

City striving to improve neighborhood partnerships

by Dedra Cordle, Staff Writer
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Columbus City Council is working hard to ensure they have a good working relationship with their neighborhood organizations.

In May, Columbus City Council President Michael Mentel and Development Committee Chair Maryellen O'Shaughnessy wanted to comprise a work group to find ways to improve and strengthen the relationship between City Hall and neighborhood organizations.

"We wanted to access our success and see what we need to do to serve the people," said O'Shaughnessy.

The work group consisted of representatives from the 13 area commissions (including the Hilltop, Southwest and Westland Area Commissions), a large and small civic association and a community council.

"The Area Commission/Civic Association Work Group met twice a month through the summer to examine the function and status of civic groups across the city and to discuss any issues that were important to us," said Gary Baker, chairperson of the Greater Hilltop Area Commission.

During a community briefing held at City Hall Dec. 12, the AC/CA presented their 18 recommendations for city council to strengthen relations and even proposed the creation of an independent Community Coalition.

"The goal of the coalition is to improve all Columbus neighborhoods and make it a better plane to live," said Baker.

The Columbus Community Coalition would be comprised of the members of the AC/CA work group, as well as the civic associations in Columbus. The first meeting is scheduled for Jan. 31 with the time and place yet to be determined.

Both Mentel and O'Shaughnessy expressed their support of the formation of the new, independent coalition, as well as the recommendations they made to City Council.

Some of those recommendations to the city include notifying area commissions on all city infrastructure projects and permitting area commissions to review graphics issues on zoning cases (for example, signs put up for new businesses).

Another recommendation is for Columbus to reduce restrictions on how area commission funds are spent and to increase funding with area commissions to \$5,000 annually. They currently receive \$2,000 annually.

"In most areas, the entire amount would not be used," said Chris Gawronski, chairperson of the Clintonville Area Commission.

Gawronski added that the \$5,000 stipend would provide additional funding to areas with fewer local resources.

All of the 18 recommendations made by the work group will be up for public viewing at the Columbus City Council Web site, www.columbuscitycouncil.org.