

Neighborhood Services and Education Committee Members  
Chair Dev Davis, Vice Chair Peter Ortiz,  
and Members Bien Doan, Omar Torres, and Domingo Candelas  
City of San José, 200 E. Santa Clara Street  
San José, CA 95113  
via email, sent March 7, 2023

re: Neighborhoods Commission – NSE Cmte agenda item (d)3, March 9, 2023

Dear NSE Committee Members,

I write to you in support of the Neighborhoods Commission. I write as an individual who has worked with many other community volunteers on various commissions, committees, etc., to equitably and sustainably improve our quality of life here in San José. And while I served on the Neighborhoods Commission from its start in 2008 (and was its Chair from 2014 to 2016) and now currently serve on another commission, this is a personal letter in support of the Neighborhoods Commission.

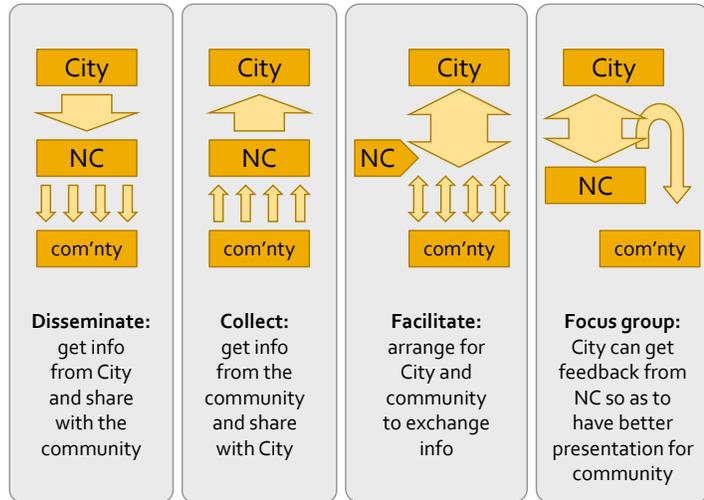
Commissions help us in the community to formally and effectively work together with you in the City. San José is a large city, and you on the Council can't possibly have the time to be thoroughly involved in every matter that occurs in your district. Commissions help you by working with us in the public, collecting and evaluating our input, and then forwarding alternatives and recommendations to you on the Council for decisions. The Neighborhoods Commission advises the City Council regarding San José neighborhoods on matters regarding issues, policies, and programs affecting the quality of life in San José neighborhoods focusing on neighborhood safety, transportation, and code enforcement, and it also makes recommendations regarding annual budget priorities.

The Neighborhoods Commission (NC) is unique in that its commissioners are selected by the community rather than by the city. For most city commissions, Councilmembers and the Mayor each select a commissioner, and the resulting commission may end up mirroring the Council. Commissioners on the NC, on the other hand, are community volunteers selected by delegates of that district's various neighborhood associations in a caucus, an open process run by the NC with minimal Staff involvement, and then confirmed or rejected by the Council. (In the case of a mid-term vacancy, the Council can make interim appointments.) The result is a NC that is more reflective of the community, giving it the ability to more truly express the concerns of the neighborhoods.

The NC recently lost a number of its members due to term-limits and redistricting, Covid interfered with the planned caucuses, and the outgoing Council deferred the appointment of interim replacements to let the new Councilmembers make the appointments. As a result, the NC now lacks a quorum and can't even meet: a number of you on the NSE Committee who are new to the Council may never have seen the Neighborhoods Commission in action. I hope you will appoint interim replacements so the NC can reach a quorum, resume the caucus process, and revitalize itself.

The NC is a formal city commission, not merely an ad hoc group, and it has formal roles to serve in the city:

- The Neighborhoods Commission helps disseminate information from the City to the various Community associations and groups in the district.
- The NC helps collect issues and concerns from the community that are then incorporated into feedback to the City, such as the annual report on the City Budget or position papers on topics of community concern like protecting the city's tree canopy or stopping illegal fireworks. An upcoming topic concerns the operation of the city's animal shelter.
- The NC can also help facilitate an exchange of information between City and the community, as it did in 2015 when the NC hosted a series of community forums to help the SJ Police Department develop policies on the use of drones.
- And the NC can serve as a "focus group" – a representative sampling of community concerns, allowing the City to refine its presentation prior to general release.



There is work to do. We in the community want our issues to be heard and our input on the city budget to be considered.

I urge you to continue supporting the Neighborhoods Commission. I hope the Council will fill the vacancies with interim appointments so that the Neighborhoods Commission can make quorum and can conduct the district caucuses to rebuild itself.

Thank you,

~Larry Ames

Dr. Lawrence Ames, longtime community advocate.

cc: San José Mayor Matt Mahan and Members of the City Council;  
Angel Rios, Deputy City Manager; City Clerk;  
Jon Cicirelli, Dir., PRNS; Olympia Williams, Division Mngr., PRNS;  
Jim Carter, Chair, NC;  
Dist. 6 N'hd Leaders Group; All District Leadership Group.