

CREATING A NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

A positive environment of shared responsibility and collaboration makes Springfield a better place to live. Springfield Inner City Older Neighborhoods (ICON) is a proponent of increased citizen participation that benefits the whole community. Strong neighborhood associations support ICON's mission to improve quality of life in Springfield's older neighborhoods. We present ***Creating a Neighborhood Association*** as a guide to help emerging neighborhood leaders understand the basic steps to organize a community of neighbors.

THE ROLE OF NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS

Neighborhood associations represent an area of the city where residents and business partners share common goals. Neighborhood associations play a vital role in representing the interests of residents and enhancing the local community. A well-organized neighborhood association can have a significant impact on the quality of life in a neighborhood.

Neighborhood associations often organize in response to a particular issue. Other reasons for organizing could include concerns about gradually deteriorating neighborhood conditions; a commitment to maintain local property values; a desire to create green space or to improve aesthetics; or to organize events such as block parties, national night out, cleanups and potlucks.

Whatever the initial reason for organizing, the most important role of a neighborhood association is to encourage neighbors to get to know each other and to work together to support the common goals of the neighborhood.

THE BENEFITS OF A NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

- By working together, residents can preserve neighborhood character and property values.
- By looking out for each other and working with their Neighborhood Police Officer, residents can keep their neighborhood safer. An association can help residents be aware of problems and educate and encourage them to prevent crime and avoid victimization.
- By speaking with a common voice, residents can be more effective with government officials and other groups. An association can invite city and county officials to meetings to hear concerns and to keep them informed of issues and needed services.
- By providing services such as clean up days, landscaping, and beautification, neighborhood associations can spread good will and good health and create an environment that says "we care about our neighborhood."
- By installing signs to identify the neighborhood, associations can engender pride in and promote an awareness of the neighborhood within the larger city.
- By communicating city and neighborhood news to residents, associations can educate residents about city services and help them get to know their public officials.
- By organizing social activities, a neighborhood association can foster relationships between neighbors; hearing their concerns informs the association's future direction.

Important note: Neighborhood associations differ from homeowners associations, which are non-voluntary groups organized by a developer with rules and maintenance fees.

FIRST STEPS IN CREATING A NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

Is There Already a Neighborhood Association in Your Area?

The first step in forming a neighborhood association is find out if a neighborhood association already serves your area. View the [Springfield ICON map](#), review the [City of Springfield neighborhood association listing](#), or call the City of Springfield to find existing neighborhood associations and contact information. If an association already exists, contact the leaders and find out how you can get involved. If no association currently exists in your area, then the following may be helpful as you begin to create your own neighborhood association.

Get to Know and Gain the Support of Your Neighbors

The next steps in forming (or revitalizing) a neighborhood association could include:

- Call or visit neighbors you already know and ask if they are interested.
- Visit neighbors door-to-door, explaining that you are interested in getting to know your neighborhood better and that you are exploring the possibility of forming a neighborhood association. Ask if they would be interested in participating and what benefits they see in having a neighborhood association. You could have a flyer to hand out to interested neighbors – with a future meeting date, time and location - or with your contact information.
- If a neighbor seems interested, ask if they would be willing to volunteer some time to get an association started. If so, obtain their contact information.
- Plan a well-publicized organizational meeting to discuss the benefits and issue(s) you have heard.

Note: An event such as a block party, garage sale, or National Night Out can be a way to engage neighbors in conversation about starting a neighborhood association.

Organizational Meeting

Once you gauge level of interest and know the purpose of the neighborhood association, plan to hold an organizational meeting. Set up the meeting soon before people lose interest.

- Create an agenda. An agenda helps keep the meeting on track and the tone positive. Plan ahead to move the meeting to the next agenda item if complaints about the same issue continue without surfacing new information or generating productive discussion.
- Invite one or more speakers to talk about the benefits of a neighborhood association and to identify available resources that could help the association meet its goals. Invite your alderman, neighborhood police officer, the Community Relations Coordinator or leaders of other neighborhood associations to the first meeting.
- Provide snacks and drinks to welcome people and create a social atmosphere.
- After the speaker(s) complete their presentations, discuss:
 - Purpose or goals of the association
 - Association's geographical boundaries (usually streets or railroads)
 - Association name
- Talk about the need for a board of directors to help lead the new association.
 - Briefly mention general responsibilities of board members.
 - Solicit the names and contact information of people who are interested in serving on the board or in other volunteer capacities.

- Ask potential leaders to provide a brief biography and why they are interested in serving the association.
- Provide your name, phone and/or email address for those who may want to express interest between now and the next meeting.
- Talk about electing leaders at the next meeting. Waiting to elect leaders until neighbors know each other a little better can help build trust and interest in the association.
- New neighborhood associations don't have to meet monthly, especially if they don't have an event or an issue to discuss. Some successful neighborhood associations meet only twice a year; others meet monthly.
- Discuss the preferred means of communication to insure that all interested residents are informed and can attend meetings. Communications could include:
 - Door to door canvassing with flyers or a printed newsletter. This can be time-consuming and require multiple volunteers to cover a large neighborhood, but it's a great way to keep in touch with your neighbors and the state of the neighborhood.
 - Depending on the number of members who have email, an email newsletter can be an efficient way to communicate. A bulk email service will help keep your email list easy-to-manage and preserve the privacy of all members' emails. MailChimp is one service that is easy to use and free at lower levels of use.
 - Nextdoor.com is a free, private online community for people living in a defined geographic area. Neighbors use Nextdoor.com to share problems, events, notifications, items for sale or give away, lost dog, recommendations, etc.
 - A website or Facebook page can be the public face of your association.

Leadership: Board of Directors

The Board of Directors is the governing body and is responsible for making financial decisions and managing the business of the association within the limits specified by the bylaws. A good size for the board of a new association is around 5 to 9 members. Too many can slow decision-making; too few can put a burden on few people and limit participation. Basic responsibilities can include:

- **President** – Provides overall leadership; prepares for meetings, creates meeting agendas and facilitates meetings; represents the association in a public capacity; mediates arguments, clarifies decisions, recognizes accomplishments and gives credit, follows up on decisions.
- **Vice President** – Assists and advises the President; runs meetings in the President's absence.
- **Secretary** – Takes notes/minutes of meetings. Writing skills, good grammar and attention to details are important. The Secretary keeps track of decisions and plans. Minutes should include decisions - what was *done*, not what was said.
- **Treasurer** – Keeps track of the association's money. Pays expenses and reports on funds. If the association has dues or collects donations, the Treasurer will need to open a bank account. An outside person with a financial background should review the Treasurer's reports and documentation once a year to ensure confidence in the association's financial records.

Other Volunteers

Depending on your goals, plan to recruit volunteers with specific skills to help get a neighborhood association going and keep it running. Some handy volunteer skills include:

- **Refreshments Volunteer** – provides snacks and drinks for meetings.
- **Event Organizer** – organizes events other than regular meetings.
- **Writer / Editor** – recruits writers to write and edit articles and to put together newsletters and flyers. Works with printers or the digital volunteer to publish online.
- **Lawyer** –helps address legal questions and creates bylaws. (Should you decide to become a non-profit 501(c)3, a lawyer can help with that.)
- **Digital Volunteer** – sets up and maintains the website, Nextdoor account, Facebook, keeps spreadsheets, creates flyers and PDFs, takes and uploads photos.

Second Organizational Meeting

The second meeting continues the organization of the association, finalizes start-up tasks, encourages resident involvement, and keeps momentum going.

- Review, amend and vote to accept bylaws.
- Introduce candidates for the board; vote to elect board members.
- Call for volunteers, including a description of responsibilities for volunteers:
 - Attend meetings and events
 - Volunteer for specific roles (see list above)
 - Become a block captain
- Provide speaker(s) on an issue of interest.
- Arrange updates from alderman, neighborhood police officer, county board member.
- Ask attendees to sign up as members
- Collect dues from new members
- Start a Neighborhood Watch; recruit block captains.
- Set future meeting dates and plan events.

Congratulations! You have a working neighborhood association!

NEXT STEPS

Once your neighborhood association is set up with officers, a board of directors and members, it's a good idea to register with local and county officials and with Springfield ICON. City registration allows the association to receive updates the city sends to registered neighborhood associations. It also allows other people, including prospective members, potential speakers, and other interested parties, to more easily find the association and understand and support its goals.

- The **City of Springfield** publishes a list of all neighborhood associations in Springfield. The list is at <http://www.springfield.il.us/Neighborhood/NeighborhoodAssocHome.aspx> Registering with the city improves communication between citizens and government; you will receive communication from the City about work and issues that may impact your neighborhood.
 - You may register your association with the city by emailing Nellie Wanless at Nellie.Wanless@springfield.il.us with the following information: name of association, boundaries or map, contact information, including email, phone, address and ward, and by laws.

- The **Springfield and Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission** publishes a list of all neighborhood associations in Sangamon County. The list is at <http://co.sangamon.il.us/Portals/0/Departments/Regional%20Planning%20Commission/Docs/Land-Development-Subdivision/Neighborhood%20Assoc/12.2.2015%20Neighborhood%20List.pdf>
 - Registration with the SSCRPC allows state and federal agencies know about the presence of neighborhood associations in areas where a project might be planned.
Download the **Neighborhood Association Registration Packet** here: <http://co.sangamon.il.us/Portals/0/Departments/Regional%20Planning%20Commision/Docs/Land-Development-Subdivision/Neighborhood%20Assoc/Neighborhood%20Association%20Packet%20fill%20in.pdf>

- **Springfield Inner City Older Neighborhoods (ICON)** publishes an interactive city map with ward boundaries and neighborhood associations. Hovering over a ward name on the map displays that ward's Alderman with their contact information. Hovering over the shaded area of a neighborhood association displays the contact information for that neighborhood association. The map is updated regularly with new neighborhood associations, when ward boundaries change (once every 10 years), and when Alderman change (once every 4 years). ICON is called frequently with requests to contact neighborhood leaders, and registering with ICON also helps people find you via the internet.

The ICON map is at <http://springfieldicon.org/interactive-city-map/>

FORMALIZING YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

Tax Identification Number (TIN)

A federal tax identification number can be used to open bank accounts, file IRS tax forms, apply for tax exempt status, etc. Organizations don't need to be incorporated to receive a TIN. Fill out tax ID form SS-4.

Incorporation

Incorporation is optional, but may be beneficial to help define the group and enhance the appearance of trustworthiness. More importantly, it can protect the personal liability of group members. There are incorporation fees and annual reporting requirements.

Download the IL Secretary of State's Incorporation Guide from

<http://www.ccim.com/sites/default/files/il%20secretary%20of%20state%20incorporation%20guide.pdf>

Tax Exempt Status

A tax exempt status is not required to be a strong, active, viable neighborhood association. If the association chooses to pursue a tax exempt status, the association must first be incorporated at the state of Illinois. If the association wants donations to be tax exempt, then a tax exempt status with the federal government is necessary; this is called a 501(c)3. This would also allow the association to qualify for grants that are only available to non-profits.

RESOURCES

The **City of Springfield** has multiple resources available to neighborhood leaders:

- Community Relations Department, 217-789-2270
 - Information on where to go for help in City government
 - Workshops on various issues
 - Landlord / tenant issues
- Police, Fire, Ambulance Emergency 911
- Police Non-Emergency Number 217-788-8311
- Neighborhood Police Officers 217-788-8325
- Neighborhood Watch Program 217-788-8390
- CWLP – street light out 217-789-2121
- Report weeds, trash, garbage 217-789-2167
- Report public health concerns 217-789-2185
- Additional contacts, including aldermen: springfieldicon.org/contact

Springfield ICON is available to:

- Speak to your group about forming a neighborhood association.
- Provide technical assistance and best practices on specific issues in small groups, on the phone or in person.
- Provide support at City Council for various issues, such as zoning.
- Provide support by letter for specific issues.
- Help identify resources for you to use to get help for issues.
- Support neighborhood leaders and act as a source of institutional knowledge about what works for neighborhood associations.

OTHER RESOURCES

- The **Neighborhood Watch Manual** is available online at springfieldicon.org/watch.
- **IL Secretary of State: Guide for Organizing Not-for-Profit Organizations**
https://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/publications/pdf_publications/c165.pdf
- **Sample bylaws:**
https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=5&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwiTrzW4cPKAhUCMSYKHZWpCzcQFgg3MAQ&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.illinoislegaladvocate.org%2FUploads%2F8231NLAP-Bylaws.doc&usq=AFQjCNG4I6Xtge_FoWbDf8VlxMVoio2hA&sig2=UrQr7yjno_edzvzZfLXYw
- **Strategies for Developing a Neighborhood Association** (Moline, IL)
<http://www.moline.il.us/DocumentCenter/Home/View/69>
- **Neighborhood Association How To's** (Lincoln, NE)
<https://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/police/ssn/SSN/Releases/NAHow2.pdf>
- **Taking Action! A Manual for Neighborhood Associations** (College Station, TX)
<http://www.cstx.gov/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=2926>
- **NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION TOOL KIT** (Providence, RI)
<http://www.providenceri.com/efile/101>
- **National Night Out**
<https://natw.org/>