Neighborhood Association How To's

Advice on starting and maintaining a neighborhood association, with some details specific to Lincoln, Nebraska

Table of Contents

Introduction. 1
What is a Neighborhood Association? 1
Existing Neighborhood Associations 1
First Steps. 2
Organizational Structure Options. 3
Bylaws 3
Setting Goals and Making Plans 4
Goal-Setting is a Process 4
A Neighborhood Plan 4
Membership 6
Recruiting Members 4
Volunteers 8
New Leaders 9
Leadership Training 4
Meetings 10
Six Rules for Meetings 10
Meeting Mechanics 11
Basic Parlimentary Procedures 13
Reports & Records 13
Three Types of Meetings 14
More Meeting Tips 15
Fund-Raising 16
Elements of Fund-Raising 16
"Job" Descriptions 17
Board Member 17
President or Chairperson 17
Vice President 18
Secretary 18
Treasurer 19
Other Key Points 20
Ways to Kill Any Organization 20
Why Boards Fail 20
Conclusion 21
Appendix A: Organizational Options 22
Charitable Organization 22
Non-Profit Incorporated Organization 22
Tax Exempt Organization – 501(c)(3) 22
Appendix B: Bylaws 24
Example 1: Bylaws Outline 24
Example 2: Generic Bylaws 24

UNL Big Event volunteer working with Everett Neighborhood Association clean-up

CITY OF LINCOLN™ NEBRASKA

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Introduction

You are convinced that your neighborhood needs to be organized. Now what? There's no need to completely reinvent the wheel! Research how other neighborhoods got started – search the Internet and books, talk with members of other neighborhood associations and read this booklet.

What is a Neighborhood Association?

A neighborhood association is a group of neighbors who get together, share ideas and work cooperatively to make their neighborhood a better place to live. For the purposes of this document, membership in a neighborhood association is voluntary and open to anyone who lives in the neighborhood.

Voluntary, open membership makes neighborhood associations different from homeowner assocations. Homeowner associations require homeowners to be members as a part of a covenant included in their purchase agreement. Non-homeowners (renters or leasers, for example) are excluded from homeowner associations. Usually a homeowners association is incorporated and requires dues to pay for maintenance of commons areas. No matter what an organization is named, its function is what determines what it is.

This document focuses primarily on neighborhood associations, but some of the material may also be useful to homeowners associations.

Existing Neighborhood Associations

Before you start a new neighborhood association, check to see if there's already one in your area. To find out where Lincoln's active neighborhood associations are, you can:

- Check the City's website: www.lincoln.ne.gov, keyword: neighborhood or
- Call the City Urban Development Department at 402-441-7606.

If there's already an active neighborhood association in your area, consider joining it. New members with an active interest are greatly appreciated! If the neighborhood association isn't currently focused on your concern, raise the subject and get discussion rolling. Listen to other concerns, get involved in neighborhood activities, and get your neighbors involved. The result will be a stronger neighborhood association.

If you're located in an inactive neighborhood association, you have some options. If contact information is available for past leaders, you could contact them for their insights. Then, you can choose to re-activate the "old" organization or start over.

Mural painting in the Clinton neighborhood

Everett neighborhood festival

Everett Neighborhood festival

First Steps

You've checked and there isn't a neighborhood association in your area. You still think it would be a good idea to have one. As you think about starting a neighborhood association, discuss it with other people who might want to be involved. Recruit a handful of people – a temporary committee – to get the word out about the idea of having a neighborhood association. Besides personal contacts, reach out to the broader community using anything from social media to yard signs. Consider including people from the following list and any organizations, groups, or places that make your neighborhood unique.

- Schools (elementary, middle and high) – the parent teacher organization and school staff
- Churches – pastors, boards, activity groups
- Scouting group leaders
- Lodges and fraternal organizations
- Local business people (including home-based businesses)
- Labor organizations
- Local professionals (doctors, CPA's, real estate agents, etc.)
- Cultural centers and organizations
- Local government leaders
- Long-time residents (people with a sense of the area's history)
- Parents of your children's friends
- Child care providers
- Next door neighbors
- Newspaper editors

Invite everyone you contact to an open meeting to discuss the idea of a neighborhood association. Have a picnic in a park, meet at a library or school, or share conversation over a cup at a local coffee shop. The location will depend on how many are invited to attend. Just by getting to know each other better, the neighborhood benefits.

If there is support for starting a neighborhood association, the next step is to figure out what its general purpose will be. Will it mainly coordinate existing neighborhood activities? Will it be an action group dealing with urgent issues? Or both? And how will the organization work? The purpose of your neighborhood association will help shape its structure.

"Great Neighborhoods!" leadership training workshop

Organizational Structure Options

There's a spectrum of possibilities for how your neighborhood association can be organized. The structure that will work best will depend on the purpose of the group and the resources available. There are three basic organizational models to choose from:

Charitable Organization: This is the simplest and least structured model and there is a range of possibilities within it. For example, a charitable organization can choose to have bylaws to help with continuity and process, even though bylaws aren't a necessary part of this model.

Non-Profit Incorporated Organization: This option involves more structure and paperwork, but that may be necessary if your neighborhood association will need to be recognized as a legal entity which can sign contracts or own property.

Tax-Exempt Organization: This is the most structured organizational model. If your neighborhood association expects to have significant earnings that may be taxable or if you want donations to the neighborhood association to be tax exempt, this will be how you will want to organize.

More information about each of these options is available in Appendix A, which is a summary drawn from "*How to Create a Nonprofit Organization in Nebraska*" by the Funders' Group of Lincoln and Lancaster County.

It's also worth remembering that the organizational structure that works for your neighborhood now may change in the future. Over time, neighborhood organizations can change as they respond to the needs and desires of their members.

Youth entertaining at Everett Neighborhood festival

Bylaws

Should your neighborhood association have bylaws? What are bylaws, anyway? Basically, bylaws tell you who should do what and how. They establish the structure of your neighborhood association "in black and white" and provide consistent, ongoing guidelines through changing leadership over time. Bylaws should be firm enough to give guidance when a question arises, but flexible enough so your hands are not tied. By-laws can and should be amended if there are problems living with them.

If you choose to have bylaws, they should be shaped and written specifically for your group. Using the outline and "generic" example in Appendix B, you can create a rough framework and then fill in your own details. You may even want to review them with a lawyer.

Irvingdale neighborhood clean-up day

Setting Goals & Making Plans

Setting goals and making plans aren't just for startup neighborhood associations. Periodic goal-setting keeps an organization responsive to changing needs and a neighborhood plan can help accomplish goals.

Goal-Setting is a Process

The goal-setting process that your neighborhood association uses will be unique because your group is unique. In its most basic form, goal-setting is a discussion among people representative of your neighborhood (ethnic, occupational, age, etc.) about your neighborhood's needs and ideas on how to address those needs. Whatever the process used, it should enhance participation and build consensus while providing enough structure that effective discussion occurs.

Most goal-setting processes start with the "big picture" and work down to the details. A common type of goal-setting process is described below. It uses small groups to encourage a high level of participation, some basic rules, referees, and a facilitator. The referees primarily keep discussion from bogging down in details too early in the process and prevent domination of the discussion by a few individuals. The facilitator ensures an open flow of ideas, helps clarify and summarize points, and generally keeps the group on track. The process occurs in stages, each building on the previous stage.

Set Your Targets: The group identifies broad areas of community concern such as education, land use, safety, etc. It helps to post these so everyone can see them - use a chalk board, flip chart, or digital projection.

Neighbors training to participate in a survey of neighborhood conditions

Prioritize: Next, the group names urgent community issues that fall within the broad concerns. Now the group can narrow their focus to just a few issues. Sometimes it helps to point out how issues are inter-connected (i.e., housing stock might suffer because of a school closing or a street widening).

Define: Before setting goals, define the differences between goals, objectives and tasks. Goals are broad statements of purpose and objectives are more specific statements of purpose. It's helpful if both goals and objectives can be measured. Tasks are the actions undertaken to achieve the goals and objectives. For example, a goal could be improvement of landscaping in the local park, an objective could be replacement of old landscaping around the playground in the park, and a task could be planting perennial flowers around the south side of the playground.

Listing Goals: Next, break into small groups, each appointing a moderator and a referee. Each small group will list two or three goals for each broad concern. To be sure to hear from everyone, each person should write down their ideas and then all ideas should be shared for discussion.

Prioritize Groups' Goals: Then the moderator presents his/her small group's goals to the larger group. The facilitator helps clarify as necessary and the larger group selects the top three or four goals for each broad concern.

Developing Objectives: The facilitator assigns each small group to a broad concern (education, zoning, etc.) with its top three or four goals. Each member of the small group can present objectives relating to the goals and justify them. After discussion, the small group should end up with no more than two or three objectives per goal.

Prioritize Groups' Objectives: Each small group moderator presents the objectives developed to the assembled, larger group. The facilitator helps clarify the objectives as needed. The assembled large group assigns priority levels to the suggested objectives, ranging from high (critical) to low (nonessential). For the higher priority objectives, the small group process is used again to develop and list group tasks that will lead to accomplishment of the group's goals and objectives.

Developing and Prioritizing Tasks: Once again the small groups and the group as a whole work together to identify and prioritize tasks that will accomplish the goals and objectives. When deciding what to do and when, the group needs to evaluate the resources available – time, money, and energy.

Whatever goal-setting process your neighborhood uses, it is important to stay flexible. Issues, resources and membership can and will change. To be a responsive neighborhood association, you will need to reflect those changes in your tasks, objectives and goals.

A Neighborhood Plan

A neighborhood plan is not required and it involves some work. However, if your neighborhood has already spent the time and effort to identify the neighborhood association's goals and objectives, that's essentially what a neighborhood plan is – just in written form. On the plus side, as a written resource, a neighborhood plan can help focus the group's activities — from board-level decision making to the specific job assignments given to volunteers. By providing clear milestones on the way towards achieving the group's goals, a plan can also help the neighborhood association persevere.

To keep a plan relevant and flexible, it should be revisited regularly – perhaps every other year or so. If neighborhood goals and objectives change, the plan should change as well. Neighborhood association leaders can evaluate progress toward completing the plan quarterly and seasonally. Based on that evaluation, a calendar of activities can be projected for the next three or four months.

NeighborWorks® Lincoln staff works to build neighborhood association capacity

Conference participants learn about resources available to neighborhood associations

"Streets Alive," sponsored by the Health Department, has many neighborhood connections

Membership

Okay, your neighborhood association has worked out some goals and objectives. As activities begin, one of your neighborhood association's most valuable resources is its membership. How many members does a neighborhood association really need?

Neighborhood associations don't need 100% of the area's population to be members. Most groups have learned from experience that members will fall into four categories:

Workers contribute their time and energy in addition to paying their dues. Not everyone needs to be a worker, but the number of workers will shape your planned activities.

Supporters pay their dues and maybe contribute a little more, but they may not normally attend meetings or contribute their time. They may occasionally help with an activity that interests them.

Beneficiaries don't pay dues and don't get involved. However, they do reap the benefits of the association's good works. Remember, it's possible for them to become involved in the future.

Detractors don't like the neighborhood group. Sometimes they will actively oppose neighborhood association activities. Unfortunately, every volunteer group has at least a few of these as well.

Recruiting Members

Recruiting – and keeping – members is an ongoing concern for all volunteer organizations and neighborhood associations are no exception. How can a neighborhood association recruit and keep active members, especially workers and supporters?

Have a Purpose: Have clear goals and objectives or a cause of immediate interest to potential members. Knowing what tasks or projects are planned helps new volunteers know exactly what is expected of them. Initially, the purpose could even be a survey of the neighborhood to identify needs.

Be Visible: Have a website, Facebook page, blog, and/or newsletter. Publically brag about neighborhood association accomplishments and recognize volunteers. Write press releases for the media or develop a good relationship with a reporter. Develop a group identity that helps your efforts be recognized.

Whatever means you use to gain visibility, try to consistently provide or make available:

- the name of the organization,
- its basic mission,
- its boundaries,
- any membership requirements or dues,
- meeting schedule and location,
- full contact information of a designated "first contact person,"
- a very brief list of activities and/or committees, and
- your source of funds – memberships, donations, and/or grants

Build on Connections: Build working relationships with other neighborhood area groups such as Neighborhood Crime Watch, a local business group, or the local parent teacher organization.

Know Who Benefits: Collect the names of residents who have benefited from your neighborhood's efforts. Who has had alleys

graveled, homes painted, sidewalks repaired, garbage hauled away, or a new street tree planted? If you remind them what was done for them, they may want to "pass it on" to others.

Be Personal: Make personal contact with residents through block captains or recruitment committee members. Have a person that new recruits can easily contact, someone easy to talk to. Your own enthusiasm and pride will help convey the advantages of joining. When new people move in, welcome them and give them information about the neighborhood association, other neighborhood activities, and perhaps even coupons to local businesses.

Listen: There really are people who want to be part of a team, serve their community, or use talents not otherwise expressed. Few people will come right out and say, "I'd feel really fulfilled it I could do ___." Try to listen between the lines and hear what triggers their enthusiasm. When your neighborhood association can offer something that is in sync with what an individual needs, everyone benefits.

Be Accessible: Make it easy to become a member. Have membership information available on an up-to-date neighborhood association website or Facebook page, and at community events in your area — fairs and festivals, parades and picnics, sidewalk sales, local church events, flea markets and garage sales, and PTO/school events. Distribute or mail a membership brochure to all neighborhood residents. Provide membership forms and information in your newsletter. Keep membership dues low.

Have Fun: Be enthusiastic about what you're doing. Have a party and invite the whole neighborhood. Have interesting and lively meetings. Socialize and have snacks after meetings. Do hands-on projects and invite non-members to participate. Have a good-natured contest to see who can recruit the most new members.

Be Appreciative: Thank people for whatever they contribute – time, funds, or materials. Being appreciated will keep people involved and active even when their own "good feelings" aren't enough. A personal thank you – a heart-felt hand shake or a hand written note – is probably the most effective form of appreciation. Public acknowledgement – at the annual meeting, in the newsletter, on the website – is also good. Other options include arranging for discounts at local stores or handing out freebies (group t-shirts, mugs, pens).

Hawley Neighborhood's Home & Garden Tour

Volunteers

Volunteers are the life blood of any neighborhood association. And even when people are dues-paying members, it's often difficult to get them to volunteer their time as well. To commit time, the value of the result has to be very important to the potential volunteer. That's one important reason to stay in touch with the interests and needs of neighborhood residents. Of course, volunteers don't have to be members to participate, so don't limit volunteer recruitment to dues-paying members.

1. How do I get people to do a job?

Ask them. Few people will volunteer their services. This does not mean that they don't want to be active, however. People wait to be asked. Asking builds activity.

2. Who should ask them?

If possible, someone they know and trust; a friend, a neighbor, a co-worker. If you can't arrange that, do it yourself. Remember that the act of asking is itself important. After this has been done, be sure that the leader of the group welcomes the new recruit she or he will work with.

3. What do I tell them?

- ***Make clear what job you are asking them to do.*** What do you want the volunteer to do? When? Where? How long will it take? Will they need to bring their own tools and/or equipment? The task should have a definite beginning and ending. People don't want to sign up for life, so don't ask them to over-commit themselves.
- ***Ask people to do things they can do well.*** People are more willing to begin things they know how to do. After sharing a list of the tasks that need to be done, ask what they would like to do. If they eventually become part of your group, they may be more willing to try new things.
- ***Tell each person how their job fits in with the rest.*** People want to understand things that they are a part of, and they work best when they know that others are depending on them. Tell people how the project will benefit them and the entire community.
- ***Let each person know that their help is needed.*** If she or he feels that you are "looking for people" she or he will also feel easily replaceable and less responsible for doing a job.
- ***Discuss their personal goals and how they fit into those of the organization.*** People have their own reasons for volunteering. Knowing what those are will help you lead effectively. If possible, encourage people to keep their expectations realistic. If their expectations of the neighborhood association can't be met, your group will become a source of disappointment rather than fulfillment.
- ***Ask what they would like to know, and give them plenty of time and help in asking questions.*** Many people are reluctant to ask questions, but they will be better volunteers after they have done so.
- ***Do these things in person.*** Do not rely on printed circulars, letters, phone calls, email, Facebook, or Twitter. There is no substitute for talking face-to-face. It tells the person that you consider the discussion important, and it gives you a chance to get acquainted with them.

Union College volunteers assist with a neighborhood clean-up

New Leaders

Once your neighborhood association has been up and running for a while, the group should think about how to find and encourage new leadership within the organization. If the group stays with the same leadership year after year, there is a very real risk of "burning out." This is hard on both the people and the organization. Although nurturing new leaders takes time and effort, the results are worth it – a healthy organization with leaders who are fresh and enthusiastic.

The first place to look for names of potential officers and/or board members is within your association's membership. To do that, the group needs to know something about the members, especially those who are also volunteers. For example, it would be useful to know a member's name, address, phone (home, cell, and/or work), email address, the first year active, neighborhood interests and concerns, and current and past projects. This takes someone who will need to consistently:

- Collect new and updated information – for example, using a sign-up sheet at each neighborhood association activity and
- Record and organize the information – using a computer spreadsheet or data base or index cards – whatever technology works best for the person collecting information.

Another way to recruit new leadership is to directly ask the paid membership. Members of a "leadership committee" can divide up the membership list, directly contact all the members, and ask them:

- Why did you join the neighborhood association?
- What projects might you want to participate in?
- Would you ever be interested in serving on the board of directors or as an officer?

Leadership Training

Just like any volunteers, new leaders need to know as much about their "jobs" as possible. One-on-one sessions with outgoing and incoming officers will certainly help. Written descriptions of the duties of officers or board members are also useful. Many organizations have a vice-president elect, allowing that officer to observe the president for a year – a kind of "on the job training."

In addition, some community organizations offer leadership training classes or workshops — sometimes for a fee, sometimes free. An Internet search will usually find any available local classes or workshops.

Neighbors attend a class to learn about rain barrels and water conservation

School children helped pick up litter in their neighborhood

Meetings

Successful meetings can build an organization; poor meetings can erode even the best organization. This section is full of good ideas for holding great meetings.

Six Rules for Meetings

#1 Time Is Everyone's Most Valuable Commodity

If you waste people's time with dull, extended, unnecessary, and unproductive meetings, they will resent you doubly: first for wasting their time; second, for taking them away from what they now wish they had done instead of coming to the meeting.

Always ask yourself: Is this meeting necessary? Is this topic necessary?

#2 The Reason to Hold a Meeting Is to Plan Action

The program of your meeting should consist of action, not meetings. It is very easy to slip into the opposite – a program of meetings, not action.

If your bylaws say one meeting a month, then you need to include an activity at least once every two months or people will stop coming to your meetings.

If you substitute educational programs at your meetings for planning action, you will attract a different kind of membership (which will make it hard for the organization to get back into action).

Sometimes meetings are combined with action as with candidates' nights, meetings at which public officials respond to the organization's demands, and mass community protest meetings.

#3 Pre-plan the Meeting as Carefully as You Would If You Were Putting on a Play

Remind people to come. Don't rely on mailings or a phone call a week or two before. Call, email, or tweet all active members starting three nights before the meeting. Have as many people as possible send out the reminders — the people sending the messages will also be more likely to come.

Remind each member of the date, time, and place. Tell them why the meeting is important in terms of the issue the group is working on, and mention the main decision that will be made at the meeting.

Determine who needs help with transportation. Ask each person directly, "Can you come?" Then say, "Good, I will look forward to seeing you there."

Always plan for fewer people than you expect. Empty chairs are demoralizing. Having to get more chairs is a victory in itself.

Consult with as many participants as possible beforehand. Find out their concerns. Let them know what fits or does not fit into the purpose of the meeting. Prepare them. Organize them and get opinions.

Delegate meeting tasks beforehand. This includes everything from making reports to making coffee. This helps to guarantee the attendance of the people with assignments and makes you, the organizer, more available to respond to anything unexpected.

Have assignments in mind to give to specific participants at the meeting. Ask them beforehand if they will accept.

#4 Have a Printed/Posted Agenda

Limit the number of items to four or five.

Limit the total length of the meeting to two hours –- tops.

Put a suggested time limit on the agenda for each item.

Decide beforehand what agenda item will generate the most enthusiasm and use its place in the agenda effectively.

Neighborhood landlords meeting with NeighborWorks®Lincoln and City staff about changes in regulations

Have proposals for each part of the meeting thought out in advance. Never pose a question to the group if you have no idea what the answer is.

Have a period for open discussion at the end of the meeting. This is the time for announcements and items that are not central to the point of the meeting. Limit this time so that the meeting does not dribble away at the end. After the discussion period, the chair should review everything decided at the meeting and then formally close the meeting.

#5 Have a Chairperson

The chair is the leader for the meeting. More than just a moderator, the chair has the responsibility for moving the meeting along, encouraging participation, and getting the agenda accomplished.

The chair should be briefed on each agenda item, and what kind of decision needs to be made.

#6 Have Well-Thought Out Alternatives for the Membership to Choose From

It is more effective to develop alternatives to which a group can respond. In the discussion phase, it is easier to revise an existing alternative than to create one from nothing.

In a democratically run meeting, both the majority and the minority have rights on any particular issue. The minority has the right to make their views heard. The majority has the right to end the debate and move along to a decision, provided that they have enough support as stated in the bylaws – often two-thirds of the group.

Once all views have been heard, vote. Do not to let the meeting drag on.

If a small majority makes a major decision, it was probably the wrong decision and will split the group. It is often wise for the majority to say that unity is more important than winning on a particular point.

It is helpful to have some minimal rules (such as Robert's Rules of Order) for the conduct of regular business meetings. These should be distributed to all. They help new people figure out how to participate.

Meeting Mechanics

Things to Be Accomplished at a Meeting:

- Make decisions to start an action program.
- Disseminate information. *This can also be done outside a meeting using whatever communication tools are available.*
- Identify willing volunteers and divide the group's workload.
- Develop new ideas and insights.
- Build organizational morale by demonstrating mutual support.

Conducting the Meeting:

- Review the purpose of the meeting after introducing and welcoming new people. Remind the members what has happened since the last meeting and what decisions have to be considered at this one. This short unifying keynote can be made by the chair or another officer.
- Distribute the agenda and ask for suggestions or changes.
- Where there are different points of view on what the group should be doing, set aside five or ten minutes of open discussion during which no motions are made and no votes are taken.

Participants in the 11th Street design process

Participants in the 11th Street design process

- Keep the tone upbeat. If differences can't be settled in a positive way, put off deciding and work things out later.
- Thank everyone who worked for the organization since the last meeting.
- Everyone should leave the meeting with something to do, even if it is only a leaflet to give out or a sign to put in a store window.
- At the end of the meeting the chair summarizes the major points and reviews the assignments which have been made.

Role of the Planning Committee or Floor Team:

The floor team is a group of three or four people, usually the other officers of the organization, who have special responsibility during the meetings. Responsibilities of the floor team include:

- Supporting the chair.
- Providing enthusiasm – starting applause where appropriate, giving support to good ideas, etc.
- Continually assessing what needs to be done to move things along, provoking discussion, drawing out members, helping the chair, etc.
- Participating in discussion.
- Calling for votes when the meeting drags.
- Responding to off-the-wall remarks (but don't dwell on them–avoid overkill).
- Assessing how people are feeling and being prepared to intervene to clarify issues, calling for more discussion if necessary.
- Meeting new members and making them feel welcome.
- Helping with physical arrangements, being prepared to get more chairs, open windows, answer the phone, etc.
- Circulating afterward to get opinions on the meeting.
- Going out after the meeting with new members or people who need to socialize or discuss a topic.

After the Meeting:

- The officers and staff should follow up on all assignments before the next meeting. At the next meeting, a report should be made on the outcome of the decisions and assignments of the previous meeting.
- Contact active members who missed the meeting and fill them in.
- Call the chair and other people who played a major role and congratulate them.

A Suggested Basic Agenda

- Call to order.
- Roll call (if any).
- Greetings from the president (opening remarks, welcome, welcome to special guests, etc.).
- Approval of minutes.
- Reports of officers (Treasurer's report, etc.).
- Communications not requiring action (letters, thank-you notes, etc.).
- Reports of any associate organizations ("Your Neighborhood" Housing Corporation, "Your Neighborhood" Council, etc.).
- Reports of special committees.
- Old business (business unfinished at close of last meeting).
- New business (motions, announcements, etc.).
- Programs (program chair introduces guest speakers, etc.).
- Adjournment.

Street tree planting in the Clinton neighborhood

Basic Parliamentary Procedures

For a complete description of parliamentary procedures, you can refer to a copy of **Robert's Rules of Order**. It is available at libraries, bookstores, or via the Internet. A summary is available at www.robertsrules.org. The following summary covers three of the most commonly used procedures — main motions, basic rules for debate, and voting.

Basic Process for a Main Motion or Resolution:

- A member secures the floor. Member rises, addresses the chair, (gives name in large assembly) and is recognized by the chair.
- A member introduces business. Member makes a motion ("I move"), another member seconds the motion, and the chair (presiding officer) states the motion, which opens the question presented to discussion.
- The chair puts the question. Chair takes the affirmative vote and the negative vote, and must announce the result (carried or lost).

Basic Rules of Debate:

- Each member is entitled to speak once to a question, sometimes twice or more often, if there is no objection.
- Members indulge no personalities, avoid reference by name.
- Members always make inquiries through the chair.
- Maker of motion has privilege of opening and closing debate.
- Chair must remain strictly neutral and must leave the chair (calling the vice president to preside) to debate and does not return to the chair until the pending question is voted upon.

Voting – Types:

- Majority – a number greater than half the votes cast.
- Plurality – in a contest of more than two alternatives, the number of votes cast for the winning alternative if it is not a simple majority.
- 2/3 Vote – 2/3 of the votes cast. To determine a 2/3 vote quickly, double the negative vote cast, and if equal to or less the affirmative vote cast, a 2/3 vote has been cast.
- Tie Vote – same number for and against, motion is lost.

Voting – Methods:

- Voice Vote: "Aye and No" – for majority vote.
- Show of Hands: "Affirmative and Negative" for small groups.
- Rising Vote: "Affirmative and Negative" for 2/3 vote.
- Roll Call – checks attendance as well as vote
- Ballot – assures each voter's secrecy.
- Secretary to cast on ballot – only if authorized in by laws
- By Mail or Proxy – only if authorized in bylaws
- By General Consent – for routine decisions, for example, the Chair states, "If there is no objection, we will . . , etc."

Reports & Records

Reports are a necessary part of any meeting. Through reports an organization knows if it is functioning properly and being informed about all progress and activity. A report is a concise statement of activities done during a given period. A good report should include:

- Name of activity
- Summary of accomplishments
- Description of methods, if useful – and then only briefly and in general terms
- Announcements of future activities – project ideas for next period, etc.
- Any special information that a committee feels is of interest to the chairperson, but is not part of the body of a report, should be written on a separate sheet of paper and given to the chairperson.

Participants in the 11th Street design process

Remember: Good Reports are limited to essential information and are brief and factual. Bad Reports take extra time, give a personal opinion, or deliver a "homily."

A record is an itemized list of your activities, meetings you have attended, groups you have addressed, letters written, etc. These are not part of the report. However, it is proper to list them, if you care to, on the reverse side of your report or on a separate sheet, showing that it is a record. Records are not read at the meeting, but are filed for future reference so that information of the organization's activities may be complete. In organizations with a changing leadership and membership, recording who a contact person was or detailing a process that was followed can help prevent the need to "reinvent the wheel."

Three Types of Meetings

Business Meeting: As the leader of the meeting, the chairperson or president should:

- Initiate items or proposals for the members to consider; to bring up matters on which the group may wish to take action. Frequently, if members are informed ahead of time of the tentative agenda and proposals they will be more equipped to intelligently participate.
- Facilitate the deliberations and actions of the group; to make it easier for them to conduct business.
- Follow an agenda.
- Know your parliamentary procedure.
- Use the secretary as a resource.
- Orient and guide the group in the conduct of their business.
- Encourage and bring about a free and complete discussion of matters brought before the meeting.
- Act as a consensus builder when debate waxes a little too warm.
- Summarize, clarify, and restate motions made and considered by the group before voting.

Round Table Discussion

The Leader or Facilitator will:

- Help the group get acquainted.
- State the problem or helps the group state it.
- Stimulate and direct the discussion.
- Promote participation by all members.
- Encourage the timid soul; discourage the monopolizer.
- Summarize when necessary.
- Bring the group to a conclusion and to a plan of action.

Brainstorming

The conduct of this kind of meeting is very simple. The leader must be sure that the ground rules are understood; that the problem is stated; that those present are conditioned to present ideas; that the session is a freewheeling, fast-moving succession of ideas, despite how foolish; that no one criticizes or comments; that all ideas are accepted as stated, or as improved upon by a subsequent speaker, that a record is kept of all; and that, finally, the suggestions made in this session are evaluated and the grain is separated from the chaff.

Five steps to follow in brainstorming:

1. What is the problem?
2. What is the cause of the problem?
3. What are the possible solutions?

Graffiti removal in the Clinton neighborhood

4. What are the best possible solutions?
5. How is it to be accomplished?

More Meeting Tips

Parallel Agenda

What can group leaders do when a group member digresses from the topic to an entirely different issue? Especially when several others show interest in the side issue and discuss it also? Is the purpose of your meeting derailed? No, not if you use a "parallel agenda."

A parallel agenda is a list of topics that your group does not have time to discuss at the current meeting, but plans to discuss at an upcoming meeting. If you use a parallel agenda at your meeting, meeting leaders can tactfully overcome digressions with: "That topic isn't on our agenda today, but let's put it on the agenda for our next meeting."

Using a parallel agenda allows you to acknowledge creative ideas without side-tracking the group away from the previously agreed upon agenda. Your group members will know that the topic will be on the next meeting agenda and can prepare for that discussion.

Delegation

Ever notice how the busiest person you know is also a great leader? What makes him or her so special? It may be delegation. Busy people are forced to delegate tasks to others. Delegation may be one of the most important skills any group leader can learn and practice. Effective delegation develops new skills in the person sharing the task and the person taking the assignment.

The "delegator" needs to think through what is needed to accomplish the task. Then, matching the task with a person's interests and abilities, the delegator asks that person to help. After the "delegatee" agrees to help, the delegator and the delegatee discuss the task, the reason for the task, the expected results and any materials needed to complete the task. After the task is finished, delegator and delegatee should discuss what worked well and what could have been improved – on both sides of the delegation equation.

The "delegatee" gains familiarity with the neighborhood association, its purpose and the people in it. Because of their involvement and commitment, the delegatee will be more respected and appreciated by neighborhood association members. And, from taking on a new task and succeeding, the delegatee gains confidence in their abilities.

Environmental Concerns

Don't forget the physical environment where meetings are held. Is the meeting room air conditioned or heated appropriately? Is there enough lighting? Are there enough chairs (but not too many) and are they arranged in a way that will facilitate the meeting? Can latecomers enter quietly without disrupting the meeting? If you have a special guest, is there a place designated for them to sit? Will someone meet the guest and show them where to sit? If there will be an audio-visual presentation, display materials, or speakers' materials, plan to set things up before the meeting starts.

City staffer presenting neighborhood statistics at a neighborhood leadership training session

Fund-Raising

When you get right down to it, your neighborhood association will need money. How much will depend completely on what the funds are needed for. There are a variety of methods for raising funds: grant writing, membership drives, admission to special events, mail solicitation, and annual campaigns asking for donations. Whichever method(s) you use, you will need to have a clear understanding of what the funds will be used for and how much needs to be raised. The following list identifies elements of the fund-raising "experience."

Elements of Fund-Raising

- **Feasibility Study:** Your group may want to do a feasibility study that asks businesses and individuals "Would you be willing to give to this project?" In other words, it might save time and money to test the waters before jumping in.
- **Strong Commitment:** The neighborhood association needs to be strongly committed to the project/program being undertaken. The board organizes the fund-raising effort and recruits volunteers.
- **Case Statement:** Develop a one to two page summary of the purpose of your organization and its credentials, what the problem is and how it can be solved, and how much volunteer time is needed to accomplish the task(s). The group can use this case statement when soliciting donations from businesses, individuals, churches, and corporations. They can send a more detailed statement as a grant proposal to larger foundations and corporate foundations.
- **Donors:** Make a list of prospective donors – residents, adjacent neighborhood residents, local businesses, churches, service clubs, local government programs, sympathetic businesses and corporations, banks and lenders, civic organizations, etc.
- **Volunteers:** The board members will need to recruit volunteers who can help with the fundraising. Assign volunteers to prospective donors, taking into account a volunteer's abilities, talents or interests that may be more effective with particular donors. Each fund raiser should know the Case Statement so well that they can easily respond to donor questions.
- **Methods of Approach:** Explore the methods of approaching prospective donors and select the method that will work best for your group. Besides the methods already mentioned, consider these: telethons, direct mail appeals, door-to door campaigns, and sales (i.e., Honey Sunday or Girl Scout Cookies).
- **Schedule:** Set a kick off date and a completion date for the fund-raising effort.
- **Implementation:** Using the method(s) you selected, go raise funds.
- **Appreciation:** Thank the donors and the volunteers.
- **Evaluation:** How well did it work? What worked well, what could be improved?
- **Announcement:** After accomplishing the project's objectives, be sure to publicize what you did with the money you raised.

Bi-annual Near South home tour is an association fundraiser

"Job" Descriptions

While there will be some variation from organization to organization, the following "job" descriptions can give people an idea of what might be expected of them.

Board Member

A neighborhood association board member helps with the administration of the neighborhood association. Generally, a board member should:

- Attend regular meetings.
- With other board members, set policy, goals, and priorities.
- Plan projects and events.
- Participate in committee work (i.e., housing, fund-raising, etc.).
- Represent the neighborhood on city advisory committees.
- Represent the neighborhood at civic activities, testifying at public hearings.
- Recruit volunteers.

In addition, a board member must:

- Be committed to the betterment of the neighborhood.
- Work well with others and respect their opinions.
- Listen attentively to other people's ideas and concerns.
- Communicate ideas and concerns clearly to others.
- Follow through on commitment.
- Be assertive and friendly when representing the neighborhood association.

Being a board member involves a time commitment, on the average, of about five hours per month. This is based on time needed for monthly board and committee meetings and participation in one neighborhood project. The benefits of being a board member include meeting new friends, gaining new skills, and influencing the future of your neighborhood.

President or Chairperson

The president of any organization has a special role. The strength of the organization will be a reflection of the president/chair's abilities as an administrator. The spirit of the organization will be a reflection of the president's clarity and understanding. Meetings and proceedings will reflect his or her organizational ability.

The duties and responsibilities of a neighborhood association president or chair person include:

- Knowing the constitution and/or by laws of the organization.
- Preparation, in advance, of an agenda for every meeting to insure a smoothly run, on-schedule meeting. The president/chair should consult with the board/officers before meeting, so that all necessary agenda items are included.
- Presiding at all meetings. If it is necessary for the president/chair to be absent, the vice-president or other designated person should be notified in advance.
- Knowing basic parliamentary procedure and protocol, bearing in mind that tact and graciousness are important at all times and in all situations.

Elementary school students helped create a building mural in Everett neighborhood

"Our Street" on KZUM public radio station focuses on issues of interest to neighborhoods

- Appointment of leadership for special committees, carefully selecting them according to their talents and capabilities.
- With the board/other officers, planning and implementation of the neighborhood association's long-range and intermediate activities.
- Timely communication of any pertinent information that is intended for the organization.
- Delegation of tasks and responsibilities among board members/officers to fairly distribute the workload whenever possible.
- Representation of the neighborhood association, both officially when requested at community or local government functions, and unofficially, as a good example of a responsible member of the community and neighborhood.
- In addition to the "official" job description, here are some "unofficial" items suggested by past neighborhood leaders:
- Be yourself – your style of leadership will be different from your predecessor and that's okay.
- Know your strengths and weaknesses – use the strengths and draw upon other members to bolster the weaknesses.
- Seek out the opinions of others and listen – if you are too forceful about your own opinions, you may never hear from that quiet member in the corner.
- Respect all points of view.
- Lead with a friendly smile and a positive attitude.
- Face problems as they arise – careful consideration is good but avoidance often just makes things worse.
- Accept a few "emotional bruises" – we get bruises while learning to ride a bicycle and learning to lead is at least as complicated.
- A sense of humor can keep it all in perspective.

Vice President

If the president is present, the vice president assists the president. If the president is absent, the vice president does the president's job – presiding at the meetings and otherwise performing the duties set forth in the constitution and/or bylaws of the organization. In case of resignation or death of the president, the vice-president, unless otherwise provided for in the bylaws, becomes president for the unexpired part of the term.

Secretary

Some organizations have two secretaries – recording and corresponding. A recording secretary should:

- Keep a record of the business proceedings of the organization.
- Keeping an accurate, up-to-date list of the officers, chairpersons, and members.
- Have available, at all times, a copy of the rules the association has adopted or agreed to use (bylaws, neighborhood plan, Roberts' Rules of Order, etc.).
- If requested, assist the chair with preparation of the agenda; for example, by providing a record of any unfinished or postponed business.
- Cooperate with and assist all officers.
- Write the minutes of the meetings.

When writing the minutes, the recording secretary should remember that adjectives are unnecessary. Minutes should report what was done – not what was said. Individual reports should not be elaborated upon – simply state that the reports were read and filed with the secretary.

The corresponding secretary should:

- Send notification of all meetings to the officers, affiliated organizations, and other interested persons.
- Notify officers and chairs of planning meetings scheduled.
- Prepare any official organization correspondence at the chair's request.
- Report at the meeting on correspondence sent by the organization and correspondence received since the last meeting.

For those organizations with only one secretary, that one officer handles both recording and correspondence duties.

Treasurer

The treasurer is the keeper of all funds. The treasurer should:

- Pay all bills approved at the meeting.
- Maintain an itemized account of all receipts and disbursements.
- Report such receipts and disbursements at each meeting.
- Submit records for audit annually.
- Submit a written report (properly audited) at the annual meeting.

Meeting Minutes Check List

- ❒ Name of organization
- ❒ Date and place of meeting
- ❒ Nature of meeting — regular or special
- ❒ Name of person presiding (if a substitute presides, the name should be given as acting in the place of the regular officer)
- ❒ Results of roll call or a list of attendees and absentees — not always required, but should usually indicate which officers and board members were present
- ❒ Approval of minutes, along with any changes approved
- ❒ Treasurer's report
- ❒ Names of officers and chairs who gave reports
- ❒ Name of any presenter and title of their presentation (further details not needed),
- ❒ All motions as stated by the chair, the motion maker's names, and the results of the motions
- ❒ Motion to adjourn
- ❒ Adjournment time
- ❒ Signature of the recording secretary

Conference participants learn about resources available to neighborhood associaitons

Other Key Points

The following lists contain many things that have already been covered, but from a different perspective which may be helpful.

Ways to Kill Any Organization

- Don't attend meetings, but if you do, arrive late.
- Leave early, before the meeting is closed.
- Never say anything at the meeting – wait until you get outside.
- While at the meeting, vote to do everything, then go home and do nothing.
- The next day, find fault with the officers and other members.
- Take no part in the organization's activities.
- Sit in the back of the room and talk freely to others.
- Get all the organization can give you, but don't give the organization anything.
- Never ask anyone to join the organization.
- At every opportunity, threaten to resign, and encourage others to do the same.
- Talk cooperation, but don't cooperate.
- When asked to help, say you don't have the time.
- Never learn anything about the organization.
- Never accept an office – it is easier to criticize than to do things.
- If appointed to a committee, never give any time or service to it.
- If there are dues to pay, don't pay them.
- Don't do anything more than you have to, and when others willingly and unselfishly use their ability to help the cause along, complain that the organization is being run by a clique.

The audience enjoying "home grown" entertainment at the Everett Neighborhood festival

Why Boards Fail

Based on David Long's book, *How to Organize and Raise Funds for Small Nonprofit Organizations*, here's a list of why boards fail:

- An ineffective nominating committee.
- Members do not have a good understanding of the organization and what their role is.
- The same people serve year after year with no concerted effort to recruit and nurture new members.
- No effective way of eliminating non-productive members.
- No committees established and/or no non-board members participating in the committees.
- No orientation for new members or debriefing for out-going members.
- No annual plan, short-term and long-range goals, and objectives – no focus.

Conclusion

Hopefully the ideas covered here have you well on the way to starting or maintaining a healthy, active neighborhood association. There are many other concepts and strategies "out there" that can help your neighborhood association grow and continue to prosper. By far the easiest way to search for information is the Web. There are many, many websites and publications that can help keep the flame of enthusiasm burning in your group.

When local, real life resources are needed, NeighborWorks®Lincoln should be your first stop (nwlincoln.org). NeighborWorks®Lincoln is a non-profit organization dedicated to community revitalization through an active partnership of resident leaders, private businesses and public officials. Part of their mission is to open doors for people who desire a safe and attractive neighborhood.

If you tried to start a neighborhood association and it just didn't work, don't lose hope. The time may not be right for your neighborhood. Neighborhoods, like every community of people, change and grow. Wait a year or two, watch for an issue that is important to neighborhood residents and then try again!

Good luck and happy neighborhoods to you!

Appendix A: Organizational Options

Charitable Organization

Purpose: To serve the public good

Officers: Not required to install officers or hold regular meetings unless the organization's members want to.

Liability: There is no liability imposed on the organization except for those taken on by the individual members personally.

Tax Deductions: Individuals and corporations cannot take tax deductions for their donations to the organization.

Grants: Ineligible to receive grants directly from governmental agencies or most foundations. The organization may have to work with another non-profit incorporated organization that can serve as a fiscal agent.

Structure: Not required to install officers or hold regular meetings, so the organization may lack continuity and structure. Organization may be more susceptible to failure because of possible lack of support from members.

Fees: Little or no fees involved since the organization will not have to complete paperwork that is necessary to become a non-profit corporation or a tax exempt organization.

Non-Profit Incorporated Organization

Purpose: To serve a public or mutual benefit purpose – a purpose other than the pursuit or accumulation of profits.

Officers: Must hold regular meetings, elect a board of directors, write and observe bylaws, and give notice of any changes to its articles of incorporation and bylaws to its members.

Liability: Members of the organization's board may have some insulation from legal liability in relation to the organization's debts.

Tax Deductions: Individuals and corporations may not be able to take full tax deductions for their donations to the organization.

Grants: Eligible to receive grants that require the organization to be a legal entity.

Structure: Incorporation may give the organization some continuity and structure due to the requirements for a board of directors, regular meetings and incorporation documents.

Fees: The organization pays a $20 fee plus $3 per page (one side) to file Articles of Incorporation with the Nebraska Secretary of State's Office. In addition, the names and addresses of members and officers must be reported every two years to the Secretary of State. Additional fees must be paid if changes are made to the Articles 29 of Incorporation (other than the address of their registered office, or the name of their registered agent) after the document has been filed.

Other: The organization can sign contracts, own real estate and other large assets and apply for loans. It cannot sell shares of stock or otherwise distribute its income to members or other private entities. Payment to individuals can only be made for services rendered. Income can only be used to finance the organization, or given to another non-profit organization. For more information about how to become a non-profit corporation, you can check the Nebraska Department of Economic Development website at: http://assist.neded.org/npincorp.html

Tax Exempt Organization – 501(c)(3)

Purpose: To serve a public or mutual benefit purpose; a purpose other than the pursuit or accumulation of profits. See the IRS website for a complete list: www.irs.gov/exempt/

Officers: Must hold regular meetings, elect a board of directors, write and observe bylaws, record official minutes, and give notice of meetings and changes to its Articles of Incorporation and bylaws to its members.

Liability: Organization is not liable for federal income tax on its earnings unless the organization brings in substantial earnings not related to its tax-exempt purpose.

Tax Deductions: Donors may take a tax deduction for donations made to your organization to the extent allowed by law.

Grants: May be able to apply for government, corporate and private grants limited to 501(c)(3) organizations.

Structure: The pre-requisite tax exempt incorporation may give the organization some continuity and structure due to the requirements for a board of directors, regular meetings, and incorporation documents.

Fees: Fees must be paid to the Internal Revenue Service to file for tax-exempt status. This fee is in addition to the fees paid to the Nebraska Secretary of State's Office for filing Articles of Incorporation. In addition, the names and addresses of members and officers must be reported every two years to the Secretary of State. If changes are made to the Articles of

Incorporation (other than the address of their registered office, or the name of their registered agent), additional fees must be paid after the document has been filed.

Other: The tax-exempt application may require a lot of time to complete, especially with regard to budget matters – the organization will need to complete a two-year budget. The organization must keep detailed financial records. If the organization's annual receipts are $25,000 or more or its total assets are more than $250,000, it will need to complete a Form 990 Income Tax Return. However, if the organization earned less than $25,000 in a year, the form is very simple. The IRS monitors organizational expenditures by requiring a report on how earnings were spent at the end of the first two years of exemption. Using this information they then decide if the organization is qualified to continue as a tax exempt organization.

The organization cannot lobby for legislation or endorse any candidate for public office. This restriction does not, of course, affect actions that members of the organization take as individuals. Some exceptions are made to this prohibition when officials request the organization's input, for example, at public hearings. If the organization dissolves, it must give its money to another 501(c)(3) organization of its choice. Reduced postal rates may be available to the organization.

In addition to 501(c)(3) status, there is another tax-exempt status that your organization may want to consider – 501(c)(4) status. In IRS terms, this tax exempt status is for "social welfare organizations." There are some key differences: donations to a 501(c)(4) organization are not tax deductible, but a 501(c)(4) organization can lobby for legislation on the basis of issues (still can't endorse candidates). For further details, check out the IRS website: www.irs.gov/exempt/.

The same site also has everything from applications to requirements. You can also download **Publication 557: Tax Exempt Status for Your Organization** from this site.

It is also worth noting that neither a 501(c)(3) nor a 501(c)(4) status makes a neighborhood association exempt from state sales tax. According to the Nebraska Department of Revenue, neighborhood organizations are not eligible to receive a sales tax exemption number.

Appendix B: Bylaws

Example 1: Bylaws Outline

Article I. Name and Location

Article II. Purpose

Article III. Membership

- Sec. 1 Definition of Membership
- Sec. 2 Removal from Membership
- Sec. 3 Withdrawal from Membership
- Sec. 4 Termination of Association by Non-Member

Article IV. Government

- Sec. 1 Annual Meeting
- Sec. 2 Special Meeting
- Sec. 3 Notice of Meetings
- Sec. 4 Quorum at Membership Meetings
- Sec. 5 Voting Methods

Article V. Annual Meeting

- Sec. 1 Purpose
- Sec. 2 Quorum
- Sec. 3 Voting

Article VI. Board of Directors

- Sec. 1 Elections
- Sec. 2 Eligibility for Office
- Sec. 3 Removal from Office
- Sec. 4 Vacancies on the Board
- Sec. 5 Meetings of the Board
- Sec. 6 Rights and Duties of the Board

Article VII. Rights and Duties of the Officers

- Sec. 1 President
- Sec. 2 Vice President
- Sec. 3 Secretary
- Sec. 4 Treasurer

Article VIII. Finance

- Sec. 1 Membership
- Sec. 2 Loan Capital
- Sec. 3 The Right to Borrow
- Sec. 4 Investment in Other Cooperatives
- Sec. 5 Subsidiary Corporations
- Sec. 6 Partnership

Article IX. Earnings

- Sec. 1 Distribution of Earnings

Article X. Amendments

Article XI. Dissolution

Example 2: Generic Bylaws

Articles of Organization of *[State name of Neighborhood Association].*

Article I. Name

The name of this organization shall be the *[Name of Neighborhood Association].*

Article II. Area of Operation

This neighborhood organization shall limit its activities to the area within these boundaries:

[describe boundaries]

Article III. Purpose

The general purpose shall be to

_____

[State whatever purpose that is agreed upon, see some examples below.]

Make the area a better community in which to live and raise a family

Encourage the residential character of the neighborhood and quality of life through compatible land use and housing preservation.

Achieve better facilities and services to meet the needs of the residents of the area.

Maintain a pleasing aesthetic character for the neighborhood.

Develop local leadership and resources effectively to deal with neighborhood issues.

Promote an increased awareness of the benefits and problems of living in the neighborhood.

Inform the residents of the neighborhood of events concerning this area.

Meet community needs so that all who live in the area will feel a part of the community.

Provide a vehicle through which group unity may be directed when needed.

Article IV. Membership

Membership is open to anyone interested in the organization. Special efforts will be made to see that all segments of the community are included in the membership of the group. Each adult member (19 years or above) with dues current will be allowed to vote *[or state whatever membership policy is agreed upon].*

Article V. Dues

Annual dues will be $2 per regular membership. Senior citizen memberships will be $1. Dues shall be paid on or before the date of each annual meeting *[or whatever is agreed upon].*

Article VI. Meetings

The annual meeting of the organization will be held during the month of _____. Special general meetings can be called by a quorum of the Board. The membership shall be notified at least two weeks before scheduled meetings and when possible before special meetings. Procedures at general meetings shall follow "Robert's Rules of Order" *[or whatever is agreed upon].*

Article VII. Board

Functions of this organization shall be administered by a twelve (12) member board which the general membership will elect. Board members will be elected for a three-year tenure. Four (4) board members will be elected annually (except the first election at which four three-year members, four two-year members and four one-year members are elected). Members may be reelected. The Board will meet once a month or as often as necessary. The Board meetings will be open to the public. As much as possible, the Board shall represent all areas of the neighborhood.

The Board will select among themselves the presiding officers of the Board. If a vacancy occurs, a replacement shall be appointed by the Board to fill out the remainder of the term.

The Board shall appoint committees as needed. Chairs of the committees can attend Board meetings. Any issues involving financial resources or capital improvements shall be brought before a meeting of the general membership. *[Or state whatever definition is agreed upon.]*

Article VIII. Amendments

These Bylaws may be amended, altered, or repealed. A majority of members present may adopt New Bylaws at either an annual meeting or a special meeting called for that purpose. *[Or state whatever wording is agreed upon.]*