

Associations have a voice at city hall

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becoming more the rule than the exception, the Community Development Division also works closely with neighborhoods.

"They do serve a valuable function. They have always been a valuable tool or institution for controlling their own neighborhoods, as well as helping the city," Farmington Hills Zoning Supervisor Hal Rowe said. "With about 68,000 people in the city, there is no way four or five people here can police those neighborhoods."

FOR THE Farmington Hills Planning Commission, association members fill in minor details about their neighborhood that might not otherwise be discussed when site plans and rezoning requests are reviewed.

Neighbors can tell planners about the back yard that floods or the traffic bottleneck leading into their subdivision. "They live there," Planning Commission Chairman Philip Arnold said.

While providing city hall with a window on the neighborhood, associations also form a vital communication link for local politicians and administrators. "If a neighborhood wants to be heard on a problem but they don't feel they have the expertise, they

will want to reach some key individual at city hall and work through that person," Oakland University Professor Don Warren said. Developing communication links benefits both the city and the neighborhoods. City officials can streamline their work by knowing exactly who must be contacted within the neighborhoods. In turn, by contacting a key person or representative in the city, associations provide the city with a source of information — a direct link to homeowners.

"Obviously, we can't have a direct link with every citizen," Costick said.

CITY OFFICIALS are finding there is almost no better way to communicate with citizens than to either attend association meetings or to directly contact association officers.

Oakland County Commissioner David Moffitt, R-Birmingham, who represents a portion of Farmington Hills, agrees with Costick's assessment.

"If a homeowners association president presents a summary of complaints, for example, then it's easier to deal with. The associations give us someone to report to. It gives us someone to funnel down to."

It's easier to communicate with

one or two people from a subdivision than try to contact 200-300 people in an area, Community Development Manager Richard Lampi said. Association officials function as liaisons when the city is working with subdivisions on particular projects or problems, he added.

"We have begun to broaden our contacts with subdivision associations whether it's on paving or other projects," Costick said. "It's an excellent way of making desires known and communicating with the people."

CITY OFFICIALS attempt to meet with subdivision associations when asked or when there's a need to discuss a project or problem. Currently, however, the city does not follow a regular meeting schedule with associations.

"Someday, we may get into that," Lampi said. "Right now, I just don't have the time to do it."

When faced with providing information about citywide concerns, issues or election information, city staff generally find it's easier to meet with associations than to rely on residents voluntarily turning out for an informational city council meeting.

But seeking out the associations

doesn't always spell success for the city.

Two years ago, when the city attempted to garner voter support of a 1 mill levy for capital improvements, city officials met with associations to present the need for such a levy. Unfortunately, only 20 percent of the total association members in the city attended, Costick said.

CITY OFFICIALS maintain they would like to hear more from associations. The results would be twofold. First, greater communication would provide the city with a pipeline for informing and educating the public on city concerns and issues. Second, associations can provide city officials with an ear on public sentiment.

"If they are officers of an association, they are then speaking for an association. That's an indication of public opinion," Rowe said.

Increasingly, association members and officers are — on their own initiative — sending a neighborhood representative regularly to city council and planning commission meetings.

Still others are on the city's mailing list for council and planning commission agendas. When an item of interest is listed on either agenda, a neighborhood representative attends a meeting or contacts

city officials.

Springbrook Homeowners Association — increasingly concerned about drainage problems, building and zoning issues along Orchard Lake Road — has formed what's called a City Council Pulse Committee. The committee's duties include keeping pace with what's happening at council and planning commission meetings.

"WE PLAN to make every Monday (city council) and Thursday (planning commission) meetings," Springbrook member Jack Joynt said. "They (city officials) have to listen to somebody, not just builders and developers."

Pasadena Park Association is considering receiving council and planning commission meeting agendas as well as regularly attending meetings, president Roxanne Fitzpatrick said.

Satisfied with the Meadowbrook Parks Homeowners Association's work with the city, president Riccio would like even better ties with the city.

"It's important to have a close working relationship with city officials," she said. "My dealings with the city have been extremely good."

But successful communication needs continued active involvement of both the city and the asso-

ciations, city officials maintain. Sometimes it's difficult to draw a large number of residents to informational meetings. It's equally difficult to encourage association members to take as much interest in citywide issues as they do in neighborhood issues.

"I THINK it's a two-way street. I don't think local government can be effective without their input. And I don't think they can be effective without input from the city," Councilman Terry Sever said.

"I think neighborhood associations are effective and could play a more positive role in shaping our community," he continued.

That expanded role can only begin when firmer communications lines between the city and associations are developed.

"The drastic condition of our roads, for example . . . neighborhood associations may say it's not our concern. But if they realized it does concern them, then we might be able to come up with some solutions."

Solutions to many problems require resident support. The best way of garnering support is to provide necessary information to residents. And the most effective way appears to be through a network of associations, Sever said.

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She upholds women's rights

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GOOD ALSO recalled with disappointment the first time a woman became involved with the United States space program and her reaction to questions of sex discrimination leveled by reporters.

"She said she had never been discriminated against," Good said in disbelief. "She didn't know the blisters on my feet or hands . . . she didn't even know we helped her get there."

The Hills activist is also an avid "red, white and blue patriot," becoming active politically not only for her feminist views, but for the love of country. Her activities — 106 workshops, speeches, panels and meetings during 1985 alone — call her to action on numerous women-related issues.

"I am emotional about my country," she said. "I love everything about Americana, although I don't like everything we do."

One of the things she doesn't like is the treatment of older workers in this country, especially women.

"When you get to the golden years, it's called the 'golden shove' — we don't need you anymore, get out," she said. "Older women make up the majority of the country's poor."

Good notices the lack of focus and the division presently in the women's movement, but said, "I think we're now getting our second breath."

"We are not going to give up."

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