

# CHAPTER 9: NEIGHBORHOOD CAPACITY BUILDING

Neighborhoods are our most basic community building blocks. Strengthening the capacity of neighborhoods to achieve their goals will have a positive impact on Fort Worth's future. This chapter focuses on the programs that have been developed to respond to the needs and issues facing Fort Worth neighborhoods.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS AND TRENDS

Neighborhood capacity is most developed when there is a sense of community among area residents. With a sense of community comes pride in the neighborhood, a strong neighborhood image, and resident involvement in neighborhood improvements. Neighborhood organizations, such as associations, non-profits, Citizens On Patrol, and neighborhood alliances, are a means to building neighborhood capacity. Through neighborhood organizations, residents can discuss issues and concur on a clear set of priorities and courses of action to reach their goals.

The number of neighborhood organizations in Fort Worth is growing. Since August 1997, the number of registered associations has increased from 114 to 253. The City has 14 registered neighborhood alliances, a variety of neighborhood redevelopment organizations, and community development corporations. New neighborhood associations are regularly forming and registering with the City. However, there are existing neighborhood organizations that are not registered with the City, and there are many areas in Fort Worth that remain unrepresented by any type of neighborhood association. The City's goal is to have an active neighborhood association in every residential part of Fort Worth.

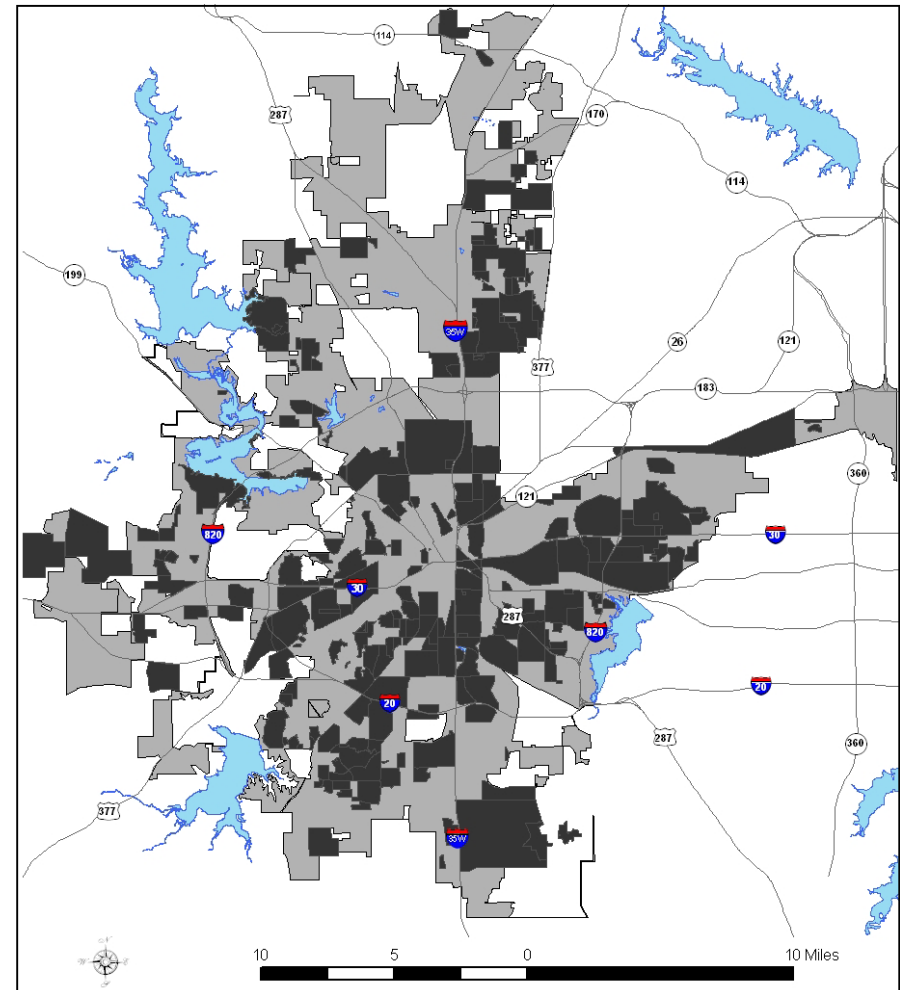
Neighborhood associations are involved in a wide variety of activities, such as planting trees, organizing clean-ups, funding special neighborhood street signage, and community policing. Neighborhoods monitor zoning and building proposals in their areas through a City program that provides courtesy notification to residents about local zoning and development cases that are going before the Zoning Commission, City Plan Commission, and Board of Adjustment. The City is better able to serve neighborhoods where established neighborhood organizations foster close links to residents. Through neighborhood organizations, residents can discuss issues and concur on a clear set of priorities and courses of action to reach their goals.

### Neighborhood-Based Nonprofit Organizations

In addition to an increase in neighborhood associations, the number of community-based nonprofit development corporations has also increased. These nonprofit entities can operate in the market just as for-profit developers, meaning the neighborhoods themselves can redevelop their communities or serve as catalysts to redevelopment.

New development corporations have been created in several central city neighborhoods, many of which are Model Blocks neighborhoods. The Model Blocks Program

**Areas Covered by Existing Neighborhood Associations, 2007**



There are 253 registered neighborhood associations in Fort Worth. The service areas of neighborhood associations are depicted above. It is the City's goal to have all neighborhoods represented by formal neighborhood associations. (Sources: Community Relations Department and Planning and Development Department, 2008.)

provides funding for neighborhood improvements and neighborhood plan implementation by community development corporations (CDCs). Community-based nonprofit development corporations created through the Model Blocks Program include groups such as the Near Southeast Community Development Corporation, the Near Northside Partners Council, and the Lake Como Area Council.

These organizations have been formed by the residents themselves, which is why they are termed community-based. Many of them have also been certified by the Housing Department as Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDOs) to receive operating and project funding for housing activities through federal HOME funds. Often a prerequisite for funding is that a significant portion of their board members be residents of the low- and moderate-income communities they serve. This has meant new responsibilities for neighborhood leaders and the need for building the capacity of these new organizations. Particularly when federal grant monies are a source of funding, the development corporation must satisfy complex reporting and administrative requirements. However, such community-based organizations represent new energy and commitment to specific areas of the city.

#### **Other Types of Neighborhood Organizations**

Community policing groups have been an effective force in helping to reduce crime. In Fort Worth, these groups are important neighborhood resources. Fort Worth's award-winning community policing program has trained over 5,200 members who are organized in 189 Citizens on Patrol groups. The community policing structure also includes citizen advisory committees that provide support.

City departments other than the Police Department are also helping neighborhoods reach their goals. The Housing Department assists neighborhoods through its Model Blocks Program. The Public Health Department helps neighborhoods by creating neighborhood-based teams that are led by public health nurses and are assisted by two community service aides. These teams work with residents to identify concerns and implement solutions, aiming to anticipate health issues rather than respond to crisis situations. Churches, synagogues, and other faith-based organizations are also important community-based organizations.

Another type of neighborhood organization is the neighborhood alliance or coalition. The Fort Worth League of Neighborhood Associations is the largest of these alliances. It has a membership of more than 85 neighborhood associations that meet quarterly to discuss issues and concerns, take positions on local legislative matters, and sponsor neighborhood training. Other alliances have formed in geographic regions of the city. The Riverside Alliance, for example, has a formal organizational structure linking seven neighborhoods in the larger Riverside area.

#### **Neighborhood Planning Needs**

The City's ability to plan for individual neighborhoods is limited, and the number of neighborhood associations that want to plan for their area is growing. Some neighborhoods have taken the initiative in developing plans for their neighborhoods



Established in 1985, the primary purpose of the Fort Worth League of Neighborhood Associations is to protect and enhance the neighborhood concept within the civic structure and to encourage, communicate, educate, share information, exchange ideas, and promote a better quality of life for those who live in Fort Worth. (Source: *Fort Worth League of Neighborhood Associations, 2007.*)

with technical assistance from City planning staff. Highland Hills, Carter Riverside, Stop Six, Polytechnic Heights/Wesleyan, and Woodhaven are among the neighborhoods that have completed such plans.

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Assist neighborhoods in forming associations, increasing their capacity, and preparing and implementing neighborhood plans.

- Help 10 neighborhoods form associations by the end of 2008.
- Each year respond to or provide referrals to over 500 requests from neighborhoods and residents regarding accessing City services.
- Every year, assist up to three neighborhood finalists in the Model Blocks Program in creating neighborhood plans, select one finalist to receive the \$1.2 million Model Blocks grant, and assist the Model Blocks winner in implementing its plan.
- By the end of 2008, prepare and implement additional organizational development and neighborhood training opportunities.

## PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS

Existing neighborhood capacity building programs are discussed below.

### Community Relations Department

The City's Neighborhood Office, part of the Neighborhood & Community Outreach Division of the Community Relations Department, was created in 1997. Its purpose is to help neighborhoods organize and develop the skills necessary to create and maintain successful neighborhood associations. The office is responsible for registering new neighborhood organizations with the City.

The Neighborhood Office also offers organizational development and leadership training opportunities to organizations or individuals working toward maintaining or improving their neighborhood. In addition, the Office serves as a resource for neighborhoods when they have questions or need information about City government.

The Neighborhood Office maintains a neighborhood web site ([www.fwlinc.org](http://www.fwlinc.org)) to provide important information to neighborhoods, improve communication between neighborhoods, foster alliances among neighborhoods, and link individual neighborhood web sites.

### Courtesy Notification System

Neighborhood associations that are registered with the City are included in the Courtesy Notification System. Through this system, neighborhoods receive information on cases scheduled to go before the Zoning Commission, City Plan Commission, or Board of Adjustment if those cases are located within the boundaries of an association or within a quarter of a mile of a neighborhood's boundaries.

**Fort Worth Neighborhood Web Site**

**Fort Worth Neighborhood Office**

The Neighborhood Office is part of the Community Relations Department (CRD). The Neighborhood Office serves the residents of Fort Worth by encouraging and assisting neighborhoods with the organization of neighborhood associations, helping and supporting existing neighborhood associations, facilitating communication between residents and city departments, providing useful information to neighborhoods, and developing educational opportunities for neighborhood associations to continue to grow and be successful.

**~ WHAT IS A NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION?~**

A neighborhood association represents all residents in the neighborhood and operates through an open, democratic process to improve or maintain the overall quality of life for all individuals within those boundaries.

*Each neighborhood association in the City of Fort Worth defines*

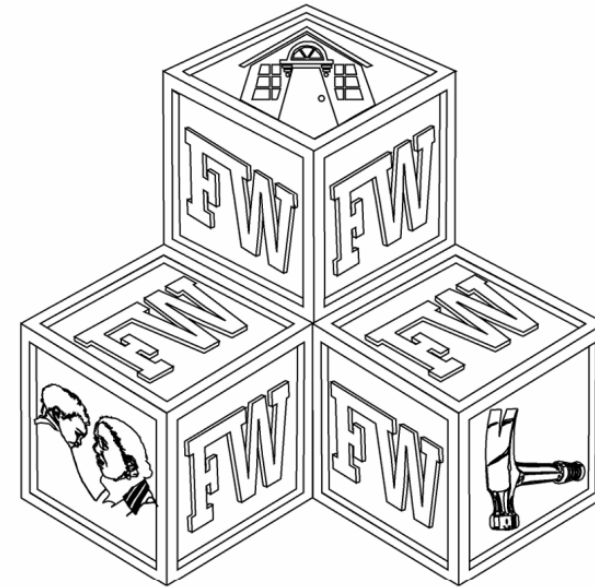
The Neighborhood Web Site (<http://www.fwlinc.org>) is a project of the City's Neighborhood Office. It was created to improve communications between neighborhoods. On the web site, users can search the Neighborhood Database, which is maintained by the Neighborhood Office, view a neighborhood calendar of meetings, access archived neighborhood press releases, and view web pages created by individual neighborhood organizations. (Source: Community Relations Department, 2007.)

### **Neighborhood Planning Programs**

The Planning and Development Department and the Housing Department plan for individual neighborhoods through the Model Blocks Program. Every year, up to three neighborhoods are selected to prepare neighborhood plans for their area with technical assistance from the City. One is selected as a Model Block neighborhood, and is awarded \$1.2 million to implement its plan. The one or two neighborhood finalists that do not receive the award are assisted in identifying ways to implement their plans through other funding sources (see Appendix A for Model Blocks). In addition to the Model Blocks Program, the Housing Department also provides neighborhood planning assistance, capacity building and funding to selected neighborhoods located in special target areas and neighborhood empowerment zones, such as Polytechnic Heights Educational Corridor, Polytechnic Heights/Wesleyan Corridor and Stop Six. The Transportation and Public Works Department also conducts special transportation planning studies in selected neighborhoods.

### **Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) Program**

The Housing Department provides training, technical assistance, and funding for operation and projects to certified CHDOs in Fort Worth. Many CHDOs are neighborhood based and managed by neighborhood leaders. The Housing Department convenes CHDOs, Model Blocks, and other community development corporations (CDCs) at a bi-monthly meeting with resource speakers. It provides one-on-one financial management assistance, conducts training workshops, and provides technical assistance, work write-up, and inspections for housing non-profits. Through the CHDO Program and the Model Blocks Program, CHDOs and CDCs also have access to training and technical assistance provided by other organizations such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Enterprise Foundation, Texas C-Bar, etc.



# **Fort Worth Model Blocks Program**

In order to apply to the Model Blocks Program, a neighborhood must have a recognized neighborhood association with by-laws and designated leaders. Residents are provided training in organizational development, neighborhood capacity building, and community empowerment. Residents work with City staff to develop their own neighborhood plans. Once a neighborhood is selected as a Model Block, federal funds are provided for implementation of the neighborhood plan. (Source: Housing Department, 2007.)