
Neighborhood Councils

A REPORT TO THE GREAT FALLS CITY COMMISSION

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Bob Demming, Mayor
Joan Bennett, Commissioner
Bill Downer, Commissioner
Randy Gray, Commissioner
John Rosenbaum, Commissioner

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Introduction

Recommendations of the Study Commission

The Constitution of the State of Montana allows all municipalities the option to review their form of government every ten years. In 1994, the City of Great Falls opted to examine its governmental structure, and in 1995 a seven member study commission was elected by popular vote. The purpose of a study commission is to examine the existing form and powers of a local government, and compare them with other forms of government available under the state constitution. After two years of work, the Great Falls Study Commission came forward with three recommendations:

1. Change the term of office for the Mayor from two years to four;
2. Increase the number of City Commissioners from five members to seven; and
3. Reestablish a system of neighborhood councils.

In the general election of 1996, all three recommendations were put to referendum as amendments to the City charter, but only the neighborhood council initiative was approved by voters.

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The approved charter amendment called for the formation of no fewer than nine and no more than thirteen neighborhood council districts. Each district is to be represented by a council of five members elected by the residents of the district to two year terms. The stated purpose of neighborhood councils is to advise the City Commission, City Manager, and other city advisory bodies on all governmental issues, affairs, and services which affect neighborhoods. Each council must elect officers and adopt bylaws. The amendment also allows for, but does not require, the individual councils to form a city-wide Citizens Council. A “sunset provision” has been included which requires another referendum in the year 2001 to determine if the council program should be retained or repealed.

Previous Neighborhood Councils

Neighborhood councils are not new to Great Falls. The first councils were established in 1976, and although they were recognized as a component of city government, their primary purpose was to operate independently and apart from any influence of the City Commission and administration. Their job was to advise the City on neighborhood issues and problems, including improvements in neighborhood

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services, but they also facilitated citizen participation by providing a means of communication with the City Commission.

Ten councils were established, each having an executive board of seven to thirteen members. At least two of these early councils were active in the Central Place Revitalization Plan. They were instrumental in making that plan more residentially oriented and scaling back areas designated for more commercial and industrial development. Most of the other councils were active in the Great Falls Area Comprehensive Plan by providing information, and by acting as a sounding board for policies and recommendations generated by the staff.

Following adoption of the City-County comprehensive plan in 1981, the activity level of most of the early councils began to decline. A few of these councils, most notably the ones serving the lower south side, lower north side, and the west side, remained active until the early 1980's primarily because there were still active issues in those neighborhoods. The Central Place Revitalization Program was being implemented, and the lower north and south side councils worked to uphold the integrity of that plan. Neighborhood Housing Services was becoming active, and neighborhood transportation improvements were being proposed. Also, the remaining councils tended to have the strongest leadership on their executive boards. In 1993, all neighborhood councils were officially disbanded when city codes were recodified.

Purpose of this Report

The purpose of this report is to identify the most effective methods for utilizing the new Neighborhood Council Program in Great Falls. The experiences of the cities of Helena, Montana and Spokane, Washington will be studied and analyzed in order to better understand the potential benefits of neighborhood councils, and to determine if changes in municipal organization and culture will be necessary to make councils an effective part of this City's government. The various roles and functions of neighborhood councils will also be examined so that both the City Commission and administration will have a clear understanding from the beginning what to expect from neighborhood councils and what level of support they will need to be successful.

The Helena Model

Early Citizen Involvement in Helena

In the late 1960's and early 70's, Helena had an active Citizen's Advisory Council (CAC). The CAC was a requirement under the federal Urban Renewal program, their primary responsibility being to identify projects and set priorities for funding. The CAC was comprised of 28 members; seven each from Helena's three neighborhoods and seven members appointed at-large by the City Commission.

During Helena's first local government review process in 1974, the Study Commission recommended that seven neighborhood districts be formed, each with a four-member elected council. The Study Commission thought that the smaller districts would insure a better knowledge of neighborhood problems, would encourage better participation on the part of residents, and provide for better representation. The CAC had proven that citizen participation was a valuable asset to the City, and the Study Commission concluded that it was important to maintain a mechanism for citizen involvement. The Study Commission further recommended that the individual neighborhood councils form the Helena Citizens Council (HCC), and that they act in an advisory capacity to the City Commission on land use and budget matters.

The HCC's Identity Struggle

With the creation of the HCC, the CAC was phased out. The HCC assumed the task of identifying and prioritizing projects for Urban Renewal until that program too was phased out. Following completion of the last of the Urban Renewal projects in the City, the HCC found it difficult to define what was meant by "act in an advisory capacity," and there appeared to be little guidance from the City Commission and City staff. The HCC slipped into a period of inactivity. For the most part, the citizens of Helena became disinterested in the HCC. Citizens no longer ran for neighborhood council openings, and as a result, many representatives were appointed to council positions by the City Commission just to keep vacancies filled and the councils going. Eventually, the lack of public involvement hurt the HCC's credibility as a representative body.

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The Helena Citizen's Council was clearly at a crossroads. Either the HCC should be disbanded because it was no longer viable, or it should be completely revitalized by giving it a new or expanded mission. Through the efforts of the City Commission and the few active members of the Council, the City's commitment to the HCC was renewed. The Council would continue to advise the City Commission on planning

The HCC would be far more effective if its priorities and recommendations were submitted during the budget development process.

and budget issues. In addition, the HCC would now be providing information to the Commission through the administration of neighborhood surveys. Also, the HCC would receive assistance from the City for the first time.

The HCC Today

The City Commission, staff, and other community organizations routinely request the HCC to poll Helena's citizens on important local issues. In the recent past, surveys have been conducted on cable TV rates, zoning issues, water and sewer policies, street maintenance, and the City's role in economic development. On occasion, the HCC will designate one of its members to be a "community agitator" on a particular issue. This usually leads to more press coverage, which in turn results in the public having the opportunity to become better informed. Follow-up surveys have indicated that the community has become better educated as a result of media coverage.

As discussed previously, one of the mandates for the HCC is to advise the City on budget issues. Members of the HCC attend the budget work sessions and are allowed and encouraged to express their views. The HCC prepares a list of budget items, mostly small capital projects that they want implemented or changed, and staff responds to their concerns. However, a major problem with this process is that many of the ideas submitted by the HCC come after the preliminary budget has been prepared. Therefore, few of the HCC's recommendations are actually incorporated into the budget document. The HCC would be far more effective if its priorities and recommendations were submitted during the budget development process.

The City Commission relies on the HCC to provide a different perspective than those provided by City staff and other advisory boards. Commission members generally work full-time outside of public office. They do not always have the time to become experts on every issue, nor do they often have first hand knowledge of issues affecting individual neighborhoods. This makes the diverse composition of the HCC and the unique insight it brings to city problems a significant benefit to the Commission.

Advising the City Commission on growth and development is another HCC responsibility. Normally, the HCC does not become involved with individual development projects except when development may be "sensitive" to a neighborhood. Sensitivity is gauged by the amount of calls the City and HCC receive when

information is publicized on a development. If there is public outcry, the HCC is obligated, by the City Commission, to hold a neighborhood meeting. During these meetings the HCC often assumes the role of “facilitator/mediator” between the City and the neighborhood. If the development involves placing a group home within a neighborhood, the HCC takes it upon themselves to hold a neighborhood meeting. The HCC has discovered that most of the neighborhood issues that surface on development projects involve retaining established pedestrian paths and traffic flow. They have experienced that City staff is willing to work out solutions to these issues, and incorporate them into development agreements.

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In 1992, the city of Helena reviewed its comprehensive plan, and the HCC played two key roles. The first was to provide information and to raise planning issues from the neighborhood perspective. The second was to organize and facilitate round table workshops to help reach consensus on issues that were dealt with in the first draft of the comprehensive plan. As a result, subsequent drafts of the plan reflected a neighborhood and community consensus on many issues.

An unintended result of the evolution of the HCC is that it has become a recruiting channel and training ground for some members into other elected and appointed governmental positions. The HCC has given its members knowledge of how their government functions and experience in reaching consensus.

What have we learned?

While fulfilling the mandates for neighborhood councils in the Helena charter, it appears that the role of the Citizen’s Council is primarily reactive, and somewhat passive. Most of the surveys and neighborhood meetings are used to gather data or to facilitate problem solving once issues have already surfaced. These same techniques could be used in a more proactive manner – gathering data to use to plan for community action on issues. Along the same lines, the HCC’s involvement in the budget process is “after the fact” rather than in the development stage. The result is that the HCC is kept informed on the proposed budget; however, HCC concerns or ideas come too late to be incorporated into the budget cycle. Finally, during the comprehensive plan development, the HCC was used to iron out wrinkles in the plan, rather than to gather data and raise neighborhood issues to be addressed in the plan from the outset.

How can we benefit?

By any indication or measurement, the Helena model for neighborhood councils is a successful one. It is also apparent, however, that councils could be even more effective by involving them earlier in the City's decision making, fact finding, and analytical processes. This can be accomplished through:

1. ***Involve neighborhood councils*** when a development is first presented at the staff level rather than forcing them react to public concerns over a fully developed and staff reviewed proposal;
2. ***Use surveys*** for evaluation of services and for gathering data for planning. With the advent of the new Comprehensive Plan and constant evaluation of the Capital Improvement Program, neighborhood councils can be a tremendous resource for staff to use in the information gathering stage;
3. Use neighborhood councils as ***a mechanism for two-way communication*** rather than one-way. The HCC gathers data for the City Commission; however, it does not appear that the HCC disseminates any information to the neighborhoods;
4. ***Do not limit*** the types of issues the neighborhood councils can become involved in; and
5. ***Empower the neighborhood councils*** to use the staff resources and community resources available to them.

The Spokane Model

Councils Began as Community Development Steering Committees

Like Helena, Montana and many other communities around the country, neighborhood councils in Spokane originated from Community Development steering committees. These committees had been active since 1975, but were only established in those neighborhoods that were eligible to receive Community Development Block Grant funds. Other areas of the City which were not eligible for HUD funds were not represented, and had no formal organization linking them to city hall.

As these steering committees worked with people in the community to identify projects and priorities for grant funding, broader issues began to emerge. Issues such as crime and the need for community policing, childcare, proposed development, traffic, and the planned siting of government facilities were all raised in neighborhood meetings. However, under CDBG guidelines, neighborhood steering committees are not permitted to engage in matters that are generally considered to be of a “political” nature. Therefore, it was technically improper for steering committees to deal with any issue of general neighborhood interest unless that issue happened to be directly related to grant funding. (Note: The City itself frequently used these committees as sounding boards and as neighborhood contacts regarding many different issues.) Some type of neighborhood organization, separate and apart from the CDBG steering committees, was clearly needed.

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Further impetus for neighborhood councils came from a growing feeling on the part of many Spokane residents that they were disenfranchised. They felt as though they had no connection to their city government, let alone any influence on how it operated. The current Mayor of Spokane campaigned on a platform to involve people in decision-making at a “grass roots” level. He conducted Town Hall meetings around the City and went on Neighborhood Walk-Arounds. From these interactions, it was clear that some type of city-sanctioned neighborhood organizational structure was called for. The City Manager’s office was assigned the task of researching how other cities formed and utilized neighborhood councils. Staff people contacted and studied several communities around the United States and Canada including Little Rock, Phoenix, Vancouver, Portland, Tacoma, and Salem, Oregon, to find the most suitable model for Spokane.

Communication Had to Go Both Ways

...participation and empowerment do not mean that the neighborhoods will have their way all the time.

Initially, neighborhood councils were seen primarily as a means to disseminate information about city government. Prior to active neighborhood councils, information about the time and place of meetings and hearings, agendas, reports, etc. were only available at City Hall, if they were available at all. Once neighborhood councils were established and organized, however, communication with City Hall became a true two-way street. Through their elected councils, individual neighborhoods were given a mechanism to provide systematic, meaningful input to the city organization on a variety of issues and problems, including public safety, capital improvement programming, zoning, housing, and social and recreational programs. In fact, neighborhood councils are key components of Spokane's overall plan to not only decentralize decision-making, but to decentralize the provision of services as well.

Program Adopted by Ordinance

In Spokane, neighborhood councils were formally and legally established through adoption of a city ordinance in the fall of 1995. This ordinance added a new chapter to the Spokane Municipal Code, titled "Neighborhood Council Program". The new code chapter (attached as Appendix A), sets forth minimum standards for councils to be recognized by the City, including bylaws, clear boundaries, qualifications for membership, and requirements for periodic meetings. It provides a section on the general duties and responsibilities for neighborhood councils, and establishes a "neighborhood liaison", which has become the City's Office of Neighborhood Services.

Community Assembly: Vehicle for Communication

This ordinance also established the Community Assembly, which is a coalition of independent councils. The Assembly serves both as a forum for issues of broad community interest, and as a body of self-government for the individual councils. It is comprised of one representative from each of the neighborhood councils and three members of the Spokane City Council. One of the more important responsibilities of the Assembly is to facilitate communication between neighborhood councils and the City. This communication must be open and **ongoing**. There was a concern on the part of city officials that if a neighborhood council brought an idea or recommendation forward, and if the City did not act to the council's satisfaction, then that particular council might "take their ball and go home". Through the Community Assembly, the City has stressed that participation and empowerment do not mean that the neighborhoods will have their way all the time. The City Council still must act in the best interests of the City as a whole, but meaningful dialogue and teamwork are what is important, and they must continue.

Open, Flexible Program

Spokane currently has twenty neighborhoods designated for the neighborhood council program. The first boundaries were based upon those established by CDBG. For areas that were not Block Grant eligible, boundaries were based upon specific area planning done by the City Planning Department. Of the twenty designated areas, thirteen have organized councils. They are as unique as the neighborhoods they represent. Some are highly organized, while others are barely organized. All are different in their levels of efficiency and effectiveness. To a great extent, this reflects the approach to neighborhood councils taken by the City from the beginning. The Spokane program is very open and flexible. The City does not require each neighborhood to form a council; it is optional. Elections for council representatives are not required to follow any formal process. The City asks only that each neighborhood organization make a good faith effort to involve everyone who wants to be involved. For example, any neighborhood resident at least 16 years of age is eligible for council membership, and a business owner in the neighborhood may serve on a council even if he or she resides elsewhere. In Spokane, neighborhood councils are a standing invitation to participate, and not a mandate to do so.

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City Resources

Other than staffing the Office of Neighborhood Services, the city of Spokane provides very little in the way of direct financial support for its councils. All fund raising to support council activities and programs is done in the neighborhoods themselves. For this reason, many of the active councils are exploring incorporating as non-profits in hopes of broadening their possible funding sources.

Cultural Changes

It is still too early to accurately assess the effectiveness of neighborhood councils, and therefore, the success of the Spokane Model. The program has yet to establish a track record of any significance. Ironically, the ultimate ability of neighborhood councils to deal effectively with the City may depend upon the City itself. Spokane's City Manager talked of "cultural changes" which would have to take place within the organizational structure for the City to get the best value out of the councils. This means that department heads, division heads, and eventually **all** city personnel would have to accept (and embrace) the concept of the City empowering its citizens. But a change of this magnitude may not come easily. The Spokane city organization is large, and like most other municipalities, is accustomed to conducting business in a "top down" manner.

Neighborhood Councils in Community Planning

...if people don't (or can't) participate at the neighborhood level, then the councils cannot be effective at the community level.

Like the neighborhood councils themselves, the Spokane Neighborhood Planning Program also originated with the Community Development Program. Neighborhood plans, or Specific Plans as they are called, are a “detailing” of the General Land Use Plan for the City, and are required to be consistent with the general plan. In CDBG eligible neighborhoods, a Neighborhood Improvement Plan (NIP) is prepared based upon the policies and recommendations generated by the Specific Plan. The NIP is a highly localized capital improvement program of sorts, which guides and manages the spending of CDBG monies and other public funds. However, to date this has all been accomplished through appointed citizen task forces. Neighborhood Councils are still too new to Spokane to have been involved, even though they may be from now on. Although the City is currently updating its comprehensive plan and General Land Use Plan, it is doing so primarily to designate urban growth boundaries as required by the State of Washington’s Growth Management Act (GMA), and neighborhoods are not an active issue at this point.

Neighborhood Councils have not yet become fully involved in land development review, even though this was one of the primary reasons the council program was initiated. At this time, however, the City has no specific plans to make Neighborhood Councils active participants in this function.

Pros and Cons to Flexible Approach

The most striking characteristic about Spokane’s Neighborhood Councils Program is its openness and flexibility; it lacks formal structure and rigid requirements. As pointed out previously, the City chose this approach over more structured models. One obvious advantage to this approach is the ease with which both neighborhood councils can participate with the City, and citizens can participate in their neighborhood councils. The second part of this point is the most critical; if people don't (or can't) participate at the neighborhood level, then the councils cannot be effective at the community level. Another advantage to the program’s flexibility is its adaptability. Because the entire program is established by ordinance, it can be amended by ordinance. As Spokane builds on its experience with neighborhood councils, the program can be fine tuned as necessary. Had their program been established by charter, refinements it would prove more cumbersome.

One downside to this approach is that all twenty of Spokane’s neighborhoods are not organized and operating at the same level. In fact, seven neighborhoods do not yet have councils at all. These neighborhoods which are not represented are an obvious disadvantage. However, an even larger issue could prove to be the reluctance

of elected officials and ranking city policy makers to utilize councils and place proper value on their input when all areas of the City are not represented equally. As an alternative, Spokane could have taken a more proactive role in the program. They could have offered strong incentives to organize. They could have **required** that council representatives be elected in a general election (as Great Falls will be doing), and any neighborhood failing to meet the election deadline would have to wait until the following election to organize. Such an approach would tend to put all neighborhoods on a more or less equal footing, but the trade-offs are increased difficulty of participation and the possible perception that the program is being mandated and orchestrated by the City.

Great Falls may wish to consider removing certain provisions from the charter..

What Have We Learned?

Spokane's open and flexible approach to the program has resulted in councils being slow to organize, and seven neighborhoods still do not have organized councils. While this approach serves Spokane well, it is not conducive to using Neighborhood Councils in comprehensive planning. The City of Great Falls will have all of its councils established and all representatives elected at the same time. This should speed citywide organization of councils and make them more timely and effective participants in the Comprehensive Plan.

If Neighborhood Councils are established and elected at the same time (with all the publicity and fanfare of a general election), they will instantly become recognized institutions of authority in the community. Everyone will know exactly what they are and what they are supposed to be doing. This should avoid the problem Spokane is having with key city personnel acknowledging the legitimate empowerment of the Councils. That "cultural change" which Spokane's City Manager described should come easier in Great Falls with Neighborhood Councils all organizing and becoming interactive with city government at the same time.

As discussed previously, Spokane opted to establish its council program through ordinance. This provides the City with greater flexibility to make changes in the program as necessary. Great Falls may wish to consider removing certain provisions from the charter, such as the number of councils allowed, residency requirements, terms of office, etc., and place them in an ordinance so they can be more easily revised. By having its council program recognized in the City Charter, but having the "nuts and bolts" of how the councils conduct business spelled out in an ordinance, Great Falls can enjoy the best advantages of each approach. To accomplish this, however, the charter amendment must go back for a second referendum.

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For Neighborhood Councils to be effective in Spokane, Great Falls, or anywhere, they need basic resources. While Spokane has an Office of Neighborhood Services, the City provides little else to its councils. Even the resource shelf at the ONS is practically bare. A centralized neighborhood resource center, with a computer terminal, books, periodicals and videotapes on planning, community development, recreation, public safety, and local government in general, could be a very effective resource for the neighborhoods and be provided at minimal cost. Neighborhood Council representatives in Spokane also expressed a need for a modest budget to support communication, i.e., printing of letters and fliers, notifications in newspapers, etc.

Neighborhood Councils for Great Falls

Where Are We Now?

At this time, the City of Great Falls has a charter amendment in place that sets forth the following:

- ♦ Nine to thirteen neighborhood councils will be formed.
- ♦ Each neighborhood will elect five council members to two-year terms in the general election to be held in November 1997. Council members must reside in the neighborhood the represent.
- ♦ Each council must organize, at least to the extent of electing a chairperson, a secretary, and a delegate to attend meetings of the City Commission.
- ♦ The role of the councils is advisory; to the City Commission, City Manager, and other city advisory bodies “on all governmental affairs and services having an effect on the area the neighborhood council represents...”.
- ♦ Each council shall adopt bylaws which prescribe additional duties of the council (which go unspecified in charter language), meeting times, and “criteria” for meetings (also unspecified).
- ♦ All meetings of the neighborhood councils are open to the public, and records shall be maintained and available for public inspection.
- ♦ A majority of the neighborhood councils may form a Great Falls Citizens’ Council, but this is not required.
- ♦ The City of Great Falls is not obligated to provide funds (or any other resources) to the neighborhood councils, nor is the City liable for any obligations incurred by the councils.
- ♦ After four years, this issue goes back before the voters to determine if the council program shall be retained or eliminated.

What Do We Need to Do?

The major issue not touched upon in charter language is communication.

Any change to what has been established by charter would send the charter amendment, either in whole or in part, back to a referendum. This would delay the neighborhood council program by at least one year. However, prior to the election in November 1997, the City must enact an ordinance to establish the number of councils and their boundaries, the Citizens' Council, and any other criteria or guidelines not spelled out in the charter amendment. This ordinance must be enacted by mid-September, 1997 in order for council candidates to file for the general election.

A Wide Range of Issues

As pointed out above, charter language allows neighborhood councils to advise the City on a very wide range of issues, including finance, public works, public safety, planning and zoning, and housing. Being knowledgeable and involved with multiple issues makes the councils more valuable to the City, and therefore, more effective. The major issue not touched upon in charter language is communication. There must be free and open communication between the City and the councils for the full benefits of the program to be realized, and this should be clearly stated in the ordinance. Other areas of council activity could include Neighborhood Watch, social services, comprehensive code enforcement, capital improvements, and advising the Community Council on priorities for block grant funding. Neighborhood councils could also take on coordination roles with other public organizations, such as working with the school district on local latchkey and crossing guard programs.

An Optimum Level of Support

One key to the success and effectiveness of the neighborhood council program will be the level of support provided by the City. Beginning in FY 1997-98 there will be a neighborhood liaison position in the Community Development Department. Presumably, this person will organize orientation and training programs, and be a first point of contact for councils as they interact with city government. The City could provide each council with a modest budget to cover costs of postage, printing, telephone, etc. A "neighborhood resource center" could be set up for use not only by the councils, but also for any member of the community. This resource center could have literature and videotapes on neighborhood planning, citizen participation, local law enforcement, recreation, neighborhood and in-home businesses, or any other subjects of general interest that would help citizens to be better informed. The center could have a bulletin board (electronic or otherwise) where people could find information about upcoming city meetings, public hearings, or other events of interest.

The City could also provide space for neighborhood councils to meet, such as fire stations, public schools, the library, or other city facilities around the community.

Charter language states that the City “may” provide model bylaws for councils to prepare their own bylaws, and that council bylaws shall be in accord with Montana law. However, the charter does not state how or if the City reviews council bylaws, and what, if any, ratification powers the City might have. Apparently, this is an open issue that should be addressed in an ordinance.

Alternative Boundaries

Once again, the charter states that nine to thirteen neighborhood districts shall be formed. The exact number of districts and their boundaries must be set forth by ordinance. Because neighborhood council members are elected, district boundaries must at least recognize voting precinct boundaries. Included in this report are three alternatives for neighborhood district boundaries. Alternatives 1 and 2 have nine districts, and ten districts are shown in Alternative 3. All three are based at least in part on the boundaries of the original ten districts formed in 1976. Alternative 3 divides the downtown area into a north and a south district while Alternatives 1 and 2 both have this area as one district. The obvious advantage of structuring district boundaries to coincide with precincts is the ease of conducting elections. The disadvantage is that the resulting districts may not reflect true neighborhoods. Parks, schools, community centers, and other focal points all serve to identify a neighborhood within the community, and their distribution can have a profound effect on neighboring patterns. Arterial and collector streets, especially one-way pairs, also tend to define neighborhood boundaries.

The obvious advantage of structuring district boundaries to coincide with precincts is the ease of conducting elections.

Options and Recommendations

The final section of this report will summarize the various options the City has in implementing the neighborhood council program, and offer a series of recommendations for consideration by the City Commission.

Language in the charter amendment allows nine to thirteen neighborhood councils to be established, and three alternatives for district boundaries prepared by staff show nine or ten separate districts. As discussed in the previous section, these alternatives mostly reflect existing voting precincts for ease of holding council elections. The down side to this is that true neighborhood boundaries may not be reflected, and once neighborhood councils are organized and operating, they may wish to adjust boundaries for that reason. However, to change the charter at this point in time would require another referendum and would delay the program at least one year. The City always has the option of proposing changes to charter language when the council program comes back before the voters in the year 2001 general election.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 1

Leave the charter as approved by the voters in 1996.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 2

Initial adoption of a district boundary plan that closely follows precinct boundaries. However, a boundary amendment procedure should be included in the ordinance.

The charter amendment requires councils to adopt bylaws, but gives the City the option of furnishing model bylaws for their use. The charter is silent on any review or ratification of council bylaws by the City. If the City did provide organizing councils with model bylaws, it would no doubt facilitate drafting and adoption of bylaws, thereby allowing neighborhood councils to quickly move on to more important business.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 3

The City should provide model bylaws for use at each council's discretion. The City should review bylaws for compliance with Montana statutes, the City Charter, and municipal code only, through a simple procedure set forth in the ordinance.

According to the charter, only residents of a neighborhood may be council members or vote in a council election. This excludes persons under voting age, as well as those who own or operate businesses in a different neighborhood than the one in which they reside. But these people have a stake in the neighborhood too, and the neighborhood councils should be encouraged to involve them.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 4

A section which encourages councils to involve business people, young people, and others who may not be eligible for council membership or to vote in a council election, should be included in the ordinance.

Charter language allows councils to advise the City on a very broad range of issues. More broad, in fact, than the Helena or Spokane models. A broad focus will make the neighborhood councils the most effective, and therefore, the most valuable to the City. If any council, for whatever reason, becomes preoccupied with a single issue, the result can be polarization and loss of credibility. It should also be made clear to the councils that their input is sought primarily at a policy level. The role of the neighborhood council is not to micro-manage any part of city government. Councils should not be involved with operating budgets, personnel, or law enforcement operations. No department or division head should be held directly accountable to a neighborhood council.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 5

The scope of topics and issues on which the City should seek council input should be as broad as possible. The ordinance to be adopted pursuant to the charter amendment should include a section on duties and powers. This section should build upon the charter language and list all likely areas of involvement for neighborhood councils.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 6

The neighborhood liaison should set up regular reporting procedures for use by the councils. This would encourage systematic input on a full range of neighborhood issues, while discouraging councils from focusing only upon a single issue.

Within the City, the primary contacts for neighborhood councils will be a City staff person, or "neighborhood liaison", and the City Commission. The liaison will be a first point of contact and a resource for the councils. The staff person(s) who performs this function will need to have a working knowledge of city government and be capable of directing council members (or any other citizen) to the right office or person for the information they seek. Fliers, bulletins, and other informational

resources should be collected and maintained by the liaison, and internal procedures should be developed so that information flows from the various city departments to the liaison. For example, the City Clerk must provide information on all City Commission meetings and work sessions, the Planning Department needs to provide schedules for the City-County Planning Board, comprehensive plan workshops, transportation committee meetings, etc.

The City Commission will be in direct contact with council members at regular Commission meetings and workshops, at meetings of the Great Falls Citizens' Council, and at any special meetings called by the Commission or a council to address neighborhood issues. Charter language states that the Citizens' Council is comprised of one member from each of the participating neighborhood councils, but does not include any members of the City Commission. Spokane's experience has shown that elected officials serving on the Citizens' Council facilitates dialogue between the individual councils and the City by working face-to-face with neighborhood representatives. Recently, the Great Falls City Commission added a Public Comment item to its regular agenda. This allows time for anyone to address the Commission about any item not on the agenda for that particular meeting. The Commission may also wish to consider a regular item to receive reports and other communications from neighborhood councils.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 7

The neighborhood liaison function should be provided for within the Community Development Department. It should be formally established by ordinance, with all duties and responsibilities defined.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 8

Recognize the Citizens' Council in the implementing ordinance, and include no more than two City Commissioners in its membership (three Commissioners would constitute a quorum).

RECOMMENDATION NO. 9

Place a regular item on the City Commission agenda to receive neighborhood council reports.

As noted previously, charter language does not commit the City to any support for neighborhood councils or the Citizen's Council. However, it has also been pointed out that some support from the City will be critical in the success of the council program. Support for councils can be in any form, from a small budget for phone and postage to fully equipped offices to meeting space. In any case, it will be the councils themselves who can best determine what resources they need to accomplish their mission.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 10

The City should budget a small amount (\$150- \$200) of “start up” money for each council in the FY97-98 budget. As the councils begin to organize and operate through the early part of 1998, they should be in a better position to assess their own resource needs. They can then work with the city administration on any budget requests for FY98-99.

Once organized, neighborhood councils will be active in both comprehensive planning and development review. The councils should play a primary role in identifying neighborhood issues to be addressed through the comprehensive plan. In development review, the councils can provide a forum for developers to present their proposals to the neighbors early enough in the process so that changes, which the neighborhood might wish to see, can be made more easily. The planning staff can also solicit comments from the neighborhood councils to include in project reports for the benefit of decision-makers.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 11

In the detailed work program for the comprehensive plan, spell out the role for neighborhood councils.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 12

In the program-implementing ordinance, formalize a “review and comment” advisory role for neighborhood councils and the Great Falls Citizens’ Council.

While neighborhood councils will be formed only within the corporate limits of Great Falls, many issues and problems of concern to neighborhoods do not stop at the city limits. Air and water quality, transportation, schools, economic development, and others are all community-wide issues. To broaden the perspectives of the neighborhood councils and the Citizens’ Council, there needs to be some means of participation for the unincorporated communities and neighborhoods in the Great Falls area. Black Eagle and Malmstrom could organize councils of their own to advise both the City and county, and they should be invited to participate in the Great Falls Citizens’ Council.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 13

In the section of the ordinance establishing the Great Falls Citizens’ Council, provide for the non-voting participation of councils from unincorporated neighborhoods and communities.

Appendix A



AN ORDINANCE CREATING THE NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL PROGRAM:
ADDING A NEW CHAPTER TO THE SPOKANE MUNICIPAL CODE.

ORDINANCE NO. C- 31465

An ordinance creating the Neighborhood Council Program; adding a new chapter to SMC Title 4.

WHEREAS, The City of Spokane seeks to foster a partnership among the city council, city staff and community members and to create an environment in which citizens are afforded an opportunity to participate in city affairs in an advisory or advocate role; and

WHEREAS, the City of Spokane believes that citizen participation is necessary and important in the process of governance. In order to foster communication between the citizens of Spokane and all facets of city government, Neighborhood Councils may be formed.

NOW, THEREFORE,

The City of Spokane does ordain:

Section 1. That there be added to SMC Title 4 -- Administrative Agencies and Procedures -- a new chapter to be designed at Chapter 4.27 -- Neighborhood Council Program -- to consist of four new sections to read as follow.

Section 2. That there be added to SMC Chapter 4.27 a new section, designated 4.27.010, to read as follows:

04.27.010
Neighborhood Councils

Neighborhood Councils may be formed or existing associations shall be recognized by the City Council when they meet the minimum standards for recognition. A Neighborhood Council shall meet and continue to maintain conformity with the following minimum standards:

1. Establish clear geographical boundaries.
2. Establish and adhere to bylaws that ensure democratic deliberative and voting procedures.
3. Hold periodic meetings.

4. Comply with all applicable federal, state and local laws.
5. Provide the City Council Neighborhood Committee with a copy of their bylaws and subsequent amendments.
6. Membership: Age 16 or older and reside, own property or operate business within the neighborhood council boundaries.

Initial boundaries will be established for a one year period. After that time, Neighborhood Councils may propose amendments to their boundaries and bring the amendments before the Community Assembly for their review and recommendations.

Geographical boundaries of a Neighborhood Council may extend to areas beyond the city limits. However, only members who reside, own property or operate businesses within those portions of the neighborhood council that are part of the city may participate in official decisions of the Neighborhood Council.

Each Neighborhood Council shall designate at least two individuals who will receive written documentation and other information from the City's Neighborhood Liaison and will be responsible for disseminating this information to their respective neighborhood councils.

Section 3. That there be added to SMC Chapter 4.27 a new section, designed 4.27.020, to read as follows:

04.27.020

Neighborhood Councils Duties and Responsibilities

Neighborhoods who wish to form themselves into councils are encouraged to do so and may be assisted in the process by the City's Neighborhood Liaison and the Community Assembly. A recognized Neighborhood Council may:

1. Review and recommend an action, a policy, or a plan to the City Council Neighborhood Committee, the city and to any city agency, commission or board on any matter affecting that neighborhood;
2. Assist city agencies in determining priority needs for the neighborhood;
3. Review items for inclusion in the city budget and make recommendations relating to budget items for neighborhood improvements;
4. Undertake to manage projects as may be agreed upon or

contracted with public agencies.

Section 4. That there be added to SMC Chapter 4.27 a new section, designed 4.27.030, to read as follows:

4.27.03
Community Assembly

The Community Assembly is a coalition of independent Neighborhood Councils and serves as a forum for discussion of issues of broad interest. Each Neighborhood Council shall select one representative with a designated alternate to serve on the Community Assembly. The representatives will be expected to represent the interests of their respective Neighborhood Council. The Community Assembly shall meet with the City Council Neighborhood Committee and the City's Neighborhood Liaison periodically to discuss community-wide issues. The responsibilities of the Community Assembly include:

1. Review and recommend an action, a policy, or a plan to the City Council Neighborhood Committee, the city and to any city agency, commission or board on any matter affecting the city;
2. Support and promote citizen participation and neighborhood enhancement.
3. Promote and facilitate open communication between the city and Neighborhood Councils and provide the primary means of communication between individual Neighborhood Councils.
4. Support and assist, as requested, individual neighborhood councils in becoming recognized and in performing their functions and responsibilities.
5. Serve as an information resource to Neighborhood Councils.

Section 5. That there be added to SMC Chapter 4.27 a new section, designed 4.27.040, to read as follows:

4.27.040
Neighborhood Liaison

As collateral duties, the City's Neighborhood Liaison shall:

1. Maintain a close working relationship with all segments

of the city government and facilitate the interaction of neighborhoods with their city government; government, its departments, and neighborhoods.

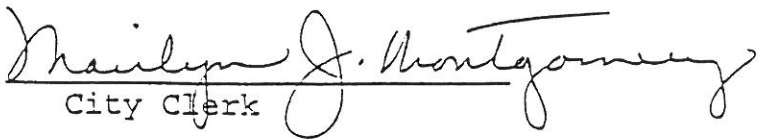
- 2. Be responsive to neighborhood requests for assistance; and,
- 3. Be a conduit for communication between the city

It shall be the responsibility of the City's Neighborhood Liaison to maintain a program of communication, education and technical assistance. In general, these activities will be directed toward improving the ability of residents and city officials to interact in a productive manner. Specific functions will include, but not be limited to the following:

- 1. Facilitate and maintain communication among various segments of city government and neighborhood associations. The Neighborhood Liaison shall endeavor to provide the mechanism for information exchange rather than becoming a disseminator of information.
- 2. Provide neighborhood groups with instruction on organizational development and how to deal effectively with city government.
- 3. Assist city officials and staff in developing more effective ways of working with neighborhood groups.
- 4. Facilitate the city's response to requests for information from neighborhood groups concerning city services, programs and projects.
- 5. Organize and facilitate Community Assembly meetings.

Passed by the City Council September 11, 1995.


MAYOR

Attest: 
City Clerk

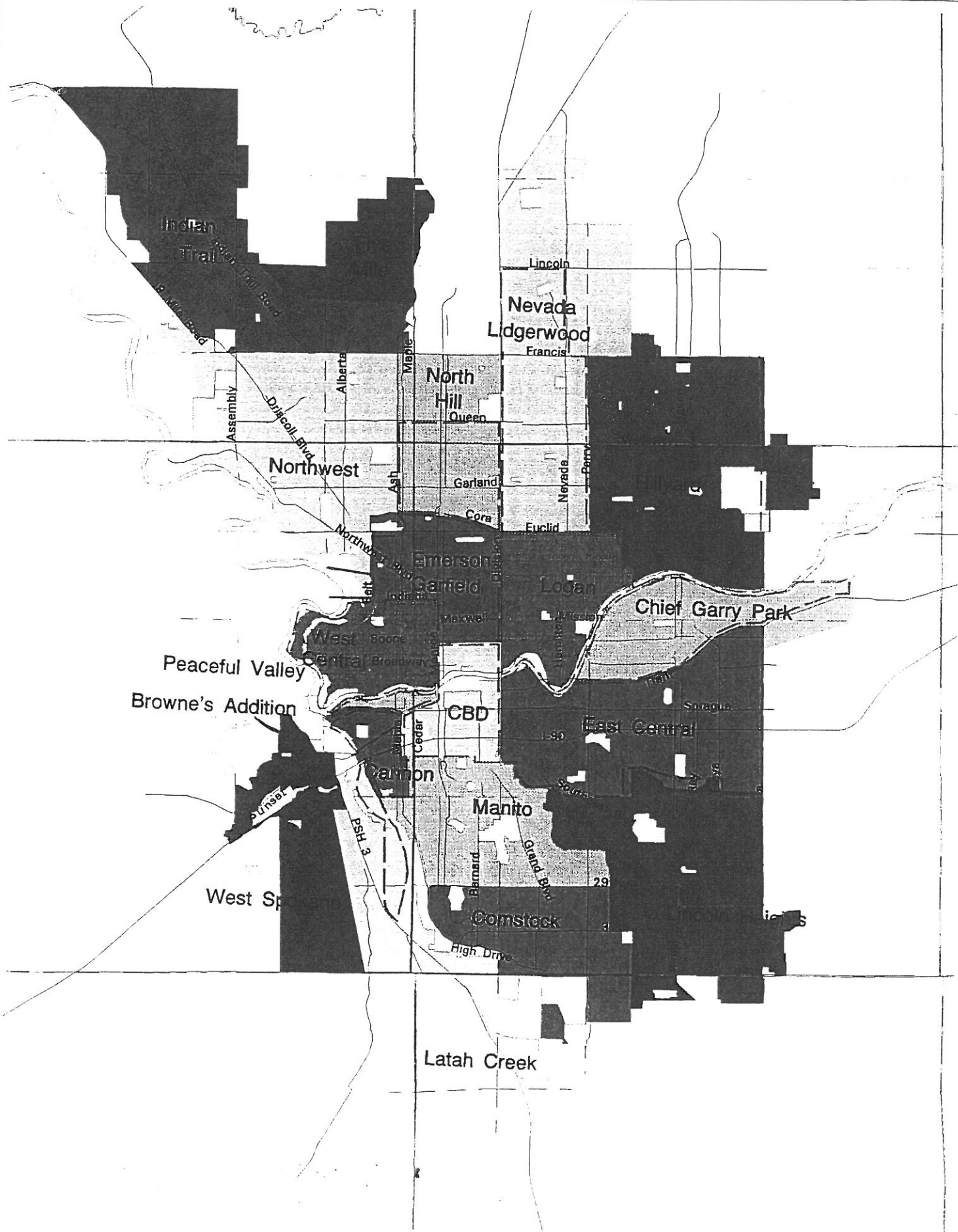
Approved as to form:


Assistant City Attorney

Appendix B



NEIGHBORHOOD MAP: CITY OF SPOKANE

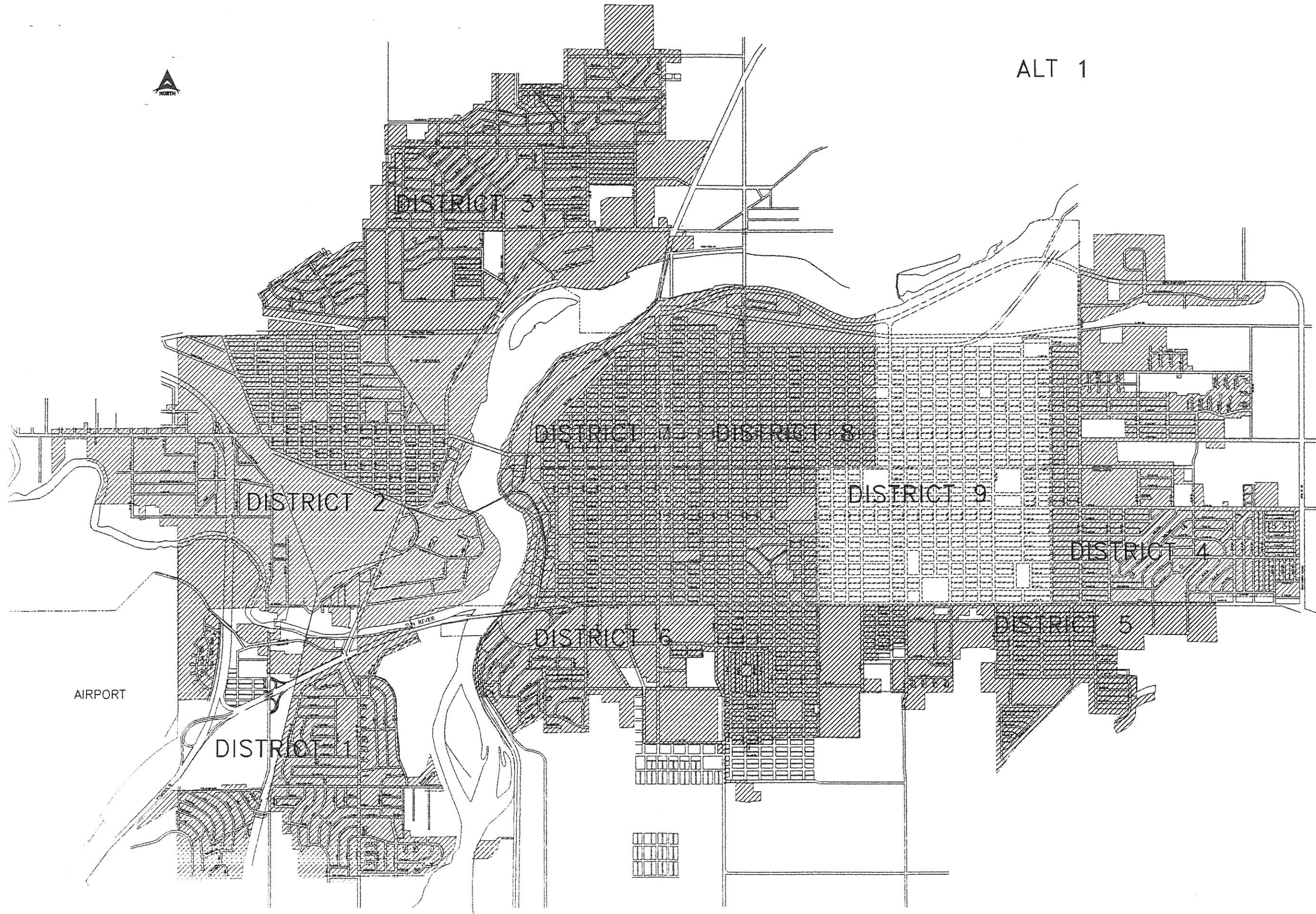


Appendix C



NEIGHBORHOOD BOUNDARY ALTERNATIVES: CITY OF GREAT FALLS

ALT 1



AIRPORT

DISTRICT 1

DISTRICT 2

DISTRICT 3

DISTRICT 6

DISTRICT 7

DISTRICT 8

DISTRICT 9

DISTRICT 4

DISTRICT 5



ALT 2

DISTRICT 3

DISTRICT 7

DISTRICT 8

DISTRICT 2

DISTRICT 9

DISTRICT 4

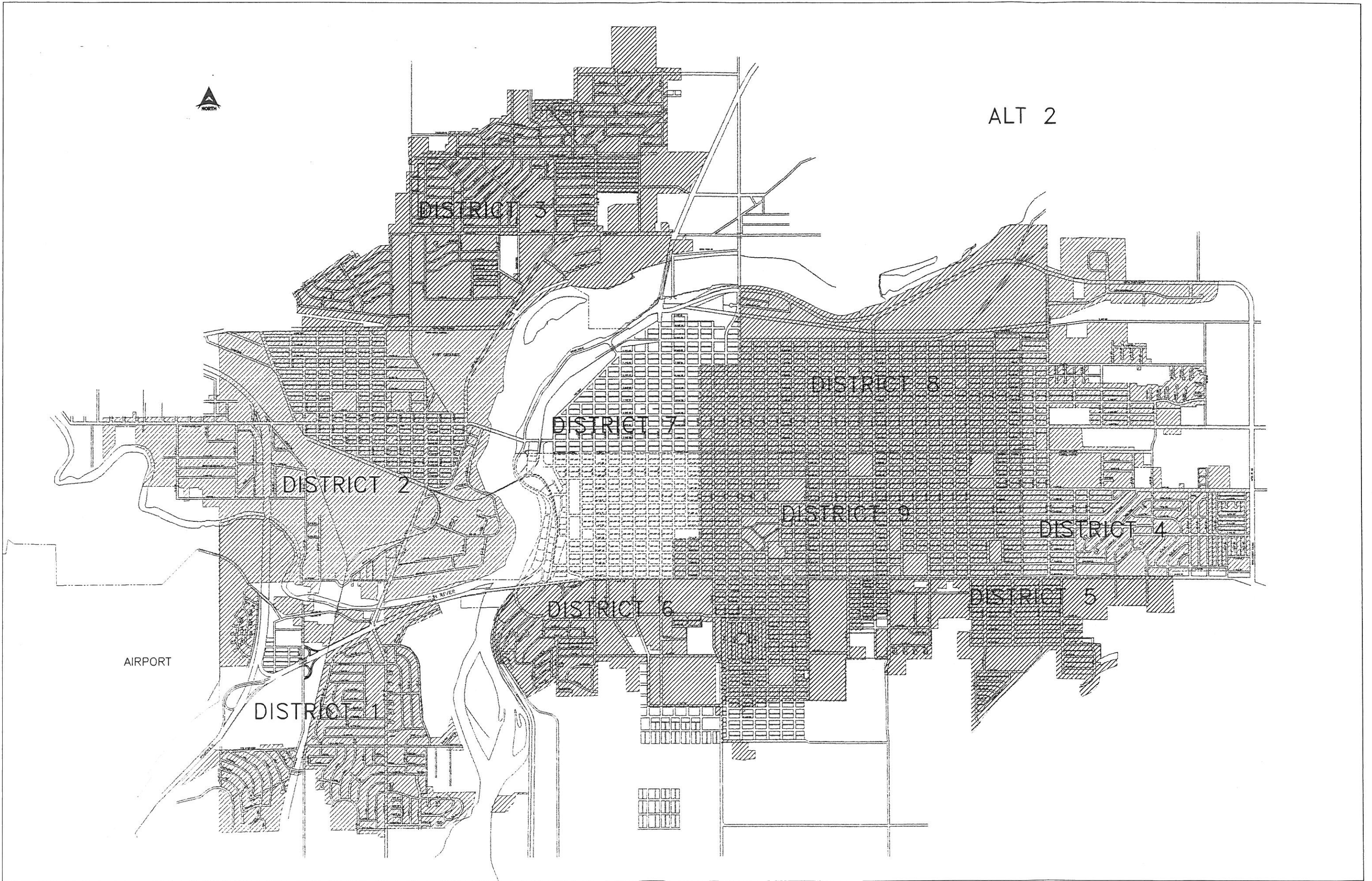
DISTRICT 6

DISTRICT 5

AIRPORT

DISTRICT 1

LA RIVER





ALT 3

DISTRICT 3

DISTRICT 3

DISTRICT 9

DISTRICT 2

DISTRICT 7

DISTRICT 10

DISTRICT 4

DISTRICT 6

DISTRICT 5

AIRPORT

DISTRICT 1

W. RIVER

