

The Time Is Now for the Neighborhood Leadership Alliance

This is a critical time for Bend. Important decisions are about to be made, among them Urban Growth Boundary updates, zoning alignment to the Comprehensive Plan and an update to the Transportation System Plan. These efforts are in addition to the myriad of everyday decisions required to manage and maintain Bend, within the set of limited resources available to it.

At this critical time, City leadership is moving to ensure that all stakeholders are heard equitably in the dialogue on the future of Bend. Consequently, the City of Bend is considering formalizing a relationship with the Bend Neighborhood Associations (NAs) to create a committee representing all neighborhoods. Called the Neighborhood Leadership Alliance (NLA), the City's new Code would formally recognize an advisory committee comprised of one representative nominated by the Boards of each of the 13 City-chartered NAs.

Who are the Neighborhood Associations? They are 13 geographic groups that cover the entire population of the City of Bend. They represent their Neighborhoods on behalf of their constituents. According to the City of Bend website, "The Bend Neighborhood Associations provide residents the opportunity to help shape the future of their neighborhood and the City. Neighborhood Associations maintain and improve the quality of life in the city, increase citizen participation in local decision making, and form an effective partnership between the City and neighborhood residents."

A core principle of the Bend Neighborhood Associations is inclusivity. The Associations work to coordinate conversations among multiple parties to consider matters such as traffic, neighborhood character, business vitality, development, neighborhood watch and welcome, and disaster preparedness. The Neighborhood Associations represent all constituents within their boundaries.

The Neighborhood Associations are the voice of Bend residents, and that voice has not, until now, been a coordinated one. Currently, individuals can approach our City leadership with perspectives on City strategy, policy or ordinances, but the Council and Staff cannot deal with 100,000 individuals. The purpose and value of Neighborhood Associations is to help streamline such communications while giving voice to all their residents. The Neighborhood Leadership Alliance is a natural evolution of this communications channel that will offer Council better visibility into residents' ideas and concerns, and into the community's vision for Bend.

This is not a new concept. In fact, the proposed Bend NLA is modeled after many such very successful Advisory Committees across the country. Some are as close as Portland, Eugene and Kirkland, WA. Others are as distant as Green Bay, WI and Kansas City, KS. Each of these cities has experienced some of the same issues that face Bend. And, in each of these cities, the neighborhood leadership associations have become vital two-way communications channels between their constituents and City leadership in dealing with them. We expect the same outcome here in Bend.

The Council uses the committee system as a means of dialogue with constituents. **The NLA would provide for efficiencies in communications and education with residents.** Consolidated feedback from the NAs, through the NLA, will assist the Council in prioritization, and the NLA will provide an efficient means of communication from the City Council back to its constituents. The NLA will ensure that the voice of all Bend's residents will be heard on topics that affect multiple NAs. Residents deserve a seat at the table and the NLA will give it to them.

Any objective look at the City of Bend, with increasing growth and the compromises demanded, reveals that a more efficient and effective means of communication between city leadership and its constituents is desirable. City Councilors face a huge challenge communicating with their ever-growing constituent size. The general support of City leadership for this initiative reflects their wisdom in seeing the necessity for a regular continuing channel of communications through the Neighborhood Leadership Alliance (NLA), and we champion their thoughtfulness in this approach.

Bend Neighborhood Leadership Alliance Working Group
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