



# **COMMUNITY RESOURCES: CITY OF MADISON NEIGHBORHOOD RESOURCE TEAMS**

**IMPROVING THE DELIVERY OF SERVICES AND CONNECTING CITY  
GOVERNMENT DIRECTLY TO MADISON NEIGHBORHOODS**

**BY MAYOR PAUL R. SOGLIN | JANUARY, 2014**

## INTRODUCTION

Neighborhood Resource Teams (NRTs) play a vital role in the City's efforts to improve and coordinate local government services, promote equity, and improve the quality of life. NRTs are comprised of City staff, who in addition to their respective departmental assignments is a member of these teams serving specified neighborhoods with a population range of 500-2,000. NRTs focus on an agenda created by the community which can range from better lighting and housing to youth recreation and transportation matters. In addition, the NRTs engage other government agencies and non-profits in an effort to ensure that services are delivered in a comprehensive manner covering transportation, health, housing, quality childcare, and education and job training.

There are three critical ingredients to preserving or improving a neighborhood. First, there must be residents with respectful values – the dignity of work, the importance of family and education, and a concern for each other. Add to that empathy, kindness, and faith – based in religion, or not – and we have the foundation of a great place.

But all of that is not enough. There are two more essential elements:

1. The people of the neighborhood must have the will to fight for these values
2. The government must respond and support the neighborhood

That is the NRTs, we lead by serving.

## BACKGROUND

In May of 1989, a young Madison officer, Joe Balles, newly assigned to a challenged neighborhood and trained in community policing wrote a note to Mayor Soglin:

---

*“I am the new community police officer assigned to the Broadway-Simpson neighborhood. I am trained as a police officer and in community policing. The problem is I do not know what I am doing here. What is my purpose?” - Joe Balles, Madison PD*

---

Police Officer Balles, like many other City employees, was isolated from other City agencies and support networks. Balles could develop

## *Neighborhood Partnerships*

---

“NRT Mission: To encourage and enhance communication, coordination, and relationship building among City staff, City departments, neighborhood residents, and other stakeholders to promote equity and improve the quality of life for all residents of Madison’s neighborhoods.”

trust and rapport with the area residents, but he was not able to make positive changes in the neighborhood. More importantly, neither Balles, nor other City employees, were engaged in supporting neighborhood empowerment, a key element in building strong communities.

The following year, motivated by Police Officer Balles question, the first Neighborhood Resource Teams were established by Mayor Paul Soglin.

## **THE CONCEPT**

While membership varied, most NRTs consisted of City staff from agencies that already had a presence in neighborhoods, such as, Police, Fire, Parks, Building Inspection, Public Health, the Office of Community Services, and Community Development Block Grant Program. The intent of the teams was to provide innovative, Citywide initiatives to improve the delivery of services and connect City agencies directly to neighborhoods by developing relationships between City staff and neighborhood residents.

The Neighborhood Resource Teams were posed this question: "What are you trying to accomplish?" Their assignment was to create a vision statement for the City. The team struggled and finally they realized they had to first address a more fundamental question, "Why are you working for the City?"

After sorting through a number of personal items such as benefit packages and job security, the team members focused on the nature of public service. Terms like 'helping others,' 'leaving a legacy,' and 'making a difference' filled the discussion.

Finally there was focus and twenty-three years later, the City of Madison vision remains basically the same:

*"We are here to make Madison a safe and healthy place to live, work, learn, and play for everyone and their family."*

Mayor Soglin asked the NRT staff to analyze their role as public employees in building strong neighborhoods – were they to be the leaders or to facilitate providing needed resources to neighborhoods? They concluded that to have healthy, vital neighborhoods, there needed to be active resident leadership to represent neighborhoods and communities. The citizen leaders would be the focal point of neighborhood activity. The NRTs would be resources for residents, a vehicle to implement the neighborhood priorities.

The Neighborhood Resource Teams were also asked to make recommendations on financing of neighborhood initiatives and staff recommendations in the City operating and capital budgets.

## **THE FIRST YEARS**

NRTs were established in nine neighborhoods. The neighborhoods identified were selected based on the following criteria:

- Neighborhoods that had a high incidence of police calls

- Neighborhoods with significant housing and building inspection issues
- Neighborhoods with high unemployment and low academic achievement

Each team had two leaders for a total of 18 team leaders.

**Guidance Teams:** Six of those leaders from the nine teams were selected to meet regularly as a Guidance Team. The Guidance Team facilitated communication between teams, brought budget recommendations to Mayor Soglin, and developed educational programs for the teams since many of the members had no experience in community work or serving low-income constituencies.

When agencies began to utilize their partnerships across the City, the NRTs began to be successful in making changes. As a result of these new relationships, after the first year, the neighborhood and the team saw positive changes and, that, energized them.

In 1993, Dane County also began to participate in the NRTs by having Joining Forces for Families (JFF) social workers attend meetings. Within a short time, NRT members reported a significant increase in effectiveness with the addition of the JFF social workers. While the teams were effective on a neighborhood level, it was the social worker that could get into the home and provide the necessary services directly to distressed families.

## TODAY

Neighborhood Resource Teams continue to play a vital role in the City's effort to improve and coordinate local government services and improve the quality of life in Madison.

The *mission* of today's NRTs is to encourage and enhance communication, coordination, and relationship-building among City staff, City departments, residents, and other stakeholders to promote equity and improve the quality of life for all residents of Madison's neighborhoods.

The current *goals* of the NRT Program:

- Develop relationships among City staff, neighborhood residents, and other stakeholders
- Coordinate, develop, and improve City services to neighborhoods in concert with residents and other stakeholders

## Neighborhood Partnerships

---

“Ensuring that City agencies serve all Madison neighborhoods, recognizing that community leadership comes from residents.”

- Increase the City's knowledge of neighborhood issues and opportunities
- Highlight issues that cut across multiple NRT focus areas to address systemic barriers

Coordinating the activities on over 100 City staff working in close to a dozen neighborhoods is a full time position for one person who reports directly to the Mayor. The NRT Coordinator is responsible for:

- Attending all NRT meetings
- Attending all Guidance Team Meetings
- Working with Department Heads to make sure that NRT members are striking a balance between their departmental and their team responsibilities
- Making sure City departments and other government agencies are aware of NRT work that affects their service areas
- Attending all City capital and operating budget sessions
  - Identifying budget proposals and initiatives that should be taken back to the neighborhoods and their respective NRTs
  - Bringing forward budget initiatives from individual teams based on the identified goals and needs from the neighborhoods they serve

Now the NRTs provide a regular forum for City employees to meet, discuss, and support each other's efforts in delivering City services. They provide a means for City staff to move beyond their respective departmental missions and instead recognize the need to collaborate and to further the City of Madison's vision.

The Guidance Team has evolved to now include some of the department heads of agencies that constitute the NRTs. Departmental head participation gives the NRTs greater support from their agency, which often looked at NRT work as a diversion from the department's day-to-day functions.

NRT recommendations for programming and budgeting are reviewed, but the recommendations do not always require departmental approval. The reasoning is simple – these are the people on the ground, the workers we expect to make hands-on change. If we are to trust them, we have to assume that their deliberation process is sound and that they are recommending services that are needed.



## SUCCESS STORIES

Over the years, the connections made through NRTs have enhanced service delivery and made measures to improve quality of life in numerous ways.

The JFF social worker and neighborhood police officer operating in southwest Madison are incredible assets to the community and have daily contact with numerous residents and other stakeholders in the area. These positions arose partially in response to recommendations by the NRT in 2003. Today, the Balsam-Russett NRT continues to make connections to enhance the community. In 2013, a major hiring push was made to employ residents from southwest Madison at the Hy-Vee Grocery Store. An initial contact was made by the NRT's economic development representative that connected the store manager with the JFF social worker and members of the Southwest Partnership. They in turn facilitated individuals applying and the grocery store ultimately hiring 40 residents from the neighborhood.

Another example of NRTs facilitating improvements to neighborhoods came in 2013. Until then, there was no public transit to Owl Creek, a neighborhood on the outskirts of Madison. In 2012, a group of middle and high school students organized around the lack of bus service. They attended Madison Common Council meetings and advocated for improvements in service. The Owl Creek NRT was able to elevate the issue and recommend it as a budget initiative. This helped result in a route being developed to serve the area.

Similarly, in response to neighborhood demand, the Hammersley-Theresa NRT recommended in 2012 that a neighborhood center be constructed to serve the community. This helped lead to inclusion of development costs for a Theresa Terrace Neighborhood Center in the 2013 and 2014 City of Madison Adopted Budgets.

The Darbo-Worthington neighborhood saw two development proposals come through in 2013. At the same time, the NRT was creating a point of contact for city staff, residents, and other stakeholders. Groups of residents were able to connect with the NRT and the alder, both at community meetings and through individual contacts, to articulate their opposition to the developments. City staff, informed by resident concerns, were then able to advise and work with the respective developers to explore alternate possibilities that ameliorated the effects on the neighborhood.

## Success Stories



Try Metro Transit's  
NEW  
**ROUTE 31**  
Starting August 26, serves  
Owl Creek and surrounding  
southeast neighborhoods.

Plan your trip:  
mymetrobus.com  
(608) 266-4466

## CONCLUSION

The NRTs continue to play a critical role in assisting City agencies in responding to neighborhoods needs and issues by:

- Gathering and sharing information about major trends occurring within neighborhoods, particularly in those with fewer resources and higher concentrations of poverty
- Connecting neighborhood residents with municipal, county, and nonprofit services
- Coordinating municipal services
- Identifying issues within the service delivery system that need improvement
- Influencing the City budget in two ways:
  1. Facilitating neighborhoods in having greater input to the budget process
  2. By making their own recommendations

Furthermore, for the Neighborhood Resource Teams to continue to be effective, the mayor's involvement in the NRTs is essential. The mayor needs to attend the annual NRT retreat of all NRT members, and some of the monthly meetings of individual NRTs. The mayor must also participate in neighborhood events that are considered a priority, and continue to communicate to City agencies the importance of NRT participation.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- NRTs should get organized and members need to spend quality time learning from one another, and finding out about the professional skills and talents of other participating members. They need to learn as much as possible about the neighborhoods they are going to serve and their purpose before they begin to move into the field and become operational
- Once in the field they need to reach out to neighborhood leaders – residents, business owners, educators, NGOs, faith-based leaders – those already serving the area
- Some staff may need to serve on more than one NRT
- Most team members will need diversity training
- The NRT is a resource to serve the neighborhood, not to run it
- Budget input is critical. NRTs need to make recommendations for the next year's budget. Each year several, if not all, of their top recommendations were included in Mayor Soglin's executive budget

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The concept for creating the Neighborhood Resource Team's came from studying the works of W. Edwards Deming, the private sector expert on Total Quality Management; John McKnight and John P. Kretzmann, co-authors of Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets; and William H. (Holly) Whyte, author of Cities, who's study of place lead to the founding of the Project for Public Spaces. In addition, Peter Scholtes, who was in the process of writing The Leader's Handbook: Making Things Happen, Getting Things Done, had a profound impact on the Neighborhood Resource Team's work.

Mayor Soglin's own observations about the strength and weaknesses of neighborhoods also guided the creation of the Neighborhood Resource Teams. Certainly poverty has a considerable impact on the success of a neighborhood. But throughout history there were many low-income neighborhoods that thrived and were free of crime and exploitation. At the same time a middle-class neighborhood is not immune to deterioration.

One of the major influences that shaped the concept of the teams came from W. Edwards Deming and eight of his Fourteen Points for Management. The NRTs found these particularly critical to the management of a government that wished to truly serve its citizens:

1. Create constancy of purpose toward improvement of product and service, on a long-term relationship of loyalty and trust
2. Institute training on the job
3. Drive out fear, so that everyone may work effectively for the company
4. Break down barriers between departments
5. Eliminate slogans and exhortations
6. Provide strong leadership
7. Institute a vigorous program of education and self-improvement
8. Put everybody in the company to work to accomplish the transformation. The transformation is everybody's job

In addition, from Deming and Peter Scholtes came an understanding of the role of the leader, particularly the responsibility of listening, coaching, and guiding. The leader must be committed to making the organization responsive to the community residents. The NRT members are leaders within City government but they are a listener and a public servant when working with the community. They learned how the leader in City government must forcefully implement this new relationship between the City staff and the people they serve in order to create a new culture.

John McKnight's focus on building from strengths and assets kept NRTs committed to allocating resources in a manner that served the community. Housing initiatives were designed to improve the availability of the inventory for existing residents, not relocate them. Investments in community



resources were designed to provide access – to jobs, health services, and educational skills – through new community centers.

From Deming, Scholtes, and McKnight came the added insight that when a community designs and plans for itself, there are two victories. The first win is obvious: the success of the particular project – the community garden, the health center, the new employment opportunity.

The second win may be even more significant. It is a community taking control, empowering itself, and gaining institutional knowledge which lessens dependency on outsiders in the future.

Lastly, William ‘Holly’ Whyte’s focus on placemaking was critical. Community-based facilities, new housing, and the location of new health facilities were designed and built with the idea of building trust and access. When a new family health and resource center was built, community members were instrumental in its design and construction, despite the opposition of the local City council member. When a community center was built, the community determined the programming.

## **WEBSITE RESOURCES**

Neighborhood Resource Teams: [www.cityofmadison.com/mayor/nrt/](http://www.cityofmadison.com/mayor/nrt/)

Mayor Soglin’s Programs: [www.cityofmadison.com/mayor/programs/](http://www.cityofmadison.com/mayor/programs/)

Mayor Soglin’s Priorities: [www.cityofmadison.com/mayor/priorities/](http://www.cityofmadison.com/mayor/priorities/)

City of Madison Vision & Awards: [www.cityofmadison.com/vision-awards](http://www.cityofmadison.com/vision-awards)