have a harder time networking and being able to have achieved a significant impact in every area at anyone time in order to stimulate an interest through out the area. Communication is also an issue, a direct mail bulk piece announcing the annual meeting would cost 6 times as much in a larger district. In district 5 a (one, singular) first class stamp for every resident in the district would eat up 24% of the council's entire city yearly budget allocation! So, you know they don't do a lot of mailings.

Chuck Repke
live in West Seventh
work on the East Side

Let's hear what people think about how they work ... are the voices of the District Councils representative of the people that live in the respective district? ... has leadership and participation turned over in the previous 25 years? ... do people living and working throughout district's entire geographic area benefit from the investment or only certain areas within the district? ... what other criteria could be used to evaluate the performance of the District Council's?

I live in Mary's District Council area - West 7th Street Here are my observations - I'm curious what her's are for the same area...

The West Seventh St Federation is appx 30 years old. Its board is made up of people who live or work in w7th (specific boundaries if you really want)
Pres, VP, Sec, Treas and then 2 each from each of three geographic sub areas.

Turnover has been healthy - there are no members who were on the board 10 years ago and i think we've had appx 2 new faces per year. Participation though is not limited to board members. Many alumnis (like myself) keep tabs on activities and volunteer on committees , neigh cleanup, etc. Minutes of board meetings are taken by a professional clerk, and a summary of each monthly meeting is published in the Community Reporter monthly neighborhood newspaper circulated to every household and business in the area.

Elections happen once a year at the annual meeting, held in an accessible, non-religious (for eric) locsation (last 2 years Summit Brewing) Beer is not served during the actual meeting... :-)

Board members cross all gender, age, own/rent, and business/resident lines. We have had trouble enlisting the involvement of racial minorities. As the mix out here diversifies, i expect this will change.

People generally get involved in the organization after being involved in an issue. Often the organization's position on things is taken after a large public meeting. The board is free to act on its own, but in my experience, I have never seen it act contrary to the consensus of a large meeting.

The Federation also has a development arm - a separate entity within the organization. It develops housing in partnership with other non-profits, developers and the city.

The Federation has 3 fulltime employees - a director, organizer, and development specialist.

Recent issues have been anti-bus rapid transit (as proposed down w7th); the ethanol stink, housing development, garbage properties, certain idiot families who raise generations of theives and assorted other misbehavers, and minor involvement in the local schools.

The Federation is generally considered one of the most effective neighborhood groups in the metro area; is occassionally controversial; usually wins its issues; but occassionally is stymied along with everyone else on issues like ethanol.

As to criteria, one could presume that if an organization is either ineffective or unrepresentative, another organization could be created to challenge it, or citizens could challenge for board seats at the annual meeting. Thats kind of the proof of the pudding in my mind.

dave thune

The Macalester-Groveland Community Council is relatively protected against being highjacked by a group from a small area within District 14, because most of the council's board members are chosen by the residents of grids within the district, rather than at large. Interest in the at-large board seats definitely grows when there is a hot issue, like expanding the University of St. Thomas' boundaries or striping bike lanes on River Road.

Bill Connors
Macalester-Groveland

Let's hear what people think about how they work ... are the voices of the District Councils representative of the people that live in the respective district? ... has leadership and participation turned over in the previous 25 years? ... do people living and working throughout district's entire geographic area benefit from the investment or only certain areas within the district?

I would like to respond to the accountability issue of the district councils. Is there a evaluation process in place for the dollars that come from the city like a report that is due after recieving a grant?

If so how does this information help to improve the councils?

If so how does the city use this information to make other resources avialible to neighborhoods?

If not why not?

How do councils create or implement long range plans when leadership turns over often?

My experience is more in the area of school decision making. What I have seen over the years is that the state has given districts money without any evalutions for student improvement, the outcome of that has been standards and profiles of learning.

Now part of that solution is site based councils puting lots of people together who have never had to make these kinds of decisions before, or have been limited in thier participation. Maybe there is something to learn from this for the district councils.

Roxy Foster-Hayden Heights District 2

I would also like to see a discussion about the various modes of communication that district councils use to keep residents of their districts informed about the issues they're considering, impact of decisions they've already made, and what issues may be emerging. What methods of communication do District Councils

(both staff and reps) find most effective? For example, community paper, newsletters, special mailings, website, listservs, phone trees, etc. Also, are these communications, especially about important issues, ever in multiple languages?

Sherry Lampman
Como neighborhood

What methods of communication do District Councils (both staff and reps) find most effective? For example, community paper, newsletters, special mailings, website, listservs, phone trees, etc. Also, are these communications, especially about important issues, ever in multiple languages?

Good question and it gets back to the funding issue I have raised. The most effective forms of communication costs money, direct mail, newsletters and community newspapers. The District 1 (Sunray, Battle Creek, Highwood) population about 17,000 allocation (to pay rent, staff and all services) \$41,000 a year attempts to do a regular newspaper. Their community organizer is the paper's editor and the last time I checked the add sales person as well. One would think that though this makes good communication other tasks, outreach, responding to individual citizen complaints, concerns hard to handle. I know we have folks from the board on Dist 1 on the list they could comment better.

District 2 (where I work) (Hillcrest, Hazel Park, Beaver Lake, Frost Lake, Lincoln Park, Parkway/Greenbrier, Phalen Village, Hayden Heights, East Phalen, Prosperity Heights) population 26,000 allocation \$45,483 does a quarterly newspaper that is bulk mailed to every address in the district all 7,777 of them. We print 10,000 and distribute the rest at the Rec centers and businesses in the district. Quarterly newspapers at least gets the word out on what are major projects going on in the district but can never be as timely as a more regular newsletter. But, when you're mailing to 7,777 households you can't find the cash to do anything more regularly. We depend on volunteers to flier neighborhoods with hot issues. When you have a population of 26,000 phone trees or an e-mail list would be a little hard to manage. We have a Hmong outreach worker who has a regular page in our newsletter and translates fliers into Hmong. District 5 usually has had someone who does Spanish so we frequently have shared translating services with our neighbor to the west... we do Hmong for them they do Spanish for us.

The East Side Review is a for profit newspaper that services the entire East Side about a third of the city. They will, at times, when space permits, put a notice in the paper or we can buy an add.

I would assume that most of the larger districts like mine would be in the same situation (Districts 5, 6, and 15). Not enough cash to do a regular newsletter/paper and dependent on the community newspaper for quicker broad notification. Just the stamps for a first class mailing to my district would cost \$2,877.49 add the cost of printing and you see why I wouldn't do a lot of direct mail.

Chuck Repke
Live in West Seventh
Work on the East Side

In a message dated 9/12/02 9:47:04 AM Central Daylight Time, fosterrox@aol.com writes:

I would like to respond to the accountability issue of the district councils.

Is there a evaluation process in place for the dollars that come from the city like a report that is due after recieving a grant?

If so how does this information help to improve the councils?

If so how does the city use this information to make other resources available to neighborhoods? If not why not?

All of the districts are required to prepare a very long form that lists the goals and objectives of the council and their intended methods to accomplish those goals and objectives for the upcoming year. They also prepare a statement listing how they achieved those objectives in the preceding year. (Stop by the office and I will give you a copy Roxy) But, that just approves funding for the year. After that every month the council prepares a form that accounts for every dime that was spent that we believe are eligible for city reimbursement. So, the City doesn't send us a check until after we have spent money, have receipts and prove that it was an eligible City expense.
(No trips to the Bahamas for me)

The reports are reviewed by PED to insure that those goals are citizen participation goals, but it is a little hard to evaluate other than that. Most of the money goes for staff, rent and communication. Not much left after that. There are no other resources made available to the district council and as I have been saying no attempt to modify the funding in over ten years.

Chuck Repke
E. D. District 2

Thank you, Chuck, for the information. Attention to communication tools that allow for not just information delivered FROM the District Council but TWO-WAY communication between residents and Council staff and representatives is actually related to two other issues brought up here, accountability and citizen participation. Effective communications will promote and encourage citizen participation as well as provide information on Council accomplishments. Accountability will be demanded if citizens are fully aware of what's happening at the Council level. Increased citizen participation may also be a way to gradually get more funds to support the District Councils.

To get out of this Catch 22 situation of overworked staff, not enough money, hence not enough communications, therefore not enough resources.... I suggest a collective brainstorming on innovative, cost-effective, and even no-cost ways to get citizens up to speed on what the District Councils mean to our communities.

Sherry Lampman
Como neighborhood

I suggest a collective brainstorming on innovative, cost-effective, and even no-cost ways to get citizens up to speed on what the District Councils mean to our communities.

Great idea. Feel free to do some brainstorming in this forum, but here is another idea.

Is there interest in the following? Will someone volunteer to be the host?

I would like to have an open meeting for District Council staff (and interested board members) to talk about any or all of the following:

- 1) How District Councils can make better use of the St. Paul Issues Forum and Minnesota E-Democracy.
- 2) How the St. Paul Issues Forum, can better support the work being done by District Councils.
- 3) How to better use listserv technology (like this list)

- within your district council.
- 4) How to improve Council to Council communication, specifically using the internet.
 - 5) Your ideas.....

If there is any interest, contact me off-line.

PLEASE, also continue to brainstorm online.....

USE THIS LIST.

--

Tim Erickson
List Manager
St. Paul Issues Forum

--- chuckrepke@aol.com wrote:

...District 1 (Sunray, Battle Creek, Highwood) ... attempts to do a regular newspaper. Their community organizer is the paper's editor and the last time I checked the ad sales person as well. One would think that though this makes good communication other tasks, outreach, responding to individual citizen complaints, concerns hard to handle.

PF: True, our organizer is also the editor while also trying to maintain some advertising. However, we hope to have an ad sales rep to relieve responsibilities for that duty, thereby providing additional time to work on outreach, etc. We generally believe though that a monthly newspaper (or at least 10 issues/year) is far better than a quarterly publication or ad-hoc notifications. Plus, our historical numbers show that the paper can be close to/if not profitably providing we have someone dedicated to ad sales.

The East Side Review is a for profit newspaper that services the entire East Side about a third of the city. They will, at times, when space permits, put a notice in the paper or we can buy an add.

PF: There are at least three problems with the ESR- 1) They don't actually serve the entire East Side (they don't go south of I-94). That leaves out about 1/4th of District 4 (Dayton's Bluff - where they now have a 10 issue/year newspaper) and 1/2 of D1.

2) They deliver door-to-door with traditional carriers and if there's an empty route then that route generally doesn't get delivered to until the position is filled and,

3) D4 tried to use ESR as their communication tool getting 4 pages for their news once/month. Apparently it worked O.K. for a couple months, then the ESR began unilaterally editing D4's submitted content and cut the space down to 2 pages. So, D4 restarted their newspaper. They, too, believe that with some dedicated sales they will be able to afford mailing it to each household at a non-profit rate (as D1 currently does).

Philip Fuehrer
VP - District 1
(and Communications Cmte Chair, too :>}

I'd like to say a quick thanks to everyone who has participated this week. I think it's been a particularly interesting and productive week on the St. Paul Issues Forum.

I've really enjoyed the discussion on District Councils and learned a great deal.

I was surprised to count 27 different names who contributed to our discussion since the first post on Monday morning of this week.

27 is a lot of people to bring into a conversation in a week. We can do a lot better, but I'm certain that this is an above average week for our forum and just wanted to acknowledge it.

Thanks again to everyone,

Tim Erickson
List Manager
St. Paul Issues Forum

Okay. I'm a "newbie." I just signed on about two weeks ago and have been a silent reader. But now I need to ask.

1. re: history of district councils. Tim (and others?) could you compile relevant historical information into a readable document and then email to webmaster at <http://www.stpaul.gov/> ?

They have district councils under <http://www.stpaul.gov/neighborhoods/> Ask them to create a page JUST for district councils with button in main page side bar ... maybe just below city council. The history summary could provide intro text of district council opening page as well as a history link for those who want more info.

Just a suggestion because I'd hate the broader community to lose all the learning I've seen happening.

[Note: if any want to be added to my Education Alert list, just let me know.
--Jen, East Side Mom]

I just wanted to mention that over the past year, the West Side Citizens Organization (WSCO) board went out to about 15 or so neighborhood groups, including block clubs, in an effort to educate the community about what WSCO does and to elicit suggestions about how to improve it, etc.

Members of WSCO's environment committee went along to educate people and enlist support for the Clean Energy Now lawn sign campaign. Usually, one board member and one environment committee member went to each group, sometimes accompanied by WSCO's staff. The groups included a Spanish speaking group at Neighborhood House, where we had translators (my Spanish is of the high school variety and pretty limited!) I think at least a dozen people went home with Clean Energy Now lawn signs from that meeting.

So that's one way to educate people and at least to attempt to get them involved.

Elizabeth Dickinson
West Side
