

**DEPARTMENT OF NEIGHBORHOOD EMPOWERMENT
REPORT FROM STAFF**

April 18, 2006

To: Board of Neighborhood Commissioners
From: Greg Nelson, General Manager
Subject: Neighborhood Council Self-Assessment Process

RECOMMENDATION:

The Board of Neighborhood Commissioner should promote and encourage the public dialogue that will be necessary before the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment determines the method through which the Neighborhood Council self-assessments should occur, and that the BONC is careful to not reach any conclusions on its recommendations to the department, if any, before the Neighborhood Councils have had an adequate opportunity to weigh in.

DISCUSSION:

On March 20, 2006, an e-mail "blast" to Neighborhood Councils invited them to take an active role in shaping the process through which Neighborhood Councils will conduct a mandatory survey of stakeholders and assess themselves every two years.

Attached is a document that provides the Neighborhood Councils with a starting point for this discussion. For over 10 years, I have engaged people throughout the nation in a discussion of the best ways to evaluate the activities and performance of Neighborhood Councils. I ended up with as many answers as there were people who had answers. The special difficulty was that no city has ever attempted such an evaluation.

The only "evaluation" method of which I am aware appears the book "The Rebirth of Urban Democracy." It was a complex, academic work that concluded its research about 1992. Copies of the book have been made available to all commissioners.

In preparing the attached document, I suggest that rather than invent new categories for evaluation, which could be very time-consuming, the better approach might be to ask each Neighborhood Council to evaluate itself against that which the laws and rules that govern them require and expect of them, at least for this first evaluation process.

The Plan for a Citywide System of Neighborhood Councils tasks the department with the development of the method through which the self-assessment is conducted.

In keeping with the long-standing commitment to the Neighborhood Councils, and in accordance with principles contained in the Early Warning System provision of the City Charter, the department is beginning exhaustive efforts to engage the Neighborhood Councils in this important step in the evolution of the system.

Because this question was raised at your last meeting, the relationship between the self-assessment and the work of the upcoming Neighborhood Council review commission is unknown, because the ordinance that will create the review commission has not been finalized. The ordinance may not detail how the staff of the commission will be established. The quality and quantity of the commission's staff may be key to answering this question.