



City of Seattle
Seattle Department of Neighborhoods
Bernie Agor Matsuno, Director

April 24, 2013

Sent Via Email: phil.shack@gmail.com

Phil Shack, Chair
City Neighborhood Council

Dear Phil:

Laine Ross forwarded your letter of March 25, 2013 to me on April 9, 2013 and I wanted to take this opportunity to respond to your concerns as well as your requests.

I have very much appreciated the time I and other DON staff have been able to spend with the CNC Executive Committee as well as the chairs of the individual District Councils. Along with our regular meetings, work on the CNC website, and a range of other issues/opportunities, I am confident that we will be able to work together on a variety of projects.

Much of your concern focuses on a decision made about the Neighborhood Matching Fund Large Projects Fund review process - specifically, our decision to require each district council to 1) identify their District Council Review Team (DCRT) made up of 4-5 members who will review and rate the projects from the district, and 2) require the DCRT to attend the applicant Open House—that will also include Citywide Review Team (CRT) members - when projects from their district will be presented. For the majority of District Councils, the use of a “review team” is not new; it’s a method they have used for the past several years. The second item, however, is a format change that is new. Instead of presenting the project to reviewers on two separate occasions (to the DCRT, then the CRT), applicants will make their presentation once, followed by a question and answer session, with both CRT and DCRT members in the room. I have attached a draft agenda for the Open Houses.

Following the presentations at the Open House, DCRT members will convene as a committee and apart from the CRT, to determine their FINAL RATING of the projects from their district. The final rating is typically the average rating/score for the project based on the scoring of the individual DCRT members. And, as has been past practice, the DCRT score for a project counts for 50% of the project’s total score – the score used to make funding recommendations to the Mayor and City Council.

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I have heard the argument that DCRT members could be negatively influenced by the comments made or questions asked by CRT members during the project presentations, which would affect the DCRT rating of a project. Although this could be true, I believe District Councils have put together a review team that wouldn't automatically succumb to the opinions or attitudes held by others. I believe they take the role of DCRT membership seriously and will 1) objectively review and rate projects using the rating criteria as outlined in the NMF Guidelines, and 2) objectively consider any information learned from the application, as well as information that was learned in the applicants' presentations at the Open House session.

Concern has also been raised about the "lack of opportunity" for the District Council to know the projects and applicants from their district if a presentation is not made at a DC meeting. My response: 1) an Open House will be held in each regional area of the city. With the exception of the actual CRT and DCRT evaluations and discussion, the sessions are open to anyone who would like to attend. Once the Open House schedule is set, it will be sent to all District Councils, and 2) after the award recommendations are approved by the Mayor and City Council, the District Council can make contact with all of the applicants to congratulate the award recipients and to offer advice/recommendations/support to the others so they can be successful in the future. Both instances allow for in-person contact between District Councils and NMF groups.

I'd also like to clarify when these modifications were discussed and with whom. The Department reached out to the Neighborhood Matching Fund (NMF) Committee of the CNC via meetings with Laine Ross and Chas Redmond in November, 2012 and a telephone conference call with them in December, 2012. In response to concerns raised in your letter, the DCRT model and joint Open House concept were discussed, as well as other changes.

To vet this issue with the District Councils, we also began working with the Neighborhood District Coordinators in January, 2013, so they could brief the District Councils about the range of efficiencies we were making in the LPF review process and the rationale for those changes. With the exception of two District Councils (where schedules didn't accommodate a presentation prior to March 1), presentations were made to 11 of the 13 DCs in January and February, 2013 and *not one of the District Councils formally voiced any objection to the revisions* we were describing to the Open House schedule and format or believed that there was any negative effect on the DCRT or CRT process. In fact, a number of the District Councils were enthusiastic about the changes based on the feedback they received over the years from applicants, as well as CRT and DCRT representatives. They also recognized that the changes would not be "written in concrete;" that modifications could be made to the next LPF cycle, if necessary. I should note that we are now scheduling an Open House in each of the regions (north, central, and south) at the request of a couple of District Councils.

Finally, I would like to review exactly what has occurred or is planned for 2013 because I don't believe that our interests differ significantly.

- We have streamlined the LPF application and review process – internally and externally.
 - Using Webgrants, applications are submitted electronically.
 - Mandatory applicant workshops were held, involving representatives from Seattle Parks and Recreation, Seattle Department of Transportation, and Seattle School District. These workshops allow potential applicants to discuss project ideas and get feedback early in the process.
 - Prior to the application due date of May 6, a number of Technical Assistance opportunities have and will continue to take place with NMF staff. These are sessions designed to assist applicants in preparing a competitive project/application.
 - From application submittal to award decisions, the timeframe is reduced from eight months to five months which will allow the City Council to finalize the LPF awards prior to its City budget deliberations. Then we will be able to get most groups under contract and projects started during the same year as the award is made.
 - Applicants will present their project once during the review and rating process.
- Other improvements to the review process based on feedback:
 - Allow more time at the Open House for project presentations and Q&A.
 - Hold training/orientation sessions so that reviewers know and understand the NMF/LPF rating criteria which are used to judge a project's strength/worthiness for receiving an award. These sessions would expand upon information provided in writing regarding the role of CRT and DCRT members and the methodology for undertaking applicant/project reviews.
 - Mandatory, “mini-informational” session for DCRT and CRT members prior to the Open House session to remind them of its purpose, e.g. hear about the project from the applicant's perspective and get answers to questions the reviewers may have.
 - NMF staff continues to provide staff support to the DCRT review meeting (following the Open House they attend). In the event of any appeals to the Department, the NMF staff must be involved in all aspects of the application review.

I believe that these modifications and improvements to the LPF process are the result of input received from our many stakeholders. More importantly, it is important for there to be both consistency and transparency in this NMF/LPF public process, and I believe that the changes we are making will ensure that.

The Department has always been appreciative of the CNC's support for our work, especially the NMF program and, as we have discussed at recent meetings, are eager to have a more robust NMF Committee that is representative of not only the CNC and

District Councils, but also of organizations that have received NMF awards along with other community members. I also acknowledge the concerns you've raised regarding the modifications we are making to the LPF review process this year, but we will move forward with requiring the use of joint DCRT/CRT Open House sessions. As we did last year and in previous years, we will ask applicants and CRT and DCRT members to provide feedback about the process, and involve the NMF committee in our discussions toward the goal of continuously improving the way we do this work.

Sincerely,



Bernie Matsuno, Director
Seattle Department of Neighborhoods

Cc: CNC Executive Officers
Laine Ross, Chair, CNC NMF Committee
Patricia Lopez, Supervisor, NMF Program
Karen Gordon, Manager, NMF Program
James Bush, Manager, NDC Program