

Referral Neighborhood Councils Assessment Plan

Committee: Committee of the Whole

Item: Missoula Neighborhood Councils Assessment Plan

Date: February 12, 2021

Sponsor(s): Heidi West

Prepared by: Kelly Elam

Wards: All

Action Required: Approve the recommendations set forth from Keegan Flaherty, Flaherty Consulting Firm.

Recommended Motions: I move the City Council approve the recommendations set forth from Keegan Flaherty, Flaherty Consulting Firm.

Timeline:

Referral to Committee: February 22, 2021

Committee Discussion: February 24, 2021

Council Action: None

Public Hearing: None

Deadline: None

History:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Missoula established Neighborhood Councils in 1996 to strengthen and encourage citizen participation in local government and to improve communication between citizens and City officials. In July 2020, the City of Missoula Office of Neighborhoods transitioned leadership; and as a result, engaged in a needs assessment from August to October 2020. The process included a review of organizational documents and stakeholder interviews detailed and analyzed in this report. Missoula Neighborhoods retained Keegan Flaherty of Flaherty Consulting to facilitate the needs assessment process. As a first step in that process, organizational documents were reviewed to understand the structure of the Neighborhood Councils. Next, the consultant conducted nineteen confidential interviews with Neighborhood Council leadership to further understand the current landscape. After the conclusion of a review of organizational documents and interviews, the consultant analyzed the results for common trends. This report synthesizes the information provided by internal and

external stakeholders, providing Missoula Neighborhoods a comprehensive assessment outlining key findings and recommendations.

In the initial stages of the assessment, Flaherty Consulting, worked with the Missoula Neighborhoods staff to identify and clarify the information to gather from the process, and what purposes that information was to serve. Having discerned the Missoula Neighborhoods goals for the assessment, Flaherty Consulting next considered the best sources for each type of desired information, and developed a framework for the data-gathering process. That framework included three categories of stakeholders: City Council Representatives, Neighborhood Forum members, and neighborhood council constituents. Flaherty Consulting then used two central components for gathering data from each category:

Key Findings:

1. There are varying beliefs regarding the purpose and value of the Neighborhood Councils.
2. It is perceived that Neighborhood Councils and Leadership Teams do not represent the diversity of neighborhood residents.
3. Current Neighborhood Council processes create barriers for encouraging citizen participation.
4. Communications between City Government, Neighborhood Forum, and Neighborhoods Councils is disconnected.

Recommendations:

1. Evaluate the current Office of Neighborhoods resources to facilitate a more inclusive and engaging Neighborhood Council program.
2. Disseminate a community survey that touches on quality of life and engagement process that makes an implicit effort to include citizens who are historically left out.
3. Add additional Councils to the Neighborhood Councils to ensure underrepresented citizens are implicitly included in discussions, processes, and decisions.
4. Reframe the Neighborhood Council vision and purpose to identify shared values with city government, residents, nonprofits, community organizers, businesses, and developers.
5. Develop a City of Missoula led communications campaign aimed at informing citizens about the purpose of the Neighborhood Councils and increasing engagement.
6. Develop streamlined communication pathways for City Council, Neighborhood Forum, Neighborhood Councils, and Citizens.
7. Create a common architectural framework for Neighborhood Councils that fosters diversity and invites participation.

Missoula Neighborhoods is proposing the Community Forum and City Council to approve and endorse the recommendations of the strategic assessment findings.