

Neighborhood Advisory Committees

San José, California

Purpose: Neighborhood Advisory Committees (NACs) are coalitions of neighborhood representatives that make up the formal structure for citizen engagement under San José's Strong Neighborhoods Initiative (SNI). Through NACs, city residents in 19 neighborhoods under the SNI develop neighborhood visions, identify priorities for neighborhood improvements, and, in partnership with city hall staff and a city Council Member, develop plans for implementing the agreed upon priorities in their communities.



\$1,461,000 children's park built in the Washington SNI Neighborhood.

Background: In 2000, Mayor Ron Gonzales launched the Strong Neighborhoods Initiative. The SNI is carried out by the NACs that represent the targeted SNI neighborhoods. The San José Redevelopment Authority is the primary funding source for the SNI, a city initiative that targets 19 neighborhoods qualified for redevelopment investment.

In 1956, the City of San José created the San José Redevelopment Agency (SJRA), as a result of the California Community Redevelopment Law. This state law assists local governments in revitalization, by granting them the authority, scope, and financial means to stimulate economic conditions and leverage private investment in urban areas through establishing redevelopment agencies.

The San José Redevelopment Authority (SJRA) is a public, non-profit organization created to improve the quality of life in San José. The agency is governed by the San José City Council, which serves as the Redevelopment Agency Board. For many years, San José's

redevelopment efforts and funds were focused on rebuilding downtown and industrial areas, neglecting neighborhood needs.

The focus of the SJRA changed in the late 1990's. Today the work of the SJRA and its community and private sectors partners create jobs, develop affordable housing, strengthen neighborhoods, and build public facilities.

Description: The Neighborhood Advisory Committees (NAC) include neighborhood leaders, residents, business owners and other stakeholders with an interest in serving their community. A city council member and a key city staff person are also part of the NAC. In monthly public meetings and several community workshops, the committees engage in an eight month to one year strategic planning process of visioning and priority planning for their neighborhood's needs that are communicated through a neighborhood improvement plan. This plan requires NACs to conduct an inventory of their neighborhood's assets and liabilities, in order to identify a neighborhood top-ten priority list that is presented to the city council for adoption. The adopted priority list serves as the action agenda for residents, city staff and the city council.

Neighborhood improvement priorities can range from pedestrian safety, after-school homework centers, and parks, to community centers, and crime watch initiatives. Plans are implemented within the NACs with the support from city agencies. NACs may also identify other community resources to supplement city funding from business groups, community-based nonprofits and faith-based organizations.

The City of San José designates staff to work directly with the citizen groups. Senior city officials are assigned to manage each of the Neighborhood Advisory Committees. Other city personnel assigned to each of the 19 include code enforcement officers, city planners and a city council liaison.



New \$610,000, 9,000 square feet Skatepark built in the Gateway East SNI Neighborhood.

In order to prepare NAC members for their roles as planning partners with the city, the Neighborhood Development Center, a division of San's Jose's Department of Recreation, Parks, and Neighborhood Services, established San José's Neighborhood Academy which provides training to NAC members on leadership development, community organizing, grant writing, fundraising, and other capacity building skills.

After the planning phase, NACs oversee implementation of neighborhood plans and act as liaisons between city hall and neighborhood residents.

Funding: The NACs and other SNI efforts are funded primarily by the city of San José with local redevelopment money, obtained through tax increment financing and the city's general fund. Between 2000 and 2006, San José will have invested more than \$130 million to improve SNI neighborhoods.

Accomplishments: The SNI model of grassroots partnership with City Hall has led to greater coordination of services and resources from other city departments unrelated to redevelopment. San José and its citizens have completed more than 120 community improvement projects, based on priorities set by NACs. Due to this success, Mayor Gonzales has proposed extending the SNI model of grassroots engagement in planning, communication and partnership to include all city neighborhoods. San José is currently developing plans to implement a city-wide model.

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