



NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION OFFICE

Ms. Joan Manke, Executive Secretary

POWERS, DUTIES AND FUNCTIONS

In 1972, Honolulu voters approved an amendment to the Revised City Charter, Article XIV. The amendment called for the formation of a nine-member Neighborhood Commission to develop a Neighborhood Plan to assist in implementing the formation and operation of elected neighborhood boards on Oahu. The purpose was to provide a mechanism to increase and assure resident participation in the process of government decision-making. Administrative and technical staff provided through the Neighborhood Commission Office would support the mandated functions of the Neighborhood Commission and the neighborhood boards. Thus began the formation of our Neighborhood Board system.

FY 2006 – 2007 HIGHLIGHTS

On-Line Voting Offered in Neighborhood Board Elections – For the first time in Hawaii’s history, on-line voting was used to elect public officials. The Commission took a bold step in approving the use of on-line voting to offer voters an option to cast their ballot for their neighborhood board candidates using the traditional printed ballot as well as the electronic ballot via the internet.



The City teamed up with Commercial Data Systems, Inc., because of their 18 years of experience in providing highly secured online data services, including creating and operating the very successful online program for school children, Kids Voting Hawaii. (Children who participated in the first Kids Voting Hawaii are now of age to vote in the board elections.) More than 4,000 ballots were cast on-line. On June 2, 2007, board members were sworn in for a new two-year term. There are a total of 444 seats in the 32 neighborhood board areas.

Training– With the help of the Managing Director’s Office and the State’s Office of Information Practices, sunshine law training sessions were conducted for 239 neighborhood board members and commissioners on June 2 and August 14, 2007. An orientation and parliamentary session was also held for the newly elected board members. In addition, the Commission revived its Training Committee and adopted a tentative schedule to include workshops on order and decorum, and how to conduct smooth meetings.



Neighborhood Plan – In June 2007, the Neighborhood Commission formed a Permitted Interaction (PI) Group to review and revise the Neighborhood Plan. The PI Group submitted its recommendations to the Commission in November 2006 at which time it was accepted and forwarded to the Department of the Corporation Counsel for review. Following the review process, the Commission adopted the Draft Plan and has scheduled three public hearings for early November 2007.

NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION OFFICE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

The Neighborhood Commission Office (NCO) provided administrative and technical support services to the Neighborhood Commission as well as the 32 Neighborhood Boards. The NCO is a key player in facilitating the City Charter-mandated functions of the Neighborhood Board System, which is to increase and assure effective citizen participation in the decisions of government. These functions, duties and accomplishments are described in the following sections.

Neighborhood Board Field Services – The NCO field staff:

- 1) served as the primary liaison between the boards, the Neighborhood Commission, and the City, State and Federal governments;
- 2) provided documentation of board activities by producing and filing meeting agendas, attending, recording and distributing meeting minutes, and completing the written and oral requests generated by official board action;
- 3) provided technical information on proper meeting procedures, City policies and program; and
- 4) assisted in producing and distributing publicity materials to enhance two-way communication with neighborhood residents.

Administrative and Office Services Activities – The administrative staff coordinated and serviced all regular and special meetings of the Neighborhood Commission. Substantial staff support and technical assistance were provided to the commission during complaint hearings, public hearings, committee meetings, permitted interaction (PI) group meetings, as well as in activities dealing with complex issues affecting neighborhood boards and the neighborhood board system.

Section staff coordinated the fiscal expenditures of each neighborhood board through its centralized purchasing and accounting functions. Individual monthly statements were prepared for all 32 neighborhood boards to apprise each board of the status of its operational, publicity and refreshment appropriations. In addition to assisting with the preparation of the commission's annual operating budget, this section serviced the nine-member commission and handled all fiscal, personnel and property inventory matters.

The administrative staff also supported the Mayor's Representative Program in cooperation with the Managing Director's Office. Mayor's representatives are cabinet members of Mayor Mufi Hannemann who attend board meetings to

provide information as well as respond to community concerns expressed by board members and residents at each neighborhood board meeting. Questions and concerns which need research are then forwarded to the appropriate departments by the NCO. This process is monitored to assure that responses are received from departments in time for the Mayor's representatives to report and discuss at the following board meeting.

Training and Educational Programs – Training and educational programs serve a vital role in providing basic skills and essential technical information to assist board members to effectively perform their duties.

The City's ordinance requires that *"any board member whose date of taking office is after July 1, 2004 shall participate in the sunshine law training program within three months from the date of taking office."* The Managing Director's office assisted with Sunshine Law training for 239 neighborhood board members and other Commissioners on June 2 and August 14, 2007. The NCO also held orientation and parliamentary sessions for newly elected board members. The NCO staff has regularly taken advantage of training opportunities provided by the Department of Human Resources in the areas of note-taking and minute-writing for Neighborhood Assistants and skills training seminars for all NCO staff. These seminars are designed to increase and improve the skills of all staff as training is a top priority for the NCO.

In an effort to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Neighborhood Board System, the NCO identified order and decorum and parliamentary procedures as areas requiring special focus and attention. And, for the first time in its staffing complement, the NCO will create a Staff Parliamentarian position that would provide for attendance to and monitoring of board meetings, evaluating individual boards, and providing feedback and recommendations for improvement. The Staff Parliamentarian will also serve as the NCO's in-house professional consultant who will be responsible for training staff, commissioners and board members.

Public Awareness – In order to broaden public awareness of the Neighborhood Board system, as well as a part of its function as a City agency, administrative staff worked closely with 'Olelo Community Television in publicizing neighborhood board meeting dates on public cable television. 'Olelo is one of the more popular venues to view a neighborhood board in action. Fifteen of 32 boards have chosen to videotape their regular monthly meetings with funds provided in their annual budgets. While these boards have regular time slots on 'Olelo, other boards reach out to their communities via annual newsletters. This year, additional funds were offered as an incentive for boards to initiate videotaping of their monthly meetings.

Website – For the first time, the NCO website was used to post candidate profiles on-line for the 2007 Neighborhood Board elections. The site includes individual board web sites with agendas and minutes going back through 2001, as well as boundary maps for each board and board photos. Agendas and minutes for the Neighborhood Commission are also included along with commissioner and board member directories, calendars of monthly board meetings, office staff and Mayor's representatives contact information and their board assignments. In an effort to cut postage costs and save taxpayers dollars, each month the NCO generates 10,864 e-mails in the distribution of board and Commission agendas and minutes. That is 130,368 e-mails annually!

The website also includes the Revised Neighborhood Plan, proposed revisions, links to the Neighborhood Board Discussion sites, Frequently Asked Questions, and election results for board elections dating back to 2001. In the past year, the NCO website has become very active and has grown with an abundance of information for board members and the public. The NCO staff will continue in its efforts to maintain and create a web site that is informative, organized, attractive, and easy to use.

Communication - In an average month throughout FY 2007, extensive communication-related services provided by staff allowed neighborhood boards and the Neighborhood Commission to reach thousands of residents and households, including government officials and organizations. Circulation of a monthly calendar of events, agendas and minutes continues to be a valuable outreach mechanism to routinely publicize activities of Oahu's neighborhood boards and the commission in a timely manner.

Additional services involved the production and distribution of newsletters, surveys, flyers, posters, brochures, Members' Guidebook, and certificates recognizing citizens throughout Oahu. The NCO staff also published press releases and legal notices, and produced related correspondence as needed.

Complaints - With support from the Managing Director and in cooperation with the Department of the Corporation Counsel, the NCO continued its review and resolution of complaints, some of which have been pending since 2000. In FY 2006, a total of 13 complaints were closed, four pre-hearings were held, three complaints hearings were held before the Commission, and nine new complaints were filed.

Elections - The NCO also conducted the biennial neighborhood board elections in this fiscal year. In an effort to increase citizen participation and awareness, the NCO opened up the election process to registered voters who lived in neighborhood board districts where there were "uncontested" races. These are areas with no candidates or not enough candidates running to fill its seats. Historically, these voters were not provided the opportunity to participate in board elections.

It became incumbent on the NCO to find the most cost-effective way to expand its voter base. Hence, on-line voting via

the internet, was introduced. The introduction of new technology into the neighborhood board elections offered an alternative method of voting and it also successfully interfaced two voting systems – paper and on-line. For the time in the history of the Neighborhood Board System, registered voters were given two options or two methods to cast their vote for a board member; and for the first time in Hawaii’s history, on-line voting was used to elect public officials.

The rate of participation (returned ballots) in the 2007 Neighborhood Board elections increased from 25% in 2005 to 28.8% in 2007. There was a total of 526 candidates and of the 444 seats to be filled, 63 seats remained vacant, without candidates. Sixty-four percent of board members elected this year were incumbents.

Every effort was made to publicize and inform the public about the elections and on-line voting. The NCO staff participated in live and recorded radio talk shows, live local television interviews, and with the help of public service announcements, produced several radio spots that were aired during the election period. In addition, ads were placed in the newspapers, announcements were made on ‘Olelo Community Television, and the NCO staff participated in a community event where laptops were set-up in a booth for the public to utilize and learn about on-line voting.



NEIGHBORHOOD BOARDS

All 444 board members are volunteers and each of the 32 boards serve as advisory groups to the Honolulu City Council, Mayor Hannemann and the City Administration, and to departments, agencies and other public officials of the state and federal governments. Oahu’s neighborhood boards function as an island-wide communication conduit, expanding and facilitating opportunities for community and government interaction. The Revised Neighborhood Plan, developed by the Neighborhood Commission, serves as the legal framework for the neighborhood boards.

Board Activities - The neighborhood boards are encouraged to provide their community with opportunities to express its needs and desires in the delivery of government services. Boards sponsored forums to hear platforms of political candidates and presentations from various organizations and associations on issues, concerns, and/or projects that will affect all of Oahu. These included:

1. Reviewing and making recommendations to the Honolulu City Council, Hawaii State Legislature and federal agencies regarding issues such as the Environmental Protection Agency granting a waiver for the Honouliuli Wastewater Treatment facility, resolutions recognizing civil unions, and proposed legislation amending the state’s Sunshine Law;
2. Receiving presentations and making recommendations on zoning and variance applications and permits and land

use proposals, discussing its impact on the community, including traffic impacts. Issues included the Waimanalo Gulch Landfill extension, mass transit/rail project, sustainable communities, and other municipal transportation needs such as Bus Rapid Transit, bus routes, bikeways, highway beautification projects, and traffic and highway concerns;

3. Raising concerns related to beach access, making recommendations for park uses to include cultural and heritage uses, tot lots, bark parks and night closures; and
4. Reviewing and setting priorities on the Operating Budget and Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) proposed by the City and recommending a list of proposals reflecting the needs of individual neighborhood communities, such as the Kuakini Street extension.
5. Residents island-wide were able to view the following neighborhood board meetings on 'Olelo Community Television on a regular basis: Ewa Beach, Hawaii Kai, Kalihi Valley, Kailua, Makakilo, Manoa, Mililani, Mililani Mauka, North Shore, Palolo, Pearl City, Waianae Coast, Waimanalo, Waikiki and Waipahu. Videotaping board meetings through arrangements with 'Olelo continues to be a popular venue to stimulate public interest.

NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION

The Neighborhood Commission was officially established in 1973, after Honolulu voters approved a revision of the Revised City Charter, Article XIV. All nine members are appointed volunteers who serve in staggered five-year terms. Four of the Commission members are appointed by the Mayor, four are appointed by the City Council, and the ninth member is appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council. One of the Mayor's appointees and one of the City Council appointees as well as the ninth member of the Commission are required to have served one full term on a neighborhood board.

In addition to developing a Neighborhood Plan, which serves as the legal framework for the neighborhood boards, the commission is responsible for the review and evaluation of the Neighborhood Plan and the neighborhood boards. The City Charter mandates the commission to assist areas of the city, upon request, in the formation and operation of their neighborhoods and neighborhood boards. The commission is required to meet a minimum of six times within a year to review and evaluate the activities, performance and operations of the neighborhood boards.

Members of the Neighborhood Commission during fiscal year 2006-2007 were as follows:

Grant Tanimoto, Chair	Sylvia Young, Vice-chair
Sheila Apisa	Robin Makapagal
Clara Y. Ching	Jeanette Nekota
Edward E. Gall	Kalene Sakamoto
Bernard Kaahanui	

Commission Activities - This fiscal year the Commission maintained an ambitious schedule and held 10 regular meetings which were well attended by board members and community members. Commissioners conducted complaint hearings and held public hearings to amend initiative petitions for the McCully-Moilili NB#8 and the Wahiawa Whitmore Village NB#26.

Permitted interaction (PI) groups were also formed to expedite pressing issues facing the Commission, such as the City Auditor's Report on the Neighborhood Board System and the Revised Neighborhood Plan (RNP). The RNP PI group was very active and met every Saturday from July 1 through November 4, 2006 to continue review and revision of the 1998 revised neighborhood plan. The draft plan was presented to the Commission at the end of November 2006 at which time it was accepted and forwarded to the City's Department of the Corporation Counsel for review. Three public hearings will be held in early November 2007.

The Commission also recognized the need to revive its standing committees to focus on training and budgetary needs of the NCO, neighborhood boards and the Commission.

This fiscal year was a full and busy year for Commissioners, who volunteered many man-hours to meet deadlines and set timelines to address pending matters before the Commission. With the help of dedicated board members and the community, great strides have been made to move the draft RNP forward and to continue the process of working collectively to increase citizen participation in the process of government decision-making.