



# Neighborhood Organization Tool Kit



A Guide for  
Neighborhood Organizations



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## I. Introduction

It has been nearly a decade since the City launched a new initiative to invigorate the neighborhoods of the then small town. Since that time, Cedar Hill has grown to over 46,000, with residents and neighborhoods as our focus and top priority. Today our Vision of being a Premier City is becoming a reality through the work of our Neighborhoods and citizens; working hard to ensure Cedar Hill maintains its renowned and unique character.

Our values define how we intend to accomplish our vision of being a Premier City. We value: People and Relationships • Stewardship • Servant Leadership and Holding ourselves to the highest ethical standards, behavior and Integrity.

The Neighborhood Tool Kit was designed as an informational resource for citizens interested in organizing their neighborhood. This document can be used as a resource for Neighborhood Associations and/or Organizations, Public Improvement Districts (PID) or for any other type of non-profit organization.

As a resident, we want you to know that we value you, and we value servitude to this community. Thank you for being a part of our Vision. Together, opportunities and our success will grow naturally.

The City of Cedar Hill welcomes any feedback you would like to provide regarding this document. Please call the City of Cedar Hill, Neighborhood Services at (469) 272-2801





## II. Community Profile

### Location

Cedar Hill is located in southwestern Dallas County. This area, also known as "The Best Southwest" region, includes the surrounding cities of Duncanville, DeSoto, and Lancaster. With easy access to I-20 and U.S. Highway 67, Cedar Hill is home to many residents who commute to and from employment in Dallas and Fort Worth. However, with the City's continued expanding business and retail markets, more residents are able to enjoy working closer to home. Overlooking Lake Joe Pool and Cedar Hill State Park, the city offers its residents "hill country" scenery and hometown character only minutes away from big city activities.

### History

Cedar Hill is the oldest organized community in Dallas County and was once the temporary county seat. Located along the Old Chisholm Trail, the town was one of the first in north central Texas to be serviced by railroad. The city became a center of commercial activity for early settlers, cowboys, and nearby farming households.

Settlement began in 1841 when the Congress of the Republic of Texas authorized W.S. Peters to locate colonists in the north central part of the Republic. In 1845, new settlers from Illinois came to Peters' Colony and settled in southwest Dallas County. This area provided the settlers with cooler temperatures than neighboring Dallas, as it was the highest point between the Red River and the Gulf Coast. Because of the elevation and nearby cedar brakes, the settlers named the area Cedar Hill.

In 1847 one of the first wagon trains to the Cedar Hill area brought Milton Merrifield and his five married sons and their families. They bought land from the Trinity River to Beltline Road. The earliest recorded land grant in this area is by the then Governor of Texas, E.M. Pease to E.C. Thomas to Milton Merrifield. On October 5, 1854 Milton Merrifield and his wife, Margaret, donated 2 acres (situated north of Beltline Road on Old Cedar Hill Road) for the Cedar Mountain Church house of worship. There were five graves there, believed to be of the Hart Family.

### Government

In 1938, Cedar Hill incorporated as a city. The City charter was approved through a home rule election in 1975. Cedar Hill uses a council-manager form of government. The city council is comprised of an elected mayor and six elected at-large council members. The city manager is appointed by the city council. The city manager acts as policy advisor to the council and implements council directives.



### **III. Importance of Neighborhoods in Cedar Hill**

#### **Understanding Responsibility**

Responsibility can be defined in many different ways. Here, we speak of responsibility as it relates to the collective good of the community. Every member of the community is a potential stakeholder in the well-being of the collective. Stakeholders are defined as those individuals and/or entities that have a connection to the area. Most often the connection is economic, but this is not always necessary. Stakeholders have a share or investment in the future of the entity or area under consideration.

#### **The Citizen's Role**

The role of the citizen in the health and vitality of a community cannot be understated. All citizens bear the responsibility of a collective quality of life. Active participation in the process is the best way to ensure that the quality of life you expect is realized.

Citizen involvement can range from taking responsibility to vote on a regular basis or serving as an elected public official. Neither of these two examples is better than the other. Both are equally important in becoming involved in your community.

#### **Government's Role**

Government's responsibility rests in the safety of neighborhoods which preserves an area's quality of life. Government also ensures that the common good is protected and that decisions which affect the public are carried out in an equitable, efficient manner.

#### **The Role of Community Institutions**

Community organizations can be important resources to neighborhoods. These organizations may include the Chamber of Commerce, school district, social service agencies, civic and fraternal organizations, clubs and religious organizations. Community organizations are potential partners that have a common interest in enabling your community to become better places to live and work. These organizations have a wealth of resources: human (professional or volunteer), fiscal (funds or in-kind services) or physical (buildings or products), that could be tapped to assist your organization reach its goals.

#### **What Can I Do For My Neighborhood?**

The greatest contribution you, as an individual, can make in your neighborhood is to make yourself available. Utilizing your enthusiasm and unique skills for the betterment of your community can be a great personal experience. The amount of time you spend is a very personal decision. However, the old adage that states, "a little bit is better than nothing at all" holds true. Decide how much time you have to give and then set about determining on how best to serve your community.



## IV. What is a Neighborhood Association and what does it do?

A Neighborhood Association is a group of residents who meet regularly to accomplish goals in their neighborhoods, such as crime prevention or litter control for example. The association may include home owners and renters, apartment residents, business owners, school and church officials, and members of nonprofit organizations. Depending on the goals of the group, meetings may be held twice a year, once a quarter, or every month.

Neighborhood associations help represent neighborhood residents to elected officials, identify challenges and problems in the neighborhood, support change and improvement efforts, help resolve conflicts, provide volunteers for community projects, and find and get resources to make the neighborhood a better place to live.

It's important to identify some of your goals before you ask others to form a neighborhood association. Goals for improving your neighborhood may include:

- \*Helping neighbors get to know each other by holding social events
- \*Making physical improvements such as installing street lights and community signs
- \*Holding regular neighborhood clean-ups
- \*Forming a Crime Watch to reduce crime
- \*Organizing to share opinions with representatives of government

► *There are several levels of organization. Once you have a couple of meetings under your belt, the core group can decide which type is best suited to helping you achieve your goals.*

**Voluntary Informal** — Informal gathering of neighbors. May participate in getting-to-know-you activities and neighborhood crime watch groups. No tax-exempt status. May not require managing a bank account.

**Voluntary Formal** — More organized group of residents. Collect voluntary dues and meet at regular intervals. May apply for 501(c)3 status with the IRS. File Articles of Incorporation with the Secretary of State. Manage a bank account for organization funds. Elect officers for the Board. This handbook will deal primarily with this type of organization.

**Mandatory HOA** — Usually filed by the Developer of the subdivision. Check with the Dallas County Clerks Office (more instructions on the following pages). Dues are decided upon, collected and managed by the Board of Directors.

**Public Improvement District (PID)** — A defined district which levies a special assessment on all real property based upon the appraised value of the property. Chapter 372 of the Texas Local Government Code sets forth requirements for the approval process (including a petition and public hearings) and once approved by City Council, all property within the district is subject to assessment. Payment of the fees is mandatory and all money collected will provide funding for improvements within the district. Projects may include entry treatments, additional city park amenities, and maintenance and improvement of common areas.



## **V. How to form a Neighborhood Organization/Association**

### **Step One: Contact Cedar Hill's Neighborhood Services Office**

Call the City's Neighborhood Services office at 469-272-2801. We can help you get organized in the beginning, answer any questions regarding city services or issues, and will also assist you in publicizing your activities as a group. You will be provided with a page linked to the city's website and will be included in all City-related mailings and notices.

### **Step Two: Establish a core group of Leaders**

Start your neighborhood association by finding a core group of people who agree to meet regularly. Poll the community to find out how many other people are interested in the same things you are. Send flyers, flyers, flyers. **Refer to Appendix E for steps to taking and analyzing a Neighborhood Survey.** You will not get 100% cooperation; however, you should have enough people to help you do the initial work. Some people will be interested in participating once you have everything set up. You can host a block party in your neighborhood to gain interest. **Refer to Appendix J for steps to host a block party.** Post on sites such as Next Door.com to find others who may be interested in being a part of the organization.

### **Step Three: Preliminary Organization**

Most neighborhood/homeowners associations are becoming non-profits. Some of those reasons for this structure include more accountability, accessibility to grants, and more protection (indemnification from lawsuits). During your first few meetings, officers should be elected or appointed to help establish an organizational structure, if needed. The group should also decide on a few key objectives they would like to accomplish with the organization. These can range from crime reduction to beautification to simply getting to know your neighbors. Laying out a clear plan and setting goals will help you determine which level of organization is best for your neighborhood.

After an inventory is done, identify a few neighborhood goals and opportunities for improvement.

The plan should include:

- \*The reasons the association was formed
- \*Principles that will guide the association
- \*Resources required to accomplish project
- \*Tasks involved for the project
- \*A timeline of events for project
- \*Funding for the project
- \*Membership sufficient for the project
- \*Try to be realistic about what your neighborhood association can accomplish.
- How much time is needed to complete the project?
- How many people are needed for this project?
- What other projects are underway? Is it feasible for the association to take on new responsibility?



### **Step Three: Call the Dallas County Clerks Office (optional)**

Check with the Dallas County Clerks Office to see if the developer has filed a Declaration of Covenants, Conditions, and Restrictions for the subdivision in which you live. There may be a Deed of Restrictions for your subdivision establishing a homeowners association. If not, move on to [step four](#). A copy of the plat will also be useful because it shows the boundaries for the subdivision. Plats can be requested through the Planning and Zoning department or viewed online: [www.cedarhilltx.com](http://www.cedarhilltx.com)

### **Step Four: Bylaws and articles of incorporation (optional)**

The by-laws will establish the procedures for the operation of the association to include voting, financing and control procedures. The articles of incorporation, under state law, create a corporation, if the association is incorporated. **See Appendix C for sample Bylaws.**

### **Step Five: Register with the State (optional)**

Once the articles of incorporation have been completed, send two copies along with a \$25.00 fee to the Secretary of State. Address: Secretary of State, Corporate Section, P O Box 13697, Austin, Texas 78711, (512) 463-5583.

### **Step Six: Create Committees**

Neighborhood Associations work best when the work is divided among members who sit on committees. The core group should define the goals and objectives of the committees and decide the rules for members. The goals of the association will help determine what kind and how many committees to create.

Examples of committees	Possible duties
<b>Bylaws Committee</b>	*Determine how the association will conduct meetings and votes. *Make decisions to resolve disagreements among members about procedures.
<b>Crime Watch Committee</b>	*Works with the Police Dept. to educate residents about crime prevention. *Helps organize Block Watch programs.
<b>Finance Committee</b>	*Keep track of the association budget. *Conduct fundraising for the association.
<b>Neighborhood Development Committee</b>	*Works with the city and nonprofit organizations on programs to encourage business development in the neighborhood.
<b>Neighborhood Improvement Committee</b>	*Organizes neighborhood clean-ups. *Works with the city on ordinance enforcement. *Organizes tree plantings and landscaping projects.
<b>Publicity Committee</b>	*Inform people in the neighborhood of events and share information. *Inform and remind members of meeting dates and locations, and provide transportation to those who may need it.



## VI. Officers and Membership

### **Officers**

To use parliamentary procedures, the group will need at least a few elected officers. They are:

**Chair-** The chair is the presiding officer at the meeting. Meetings are controlled by the chair. It is the responsibility of the chair to use parliamentary procedures, treat everyone fairly, keep the meeting moving, and ensure that all items on the agenda are addressed. Any one who wishes to speak at a meeting must be recognized by the chair. To get the chair's attention, a member raises a hand and says, "Mr. or Madam Chair."

**Vice Chair-** Serves as alternate to the president in presiding at meetings. Also serves on the associations executive committee.

**Treasurer-** The treasurer handles finances, keeps financial records and prepares budget and financial reports. The treasurer also maintains the tax exempt number and coordinates tax statement preparation for 501(c)(3) organizations.

**Secretary-** The secretary is responsible for keeping clear and accurate records of meetings, including the minutes of the meeting. The secretary also maintains the roster of the members, stores a copy of the neighborhood plan and bylaws and handles correspondence.

Remember all officers and members of your organization are volunteers. Here are some tips on working with volunteers: **Refer to Appendix F for a Sample Participant/Volunteer**

### **Thank You**

- \*Make every member feel like they are a valued resident of the neighborhood.
- \*Involve every member in every step of organizing.
- \*Actively seek the input of your fellow members. Cooperation will help you accomplish your tasks, as well as the group's sense of identity.
- \*Invite all stakeholders, including businesses, within the boundaries of your neighborhood to be an active part of the group.
- \*Bring all activities to discussion and vote before the full membership before committing the entire group to a new project.
- \*Do not become discouraged with new members that are not as excited or eager as you are about the association. It is impossible for each and every member to be at the same level of enthusiasm.
- \*Be inclusive — encouraging input for decision-making
- \*Encourage others to take on tasks.
- \*Carefully consider doing projects. Make sure the entire membership knows why a particular project is being dropped from the group's agenda.
- \*Assure volunteers that they are not being asked to volunteer for "life." Any effort they put in is valuable to the organization



## VII. Meetings and Procedures

It is important that your association conducts its meetings efficiently and in an organized manner because it will determine how many participants it will attract, especially if it is done right. **Refer to Appendix D for Steps for Planning Your First Neighborhood Meeting.** There are a lot of things one can do to make a meeting more efficient and productive. The following is a checklist to foster a positive meeting:

### Elements of Successful Meetings

**\*Know what you want to say.** The secret to being a good speaker, whether it is part of on-the-spot group discussion or a prepared speech, is knowing the point you want to convey. Clearly outline your ideas before your speak. Jot down your main points on a piece of paper. Use the outline as a guide to help you be more focused.

**\*Keep it short.** No matter what kind of speech you are making, keep it short and to the point.

**\*Speak clearly and project your voice outward.** Do not mumble. Speak strongly and with confidence. If you believe in yourself, others will too.

**\*Practice your speech.** If you have to make a presentation to the group, try practicing it in front of your mirror at home before the meeting.

**\*Be Concise.** Focus on one or two central ideas in your speech, and look directly at the audience.

**\*Avoid distractions.** Avoid words like “um,” “ah,” “kinda” and “you know”. Also avoid physical distractions like playing with your hair or glasses, or jingling your keys.

**Listening to Others** A successful neighborhood organizer and activist knows how to really listen to others’ concerns– not just the words being spoken, but what those words mean. This is a skill that takes practice and hard work. The guidelines below may help you to improve your listening skills.

#### Things to do while you are listening:

**\*Listen for the unfamiliar.**

**\*Listen to concentrate.**

**\*Rephrase important points in your own words.** This will allow the speaker the opportunity to clarify the statement if there has been a misunderstanding.

**\*Pay attention to details.** Details are important in communication, especially if the membership differs significantly on the issue.

**\*Be open-minded about new ideas and opinions.**

**\*Allow speakers to complete their ideas or opinions without interruption.**

**\*If you are not clear on terms being used, ask the speaker to define them.**

**\*Ask clarifying questions.**



## **Parliamentary procedures**

Parliamentary procedures are rules for conducting meetings. Small groups may choose to operate informally and not use them. Large groups will find them very useful, though; they are used to maintain order, ensure equal treatment for everyone, and accomplish business efficiently.

### **Terms and Actions part of the parliamentary procedure**

*Motion.* A motion is a proposal that meeting participants take an action on or consider a subject. Only one motion may be considered or acted upon at a time. To make a motion, say “I move that...”

*Seconding a motion.* Seconding a motion means that someone other than the person who made the motion wants the whole group to consider it. The person who seconds a motion does not have to support the motion; they just want the group to consider it.

*Stating the motion.* After a motion is made and seconded, the chair formally places it before the group by saying, “It is moved and seconded that \_\_\_\_\_. Is there any discussion?” When debate stops, the chair repeats the motion and takes the vote. After the vote, the chair states the result of the vote.

*Withdrawing a motion.* Before a motion has been stated by the chair, it can be withdrawn or modified by the member.

*Motion to reconsider.* Unwise action can be corrected through the motion to reconsider something that is made by someone who voted on the winning side.

*Voice vote.* The chair says, “All those in favor say ‘yes’ (pause for vote). Those opposed say ‘no’.

*Majority vote.* Means the side with the most votes wins. The count is based on the members who are present at the meeting and participating in the vote.

*Tie vote.* When there are equal number of votes on both sides, the motion is defeated.



## Neighborhood Calendar

It is a good idea to set up a Neighborhood Calendar of Events at the first of every year. The easiest way to do this is to simply buy a calendar, mark the planned events in on the appropriate days. Be sure to notify Neighborhood Services of the events so that your webpage can be updated on the City's Website.

The President of the Association can then monitor the progress of the various committees responsible for each project, should keep the calendar. The President may wish to make copies of the various months to give to the Committee Chairs. Each item should be checked off as it is accomplished.

## Requesting Donations

Many businesses are willing to make small donations to community organizations for worthwhile projects. In order to obtain these donations, you must ask for them. **Refer to Appendix E for Sample Donation Request and Thank You Letters.** Most businesses need the request in writing, and that request might include:

1. The name of your Association, preferably on letterhead.
2. A statement that you are organized as a non-profit organization.
3. Your employer identification number, if applicable.
4. A description of the project and how the donation will be used.
5. The time and date of the project.

After the project is completed, be sure to thank the donor in writing, either with a thank-you letter from the Association, or with an article in the neighborhood newsletter (which you should then send to the donor), or both.



## **The Agenda**

All meetings should have an agenda. The agenda lists what will happen at the meeting, including committee reports and any business that needs to be discussed. Here is a typical agenda:

### **1. Call to order**

The chair calls the meeting to order and makes brief opening remarks.

### **2. Reading/approval of the minutes**

The secretary keeps minutes of all the meetings. The secretary reads the minutes of the last meeting and asks, “Are there any corrections to the minutes?” No motion is needed for approval of minutes.

### **3. Reports of officers**

The treasurer and other officers deliver association business reports. No motion is needed for adoption of the treasurer’s report unless it is audited. After each of the reports, the chair asks, “Are there any questions or observations?” If not, the reports are filed.

### **4. Reports of committees**

Committee chairs give their reports. No motion is needed for adoption of committee reports unless recommendations for association action are made. After reports, the chair asks “Are there any questions or discussion in regard to this committee report? If not, the report will be filed.” Appreciation may be expressed to the committee.

### **5. Committee recommendations for action**

Motions are usually made by the chair and seconded by a committee member. Each motion is discussed and disposed of before another motion may be proposed. The chair states, “The committee recommends that the association (take a particular action). Is there any discussion?”

### **6. Unfinished and new business**

Unfinished business from the last meeting is brought to the floor for action. The chair asks, “Is there any unfinished business?” After discussion and action, the chair asks, “Is there any new business to discuss?”

### **7. Announcements**

Persons making announcements should be seated up front. The chair asks, “Are there any announcements?”

### **8. Adjournment**

The chair automatically adjourns a meeting unless there is any business that cannot be finished at that meeting. Then a motion for adjournment must be made and seconded. The chair says, “If there is no further business, the meeting will stand adjourned.”



## **VIII. Public Relations**

Communication is very important to the success of your association. Sharing information is a great way to build a sense of community in your neighborhood, get new people to join your association, and enlist support for your events and programs.

Here are some ways to get the word out:

- \*Publish a neighborhood association newsletter 4-12 times a year.
- \*Announce your meetings and events on NextDoor.com as well as school, church and club newsletters.
- \*Distribute a neighborhood survey (and the results) by mail, phone or door to door.
- \*Ask permission to place notices, posters or flyers in Laundromats, libraries, supermarkets, restaurants, local businesses, and waiting rooms in nearby dentist and doctor's offices.
- \*Offer to be a speaker to business groups, service clubs, schools and churches.
- \*Send letters.
- \*Set up a telephone tree.
- \*Distribute flyers door to door.

Hint: The Neighborhood Services department can help with Public Relations. You can also have flyers printed for free.



### **A Summary of Potential Tools for Communication with your Neighborhood**

Finding new members is crucial to keeping neighborhood associations alive. While many people appreciate what the group is doing for their neighborhood, they may not attend meetings or even come in direct contact with your neighborhood organization. Reaching your audience will be a challenge for the entire organization. There are many ways to reach people. The following is a list that represents some ideas for accomplishing this:

- \*Weekly or monthly newsletters
- \*Post on Next Door
- \*TV, Radio and Cable
  - \*Schools, Churches, and Clubs Newsletters
  - \*Door-to-Door flyers
- \*Neighborhood Surveys
  - Mail
  - Phone
  - Door-to-Door
- \*Person to Person Phone Calls
  - To Friends
  - To Neighbors
  - To Network Contacts
- \*Bulletins, Notices, Pamphlets, and Posters
  - Laundromats
  - Libraries
  - Supermarkets and Stores
  - Local Restaurants
  - Video Stores
  - Waiting Rooms in Dentist/Doctor's Office
- \*Booth at Local Events
- \*Coffees Houses
- \*Send speakers to the following activities or events:
  - Business groups
  - Service clubs
  - Youth groups
  - Schools
  - Churches
- \*Cooperate Efforts with Adjoining Neighborhoods
- \*Lawn Signs
- \*Letters
- \*Telephone tree



## IX. Finances

Does every neighborhood association need a treasurer's report and a bank account? It depends on how active the association is, what its goals are, and how much money, if any, it collects. Every association that collects or distributes money should have a treasurer's report. Whether you need a bank account depends on how much money is involved.

### Bank Accounts

Beginning associations probably do not need a bank account. Intermediate associations with stable or growing membership and bigger goals may benefit from having a personal or corporate checking or savings account. Advanced neighborhood associations may benefit from a bank account and may want to file for 501(c)(3) status as a charitable organization **Refer to Appendix G for a Sample Letter to the Bank.**

#### *Personal account or corporate account?*

An association can open a bank account with a member's personal social security number, or with a tax identification number obtained from the IRS. If the association uses a member's social security number, the person whose number is used is liable for paying taxes on the interest income reported by the bank to the IRS. Also, if there is ever a lien against the account holder's assets, the money in the account can be assessed.

#### *Types of accounts?*

All bank accounts open to individuals are also open to neighborhood associations. Banks usually charge lower fees on checking accounts that maintain a minimum balance, so checking accounts are good for associations that need to make frequent, but not large, withdrawals to pay for expenses. Savings accounts are good for associations that don't need to make withdrawals very often; some also have limited check-writing privileges. Banks may waive service charges to organizations that provide a necessary public service.

#### *Opening an account*

To open an account with an organization tax identification number, bring a copy of your association bylaws or the minutes of a meeting. Also bring the names and titles of the members who will be authorized to conduct business for the organization. Personal identification, such as a driver's license, credit cards or a passport, is required to open any type of account. Signature cards must be signed by any member who will be signing on the account.

After you have provided the bank with documentation, the bank will provide a card with wording for a resolution to authorize the bank account. The resolution must be adopted by members of the neighborhood association or- in the case of a 501(c)(3)- the board of the charitable organization.



## **Incorporating your Association and 501(c)(3) Status**

In today's litigious society, many people are afraid to take action whatsoever for fear of being sued. Incorporating your Association helps alleviate part of this problem. When you act within the guidelines and approved boundaries of the incorporated Association, you usually will not be held personally accountable in a lawsuit. A Neighborhood Association may qualify for nonprofit status under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue code if it is incorporated, it is organized and operated exclusively for charitable or educational purposes; and it does not promote specific political candidates or campaigns.

There are other ways to qualify for nonprofit status (see Chapter 3, page 13, in I.R.S. publication 557), but these are the three most common qualifiers for neighborhood associations. Your organization may become an incorporated association by calling the Secretary of State (512)436-5555. Incorporating your organization says to the world that you plan on being around for a long time and this group is not just a passing fancy. Also See Appendix for Steps for Obtaining Tax-Exempt Status for your Neighborhood Association.

### **Major Benefits**

- \*Qualify for grants from government agencies
- \*Qualify for grants from private foundations.
- \*Provide tax deductions for your donors' gifts.
- \*Receive tax exemptions from federal, state, local, income, property, sales and excise taxes.
- \*Provide legal protections for the association's directors and officers.

### **Disadvantages**

- \*Must keep detailed financial records.
- \*Required to prepare and file an annual report or other periodic report with the state.
- \*Must make financial records available to organizations or individuals that contribute funds to the association
- \*Association must not engage in political activities such as campaigning, lobbying, or support of specific candidates for office.

Contact the Texas Secretary of State and ask for the required materials and supplies for nonprofit Incorporation. To apply for recognition by the IRS of exempt status as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, use IRS Package 1023, Application for Recognition of Exemption. The application must be complete and accompanied by the appropriate user fee. The organization should also request an employer identification number using Form SS-4, Application for Employer Identification Number, even if the organization does not have any employees.



## Important Facts about Tax-Exempt Status

Your Neighborhood Association may obtain tax-exempt status if it is incorporated by the State as a non-profit corporation, and it is organized solely for charitable purposes. This includes organizations dedicated to correct community deterioration, combat juvenile delinquency, and/or lessen neighborhood tensions.

**Refer to Appendix H for Sample Letter for applying for Exemption from Texas State Sales and Franchise Taxes.**

In order to keep your Association tax-exempt status, you must insure that:

- All assets are used for the benefit of, or distributed to, the members or officers.
- No portion of the corporation's assets or funds may be used to influence legislation, promote propaganda, or benefit special political candidates.

## Obtaining an Employee Identification Number

Every tax-exempt organization is required to have an Employer Identification Number (EIN), whether or not it has any employees. This number is also necessary in order to set up a bank account for your Association and to make purchases without paying sales tax. Obtaining this number is quite simple and can usually be accomplished within 15-30 minutes.

It's as easy as:

- 1.) Fill out I.R.S. Form SS-4  
(Application for Employer Identification Number)
- 2.) Call (1-512-462-7843) or send form SS-4 to the I.R.S. (Internal Revenue Service, ATT: Entity Control, Austin, TX 73301) to obtain an Employer Identification Number.
- 3.) If filing by phone, keep the signed original Form SS-4 in your files.



## **X. Importance of Leadership**

Part of the job of a neighborhood organizer is to identify and develop neighborhood leaders. People in leadership positions are responsible for coordinating the activities of a group, including activities designed to help the group achieve its goals and those to help members stay together and feel good about working together.

It is important for leaders to involve all group members in the decision-making process and to be sure everyone is heard before the group votes on an action or makes a decision. The qualities of good leaders include flexibility, the desire to listen and consider the opinions of others, the ability to clearly state goals and expectations, and a willingness to acknowledge the contributions and achievements of other people.

The task of recruiting and developing leaders should be an ongoing activity for all members of the neighborhood association. Sometimes leaders are reluctant to share authority or delegate responsibility, but that hurts the group in the long run: eventually these leaders may burn out and no one will be available to replace them. Part of being a good leader is helping others to grow into leadership roles as well.

<b>Develop Leaders</b>	<b>Avoid leader burnout</b>
Search for many potential leaders, not just one or two.	Delegate responsibility: match members' personal needs with the needs of the group.
Encourage people to switch tasks and discover their strengths.	Break big jobs into small parts and assign to different people.
Remind members to be open to change; bring in new members and leaders.	Encourage teenagers to get involved in Association activities.
Encourage people to communicate in a positive and productive manner.	Focus on goals and achievements, not personalities.

## **XI. When members disagree**

Neighborhood Associations, like any group of people, can run into problems with personality conflicts, burnout and leadership issues. When problems occur, encourage open and respectful discussion among association members. One way to avoid conflict is for association leaders to invest time in consensus building before key votes are taken.

## Consensus building

Consensus building is a process in which groups of people who disagree are encouraged to share information and negotiate to reach the goals of the association. Each member of the group should be asked for their opinion and each should be willing to accept less than everything they want in order to help the group move toward its goal. A majority vote does not represent a consensus. Instead, the most acceptable alternative for all members should be offered and explained; this approach requires members to be flexible and willing to accept less than everything they might want.

## Managing conflict

Some people try to avoid dealing with conflict because it makes them uncomfortable—and some people try to approach conflict as if they were in a battle, determined to win. But it's best to address conflict immediately so it won't damage personal relationships or the association, and many disagreements can be resolved with negotiation. Disagreements among association members can be an opportunity for growth, change and new understanding.

### Tips for handling conflict

\*Talk directly to one another, face to face. Direct conversation is more effective than sending a letter or complaining to someone else.

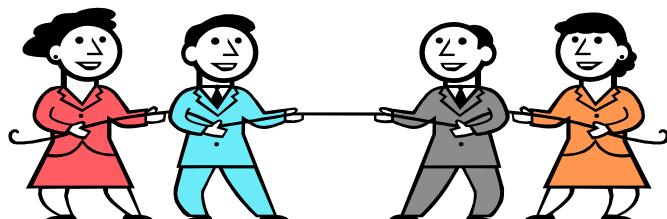
\*Choose the right time to talk. Find a neutral place where you can both talk undisturbed for as long as it takes. Approach the other person and ask if you can set up a convenient time to talk.

\*Don't blame or call names. If you make the other person angry, they are less likely to be calm with you.

\*Listen to the other person. Give them a chance to tell their side of the story completely. Although you may not agree with what is being said, show that you are listening by saying that you hear what they are saying and are glad that you are discussing the problem together.

\*Negotiate a solution. Ask "What can we do to improve the situation for both of us?" or "What can we do to resolve our differences?"

\*Check back with each other. Ask the other person, "Is this working for you?"



## Appendix A

### City Information

**Government Center is located at 285 Uptown Blvd. Normal operating hours for is 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, Monday through Friday.**

**The mailing address for the City of Cedar Hill is**

City of Cedar Hill  
285 Uptown Blvd.  
Cedar Hill, TX 75104

<b>Main Number</b>	<b>972-291-5100</b>
City Hall Fax	972-291-7250
Administration	ext. 1010
City Secretary	ext. 1011
Human Resources	ext. 1050
Water Billing Department	ext. 1200
Code Enforcement	ext. 1090
Building Inspections	ext. 1090
Building Permits	ext. 1090
Finance Department	ext. 1063
Accounts Payable	ext. 1060
Purchasing	ext. 1064
Municipal Court	ext. 1040
Planning Department	ext. 1081
Main Street	ext. 1084
Neighborhood Services	ext. 1099

#### **Public Works**

1554 S. Clark

972-291-5126

972-293-4611 (after hours emergencies)

## Cedar Hill Public Safety Information

### **Cedar Hill Police Department**

285 Uptown Blvd.  
Cedar Hill, TX 75104  
972-291-5181 (non-emergency)

### **Cedar Hill Fire Department**

1212 W. Belt Line Road  
Cedar Hill, TX 75104  
972-291-1011 (non-emergency)

**Always call 911 in case of an emergency**

## Appendix B

### Sample Meeting Agenda

Date

Time

Location

- I. Call to Order
- II. Announcement
- III. Minutes
- IV. Treasurer's Report
- V. Standing Committee Reports
  - Finance
  - Land Use Planning
- VI. Ad-hoc Committee Reports
- VII. Unfinished Business
  - (List each item)
- VIII. New Business
  - (List each item)
- IX. Open Discussion
- X. Adjournment

# Appendix C

## Sample Bylaws for your Neighborhood Association

### **Bylaws of the \_\_\_\_\_**

#### Article I. Name

The name of this organization shall be the \_\_\_\_\_.

#### Article II. Boundary

The geographic boundaries of the \_\_\_\_\_ shall be \_\_\_\_\_.

#### Article III. Purpose

The purpose of the \_\_\_\_\_ shall be to form a positive coalition to support projects and programs which promote the common good of all our members; to inform, educate and provide an open forum for the free discussion of all issues which affect our neighborhood and promote cooperative action; to build a better neighborhood by reducing and preventing crime, to develop a cleaner, safer, healthier neighborhood and improve the quality of life for its residents; to solve problems which exist or arise within our boundaries; and to enable our members to work together to determine the needs of our neighborhood and fully utilize all available resources to respond to those needs.

#### Article IV. Membership

Section 1. Individual membership shall be open to any person who is at least 18 years of age who resides, owns property or operates a business within the boundaries described above. Membership shall be open to a representative from any organization, government agency, nonprofit entity, business, church or school who owns property or meets within the boundaries described above.

Section 2. An individual member shall have only one vote. A representative member shall have only one vote and no organization or entity shall have more than one voting representative. The representative member must have specific authority from the governing board of entity that he / she represents. Voting by proxy shall not be permitted.

Section 3. It shall be the responsibility of the Board of Directors to maintain a current membership list of the association, which shall be open and available for inspection upon request. This list shall be comprised of persons and entities that qualify for membership who have enrolled as members by registering their attendance at any general meeting, program or event of the Association. The membership list is not to be used for business solicitation.

Section 4. There shall be no mandatory dues or fees required for membership in the Association.

#### Article V. Directors and Officers

Section 1. The Board of Directors shall be composed of not less than \_\_\_\_\_ nor more than \_\_\_\_\_ members.

bers to be elected by the membership at a general meeting of the Association. The directors shall be elected for a two-year term and at least one-half shall rotate off each year to be replaced or re-elected. No director shall serve more than six (6) consecutive years. Those members serving on the board at the time of these bylaws being approved shall choose numbers to determine who shall serve a full two-year term or a one-year term to begin the rotation. Members who choose even numbers will serve only a one-year term.

Section 2. Each year, the Board of Directors shall choose from its membership the following officers:

Chairperson  
Vice-Chairperson  
Secretary  
D. Treasurer

Section 3. Directors and officers shall serve the term for which they are elected or until replaced. The Board of Directors may combine two or more officers' positions for convenience and ease of operations or may designate other officers, as it deems necessary and appropriate. No officer shall serve more than three (3) consecutive years in the same office.

Section 4. Duties of Officers are as follows:

Chairperson: The Chairperson shall preside at general membership meetings of the Association and meetings of its Board of Directors.

Vice-Chairperson: The Vice-Chairperson shall act as the aide to the Chairperson and shall preside at meetings in the absence of the Chairperson.

Secretary: The Secretary shall maintain accurate minutes of meetings of the general membership and meetings of the Board of Directors. The Secretary shall be the custodian of all official records of the Association.

D. Treasurer: The Treasurer shall have custody of all funds and shall keep a full and accurate account of all receipts, disbursements and expenditures of the Association. The Treasurer shall present a financial report at each general membership meeting of the Association and meetings of its Board of Directors.

Section 5. The business and affairs of the Association shall be managed by its Board of Directors. The Directors shall in all cases act as a board and may adopt such rules and regulations for the conduct of meetings and management of the Association, as they may deem proper.

Section 6. The Association or its Board of Directors shall not enter into any contract in the name of the Association, except as recommended by the Board and approved by the general membership.

Section 7. At any meeting of the Board of Directors, a simple majority shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

Section 8. Any or all members of the Board of Directors may be removed for cause by a majority vote of the members attending at general membership meeting of the Association.

Section 9. In the event that a vacancy occurs in the Board of Directors, such vacancy shall be filled by a majority vote of the Directors.

Section 10. No members of the Board of Directors of the Association shall receive any form of compensation from any source in connection with the discharge of his / her duty as an officer.

Section 11. The Board of Directors shall meet at least \_\_\_\_ times each year.

## **Article VI. Meetings**

Section 1. There shall be a general membership meeting of the Association at least \_\_\_\_\_ each quarter. The election of the Board of Directors and the presentation of annual reports shall be held in the first half of the calendar year.

Section 2. A meeting of the general membership may be called at any time by any one of the following:

The Chairperson

A majority of the Board of Directors

C. A petition signed by no less than the number of members required for a quorum.

Section 3. Notice of any meeting of the general membership or meeting of the Board of Directors shall be given in accordance with procedures established so as to assure reasonable and sufficient notice. Notice shall state the place, date and time of the meeting and the general purpose for which the meeting is held.

Section 4. At any meeting of the general membership for which proper notice has been given, a quorum shall not be less than one more than twice the number of total voting members of the Board of Directors  
(Example: 12 voting board members X 2 + 1 = 25).

## **Article VII. Proceedings**

Section 1. All proceeding of meetings of the Association and its Board of Directors shall be conducted according to generally accepted practices of parliamentary procedure.

Section 2. The resolution of any internal dispute or any grievance against the Association or its Board of Directors shall be the responsibility of a mediation committee comprised of three persons elected from the general membership.

## **Article VIII. Committees**

The Board of Directors may create and appoint standing or temporary committees with such authority and responsibilities, as it deems necessary for the accomplishment of the purposes of the Association. Chairpersons of standing or temporary committees shall be non-voting, ex-officio members of the Board of Directors, unless otherwise elected as a regular Board member and shall report directly to the Board of Directors.

## **Article IX. Amendments**

These bylaws may be amended at any duly-convened general membership meeting of the Association by a two-thirds vote of the members present, provided that notice of the proposed amendment shall have been given at the general membership meeting immediately prior to the one at which the vote will be taken.

## **Article X. Dissolution**

This Association may be dissolved by the same procedure as that provided for amending the bylaws. All debts of the Association must be paid and provisions made for the responsible disposition of any assets.

These bylaws adopted this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2003.

Chairperson  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Secretary \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### Steps for Planning Your First Neighborhood meeting

<input type="checkbox"/> Select a neutral place to meet	<input type="checkbox"/> State the purpose of your meeting clearly on the agenda
<input type="checkbox"/> Plan your meeting, create an agenda	<input type="checkbox"/> State ideas positively and show their relation to the overall issue
<input type="checkbox"/> Always start on time	<input type="checkbox"/> Keep the meeting moving and watch its general flow
<input type="checkbox"/> Encourage participation	<input type="checkbox"/> Encourage members to take responsibility
<input type="checkbox"/> Make frequent summaries of the conversation	<input type="checkbox"/> Direct the meeting and the attendees from problem to solution after each issue
<input type="checkbox"/> Stress cooperation, not conflict	<input type="checkbox"/> Outline future actions, next steps
<input type="checkbox"/> Conclude the meeting	<input type="checkbox"/> Set the next meeting date, time and place
<input type="checkbox"/> Summarize decisions reached	
<input type="checkbox"/> Point out differences not yet resolved	
<input type="checkbox"/> Set deadlines and review task assignments	
<input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate the meeting	

1. Gather 2-4 other neighbors together to help you organize the first meeting:
2. Determine the boundaries of your neighborhood:
3. Decide on a date and time for your first Neighborhood Meeting
4. Decide on an Agenda and any Guest Speakers desired for the meeting. (See Sample Agenda in Appendix).
5. Identify any special needs for your Neighborhood
  - >Language translation      >Meeting should be in walking distance
  - >Child Care                      >Assistance for the elderly
  - >Handicap access                >Hearing impaired
  - >Crime watch                    >Code enforcement
6. Decide on a meeting place and make whatever arrangements are necessary to acquire it. Some possibilities are:
  - >Neighborhood Park              >Neighborhood School (Cafeteria)
  - >Library                           >Church/Temple
  - >Community Room                >Local Business/Restaurant
7. Contact the Guest Speakers and arrange for them to attend.
8. Prepare a flyer announcing the Meeting.
9. Distribute flyers to every house, apartment, business, school, and church in your neighborhood.

## Appendix D cont.

### What to do After the First Neighborhood Meeting

1. Send Thank you letters to everyone who donated money, supplies and/or food for the meeting.
2. Send Thank you letters to all the guests who spoke at the meeting.
3. Send Thank you letters to all the participants who signed in at the meeting, with a special thanks to those who volunteered and a reminder of the date, time and place of their first committee meeting.
4. Follow up on any advice or information gathering suggested by the Guest Speakers.
4. Prepare a listing of your core group of organizers. This is your list of those volunteers who can put more time into forming the organization. Many of the people who sign up as volunteers will have good intentions, but no time. Others may simply want to socialize. This is your list of workers you can count on for extra effort. Don't be discouraged if this list is small at the beginning. It will gradually grow.
6. Meet with the Organizational Committee.

## Appendix E

### Taking the Neighborhood Survey

Following are the two most common methods of conducting a Neighborhood Survey. Method I takes more time initially from the survey takers, but is more thorough and will return more reliable results. Method II relies on the neighbors to take the initiative to fill out the forms and to not procrastinate.

#### METHOD I

- 1. Gather 2-4 neighbors together and distribute pencils, survey and clipboards (or something hard to write on) to each.**
- 2. Assign each person to a particular section of the neighborhood. (You may not be able to cover the entire neighborhood in one day—Saturday or Sunday afternoons are best. You may want to spread your effort over a few weeks.**
- 3. Survey—takers should knock on every door, introduce themselves and explain why they are there, hand the clipboard to the resident to fill out, then note the address on the form and go to the next door.**

(Hello, my name is Joe Blow, and I live on Property Street. We are considering starting a Homeowner's Association to try to improve our neighborhood and we would like to get your opinion on what you think should be improved in our neighborhood. Could you just take a few minutes to look at this short survey and give us your ideas? Thanks.)

- 4. Keep a list of doors where no one was home or the people did not have the time to fill out the form and return the next day or the next week**

#### METHOD II

- 1. Gather 2—4 neighbors together and distribute survey sheets.**
- 2. Assign each person to a particular section of the neighborhood. (You may not be able to cover the entire neighborhood in one day—Saturday or Sunday afternoons are best. You may want to spread your effort over a few weeks.**
- 3. Survey—takers should return on the date they indicated on the back of the sheets to retrieve the surveys. They will find that most doors do not have the sheets reattached to the doors, so they will need to knock on each door and probably return a second or third time to retrieve the forms.**

There are other methods that could be used. These are the most common. While it is not necessary (and in reality, almost impossible) to retrieve a form from each resident in the neighborhood, your efforts will be most effective the more input you receive from the residents.

## Appendix E cont.

### Neighborhood Improvement Survey (Front of Survey)

Dear Neighbor,

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ I live at \_\_\_\_\_ . Several residents of our neighborhood are interested in forming a Neighborhood Association to try to make some improvements in our neighborhood, and we would like to get your ideas on what you think should be changed or improved in our neighborhood. Would you please take a minute to fill out the Survey on the other side and tape it to your door on \_\_\_\_\_ ? I will return then to pick it up. Or, you could just drop it off at my house if you have time.

Thanks for your help.

(Back of the Survey)

#### **What would You like to see changed in our Neighborhood?**

Would you be interested in forming a Homeowners Association in our neighborhood?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Check the following problems you think should be corrected in our neighborhood:

Gang Activities       Drugs       Trash Dumping

Graffiti       Burglaries       Traffic Problems

High Weeds       Illegal Parking       Junk Vehicles

Fencing Repair       Other (please list)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E cont.

### Analyzing the Neighborhood Survey

The most important thing to remember both when taking the survey and when analyzing the results is that your goals may not be the most important goals for the rest of the neighborhood. If that happens, be patient. Once your Neighborhood Association is up and running and you have been able to accomplish the most popular goals, perhaps you can convince the neighborhood that your goals are also worthy of their attention.

1. Count the marks by each item after you have reviewed each item the resident noted as a concern.
2. Rearrange the list of concerns, putting the highest count first and the lowest last.
3. Grade each item as to ease of accomplishment and place numbers from 1 to 10 with 1 being the easiest and 10, the most difficult to achieve, next to each item.
4. Decide which 1 to 3 items to tackle first. Generally, you need to make sure to make the popular item your first project. However, if that project is high on the difficulty scale, you should place 1 or 2 easier to achieve items on the list to discuss at your first neighborhood meeting. If the second most popular item is not chosen for this grouping, you will need to discuss why you chose to delay tackling it right now and give a projection for when you will tackle it at the meeting. (For example, Project #1 is going to take some time and a lot of unified effort to accomplish, so we need to concentrate our efforts on it right now. Projects #2 and #3 are relatively simple, so we think we can also accomplish those within the same time period. After project #1 is accomplished, we will tackle the second most popular concern.

## Appendix F

### Sample Donation Request Letter

Creekside Neighborhood Association  
1111 Breath Street

(Date)

Dear Merchant:

The Creekside Neighborhood Association (Employer Identification Number) is a nonprofit organization organized to lessen neighborhood tensions and combat juvenile crime and community deterioration, as described in section 501 (c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, concerning nonprofit, charitable institutions. Our Neighborhood Association encompasses the area between \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ streets.

On (date), we will (describe project). This project (describe purpose or worthiness of project). We need donations for this event and hope you might be able to make a contribution to our efforts.

Your contribution will be greatly appreciated by the residents in our area, and we will make sure everyone is aware of your generosity and concern for our neighborhood.

Thank you in advance for your consideration

Jane Doe, President  
Creekside Neighborhood Association

## Appendix F cont.

### Donation Thank You Letter

Creekside Homeowners Association  
1111 Breath Street

(Date)

(Name and Address of Donor)

Dear (donor):

Thank you for donating (donation) for the (event) held on (date). We publicly thanked your business for your donation (at the meeting/in the newsletter/etc.), and our neighborhood really appreciates your help and support in our efforts to improve our community.

Thanks to businesses like yours that are committed to helping improve the quality of life for the residents of our city, we have been able to make our community a safer and more enjoyable place in which to live.

We wish you the best in your business and look forward to working with you on future projects for the betterment of our community.

Sincerely,

(Signature)  
Jane Doe, President  
Creekside Homeowners Association

## Appendix G

### Participant/Volunteer Thank You Letter

Creekside Homeowners Association  
1111 Breath Street

(Date)

(Name and Address of Participant)

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

Thank you for attending the (your neighborhood) Neighborhood Community Meeting held on (date). Your input was greatly appreciated. It was exciting to see (so many) neighbors take an active interest in the welfare of our neighborhood.

We especially want to thank you for volunteering to help organize our neighborhood to (solve problems or accomplish goals). The organizational committee will be meeting on (date) at (time) at (place). If for some reason you cannot attend this meeting, please call me at (phone) in advance.

We are looking forward to your input. We know how busy you are so we will try to keep the meeting short and to the point. Thanks again for your concern for our neighborhood.

Sincerely,

(Signature)

Jane Doe, President  
Creekside Homeowners Association

## Appendix I

### Applying for Exemption from Texas State Sales Tax

Applying for exemption from State sales, use and excise taxes can save your Association money on every qualifying purchase made for the Association. Before you apply for this exemption, you must have obtained 501(c)(3) status with the I.R.S. Then, all you need to do is send a copy of the letter from the I.R.S. granting exemption, along with a version of the following letter:

(SAMPLE LETTER)

(Your name and title within the Association)

(Your Neighborhood Association name)

(The Association mailing address)

(Date)

Tax Policy Division—Exempt Organizations Section  
Texas State Comptroller's Office  
P O Box 13528  
Austin, TX 78774-3528

The (name of your Neighborhood Association, Inc.) hereby requests tax-exempt status from State sales, use, and excise taxes. The Association has been granted nonprofit status from the I.R.S. under Section 501 (c)(3) (see enclosed letter) and is engaged solely in activities included within the 501(c)(3) guidelines.

Thank you for your assistance. You may contact (your name) at (your phone number, including area code) for more information.

Sincerely,

(your name and title within the organization)

Encl.: I.R.S. Determination letter

## Appendix I

### Applying for Exemption from Texas State Franchise Tax

Every Corporation in Texas is subject to a state franchise tax, which must be files annually, unless specifically exempted. In order to apply for exemption from this tax, send a version of the following letter, along with the following copies: (1) Articles of Incorporation; (2) By-laws; and 93) letter from the I.R.S. granting exemption under 501 (c)(3).

#### SAMPLE LETTER

(Your name and title within the Association)

(Your Neighborhood Association name)

(The Association mailing address)

(Date)

Texas State Comptroller  
Att: Exempt Organizations  
P O Box 13528  
Austin, TX 78774-3528

The (name of your Association, Inc.) hereby requests an exemption from the Texas State Franchise Tax. The Association has been granted nonprofit status from the I.R.S. under section 501(c)(3) (see enclosed letter) and is engaged solely in activities included within the 501 (c)(3) guidelines.

Our Federal I.D. number is (insert the number assigned to you by the I.R.S.) and our State Charter number is (insert the number assigned to you by the state when you filed for incorporation).

Thank you for your assistance. You may contact (your name) at (your phone number, including area code) for more information.

Sincerely,

(Your name and title within the organization)

Encl.: Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, I.R.S. Determination letter

## Appendix J

### Hosting a Block Party

1. Secure date, time and location
2. Speak to the homeowners who will be effected by the chosen street to make sure it's a good location
4. Complete a special events permit application at the police department.  
**\*the permit approval process takes a minimum of 30 days. Please try to submit your application at least 6 weeks in advance of the date of your party.**
5. Determine what food/snacks you would like to provide so you can budget accordingly (most neighborhoods do hot dogs and drinks)
6. Post about the party on Nextdoor.com to see if any of your neighbors would like to help
7. Create a flyer to promote your party. (Neighborhood Services can help)
8. Pass out flyers door to door as well as mail them
9. Arrive early to the location on the day of the party to set up food and drinks
10. Enjoy meeting and getting to know your neighbors!