

Neighborhood Notification and Community Relations Guidelines Policy

Prior to application for OH funding (permanent or bridge) for production or preservation of affordable rental housing or development of housing for low-income homebuyers, applicants are required to prepare and begin implementing a community relations plan, including neighborhood notification activities.

A successful notification effort leads to open, ongoing communication between developers and neighbors. This requires cooperation by developers, the City, and neighborhood residents. A positive, open relationship between housing developers and neighbors can prevent misunderstandings, facilitate prompt resolution of any inadvertent misunderstandings, and provide a fair, thoughtful, dependable means of ironing out differences. While not meant to be a definitive process for each proposal and neighborhood, the steps outlined below provide a comprehensive notification process.

It is the policy of the City of Seattle that OH funding of affordable housing not be refused solely on the basis of concerns expressed by neighbors; the City supports and is committed to promoting diversity in Seattle neighborhoods. Consistent with State and Federal law, a housing project should not be excluded from a neighborhood solely based on any of the following characteristics of the persons who will live there: age, ancestry, color, creed, disability, gender identity, marital status, national origin, parental status, political ideology, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, possession or use of a Section 8 certificate, or use of a guide or service animal by a person with a disability.

The City supports affordable housing projects that will preserve and enhance the strengths of Seattle's neighborhoods. Housing developers and neighbors should keep OH informed of any issues or concerns throughout the community notification process and operation of the project.

Guidelines for affordable housing developers:

This policy section is intended to provide guidance to developers, acknowledging that neighborhood notification efforts and appropriate community relations plans may vary.

1. Prior to releasing purchase and sale agreement contingencies the developer shall:
 - Consult with OH. OH will help identify developers of other affordable housing in the neighborhood(s) being considered and suggest neighborhood organizations to contact.
 - Contact other affordable housing owners to learn about a neighborhood's historical and current housing- and development-related concerns.
2. Prior to submitting an application for City Consolidated Plan consistency certification the developer shall:
 - Notify neighbors within at least 500 feet of the site using a written notice, letter or flyer. Consider including basic information about the developer agency, proposed project, estimated schedule, contact person, and neighborhood organizations that have also been notified about the project in the written communication.

- Contact neighborhood organizations, including the neighborhood community council and the local district council, with updated information about the project, including final site selection, schedule, and proposal for ongoing communication with the neighborhood. The ongoing communication plan may include presentation(s) at regularly scheduled neighborhood organization meeting(s), invitation to a meeting hosted by the housing developer, formation of an advisory committee, and/or regular project updates in neighborhood organization publications or posted at local libraries, community centers, etc. Information the housing developer should consider sharing at meetings includes the following:
 - Experience as a housing developer and manager; provide names and addresses of other affordable housing projects;
 - Description of targeted population of the housing, to the extent that it does not compromise the safety, confidentiality or well-being of the residents; information about property management and support services, if applicable;
 - Mechanisms for communication between the housing developer and neighbors, including 24-hour contact person and number if possible;
 - Estimated schedule for construction and completion; and
 - Opportunities for neighbors to provide input on the project (i.e. names of interested neighborhood organizations and how to contact them; community advisory committee; etc.).
3. Maintain communication with immediate neighbors and the neighborhood and community organizations throughout the project's design and construction phase.
 4. Once the housing is operational the developer shall:
 - Invite neighborhood and community organizations and neighbors to project open houses.
 - Establish ongoing communication with neighborhood organizations and neighboring residents and businesses. Promptly address emerging issues and share successes.
 - Keep the City apprised of any issues.

Guidelines for Neighbors:

1. Encourage housing developers and residents to be active members of your community. Invite them to neighborhood meetings and events. Build foundation for long-lasting, positive relationship.
2. Communicate concerns about design, operation and management of a project. Work collaboratively with housing developers and/or residents to identify ways to address those concerns.
3. Neighbors may want to consider negotiating a good neighbor agreement with the housing developer if it turns out that clarity of understanding is difficult to reach verbally.
4. Make sure housing developer and/or residents know what is working well.