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Neighborhood Planning Program Update (B)

In 1998, the Pilot Neighborhood Planning Program designated two neighborhoods for participation, the Duval Neighborhood and the Grove Street Neighborhood, and allocated grant funds for neighborhood projects in City right-of-way or on City-owned property. In 1999, two additional neighborhoods were added to the program, the Lincoln Estates and Hibiscus Park neighborhoods. The purpose of the Neighborhood Planning Program is to work with a particular neighborhood for approximately one to two years to assist them in developing a Neighborhood Action Plan, facilitate neighborhood organization, if needed, and to implement projects with \$15,000 dollars allocated by the City Commission. The Lincoln Estates and Hibiscus Park neighborhoods have both developed Neighborhood Action Plans, which address issues such as infrastructure and traffic, neighborhood beautification and appearance, codes enforcement, and neighborhood policing and organization. Staff held workshop sessions with each neighborhood, as outlined in the Neighborhood Action Plans, to identify goals and strategies for each major topic, and to address immediate neighborhood issues. The Lincoln Estates neighborhood is a well-organized group that has been meeting for a number of years. The Hibiscus Park neighborhood did not have an organized group when staff began working with the neighborhood, however, the neighborhood has since developed strong leadership and a core group of homeowners who actively participate.

The Lincoln Estates Neighborhood has many concerns related to code enforcement and policing, and representatives from the Code Enforcement Division and the Gainesville Police Department attend every meeting to address neighborhood concerns. The Lincoln Estates Neighborhood decided to spend the majority of their neighborhood grant funds on improving the entrance area to the Southeast Boys Club. The entrance to the Club does not include any designated pedestrian access on the public right-of-way, which creates the potential for conflict between children entering and exiting the Club on foot with vehicles and buses. The neighborhood decided to use their funds to provide a sidewalk to the Boys Club property line on the west side of Southeast 17th Drive, ten-foot brick-edged crosswalks on Southeast 12th Street and Southeast 17th Drive, and curbing and ramps at the intersections to improve pedestrian staging areas. The project is currently being implemented by the Public Works Department. The neighborhood plans to use any additional funds for crime watch signs, neighborhood entrance signs, and landscaping.

The Hibiscus Park neighborhood had many concerns related to code enforcement at the start of the planning process.

The Code Enforcement Division placed a concentrated effort on enforcing front-yard parking and landlord licensing regulations in the neighborhood in an effort to preserve single-family character. The neighborhood also has concerns about speeding and traffic calming. The neighborhood is on the Public Works Department waiting list to determine qualification for speed humps. Poor condition of streets has also been a major concern. One of the streets in the neighborhood has been placed on the approved Public Works Department resurfacing list for this fiscal year. All of the other streets in the neighborhood have been placed on the Public Works prioritized three-year nomination list. The neighborhood has decided to spend the majority of its neighborhood planning grant dollars on implementing a landscape plan for a large sinkhole located in a prominent location. The sinkhole will serve as an attractive, park-like focal point for the neighborhood. The neighborhood does not wish to focus solely on the sinkhole and plans to place entrance signs at the three neighborhood entrances along West University Avenue, and to provide historic style street signs throughout the neighborhood.

In previous reports to the City Commission, staff recommended establishing a formal, city-wide registration program for neighborhood organizations. One of the benefits of such a registry includes establishing a database of neighborhood organizations and contacts to notify regarding various programs that would impact or benefit neighborhoods. A registration application was sent out to approximately 70 contacts in May of 2000. As a result, 38 neighborhoods are currently registered with the City.

Staff recommends two additional neighborhoods for participation in the Neighborhood Planning Program: the Highland Court Manor neighborhood and the Sugarhill neighborhood. Applications were sent to all registered neighborhoods, and seven neighborhoods applied for participation. A committee of several Community Development Department staff members reviewed the applications and made the recommendations based on several factors, including the issues and concerns stated by the neighborhoods in their applications, and whether the Neighborhood Planning Program would be appropriate for addressing those issues.

The Highland Court Manor neighborhood is located in northeast Gainesville. The application that was submitted by the neighborhood states that "as the neighborhood has changed with newcomers over the years, we want to reestablish a strong, safe neighborhood for a better quality of life for all residents". The application states that some of the projects that the neighborhood would like to work on include: neighborhood friendly enhancements of a ditch and providing neighborhood entrance signs.

The Sugarhill neighborhood is located in southeast Gainesville. The application that was submitted by the neighborhood states that "we need to improve our neighborhood in so many ways but we do not have the funds. The neighborhood needs a facelift." The application states that some of the projects that the neighborhood would like to work on include improving safety by providing proper street lighting and speed humps, and improving a neighborhood park.

As an expansion of the Neighborhood Planning Program, staff recommends establishing a "Neighbor of the Year Program." The program would recognize an individual each year who has made valuable contributions, through leadership efforts, in improving the quality of life in a Gainesville neighborhood. The individual would be formally recognized by the City Commission and receive a certificate and other tokens of appreciation. A committee of City staff would be established to review applications.

The FY 2001 operating budget includes \$30,000 for the Neighborhood Planning Program grants.

The City Commission hear an update on the Neighborhood Planning Program administered by the Community Development Department, authorize staff to add two more neighborhoods for participation, and establish a Neighbor of the Year Program.