

Developing A Community Its Embracing Diversity and, Dealing with Neighbors Not Being Neighborly.

The method to be used in Developing A Community Embracing Its Diversity, and Dealing with Neighbors Not Being Neighborly is a community consensus-building and harmonizing model called, "Creating Harmony Uplifting Residential Neighborhoods." It is a ground-up neighborhood and resident driven community approach; formulated around twelve years of independent and collaborative work alongside community organizations and institutions, concerned citizens, municipal bureaus, the city police department and the city school district in Rochester New York.

This is a new more inclusive concept for municipal consensus-building and planning, which expands the opportunity and accessibility for input from a wider representation of the population within focused areas of a municipality. It allows for a greater voice to be heard from every part of that area's population, especially those who traditionally have been diminished, neglected, ignored, and subsequently under served. This concept reflects a key issue in municipal planning. That is, traditional municipal planning is often too much a top down process, allowing only the loudest, more powerful voices to be the persuaders and creators of that planning. More voices, more representation, and more concerns heard from across an area's cultural spectrum enables a connectedness which brings greater peace and harmony to that area. When voices are left out of the planning conversation, frustration, aggravation and other disturbing activities are the potential outcomes. Many use the term Community as an area within a specific geographic boundary. Community is better defined by the distinct cultural groups within that geographic boundary. This means an identifiable community can be as distinct as the culture of a small neighborhood. Raising the volume on needs and concerns of all community layers - those of a different origin and ethnicity, cultural and social background, race, religion, language, status, class, persuasion, or anything that makes them separate - allows a true reading of the plans that should be created to serve all.

THE GOALS.

- Create a community of cooperation, accepting and embracing its diverse backgrounds, cultures, ethnicity, lifestyles and world views.
- Create a universal community mindset with a greater flexibility and functionality in planning and achieving goals among all its distinct cultures.
- Create a forum for equal input, participation and action.
- Create successful tools to de-escalate unacceptable social behavior, resolve aggravated differences, and deal with neighbors not being neighborly, thereby reducing calls and need for police services.

Consider municipalities like many in the northeast US which have high concentrations of working class poverty, low performing schools, high teen pregnancy rates, workforce reductions or job source collapse, decreasing population, home ownership turning to absentee landlord rental property, and significant criminal activity. In many municipalities there is a great disparity between residential areas, classes, wealth, education and access to services. These factors converge to form one vast panorama of considerable difficulty. There are many service organizations and nonprofit institutions which can and do work on these problems. The difficulty in the array of services is often many programs have been decided to satisfy the requirements of funding sources. The people actually being served usually have no voice, power or access to this funding to assist them in developing programs they deem necessary. There is no coordination between the efforts of each provider. This condition can be described as satellites with no ground control or just, no one connecting the dots.

Regarding crime levels, the police can put more officers on the streets with less tolerance for even the lowest level of antisocial behavior and adverse activity. This can result in situations where anything that looks or hints of criminal activity is approached with possible arrest. Residents in the crime affected areas may believe they are being unfairly targeted with unbalanced attention and restrictions. Complaints of abuse of power or undue force may occur. Other residents in these areas may believe the police are not doing enough. The police will say, "we cannot do it alone." That is a good starting point for a change in policy. If the full community can be involved in the development of programs and services which affect their quality of life issues, that community becomes more effective as part of the system which alters its quality of life. Missing from the equation are initiatives which alter the social fabric and provide alternative opportunities to change the fundamental conditions which bring on criminal activity. No voice, no action! So, how does a group of like minded citizens,

members of a specific community, develop their voice such that they have the ability to make the changes they believe are most effective for their neighborhoods?

APPROACH.

Developing a unified, louder voice for a particular community is the essence of the model. The goals are designed to first develop a Community Embracing Its Diverse Population; second, build that into an empowered Spirit of Community which can seek actions to address their needs; third, create tools to help this community deal with Neighbors Not Being Neighborly without police services.

The approach peels back layers of a neighborhood's demographic, in order to :

- Identify distinct groups with specific ethnic, social, class, and other characteristics;
- Assist each in creating an environment of cooperation;
- Bring all into an inclusive process for consensus building, planning and action;
- Create a universal community mindset which can develop more inclusive planning;
- Identify underlying problems which keep neighborhood residents from developing or maintaining paths to harmony and peace;
- Create tools to redirect unacceptable social behavior and aggravated differences;
- Result in an enlarged community of understanding which can address and act upon the concerns of all its sub- parts, achieving a wider range of goals.

AN EXHIBIT.

This method can be easily applied to neighborhood initiatives and structures. Such a structure exists in the City of Rochester New York. The city is divided into four quadrants. These quadrants are partitioned into ten city sectors. When the structure was established years ago, each sector was given the funding and assistance in forming a Sector Steering Committee. The steering committees consisted of volunteer residents charged with representing all aspects of their sector, and creating plans which aided the quality of life and development of that sector. Many committees made significant efforts to incorporate a large swath of neighborhood stake holders in its membership. The downfall of the program began when support from city hall personnel and funds dwindled. The committees became smaller, less inclusive and more gentrified. At the same time, some of the ten sectors saw a changing tide of residency. Previous long time home owners were replaced by renters from numerous cultural backgrounds with absent landlords. As the formerly static nature of neighborhoods faded, the sector committees lost sight of their neighborhoods' reformulated natures and their futures.

bring more input for neighborhood planning, the city has made the effort to expand and replace membership in the committees. Now each has been challenged to become more inclusive and develop sector plans that represent the needs of all residents. At the same time, city hall has made deep cuts in its personnel due to its significant budget deficits. The sector committees have the challenge but not the support to achieve the task. Experience with such groups has shown that even when they desire to enlarge their view, they do not. Members who are leaving bring in others like themselves. Reaching out for new members becomes "who do I know," rather than who should I know. Seeking those unknowns is either too time consuming, or too uncomfortable, that is, "not like me." The result is more of the same - no advancement and no representation of all community parts. To alter that end result, the city now uses the "Creating Harmony Uplifting Residential Neighborhoods" model.

Their project is called, "Rochester in Community Harmony, or RiCH."

It focuses on twelve particular actions:

1. Obtain acceptance from the sector committees to assist current members.
2. Guide them in identification of distinct ethnic, social, class, and other groups.
3. Assist them in finding key individuals in those groups, as representatives.
4. Identify appropriate service providers and funders in order to train and assist these representatives in developing organization and communication skills which enable them to become more effective and influential.
5. Bring each into a process for understanding how to identify the essential needs of their distinct group as it relates to the greater community plan.
6. Bring these representatives into a more inclusive sector process.
7. Assist the process to achieve greater consensus and a more equal strategic plan.
8. Identify appropriate service providers and funders to achieve this plan.

9. Utilize appropriate service providers to develop a restorative justice approach to deal with neighbor disagreements and altercations without police service.
10. Assist them in creating a restorative justice conferencing forum and process, serviced and maintained by trained residents of each specific community.
11. Promote the effort to groups, institutions, city hall, and the community at large.
12. Monitor progress and the efficacy of service providers, and alter as necessary.

OUTCOMES.

Measurement of positive outcomes is being based on specific successes.

Short Term.

- Development of key individual forums within each sector.
- Development of more inclusive sector committees. .

Long Term.

- Effective service providers designated to each task of this concept.
- Achievement of inclusive sector plans that are directed and effective,
- Development of agreed upon sector norms and codes of acceptable behavior.
- Development of resident driven community restorative justice committees to handle residents' minor disruptive and unacceptable behavior issues - with support, but not with services, from municipal and police departments.

Full Term.

- Community awareness of this program's core premise.
- Greater sense of big picture thinking, cooperation and collaboration among service providers and funders.

This project is currently underway.

Step 1. has been achieved. Steps 2. and 3. are in progress.

The remaining outcomes are in the future of this process.

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