

**Neighborhood Planning Process and Implementation:  
Highlights from Four Cities**

*Executive Summary*

This paper examines neighborhood planning in Seattle, Minneapolis, and Portland and how they compare to Austin's neighborhood planning process. Seattle and Portland stand out for their detailed implementation plans and processes. They keep the neighborhoods informed after their plan has been approved, ensuring that at least parts of the plan get implemented.

## **Neighborhood Planning Process and Implementation: Highlights from Four Cities**

Neighborhood planning is described by Rohe and Gates as “municipally sponsored programs that seek to involve neighborhood groups throughout the city in one or more of the following activities: review of plans or proposals developed by municipal agencies which affect neighborhoods, preparation of neighborhood development plans, and sponsorship of self-help neighborhood improvement activities” (Salsich).

Neighborhood planning offers an alternative to top-down governance that can better respond to the needs of individual citizens by allowing those citizens to participate in decision making. This paper examines neighborhood planning in several U.S. cities and compares their practices to the way neighborhood planning is done in Austin, with special emphasis on plan implementation.

### **Seattle**

Seattle uses neighborhood planning as a way of “linking community organizing, technical planning, and city decision making in new ways” (Ruder and Dehlendorf, 1997). Its program that began in 1995 has generated significant levels of involvement, as well as some controversy. Seattle’s neighborhood planning program began after many neighborhoods protested a comprehensive plan that had an urban village strategy at its core. The neighborhoods are given a budget, a set of rules, and city staff to help with organization and the planning process. These staff members are not to actually produce the plans, but rather act as facilitators in the process.

The neighborhoods are given an outline for plan content (Ruder and Dehlendorf, 1997):

- Plan must conform to the core values established in Comprehensive Plan framework Policies – community, social equity, environmental stewardship and economic opportunity and security
- Must address the growth predictions for new jobs and housing identified in the Comprehensive Plan in accordance with the Urban Village Strategy
- Must be legal and conform to applicable environmental and other laws.

Neighborhoods are also given process requirements:

- Groups must identify all those with stakeholder interest in the community
- Must conduct outreach designed to reach everybody
- Must demonstrate that each milestone in their planning is validated by the community – vision, key issues, work plan, leadership structure, final recommendations.

There are two phases of activity, the outreach process and the technical planning stage, each with its own structure as follows:

#### *Phase 1*

- Reach everybody: identify and contact stakeholders
- Find out what they consider to be the community's 20 year vision
- Identify problems and opportunities

- Choose the most important goals and challenges
- Establish a scope of work and structure for addressing these
- Check back with the community for validation

### *Phase II*

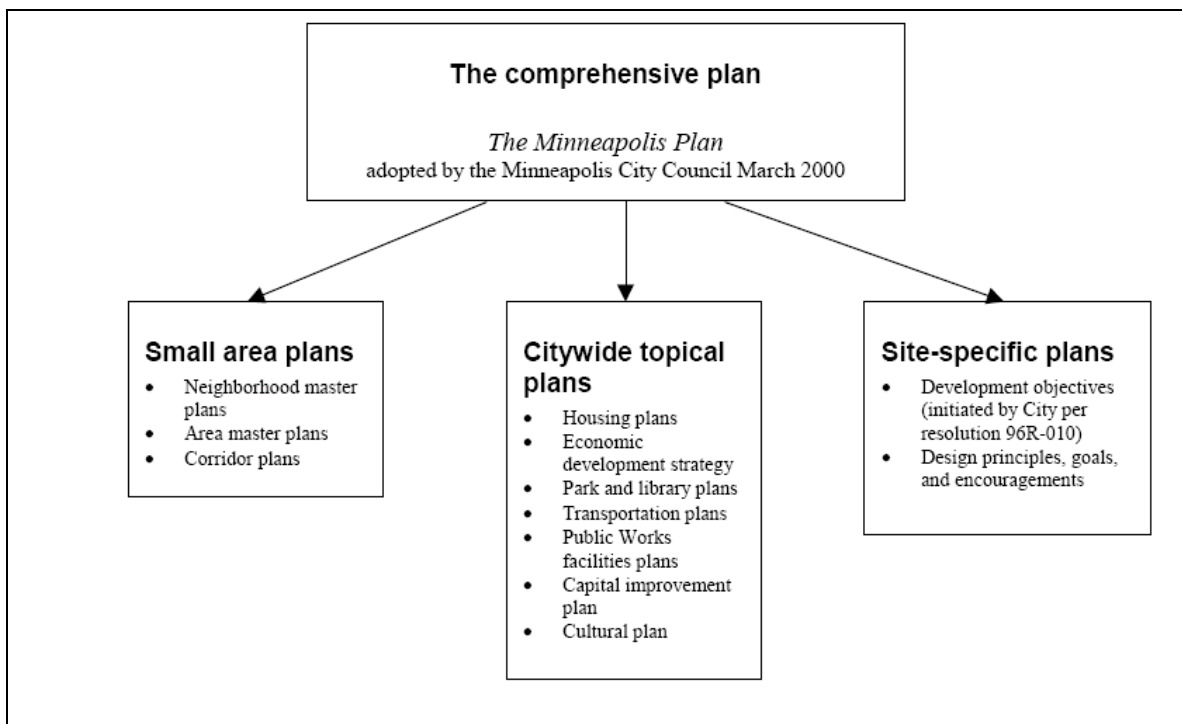
- Assess needs
- Conduct studies
- Analyze options
- Prepare and evaluate recommendations
- Submit approval and adoption package to city council

In 1999, thirty-eight different neighborhood plans were approved by Seattle. In order to help with implementation, these 38 neighborhoods were grouped into six sectors by location. The city also moved forward with prioritizing the recommendations of these plans in order for implementation to occur. The city produced a priority report; the executive summary of this report can be found in the appendix.

Because people who volunteer their valuable time for a process such as this want to see results and feel they have been heard, the website for the City of Seattle provides much information about the status of the various plans and projects. There is detailed information for each neighborhood, including maps, their approved plan, status of various projects, and a fact sheet for each neighborhood that shows progress for that area. A fact sheet for one of these neighborhoods can be found in the appendix.

## Minneapolis

Minneapolis also uses neighborhood planning as a component in their comprehensive plan. The figure below shows the structure and types of plans in Minneapolis (City of Minneapolis, 2004).



Minnesota statutes allow Minneapolis to create a Neighborhood Revitalization Program that can receive funds through tax increment financing. This process began in Minneapolis in 1991 with six of the city's 81 neighborhoods involved in a planning process. This program allows each neighborhood to design and implement a participatory process that can address the needs of the community. NRP provides guidance and funding, but the decision making powers are left to the neighborhood

residents (Pitcoff, 1999). Minneapolis claims this program is a way to design the neighborhoods into part of the process instead of them having to force their way in as in previous times. These neighborhood plans created through NRP are considered when creating larger plans for the city. The neighborhood plans help inform the city what is going on and what is needed at the neighborhood scale, while the master plan for the city helps to inform the neighborhoods what the overall city goals and visions are.

A neighborhood plan in Minneapolis requires the following components:

*Survey of existing conditions*

- Purpose or reason for undertaking plan
- Definition of geographic area
- Vision statement
- History and background
- Past planning efforts in study area
- Current comprehensive plan, land use designations, policies, and implementation steps that apply to study area
- Demographic survey of existing conditions including population, employment, and housing
- Current land uses and zoning in the study area

*Proposed changes*

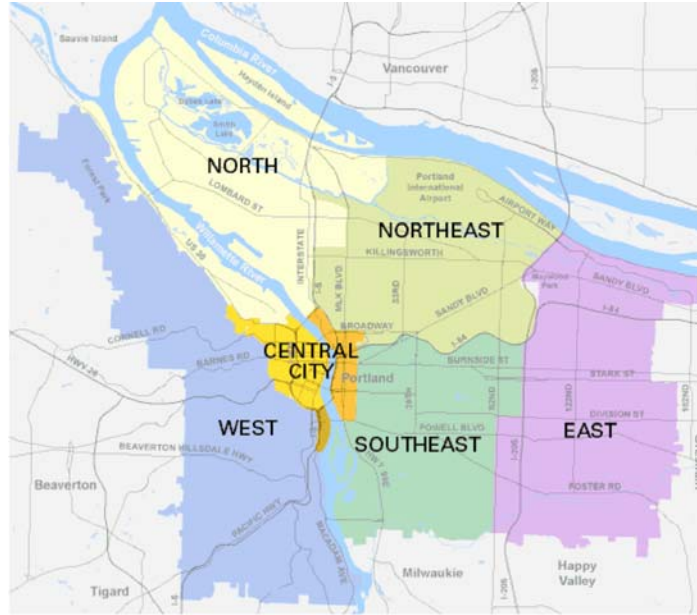
- Technical analysis and proposed changes in the following categories:
  - Future land use plan
  - Urban character and design

- Economic development
  - Housing
  - Transportation
  - Public realm
- Goals, objectives and policies
  - Implementation plan that includes proposed redevelopment sites, public improvements, timelines and costs

Through the approval process for neighborhood plans in Minneapolis, the plan is looked at to see if it is consistent with the city's comprehensive plan. The plan can then be incorporated into the comprehensive plan through amendments.

### **Portland**

Portland has moved from neighborhood planning to what they call a District Liaison Program. This is a program that focuses on neighborhood plan implementation by assigning one planner to each of the six districts of the city. The smaller neighborhoods have been combined into larger districts by geographic location, as shown on the map below.



The district planner should have in-depth knowledge of the issues and priorities of the district. They then can act as an advocate for their district: they can inform other agencies in the city about what is needed in their district, help create partnerships with businesses and non profits, share information from the city with their district, and provide technical assistance and a contact to those in their district with any planning issue they may have. This gives the people in the neighborhoods and districts a contact person in the city that is working in their interest in regard to planning and goals. The city planner assigned to the district navigates city government and works to accomplish goals instead of leaving it up to the neighbors themselves. This is an example of a strategy to work towards implementation of neighborhood plans once the initial planning process has been completed.



## **Austin**

Austin is generally known as a progressive city with very active and involved citizens. Austin is known for its neighborhood planning and is often an example that is looked to by other cities. The neighborhoods in Austin have significant influence in what decisions are made. The process ideally consists of homeowners, business owners, renters, and representatives from neighborhood institutions (City of Austin Neighborhood Planning Handbook). As in other cities, the city staff provides expertise and resources for the neighborhood planning process, while the neighbors themselves are to make the plan.

According to the city of Austin's website, a neighborhood plan:

- Represents the views of all stakeholders that make up a community
- Identifies neighborhood strengths and assets
- Identifies neighborhood needs and concerns
- Establishes goals for improving the neighborhood
- Recommends specific recommendations to reach those goals

The main steps for developing a neighborhood plan in Austin are:

- Outreach – getting stakeholders involved
- Conduct neighborhood surveys
- Hold several community meetings to identify issues, and develop goals, objectives and action items
- Review of the plan by city departments
- Present the plan to boards, commissions and City Council

- Adoption of the plan by City Council

Austin currently has twenty nine neighborhood plans adopted or under review: Bouldin, Brentwood, Central Austin Combined, Central East Austin, Chestnut, Crestview, Dawson, East Cesar Chavez, Franklin Park, Govalle, Hancock, Highland, Holy, Hyde Park, Johnston Terrace, McKinney, MLK, MLK 183, Montopolis, North Austin Civic Association, North Loop, North University, Old West Austin, Pecan Springs/Springdale, Rosewood, Southeast, upper Boggy Creek, West University, and Wooten. The appendix includes a map showing the neighborhood planning areas in Austin.

. The Neighborhood Planning Handbook for Austin describes three ways that the plan can be implemented 1) changing the zoning on the neighborhood planning area to reflect the changes expressed in the Future Land Use Map; 2) staff working with neighborhood stakeholders to develop a plan to track and implement the supported action items in the plan; 3) publicizing, disseminating, and putting into use the neighborhood design guidelines. Yet the implementation process in practice is highly criticized by neighborhood participants (see neighborhood stories).

## **Conclusions**

Many cities around the US have neighborhood planning programs that are quite similar to Austin's. They are built into the larger planning process of the city and encourage citizens to be involved in planning for the future of their surroundings. The next step following neighborhood planning is implementation, and in order to keep

citizens involved and optimistic, there must be some sincere steps towards making the plans a part of reality or else people will give up on the process believing that their input does not matter.

Cities such as Seattle and Portland are taking significant steps to ensure that the neighborhood plans are implemented and neighbors informed of the status of various projects by creating separate plans or processes for the implementation of the neighborhood plans. The examples of Seattle and Portland (see appendix) may provide ideas for strengthening the implementation and monitoring process in Austin's neighborhood planning.

## Appendix

*Figure 1: Executive Summary and Priority Report for Neighborhood Plan Implementation in Seattle*

### 2004 Neighborhood Plan Implementation (NPI) Priority Report

## Executive Summary

### Overview

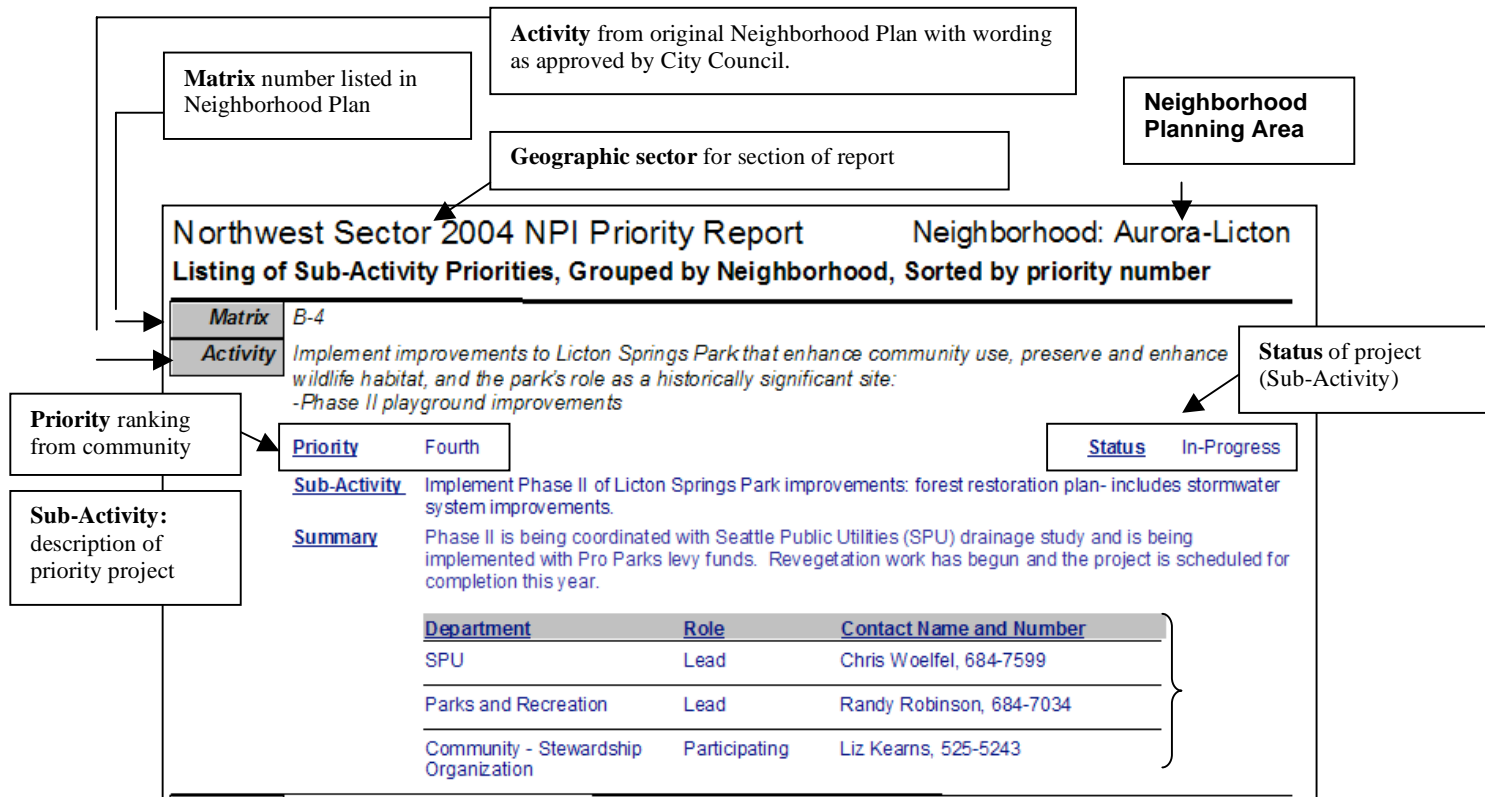
In late August of 2003, the Department of Neighborhoods asked the Chairs of Neighborhood Plan Stewardship Groups and District Councils to provide input on prioritizing neighborhood plan recommendations. The goal was to have the prioritized recommendations focus implementation efforts by both City departments and community groups.

In October 2003, detailed information was sent out to participants to assist in the ranking of the top five projects in each of the 38 Neighborhood Planning areas. In November and December, the Department worked together to help individual communities identify their recommended top four to five prioritized projects.

With this information, the Department of Neighborhoods entered all the submitted priorities into a database that tracks Neighborhood Plan Implementation (NPI), and created a preliminary report that was shared with other City departments. Over a dozen City departments helped evaluate each of the priorities, assigned project managers where appropriate, and shared explanatory comments to promote information sharing, foster better coordination, and ensure the proper department had been assigned the correct project. In addition, the Departments used many of the prioritized projects for their own planning purposes and dozens of projects were added to departmental 2005-2006 Capital Improvement Plans.

### How to Read the 2004 NPI Priority Report

*The 2004 NPI Priority Report* is grouped into six geographical sectors (East, Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, Southwest and West) which are broken down alphabetically by Neighborhood Planning Area. The report shows the Neighborhood Planning Area *Matrix* number, the *Activity* description, the *Sub-Activity* explaining the specific project, and the *Summary* statement detailing what the City is currently doing with regards to this project. In addition, the report also shows both the *Status* of the project (Sub-Activity), as well as the *Priority* ranking each neighborhood stewardship group suggested. Most priorities are ranked from top to fourth or fifth, but some neighborhoods chose to rank all their priorities as "top".



**Example of an entry in the 2004 NPI Priority Report**

**Status of Projects**

Projects are tracked by six status designations: Not started; In-Progress (finite projects that are underway); On-Going (open-ended activities like maintenance and monitoring); On-Hold (projects that have been suspended for budget or other reasons); Completed; and Closed (projects that will not move forward because they are contrary to City policies or have been superseded by other developments).

**Summary of Findings**

Before the prioritization of the Neighborhood Plan Sub-Activities, only 33% of these projects had been identified in the Neighborhood Plan Implementation as being In-Progress. Nine months later, 70% are In-Progress, and 33% are On-Going. The NPI prioritization process has resulted in 35% of previously not-started projects being added to Department work plans and the NPI database.

Summary of comments on priority projects

**Implementors:**  
Project contacts with phone numbers

- 77% of all "Top" rated projects are now in-progress or completed
- 95% of the projects have an assigned project lead

Department Lead	Percentage
Transportation (SDOT)	33.7%
Parks and Recreation	13.6%
Neighborhoods (DON)	11.4%

Department of Planning and Development (DPD)	10.9%
Office for Economic Development (OED)	6.0%
Seattle Public Utilities (SPU)	4.7%
Police (SPD)	5.2%
Housing (OH)	1.6%
Human Services (HSD)	1.6%
City Light	1.1%
Education (OFE)	0.5%
Fleets and Facilities (FFD)	0.5%
Office of Policy and Management (OPM)	0.5%
Office for Sustainability and the Environment (OSE)	0.5%
*King County/Metro (KC/Metro)	3.3%
*Sound Transit	2.1%
*Schools	1.1%
*Neighborhood Stewardship Groups	1.6%

\*Assigned Lead not in City of Seattle

As this table shows, many departments and other groups are responsible for neighborhood plan implementation. Transportation and street improvement projects are high priorities for many neighborhoods, but most of those projects also involve other departments and groups.

**Conclusion**

Identifying priority projects helps both the community and City departments focus their efforts on the most important neighborhood plan implementation needs. This was the first year of implementing a prioritization process of this kind, and although the process had its share of challenges, the results are very positive and promising. Of the identified priorities, two-thirds of these projects are currently being worked on or are already completed, which is double the number initially identified as in-progress.

The Department of Neighborhoods will continue to work with community groups, City departments and other agencies to make progress on these priorities and to determine the best process for updating neighborhood plan implementation priorities on a regular basis. This collaborative approach will ensure that the neighborhood plans remain living documents and blueprints for building stronger, healthier communities.

Figure 2: Fact Sheet from Seattle Neighborhood

*What We've Accomplished Together*

**Your Neighborhood Plan  
in Action**

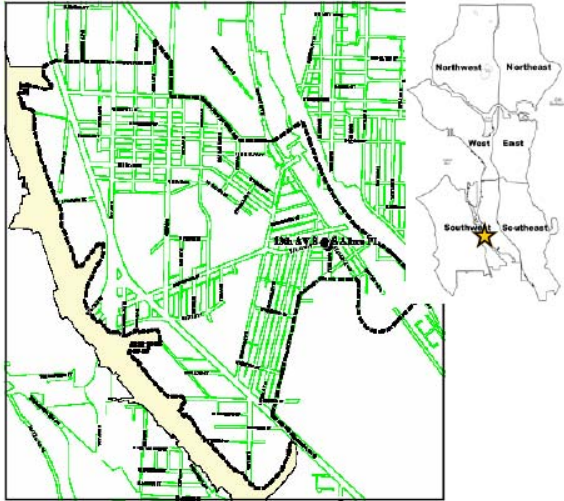
Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor  
Yvonne Sanchez, Dir., Dept. of Neighborhoods

**Neighborhood:**  
Georgetown Neighborhood Plan Area

**Plan Adopted:** 2000

**Key Elements:**

1. Old Georgetown City Hall Renovation
2. Oxbow Park



Georgetown Neighborhood Plan Area  
*Southwest sector*

### What happened in 2002

- **Old Georgetown City Hall** - The owner of the old Georgetown City Hall Building, Puget Sound Neighborhood Health Centers (PSNHC), and representatives of the Georgetown Community Council agreed to identify a location within the building for community meeting space, potentially in the space recently vacated by the food bank.
- **Hat n' Boots** - Preparations advanced for the relocation of the historic Hat 'n Boots from their current site along E. Marginal Way to their future home, 4 blocks away in the new Oxbow Park. Layers of old lead-based paint were removed from the structures revealing the original blue color on the boots and the red hat.
- **King County Airport Improvements** - A draft improvement plan and draft Environmental Impact Statement were completed and forwarded to the Federal Aviation Authority for preliminary review. The plan proposes a number of airport improvements including an extension of the runway to facilitate airport safety upgrades.

### What's Upcoming In 2003

- **Old Georgetown City Hall** - Puget Sound Neighborhood Health Centers is planning upgrades to the building.
- **Hat n' Boots** - The historic icons were moved to their new home in Oxbow Park in February of 2003. Installation of a new playground at the Park will take place in July, funded by \$335,000 from the Pro Parks Levy, the Boeing Company, and a \$122,000 Neighborhood Matching Fund grant.
- **Traffic Safety Improvements** - The Seattle Department of Transportation will construct a traffic circle at Flora Avenue S. & S Eddy Street, repair the pedestrian island and improve the intersection for pedestrian crossing at 13th Avenue S and S Bailey. These improvements were prioritized by the neighborhood and funded with \$33,000 from the Neighborhood Street Fund.
- **King County Airport and Airport Master Plan** - The Airport Improvement Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement will be completed, King County will facilitate an agency and neighborhood review process prior to implementing the airport expansion plan.



Hat & Boots

#### Who to Contact

##### At the City

Glenn Harris, Greater Duwamish Neighborhood District Coordinator

233-2044, [glenn.harris@seattle.gov](mailto:glenn.harris@seattle.gov)

John Eskelin, Neighborhood Development Manager

684-0359, [john.eskelin@seattle.gov](mailto:john.eskelin@seattle.gov)

Department of Neighborhoods Plan website:

[www.cityofseattle.net/neighborhoods/npi/](http://www.cityofseattle.net/neighborhoods/npi/)

##### In the Neighborhood

Chris Chinn, President, Georgetown Community Council, (206) 763-7661, [cchinn@hotmail.com](mailto:cchinn@hotmail.com)

Dave Gehring, Executive Director, Manufacturing Industrial Council, 762-2470, [dgmic@qwest.net](mailto:dgmic@qwest.net)

##### Neighborhood Plan Partners

Tom Knoblauch, Chair, Greater Duwamish District Council, (206) 763-3079

##### City Neighborhood Council Neighborhood Planning Committee.

Cindi Barker - 425-266-2533, [cbarker@qwest.net](mailto:cbarker@qwest.net)

Lisa Merki - 206-914-9439, [lmerki@earthlink.net](mailto:lmerki@earthlink.net)

*Neighborhood plan implementation is a program of the City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods in partnership with other City departments. DON works with 38 communities across Seattle to help meet the challenge of urban growth.*





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