

## SOME FACTS ABOUT ALBUQUERQUE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS by Patricia Willson

- They are not HOAs. A surprising number of folks confuse them with Homeowners' Associations. NAs have no authority to enforce covenants, determine your house color, mailbox location, etc.
- They are run by volunteers with different interests and skill sets. Often the same people continue to serve on boards for many years, as it is difficult to recruit new board members.
- NA accomplishments correlate to the bandwidth and/or burnout of leadership and resident engagement. At times, lack of consensus amongst residents on a particularly issue can make communication with various governmental entities difficult, an example of this is trying to give testimony in a limited amount of time in favor of or in opposition to a project.
- Many NAs support philanthropic efforts: assembling and distributing care packages for those in need, helping seniors remain in their homes, donating to APS clothing bank, etc.
- The oldest NA in Albuquerque is the Stronghurst Improvement District, formed nearly 95 years ago.
- There are currently 154 neighborhood associations and 8 coalitions that are recognized by the City of Albuquerque Office of Neighborhood Coordination (ONC). The adoption of the revised NARO in 2022 likely is the major factor in the dramatic decrease in the number of NAs recognised by the city.
- Many areas of the City have no NA coverage, thus receive no development notification.

In a Strong Towns article about South Bend, Indiana, one of the lessons learned in its revitalization effort was to merge the economic development and community development departments—in a lot of cities, those tasked with working mainly with businesses and those working with neighborhoods don't communicate well or form a united front.

This is especially true in Albuquerque. While both the NARO (Neighborhood Association Recognition Ordinance) and the IDO (Integrated Development Ordinance) profess to value Neighborhood Associations, the reality is that NAs are both marginalized and demonized by some in the administration, the development community, and other groups.

Neighborhood Associations have always existed to maintain and improve the safety and livability within their boundaries. The narrative that they delay or prevent development through frivolous appeals is not born out by data—few appeals even address housing or development which includes housing. Projects are more often delayed or derailed by a lengthy permitting process or financial hurdles. Affordability can be affected by global private equity: cheaper land is purchased and re-zoned to allow a project with a higher profit margin. Private equity is focused more on ROI than the value of the neighborhood. For example, when the out-of-state Community Preservation Partners (CPP) purchased the 241 units of Mountain View Apartments in Victory Hills, they renovated the units and raised the rents. They also stopped irrigating the landscape; the grass has died, and the mature tree canopy is stressed probably beyond recovery. This is contributing to the heat island effect in surrounding areas.

What do NAs do well? They accommodate opposing points of view. They often improve development through pre-submittal meetings—many developers recognize the value of NA buy-in. For example, the Plaza del la Luz shopping center was originally designed with the ‘back’ side—a blank wall of service doors—facing Coors Blvd. Several Taylor Ranch neighbors convinced the developer to take advantage of the great views; the final design broke the building into two and added a patio on the east side, and the tenant Jinja Bistro insisted on even more windows! The shopping center is fully leased and very successful. Associations want good development to succeed—that increases the safety and livability of the neighborhood.

NAs are the bridge between one’s individual home, apartment, or business and wider circles of influence—your block, your street, your District— and Albuquerque as a whole. Over thirty years ago, author V.B. Price wrote eloquently about this place we call home; “its rarity, its individuality, its uniqueness”. He noted that “the challenge in the next 20 years is not to go for short term, cheap shot profits, but to maintain, to hang on to our essential character and beauty...” I urge everyone, whether you have been here for 50 years or 5 months, to watch the short (27 minutes) PBS film from 1993 in which V.B. describes the city’s history, architecture, culture, environment, and 'personality.' Note how much we have already lost...

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