

Neighborhood Partnership Housing Services: 22nd Annual Benefit Dinner and Awards Celebration

September 17, 2013

Thank you. I am honored to accept the Grassroots Leadership Award.

Kudos to the work of NPHS in strengthening homeownership and neighborhoods in inland Southern California. Your mission and goals are at the center of what makes a good community.

When in office for 33 years, 14 as a Council member and 19 as Mayor, I organized ideas and initiatives around major concepts.

You need to know where you are going, and why. You need ways to think about the good community.

Sitting down to prepare this talk, I identified twelve concepts that were important to me as Mayor/Council Member: social capital, safe streets, sustainability, high tech, creative class, talent dividend, facilitative leadership, inclusiveness, invitation to the table, arts and innovation, downtown, and neighborhoods.

Tonight, let me briefly talk about neighborhoods. The premise--you cannot have a good city without good neighborhoods.

They are the litmus test of a city's services. They are where most of us have our greatest personal investment. They are where residents live, play, and raise a family.

My favorite definition of neighborhood is offered by two sociologists, Rachele and Donald Warren: "Beyond the family, the neighborhood is the most universal base of social life....All of us partake of neighborhoods life...There is a competitive market for the identify, the allegiance, loyalty, and participation....Neighborhoods as a meaningful entity is not merely an abstraction....Rather, in a profoundly practical way, it has a valuable role to to play in the lives of all city dwellers."

The IBM Global Business Services offers a powerful analysis of the importance of neighborhoods. "Neighborhoods are where people spend the majority of their time....When residents or businesses choose to move or to relocate, it is the attributes of neighborhoods that drive their decision....it is at the neighborhood level that citizens (customers) most consistently interact with the public goods that city governments provide (schools, parks, sidewalks, police protection, etc.). Neighborhoods are what matter.

However, rather than talk conceptually, let me briefly highlight several personal experiences.

First, when I ran first for the Ward One Council seat in 1979, I knocked on about 4,500 doors. I quickly discovered that people cared about their neighborhood, and deeply so. Ward One was, in contrast, a distant and uncertain abstraction.

Second, once elected, I regularly attended meetings of the Northside Improvement Association and the Downtown Neighborhood Advisory Committee. I came to respect and value what happens when neighbors meet and talk with each other.

Third, I decided to focus on policy choices that could enhance and support neighborhoods. The point--in a systemic way, what could the City do to improvement our neighborhoods? For every year in office, I asked this question, and sought specific answers.

The most important source of policy ideas was NUSA, Neighborhoods USA. I attended at least twelve of their annual conferences; and at their last conference in 2012, I was one of three recognized for an award of Who's Who in American Neighborhoods.

And fourth, there was one book on neighborhoods that I read again and again, *The Rebirth of Urban Democracy* by Berry, Portney, and Thompson. It is a great book, a field study of neighborhood participation, and its value.

So what? How is Riverside different because of this policy focus on neighborhoods?

Tonight let me highlight, albeit briefly, eleven important neighborhood initiatives that have made a difference, and I think importantly so.

- 1) Riverside has identified its neighborhoods. We have 26 community neighborhoods. Drive around Riverside and you can see signs identifying these 26 neighborhoods.
- 2) Mayor's Night Out.--once a month, in one of the City's 26 neighborhoods, I hosted 163 MNO. They were important for neighborhoods, electeds, and senior staff. They put the 26 neighborhoods on City Hall's agenda.
- 3) Office of Neighborhoods--there must be a well-staffed and effective office at City Hall that worries about neighborhoods, their organization, problems, and services. In Riverside, it is located in and staffed by the Community Development Department.
- 4) Riverside Neighborhood Partnership, otherwise known as RNP, is made up of representatives from the City's 26 neighborhoods and related community groups. The RNP meets once a month. It is staffed by the Office of Neighborhood. It is a NUSA best practice modeled after a similar partnership in Roanoke, Virginia,
- 5) Annual Neighborhood Conference--with attendance at 300 to 500 residents--is an annual and visible city wide statement of the importance of neighborhoods.

Also, the Neighborhood Leadership Academy is an important source for recruiting and training neighborhood leaders.

6) NextDoor is a highly successful digital platform for connecting residents and informing neighbors. When walking Mt. Rubidoux this past Saturday, a downtown resident shared his enthusiasm for NextDoor, and how it brings neighbors together.

7) At Home in Riverside is an excellent, award winning web site that highlights Riverside's 26 neighborhoods. Directed toward new residents, it reads, "Learn about our award-winning city, parks, first-rate schools from pre-school to higher education, and vibrant neighborhoods."

8) Crime Free Multi-Family Program is a highly acclaimed and when implemented, a strikingly effective initiative where the police and apartment managers work together on rules and good behavior. It is a major focus of the Riverside Police Department.

9) Neighborhood Livability Task Force is recognized by the National League of Cities as a national best practice. Led by the City Attorney, the Task Force coordinates the rules and resources of many departments to deal with the worst of neighborhood problems, particularly, "the neighbors from hell."

10) 311--"One Call Does It All" is a national best practice that Riverside adopted, and improved. The City receives over 200,000 calls a year; and more importantly, the City Manager has crafted ways to resolve as well as to monitor these requests. It is quite amazing!

11) Finally, Keep Riverside Clean & Beautiful is the best such program in the United States. It is the City's signature volunteer program, with over 40,000 volunteer hours a year. It provides hands on projects for litter, graffiti, and tree planting.

During my 33 years as an elected, I proposed over 50 city wide neighborhood initiatives. Not every proposal was approved, or funded. Not every program is still underway. Some initiatives were more important than others. And there were some disappointments. But overall, Riverside neighborhoods have and continue to be strengthened by systemic policy attention.

If interested in a general overview of neighborhood policy during my years as an elected, see the August 28, 2012 Council Report; Item #15: "Mayor Loveridge Recommendations for Riverside's Neighborhoods."

The challenge to Mayor Rusty Bailey, and other mayors, is to take neighborhoods seriously, and to look for policies and best practices that will make them better. City Managers tend to focus on services; electeds must lead on neighborhoods.