

## WHY **NEIGHBORHOODS** NEED TO BE RESTORED TO THE SOUTHEAST DISTRICT COUNCIL

To Whom It May Concern:

The founding members of the Southeast Neighborhood District Council are unable to summarize in one page the series of unfortunate events that have led to their decision to suspend their memberships in the SE District Council (SEDC). At one time the SEDC was known as the SE Neighborhood District Council. The removal of NEIGHBORHOODS from the title of the SEDC, both figuratively, in the name change from SE Neighborhood District Council to SE District Council, and literally, by the inclusion of social service organizations, some of whom only pretend to represent communities in SE Seattle, resulted in the founding members' decision to not attend SEDC meetings. Our voices have been silenced and our communities are no longer properly represented.

We have confirmed that many of the "organizations" that are allowed a vote at the SEDC don't hold open and regular meetings as required by all sets of bylaws. Several do hold closed meetings, but this is still in violation of all bylaws. Many don't have a process to discuss District Council issues, determine the view/vote of their members and bring that view/vote to the SEDC meetings. Many of these "groups" who can vote at SEDC are nothing more than a single individual (sometimes under the direct influence of another single individual.) Many of them reside outside Seattle.

The employees of social service agencies who are paid to attend the SEDC meetings have a huge advantage over the volunteers that aren't paid for their time to attend meetings. Worse yet, these mostly white employees are there under the guise of bringing diversity to the table. To set the record straight, we have never opposed an ethnically-based organization from having a vote at SEDC as long as that organization has a grassroots membership whose view/vote is communicated through a representative that the membership chooses. Anointing oneself as a representative because you provide a service to people is not the same as those people selecting their own representative. Nor can a hired employee ever be considered an ELECTED representative, and yet several paid employees are voting at the SEDC in lieu of an elected community representative.

The irony is low-income individuals, renters and/or people of color these agencies purport to represent are NOT at the SEDC meetings. If they had ever been allowed or encouraged to participate at the SENDC instead of the wealthy, white employees of the various social service agencies we wouldn't be having this debate. Glenn Harris, the former SE District Coordinator, spent his time bringing agencies, such as the Tenants Union (a state-wide, not community-based agency) to the District Council meetings, rather than assisting neighborhoods, whose councils had fallen into disarray, to become viable once again.

At the April 28<sup>th</sup> CNC meeting, the SEDC representative referred to the founding members as a "rogue group." Our "rogue group" included the two oldest neighborhood councils in the City of Seattle (and the two oldest, continuously running neighborhood councils in the Nation). The rogues in attendance that evening were from the following organizations: Mt. Baker Community Club, Lakewood/Seward Park Neighborhood Association, Othello Neighborhood Association, Rainier Beach Community Club, Columbia City Community Council, Pritchard Beach Neighborhood Association, Genesee Merchants Association, Columbia City Business Association, and the South Precinct Crime Prevention Council. Many other similar rogue community groups could not attend but were there in spirit. Although an apology was given, the attitude of the SEDC towards the founding members was made evident by this remark.

If our "rogue" organizations don't have a voice at the District Council, what then is the purpose of the District Councils, the City Neighborhood Council and the Department of Neighborhoods?

*This statement was approved by MBCC, Lakewood/Seward Park, ONA, Pritchard Beach and the Crime Council (full names listed above). The other organizations have agreed in principle over the past several years to what is stated here, but didn't get back to us in time to add their names to the list of endorsers. There are also other new community groups in SE that agree in principle to this statement.*