

Neighborhood Associations in Madison

Madison's neighborhoods are the building blocks that make our community strong. As a city, it is vital for us to form partnerships with neighborhoods to continually enhance the assets of their areas. We recognize the important role neighborhoods play in developing a vision and how this helps guide decisions that are made by the City.

What is a Neighborhood Association?

A Neighborhood Association is a group of residents, business representatives, and/or other interested citizens that devote their time and energy to improve and enhance a well-defined, geographic area that they and others live. Neighborhood associations offer an opportunity for government officials, developers or others to solicit input from the residents that live within a specific geographic area.

Most neighborhood associations are concerned with issues that affect the quality of life in the community. Building upon the assets of their neighborhood, residents can identify and prioritize important projects for the neighborhood to undertake. Neighborhoods can be proactive by preparing neighborhood plans, emergency preparedness plans, or undertaking specific projects such as starting community gardens, upgrading park equipment, or installing traffic calming on a residential street. A collective group of motivated residents is extremely effective: if in doubt, take a look at the long list of successes stemming from our community leaders efforts.

A neighborhood association meeting, project, or social event is a place to meet neighbors, exchange ideas, prioritize projects, propose solutions, and implement plans for the neighborhood.

What is the difference between a neighborhood association and homeowner association?

Neighborhood associations are generally a group of residents and other stakeholders that volunteer to improve and enhance the well-defined, geographic area where they live or work. The neighborhood association meeting is a time to exchange ideas, decide on projects and priorities, proposed solutions, and make plans affecting the neighborhood. Homeowners associations are groups of homeowners who live in an area built by the same developer, usually referred to as a subdivision; formed for the purpose of improving or maintaining the quality of the area. Homeowners associations usually have a formally elected body and are governed by deed restrictions – a set of rules that the buyer agreed to when they purchased the home. These rules or covenants, often govern construction regulations, membership/dues requirement, as well as a wide variety of other issues.

Why Start a Neighborhood Association?

Neighborhoods usually organize to:

- Build a sense of community among neighbors
- Address a particular issue of the neighborhood
- Provide the neighborhood with an effective communication link with government officials regarding policy, planning, and projects
- Empower residents to work together in improving their neighborhood

Organizing a neighborhood brings people together to form a collective, united voice. A well-organized, diverse group of neighbors can be a powerful force in building a cohesive neighborhood where people want to become involved in neighborhood issues and neighbors lives. You are not in this alone: your [district alderperson](#), neighborhood planning staff, and your peers across Madison are willing to give you guidance.

How do I start a neighborhood association?

You must first believe that your community can benefit from having an association. This can be determined by identifying an activity, issue or project that neighborhood residents would like to address or work on. Second, you need 2-4 additional residents who share your interests and are willing to build support for the association amongst others in the neighborhood; this group is also responsible for planning the first meeting. Set a realistic goal for attendance. The more residents recruited, the easier delegation of work becomes. However, the cultivation of members should not be rushed. With enough members, you can adopt bylaws and elect a board in a timely manner.

How do we determine our neighborhood boundaries?

Keep it simple. Draw your neighborhood boundaries reflecting the natural (e.g. lake) or manmade boundaries (e.g. major transportation corridor). Many times these particular boundaries form a coherent neighborhood area. A rule of thumb is to keep it simple and start with a relatively small (but not too small) area to build the sense of community amongst neighbors. Avoid overlapping boundaries with another recognized neighborhood association.

What if the boundaries of my neighborhood association overlap the boundaries of another?

We discourage overlap because it causes confusion for the public inquiring about the association for their area. We encourage communication between associations to come up with mutually agreed upon boundaries.

Does the City of Madison have requirements on the formal structure or operations of neighborhood associations?

No. We do encourage neighborhood associations to develop an organizational structure that works for them. Some options for neighborhood associations to consider include:

- Mission statement: An organization's vision is its driving force. The mission statement explains why a group exists and what it hopes to accomplish. A group can revise and clarify its mission statement whenever it is deemed appropriate.
- Bylaws: Bylaws are simply the rules governing an organization's internal operations, including: purpose of organization, membership information, terms of officers, committees, voting procedures and dues. Examples are available from our office.
- Meeting Management: Making the most effective use of your time, and your neighbors, by running effective meetings, communicating outcomes, and engaging/recruiting new participants is key to a successful organization.

What are some key organizational questions?

- Is the neighborhood association attracting, maintaining, and recruiting new members?
- Is the neighborhood association representative of the area? Are you involving individuals across barriers of race, religion, age and socio-economic status?
- Are the neighborhood association meetings publicized? Status reports? Successes?
- Are you identifying and forming partnerships with organizations that support the residents of your community, such as: the schools, centers of worship, the merchants, business associations, the employers, landlords, local government, hospitals, realty companies, libraries, community centers, etc.?
- Are you celebrating your victories? Spread the word and tell other associations how you did it and how it can help them!

Start-Up Organizing Tips

Organizing and managing a neighborhood association is a tough job. While it may seem difficult at first, developing your association will be enormously exciting as people come together to address important issues and learn to work together as a group.

- Remember: getting your neighbors together doesn't need to be hard. Keep in mind some important tips as you begin to organize: but we've got the resources you need.
- Building an organization is a process. It cannot be done overnight. Be patient. Identify your priorities and build them step-by-step.
- Set realistic goals. Start small and build upward. As your organizational capacity grows, your organization can expand in what is possible from year to year.
- How you treat people is crucial to your success. By treating people with respect and integrity, people will be more likely to get involved in the organization.
- Communication is a key. Open, transparent, and frequent communications to government officials, neighbors, businesses, and other stakeholders in your neighborhood is important. Face-to-face interactions to social media technology can help you get out the word.

People join neighborhood groups for a variety of reasons. One of them is to get to know their neighbors and to feel a sense of community. So as you build your organization, be sure to have fun.

City of Madison Neighborhood Association Recognition

The Department of Planning and Community and Economic Development, Planning Division maintains an electronic file of the recognized neighborhood associations. Many City departments and agencies solicit neighborhood association opinions on upcoming approvals of development projects, programs and services, and other changes proposed in particular neighborhoods.

A Neighborhood Association should meet the following standards to be officially recognized by the City of Madison:

- The Neighborhood Association must have followed written procedures to establish organization: contact district alderperson and Planning Division, placed Class II notice in local newspaper, and submit information to Planning Division.
- The Neighborhood Association should occupy a geographically distinct and specific area that does not overlap with any other recognized Neighborhood Association's defined boundaries.
- The Neighborhood Association should have a Board of Directors and/or Officers democratically elected by its general membership.
- All meetings and elections must be open to the public. Efforts should be made to conduct meetings in an accessible, public place. Membership should be inclusive.

Neighborhood Association Registration

Four simple steps is all it takes.

- Contact your [Aldersperson](#) to inform them of your intention to create a neighborhood association. Your Aldersperson will be helpful in providing you with useful information on any other neighborhood associations that are functioning within the area. Call the Common Council Office at 608- 266-4071 to leave a message for your Aldersperson.
- Contact [Linda Horvath](#) or [Angela Puerta](#) with the City of Madison Planning Division to discuss establishing a neighborhood association. They will discuss the steps in forming a neighborhood association, setting boundaries, and refer you to other technical information that may be useful in your neighborhood-based initiatives.
- Place a Class II Public Notice in the [Wisconsin State Journal and Capital Times](#) indicating the time and place of the official organizational meeting. We also encourage you to post notices at frequently visited places in the neighborhood such as a local grocery store, the public schools, or go door to door inviting your neighbors to this meeting.
Example: “Residents of the (*sample neighborhood*) are invited to attend an organizational meeting at (*public location of meeting*) on (*date/time*) for the purpose of establishing a neighborhood association, adopting neighborhood boundaries and to elect officers. The proposed boundaries of the neighborhood are (*neighborhood geography such as streets, property lines or natural features*). For more information, contact (*resident contact information*).
- Inform your neighbors about the association and let them know the ways they can be involved. You can do it online through social media or by distributing informative flyers.
- Forward a copy of the public notice, a short description of the neighborhood association, a map of your neighborhood boundaries, name, address, and phone number and email address of a neighborhood contact person at neighborhoods@cityofmadison.com or to:

Planning Division

Madison Municipal Building, Suite 017 (Lower Level)
215 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Madison, WI 53703

Frequently Asked Questions

How do people find out whether there is a neighborhood association in their area?

Check our [neighborhood association profiles](#) to determine if you live in an area with an active organization. Do not hesitate giving us a call at 608-266-4635 to confirm the neighborhood association which covers your area. If there isn't an active association near your location, we will assist you in organizing your own neighborhood association.

What are the benefits of an organization having a tax-exempt status?

Many organizations see the financial benefits of tax-exempt status. In addition to qualifying for public and private grant money, most nonprofit groups seek the status to obtain exemptions from federal and state income taxes, and therefore can devote a larger proportion of their resources to achieving their particular goals. The status can also be beneficial to those groups who'd like special rates for services such as postage. Also, donors prefer to give contributions to these groups because they can deduct their gifts on their own taxes. On the other hand, the IRS restricts lobbying activity, political activity is prohibited, and the organization's activities must be limited to the charitable purpose. Each individual group must weigh the pros and cons of the status carefully in light of their organizational goals and values.

Many of our City of Madison neighborhood grants do not require tax-exempt status, and if they do, we will work with the neighborhood association to secure a fiscal agent that has tax-exempt status. The fiscal agent may charge an administrative fee but this might be less than the cost of obtaining/maintaining tax-exempt status for your neighborhood association.

How does my organization become tax exempt?

Once you file your articles of incorporation, your organization becomes a nonprofit. To receive tax-exemption status, your organization must meet three key components under 501(c)(3) of the IRS: be organized as a corporation, trust, or unincorporated association (articles serves this purpose); be operated with stipulation (such as agreeing to refrain from participation in political campaigns); and have an exempt purpose: charitable, educational, religious, or scientific. Contact IRS and Complete Form 557. The City of Madison does not assist organization is preparing/filing the proper paperwork.

Where should our neighborhoods hold its meetings?

Neighborhood Association meetings should be conducted in a place that is accessible and open to the public. You want to make sure that the location is welcoming so interested neighbors are willing to participate in your scheduled meetings. Be conscious of barriers to participation such as language, time of day, and accessibility/convenience of meeting location.

Most public and quasi-public facilities are usually provide meeting space free of charge to neighborhood associations. Possible locations for neighborhood meetings:

- Community Centers
- Fire Stations
- Police Stations
- Public Library

Other possible locations that could host neighborhood meetings include Centers of Worship, Financial Institutions or Neighborhood Schools