

Neighborhood Area Councils: An Implementation Plan

In order to move forward with an effort to define and organize neighborhood area councils across the city, a number of activities will be needed. Success in organizing such councils falls to the residents of the City and not to city hall. The mayor's office cannot organize neighborhood area councils. Residents of the villages must do that. However, there are a number of specific measures that city hall can and should take to make organizing councils easier in order to maximize the chances that such councils will become a reality.

- Mayor Warren should take every opportunity to express his support for neighborhood area councils, including making them an item for discussion at every town hall meeting.
- Mayor Warren should engage the President of the Board of Aldermen in a discussion of the specific conditions under which the Board would likely be willing to approve (or disapprove) the creation of new neighborhood area councils. He should express a desire to see such councils have particular characteristics, and seek agreement from the Board concerning these characteristics.
- The city should create a “neighborhood area council packet” that provides all the information necessary for residents to get started in creating their council. The packet should consist of:
 - A copy of Article 9 of the City Charter
 - A printable copy of a petition form
 - A target number of petition signatures needed in each village
 - Instructions on where to get assistance in city hall (the Planning Department?) for preparation of application materials, including assistance in defining the geographic area to be covered, and the number of petition signatures needed for non-village areas
 - A set of guidelines outlining the anticipated roles, responsibilities, and activities of neighborhood area councils
 - A sample set of bylaws for the organization – perhaps a copy of the Newton Highlands Area Neighborhood Council bylaws
 - Clear, step-by-step instructions on how to secure approval from the Board of Aldermen, including a checklist of items and issues that would need to be presented to the Board
- Where feasible, this “packet” should be available online and on paper, including the ability to circulate a petition electronically rather than just through the traditional paper methods. The City Charter requires signatures from 20% of the registered voters in an area. Acquiring this large a number may be a formidable challenge to prospective organizers, so facilitating this process should be a high priority.

- A city web site dedicated to area neighborhood councils describing the council system and containing the packet described above, and providing a public space for each defined council. Each council would be responsible for providing its own content in a standard format, and this would likely include a periodic newsletter, meeting and event calendar, list of council members and their contact information, and time-sensitive notifications and early warnings.
- Access to, and technical assistance with, new technologies, including blogs, social networks, twitter, and any other communications mechanisms the council deems desirable.
- A city employee should be designated as the contact person for providing assistance to prospective council organizers.