



City Neighborhood Council

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DISTRICT COUNCILS:

- Ballard
- Central
- Delridge Neighborhoods
- Downtown
- East
- Greater Duwamish
- Lake Union
- Magnolia/Queen Anne
- North
- Northeast
- Northwest
- Southeast
- Southwest

March 25, 2013

Bernie Matsuno, Director
Seattle Department of Neighborhoods
700 5th Avenue, Suite 1700 / Seattle Municipal Tower
Seattle, WA 98104

RE: Neighborhood Matching Fund

Dear Bernie:

As you know, one of the functions of the City Neighborhood Council, (CNC), is to review and make recommendations about the Neighborhood Matching Fund, (NMF), and to work collaboratively with the Department of Neighborhoods, (DoN), to accomplish that goal. Over the past year, DoN implemented (or may soon implement) changes impacting the NMF program, Large Projects Fund, (LPF). In February of 2013, a shift to conducting LPF reviews via a Joint Open House model appeared to be moving forward. This approach was previously rejected at the March 30, 2010 CNC meeting based upon input from District Councils, (minutes from the 2010 meeting are attached for your convenience). The CNC discussed this potential change to the NMF Large Projects Fund at its February 25, 2013 meeting where concerns were raised again at that time and recently at the March 25, 2013 meeting.

At the March 30, 2010 CNC meeting, former DoN Director, Stella Chao supported the District Councils' preference to continue to review Large Project Fund applications as had been done in the past. Both parties, CNC and DoN, further discussed that District Councils would work to become more aligned with the Citywide Review Team process. As of our March 25, 2013 meeting, CNC has reached out to District Councils and found that many have reaffirmed their preference to maintain project reviews within their Districts, using materials provided by NMF staff. District Councils are aware that the DCRT process may not be supported by Matching Fund staff members and are comfortable working with Neighborhood Coordinators to conduct their District level reviews. By continuing the review process at the District Council level, community is further empowered and District Councils operate as intended when the Department was formed. As you know, District Councils play a vital role in the NMF LPF Process by:

- Nominating and endorsing members for both DCRT and CRT panels;
- Possessing a broad understanding of projects being proposed and investments needed in their Districts;
- Providing feedback to project applicants which helps strengthen presentations to CRT;
- Working with project applicant groups throughout the year;
- Strengthening connections with community members that were intended to start with the District Councils.

Furthermore, temporary changes made to the NMF Large Projects Fund review process by DoN, characterized as 'test or pilot' models, similar to the Joint Open House format, have often become permanent without measures in place to thoroughly review with CNC, which is unsatisfactory. As you may also be aware, CRT and DCRT representatives make suggestions on various improvements on the overall process. A few of those points below:

- Further review and improvements are needed on the existing Open House format prior to adding another layer;
- Increase the time being spent with project applicants during the current Open House session;
- Panel members (on both teams) would benefit from an expanded orientation with discussion on scoring and consistency;
- Broader clarification is needed on the roles of both panels;
- Review and honor previous commitments from the Department prior to altering current processes;
- Collaborate with CNC/District Councils to implement strategies to update and improve overall review processes and to establish protocols for test models to determine success rate;
- Provide more notice to District Councils prior to rolling out major process changes

More than with any other Seattle City program, the nationally award-winning Neighborhood Matching Fund was designed by and governed by District Council volunteers. As stated above, the CNC, District Councils and NMF Committee members have enjoyed a healthy dialogue with DoN over the years due to the collaborative environment that has existed between the parties. Seattle benefits from the vast number of tasks and hours of work citizens provide through volunteer efforts. The NMF program has been a valuable asset to the city for the incredible dividends it pays and is the cornerstone of DoN. Preserving the Neighborhood Matching Fund is necessary in order for DoN to fulfill on its mission of community building, however, citizens share concerns that the program continues to be eroded.

CNC members are aware that the Department of Neighborhoods has taken a disproportionate amount of budget cuts than were made within other departments over the past few years and that staffing levels have been negatively impacted. Citizens have felt that the Matching Fund Program has been chipped away to minimal levels – the result of which is also restricting citizen access to community improvements. Numerous District Council and CNC members passionately lobbied to restore those cuts and have a long history of supporting the Department. While there haven't been major cuts in the past year, the CNC acknowledges that the Department is still operating with a much lower staffing level. Citizens remain passionate about restoring staffing and budget levels to pre-2010 cuts where possible.

District Councils are sensitive to budget and staff challenges and have expressed a desire to continue to conduct reviews without NMF staff members. District Councils continue to put mechanisms in place to further streamline their District review process (started in 2010) with little or no support from DoN in this effort. Centralizing CRT / DCRT processes to address real or perceived inconsistencies in reviews without a broader understanding of the impacts to all 13 Districts should not be the only option. Therefore, the CNC re-states its position in this matter below:

- Suspend all changes on the 2013 NMF Large Projects Fund until additional outreach and review can be conducted with District Councils and CNC regarding the Joint Open House format;
- Strengthen connections between the CNC and DoN by providing earlier notice on the department's plans to make process changes;
- District Councils will conduct applicant reviews as before, without NMF staff members and continue further alignment of the District Councils with the CRT process as initiated in 2010.

Thank you for your consideration of the position of the CNC and District Councils in this matter.

Sincerely,



Phil Shack, Chair
City Neighborhood Council