

Forming an Area Commission

Area Commissions

Area Commissions are established to afford additional voluntary citizen participation in decision-making in an advisory capacity and to facilitate communication, understanding and cooperation between neighborhood groups, city officials, and developers.

The Functions and Duties of Area Commissions

An Area Commission is an advisory body. No duty or function of an Area Commission will invalidate any action of City Council. Area Commissions identify and study the problems and requirements of the local commission area in order to create plans and policies to serve as guidelines for future development of the area. Commissions bring problems and needs of the area to the attention of the appropriate governmental agencies or residents and recommend solutions or legislation. Commissions also aid and promote communications within the commission area between it and the rest of the city.

Forming an Area Commission

Forming an Area Commission can take up to 18 months for completion from beginning to end. The formation includes forming a Task Force, discussing the effort with residents and community organizations, conduction open meetings, hearings and workshops, preparation of by-laws and selection procedures. Proposed boundaries of the area the commission will serve will have to be established. Task Force members will also have to prepare a petition and obtain more than 500 signatures of people living, working, or owning property within the area's boundaries. Signers of the petition agree a commission is needed and approve the boundaries, Task Force, agent, by-laws and selection rules.

Task Force and Commission Membership

Anyone who lives, works, or owns property within the commission boundaries may serve as a Task Force member or as a Commissioner.

Task Force Duties

Task Force members named on the petition will represent the commission area by filing the petition and documents and make any necessary revisions of the documents prior to approval. Members will notify residents of the proposed commission and institute the selection procedure, if any, for nominations to the Area Commission. When nominees have been chosen, the Task Force will certify the results to the Mayor and to the City Clerk. During the interim between Council's decision and the organization of the Area Commission, the Task Force may serve the commission area by performing any necessary functions. As soon as the appointed members organize the Area Commission, the Task Force having completed its purpose will disband and cease to represent the area.

Steps to Becoming a Commission

After the necessary signatures have been gathered, the proposed by-laws, rules, and selection procedure for the Area Commission will be attached to the petition and filed with the City Clerk. At that point, any interested party may look over the documents. Within 30 days of filing, the Task Force will notify residents of the proposed commission areas of the filing with the City Clerk. Notification of the filing may be door-to-door distribution or publication in an area newspaper and the City Bulletin. Any interested body who objects to the proposed commission must file objection or alternate petition within 60 days of the notice.

The Commission

Each Area Commission shall consist of the number of members prescribed in its by-laws, limited, however to no less than seven and no more than 21. An odd number of Commissioners is recommended for a decisive vote. All members are elected by the residents and appointed by the Mayor with the concurrence of City Council.

Selection Procedures

Nominations for the Mayor's consideration may be made in accordance with its duly authorized selection procedure. Any such selection procedure will be followed by the Task Force in selecting nominees for the first Area Commission and by each Area Commission thereafter. A method for amendment of the procedure may be provided in the by-laws.

Terms

Members of an Area Commission serve without compensation for the term specified in the commission's by-laws, provided, however that the term will be for no less than two nor more than four years. The by-laws will provide that initial appointments be made for no less than a year nor more than a full term arranged to assure future continuity of experienced service. Subsequent full-term appointments should be of uniform length.

Columbus City Codes, 1959, Chapter 3109

Current Area Commissions

Clintonville Area Commission
Driving Park Area Commission
Franklinton Area Commission
Greater Hilltop Area Commission
Milo-Grogan Area Commission
Near East Area Commission
North Central Area Commission
North East Area Commission
North Linden Area Commission
South Linden Area Commission
University Area Commission
Westland Area Commission

For more information:

Gene Bailey
City of Columbus
Development Department
Neighborhood Services Division
645-7564



City of Columbus
Michael B. Coleman, Mayor

City of Columbus
Department of Development

Forming an Area Commission

Forming a Civic Association

You've walked casually through your neighborhood and seen some things that concern you. Yet, there's no neighborhood group or civic association with which to share your concerns. You get the idea that maybe you should try to form a civic association, but you're stumped on how to go about it or if you should even bother. Here are some things to try.

Before you go forward, ask yourself the right questions...

- ◆ Why do you think you should organize?
- ◆ Are there issues that need to be addressed?
- ◆ How do you want to improve your neighborhood?
- ◆ How can an organized group of neighbors be more effective at change?
- ◆ What type of potential leadership is there within your neighborhood?
- ◆ What type of resources does your neighborhood have?
- ◆ What have been your past successes and how can you build on them?

Get to know your neighborhood and its needs

Canvass your neighborhood, talk to people, find out what problems annoy them. As you walk through the neighborhood, keep an eye out for problems: Are the streets littered? Are they adequately lit? Are they passable? Are there many abandoned buildings? Unused vacant lots? What are the needs of the small business owners in your area? You can make a survey of everyone's concerns using a questionnaire. Make a master list. For the purpose of organizing, look for neighborhood-wide problems. As you canvass, look for neighborhood leaders, people who are especially outspoken, concerned or articulate about neighborhood problems. Take down their names, addresses, and telephone numbers. After you canvass the neighborhood and have collected all your information, you will know your neighborhood intimately.

Define your neighborhood

Define the boundaries of your neighborhood. Try to keep the size of the neighborhood manageable, around 500 people, if possible.

Build coalitions

Find out about the existing neighborhood organizations within that area and what functions they serve. Be sure that the organization you wish to form does not duplicate the services of any of these groups, and be sure to enlist their efforts. This will provide you the broad base of neighborhood political support you will need to be successful.

Identify action issues

Contact the leaders you identified in your survey and set up an organizational meeting with them alone. Share the information you gathered with them, and decide together which problems are the most pressing, the most extensive, the most easily solved. Choose an issue you want to tackle first. Because you are organizing and not established, select an issue that plagues or affects the entire neighborhood and one that is easily solved. This issue will become your top priority.

Planning

Your organization should develop a detailed plan which will specify how you propose to reach your goals and objectives.

Get people involved

Set a date for a general neighborhood-wide meeting. Select a site for that meeting that is large enough for the group you expect. Try a church basement, a large schoolroom, a community hall or a library.

Publicize your meeting. If you have a neighborhood newspaper, announce the meeting in that. Put public service announcements on the local radio shows, and circulate flyers. Reach as many people in your neighborhood as you can, so you can have a good turnout. You cannot publicize enough.

Hold the general meeting. Be sure it has a lively pace and keeps people involved. Let your neighbors know what you learned when you were canvassing; announce the kinds of things an organized neighborhood can do; identify the top priority issue. You must keep people involved in the meeting; solicit their opinions, get their names, addresses and telephone numbers. This will be your initial membership list.

Define the approach your group will use in dealing with the issue or problem. Conclude the meeting by taking concrete action so participants can see that they did accomplish something. It would also be a good idea to set up a tentative date for your next meeting, so people can mentally commit that time to the next meeting.

Be sure you set up regular meeting times. Try to keep meetings interesting; be sure something is always happening and keep the issues you have identified in your survey active.

Status

Come up with a name for your neighborhood organization, set an organizational structure. Identify committees or task forces that will have to be set up. You may want to collect a small membership fee, to help meet expenses and as a token of the people's commitment. Your group should decide, if you wish to become a legal entity. If so, you should look into state laws on incorporating and initiate the process, because it may be lengthy.

Fundraising

In all probability, your organization will need money to operate, i.e. cost for mailings, printing, copying, etc. You should determine how much money you will need to function and then proceed to identify sources of money and try to tap into them. Charities, churches, foundations, local, State, Regional and Federal governments are sources of funding that you should definitely look into. Another alternative is that of generating your own funds. You can host a dinner, have a street fair, rummage sale, car wash or any other such activity which will produce the funds you need for operating expenses.

Take the offensive

Once you have accomplished the short-term goals the group has set for itself, you should then start to work on the long-term objectives while the members are still basking in the success of its first or first few projects. Don't fight against things, fight for objects. Have a positive alternative to offer in place of what you oppose. Do not let the momentum and the motivation of the organization die down once you have accomplished the simple tasks you have set yourselves. As you acquire experience, your group can then undertake more difficult problems. Remember that your neighborhood has control of its own future; if it does nothing, nothing will get done. You must choose your projects and strategies carefully in order to be effective, and you must target your requests of city government with care, respect and shrewdness.

For more information regarding neighborhood or civic associations, contact:

Gene Bailey
City of Columbus
Development Department
Neighborhood Services Division
645-7564



City of Columbus
Michael B. Coleman, Mayor

City of Columbus
Department of Development

Forming a Civic Association

How To Conduct Neighborhood Activities/Projects/ Fund Raisers

Information

Know your neighborhood

What do your neighbors do?

Look for:

- ♦ Businesses that the neighborhood supports
- ♦ Businesses located in the neighborhood
- ♦ Neighborhood residents who work for businesses

Know neighborhood resources

What is unique about your neighborhood?

Look for:

- ♦ Opportunities for tours, projects, activities which tie in to neighborhood resources
- ♦ Educational or cultural facilities
- ♦ Unique houses, gardens, landscapes, streets
- ♦ Community projects happening in your area

Know community resources

Government officials, Media contacts, Community organizations, Community businesses, Other neighborhood leaders

Look for:

- ♦ Connections and opportunities for your neighborhood

The Plan

- ♦ Varies from event to event
- ♦ Can be extremely lengthy or as short as a one-page document
- ♦ May require one brief meeting or several meetings
- ♦ Write down detailed step-by-step plan for event
- ♦ Write down person responsible
- ♦ Write down date by which steps to be completed
- ♦ Group leader to be in constant contact with group members to insure that tasks are being accomplished
- ♦ Think of creative ways that you can accomplish tasks (with no cost)



Teamwork

- ♦ Successful events are those which involve a few people in key leadership positions and a large number of volunteers performing work of varying difficulty depending on their skills/talents
- ♦ One or a few chiefs and many, many Indians
- ♦ People who participate are likely to become more vested in the organization and will be likely to volunteer or lead in the future.

Day of the Event

- ♦ Stay calm!
- ♦ Good relations with media – one spokesperson
- ♦ If you have planned well, the event will take care of itself
- ♦ Think on your feet – be prepared for emergency situations/odd requests

Follow Up

The most important thing you will do in the whole process

- ♦ “Thank you” to all involved
- ♦ Write down what you did and when — it will help you or someone else the next time

Some Ideas for Activities and Programs In Your Neighborhood

- ◆ Membership drive
- ◆ Newsletter (regularly published and distributed)
- ◆ Pot luck picnic supper
- ◆ Political office candidates forum
- ◆ Historic district/neighborhood signs
- ◆ Historic house walking tour
- ◆ Rehabilitation of house/street rehab
- ◆ Gardening seminars
- ◆ Plant exchanges and sales
- ◆ Commemorative poster
- ◆ Publication about neighborhood
- ◆ Tree planting project/greenspace issues
- ◆ Creative Playground
- ◆ School aid projects, mentor programs in public schools
- ◆ Sidewalk replacement program
- ◆ Upgrading of alleys/off-street parking
- ◆ Project CARE (activities and services to elderly)
- ◆ Neighborhood safety program
- ◆ Educational/outreach seminars
- ◆ Interesting speakers at annual meetings
- ◆ Ice cream social
- ◆ “A day in the Neighborhood” for government/other officials
- ◆ Collaborative events with adjacent neighborhoods
- ◆ Safety seminars
- ◆ Street fair, Art fair
- ◆ Antiques festival
- ◆ Newcomer’s welcoming party
- ◆ Anniversary events
- ◆ Pocket park development
- ◆ Neighborhood mugs
- ◆ Neighborhood awards/recognition

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City of Columbus
Michael B. Coleman, Mayor

City of Columbus
Department of Development

How To Conduct Neighborhood Activities, Projects and Fund Raisers

Citizen Participation Through Neighborhood Organizations of Columbus

Area Commissions:

Citizen Advisory groups that are extensions of city government with a code required selection process and functions and duties defined by code.

Civic Associations:

Citizen Advisory groups that are independent of city government. Citizens define purpose, membership, boundaries, functions and duties.

Neighborhood Organizing: Items For You To Define

- ◆ Vision
- ◆ Where do you want to go?
- ◆ Purpose
- ◆ Why do you want to go there?
- ◆ Goals

What lets you know you are on target?

- ◆ Action plan
- ◆ What steps take you there?

Neighborhood Organizing: Items To Consider When Forming A Civic Association

- ◆ Get to know your neighborhood and its needs
- ◆ Define your boundaries
- ◆ Locate other groups in the area – avoid duplication
- ◆ Identify action issues
- ◆ Get people involved
- ◆ Build partnerships with public and private sectors
- ◆ Tackle priority issues
- ◆ Names group – bylaws, taskforce committees
- ◆ Do you want to collect dues?
- ◆ Detail a plan to accomplish goals
- ◆ Mobilize resource people and agencies
- ◆ Do your homework
- ◆ Develop a publicity strategy that will build a positive image
- ◆ Take the offensive
- ◆ After accomplishing short-range goals, tackle medium and long-range goals
- ◆ Have a positive alternative in place of what you oppose

Suggested Procedure For Citizen Formation Of A Civic Association

1. Learn your neighborhood and its needs.
2. Gather residents and talk about the idea of a civic association.
3. Define the boundaries of your neighborhood with suggestions from the Development Department.
4. Decide the purpose of the organization.
5. Decide the name of the organization.
6. Decide the first goal or goals of the organization.
7. Determine consistent meeting time and place for the organization.

8. Visit an existing civic association.
9. Discuss and determine provisions in by-laws consisting of:

- ◆ Membership
- ◆ Officers and duties of officers
- ◆ Meetings
- ◆ Committees
- ◆ Parliamentary Authority
- ◆ Elections

Items Which Might Be Considered in Creating Area Commission or Civic Association Bylaws:

I. BYLAWS

A. *Membership*

1. Number of members, terms, officers
2. Quorum, number of positive votes for affirmative action
3. Vacancies, temporary appointments
4. Attendance, recommendation for removal

B. *Meetings*

1. Regular meetings, time, date, location
2. Special meetings, authority to call
3. Public notice, open sessions, executive sessions, record keeping and minutes

C. *Committees*

1. Standing committees, number of members, duties
2. Special committees, authority to create

D. *Procedures* (such as Roberts Rules of Order)

1. Agenda, order of business
2. Limits and discussion
3. Withdrawals and tablings

E. *Amendments to Bylaws*

1. Procedures, public notice
2. Method of ratification

II. ELECTION PROCEDURES

(Method of selecting nominees for consideration by the Mayor for appointments to the Commission – may also be in bylaws)

A. Eligibility

1. Residency, location, duration
2. Age, voter, registration, affiliation, etc.
3. Petitions, filing dates

B. Elections

1. Dates, procedures, locations, hours
2. Voter eligibility
3. Special election procedures

Starting or Revitalizing a Neighborhood-Based Organization

Ask the Right Questions

- ♦ Why do you think you should organize?
- ♦ Are there issues that need to be addressed?
- ♦ Is there support for these issues?
- ♦ How do you want to improve your neighborhood?
- ♦ How can an organized group of neighbors be more effective at change?
- ♦ What type of potential leadership is there within your neighborhood?
- ♦ What type of resources does your neighborhood have?
- ♦ What have been your past successes and how can you build on them?



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