

**Community  
Councils**



**Roots**

# Highlights of Community Council Program History in Anchorage

## The First Five Years

1973 – 1978

### 1973

- Citizens Advisory Committee on the Goals and Objectives of the Comprehensive Plan were developing a set of community-wide goals and objectives for the future of the Greater Anchorage area.
- Hearings were held in all neighborhoods and two major community concerns stated by residents in almost all of the communities were:
  - "Government should be more responsive to citizens.
  - "Citizens should have more voice in government."

### 1974

- Borough Assembly passed community council ordinance
- Anchorage ACTION Council organized to write a grant and help facilitate organizing Community Councils
- Office opened in home of Director, Lanie Fleisher

### 1975

- ACTION grant started, first VISTAS arrived
- BLUE BOOK and How to Do It Kits produced
- Jack Keinkauf first Board Chairman
- Unification established Community Council in the Charter
- **Councils Recognized:** South Addition, Turnagain Arm, Government Hill, Tudor Park, Scenic Park, Sand Lake, Turnagain.

### 1976

- Carol Carlson, Board Chairman
- Many Workshops - Getting the Word Out, Citizen Effectiveness
- Media
  - Radio: "Your Voice" KANC, First Community Council Week,
  - Newsletter: Neighbor to Neighbor started, joined UA affiliates program
- Virginia dal Plaz, Director, office moved to basement of 4th Avenue Theater building
- Changed name to Federation of Community Councils
- Started Involvement with citizen participation in HUD Grants
- **Councils Recognized:** Fairview, Glen Alps, Chugiak, Northeast, Eagle River Valley, Eagle River, Girdwood, Birchwood
- Federation bylaws and goals written

## 1977

- Jean Buchanan, Director
- New Community Council Ordinance passed
- Several workshops done
- Fern Chandonett - Spectrum
- Cataloging of Boards & Commission members by council areas
- **Councils Recognized:** North Mountain View, Spenard, Russian Jack Park, Hillside East, Downtown, Old Seward/Oceanview, Campbell Park, North Star, Taku/Campbell

## 1978

- Robby Robinson, Board Chairman
- Community Councils meet to establish guidelines that define
  - responsibilities of councils to Municipal government
  - responsibilities of Municipal government to councils
  - responsibilities of council leadership to its members
  - responsibilities of councils to each other
- Contract received from Municipality to establish Community Council Center nonprofit
- Bulk mail permit obtained
- Move to new offices in Community Council Center, 801 W. Fireweed Lane
- Community Council Page in *Anchorage Times* and *Daily News*
- Revision of Getting the Word Out
- Council Meetings with Administration
- **Councils Expanding Boundaries:** Airport Heights, Eklutna Valley, University Area, Tudor Park
- **Councils Recognized:** Mid-Hillside, Upper Rabbit Creek Road, Abbott Loop, Huffman/O'Malley, Roger's Park

*This brief history of the Community Council Program in Anchorage was compiled by Virginia dal Piaz. It summarizes the accomplishments of the central group that helped foster and organize the program. The achievements of the individual Community Councils are too numerous to mention here.*

## **HISTORY OF THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL PROGRAM ANCHORAGE, ALASKA**

### **1973**

Beginning early in 1973, a Citizens' Advisory Committee on the Goals and Objectives of the Comprehensive Plan met for a period encompassing eight months. In October 1973 they presented a set of community-wide goals and objectives for the future of the greater Anchorage area entitled, "Anchorage borough, 1990." The organizational goal of the plan was "to employ government in a more positive, creative and responsive role" and "to provide for citizen participation in the planning process at the neighborhood level"

The two organizational goal objectives were:

"Restructure governmental program formation, requiring citizen input, review and comment on an area-wide basis, both at initial stages and prior to finalization",

"Bring government decision making to the neighborhood level."

These two objectives would enable neighborhood residents to review and comment on all facets of government activity and to re-emphasize the government's obligation of recruiting and promoting the involvement of citizens.

The Social Goal as stated in the goals and objectives was:

"To create and maintain conditions in which all residents have an equitable opportunity to share the material wealth, education, health, housing, recreation, and work satisfactions as well as in the responsibilities of service to the community.

One of the objectives was expanded upon the theme of community services as follows:

"To establish government decision making at the neighborhood level, providing for citizen review comments on an area-wide basis for government policy and program formulation."

It went on to explain that "public spirit and grass roots involvement are essential to a vital community. Citizens should be encouraged to participate actively in the betterment of their area. Opportunities for citizens' Involvement in their community should be opened on a large scale.

During a four month period beginning In December 1973, the Greater Anchorage Area Borough Planning Department and the Mayor's Advisory Group met to work on the Goals and Objectives for the Comprehensive Plan. The meetings were well attended by the public and by the end of the four months, three to five meetings had been held in each of the eleven subsections of the Borough. Following the hearings, the Borough Planning

Department published a compilation of the hearing records in a book called *The Citizen Speaks Out*.

Two major community concerns stated by residents in almost all of the communities were:

"Government should be more responsive to citizens" and

"Citizens should have more voices in government."

### **1974**

Pursuing these concerns, a group of private citizens, including several involved in drafting the goals and objectives for the Comprehensive Plan met to write a "Community Council Ordinance" and to push for its adoption. "An Ordinance Authorizing the Recognition of Community Councils" (OR 74-163) was passed as the mechanism needed to facilitate "citizen involvement in their community...on a large scale." In other words, they provided a way to make effective citizen participation a reality.

It was anticipated that if citizens had the knowledge that their neighborhood organizational efforts would be officially recognized and would by law, have impact on the decision-making process, then they would be encouraged to take part in making those decisions that affect their daily lives, at home and in their community.

At this point, a group of citizens formed the Anchorage ACTION Council and applied for a grant from the federal government's ACTION Agency. The ACTION Agency's function was to encourage volunteer citizens' groups to address the problems of society with some support from the government.

The Anchorage ACTION Council believed that some assistance was needed to get neighborhood associations started and believed that the organizational effort should not come from the government, but should be volunteer, grass-roots citizens' movement. The main premise of the Anchorage ACTION Council's proposal was to capitalize in the obvious desire of Anchorage citizens to take part in the full range of decision-making. It was reasoned that Community Councils would be the ideal vehicle for citizen participation, not only in government, but in the full range of human activities and resources. And further, Community Councils would provide a way for the various levels of government, citizens' groups and social services agencies to reach the citizenry. Finding out what people were thinking and what their needs and desires were was not a simple, automatic task, for either agencies or the people themselves; a mechanism was necessary to provide a truly meaningful two-way communication.

It takes time to build an organization that has strength, integrity and a firm idea of purpose and priorities. Therefore, the Anchorage ACTION Council embarked upon a three pronged task:

1. TO HELP CITIZENS ORGANIZE COMMUNITY COUNCILS UNDER THE ORDINANCES OF BOTH THE CITY AND THE BOROUGH;
2. TO HELP THOSE COUNCILS BUILD THE STRENGTH OF ORGANIZATION NEEDED TO DEVELOP GOALS AND PRIORITIES AND TO CARRY ON PROGRAMS OF ACTION NECESSARY TO REACH THEIR GOALS;
3. TO HELP PROVIDE ACCESS TO THE INFORMATION AND TO PROVIDE UNDERSTANDING OF THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS AND RESOURCES ALREADY AVAILABLE IN THE COMMUNITY THROUGH WHICH CITIZENS CAN ADDRESS PROBLEMS, AFFECT DECISIONS, AND INITIATE PROGRAMS.

In September 1974 the Anchorage ACTION Council opened officially in the home of the Director, Lanie Flesher, in a small but friendly room just inside the front door. Board meetings were held in the living room. Throughout the remainder of the year, Lanie and Board members wrote and developed the initial grant proposal for ACTION.

### **1975**

The ACTION grant proposal was accepted and was to start in March. But, due to numerous problems, funding did not start until July. Meanwhile, on March 25, 1975 the City adopted OR 7-75, an ordinance similar to the Borough Community Council ordinance. The first VISTA assigned to the project, Cheryl Jerabek, arrived in April and began her first assignment: the research and compilation of a directory of public services and volunteer groups in Anchorage. The first publication of the Anchorage BLUE BOOK appeared in August and was an immediate success. Also, "How to do it kits" were first developed for use by community people on how to organize Community Councils. Jack Kleinkauf was elected the first chairman of the ACTION council Board in August.

In the fall, the people voted for unification of the City and Borough governments and under the new Charter, Community Councils were recognized in the Bill of Rights and Article VIII which states:

"The assembly by ordinance shall provide for establishment of Community Councils to afford citizens an opportunity for maximum community involvement and self-determination. The ordinance shall include procedures for negotiation between the local government and each Community Council with respect to the duties and responsibilities of the Community Council."

The Community Council program was moved from Borough Planning Department to the newly unified Clerk's office and a Community Council coordinator was assigned the duty of helping councils with their needs and requests in relation to the new Municipality.

VISTA'S assigned to the program during 1975 included: Nancy Grosek, Janet Dunwoody, Lynn Brady, Martha Stiles, Scott Benson, Shelly Rorondo, Peter Lagerway and Flo Mason.

Councils recognized during 1975 were South Addition, Turnagain Arm, Government Hill, Tudor Park, Scenic Park, Sand Lake and Turnagain.

## **1976**

Increased activity in helping neighborhoods organize Community Councils and expanded public visibility of the program characterized this year. January began with the first workshop on "How to Get the Word Out." This workshop covered the use of public service media by volunteer groups. The ACTION Council also participated in the Community Service Fair at the Sears Mall with a booth and met many people interested in the Community Council Concept. The newsletter, Neighbor to Neighbor, was initiated (circulation 300) along with a fifteen minute radio program on KANC, "Your Voice," which was used to interview various people involved with Community Councils and to make announcements for meetings.

New VISTA'S included Jim Clark, Patricia Joyner, Ken Action and Carl White.

The first full-time Community Council coordinator was hired by the Municipal Clerk's office. All requests from councils to the city government were to be handled through this position.

The ACTION Council received a \$7000 video grant to do a community video center which would purchase portable black and white video equipment and train community members in its operation and the use of the video in the problem solving process.

Lanie Fleischer resigned as Director and Virginia dal Piaz took over in June. The office moved to the basement of the Fourth Avenue Theater Building, Room #2.

In September, the first Community Council Week was held. A comprehensive media blitz informing Anchorage citizens about the program was done. This included how to start a Community Council in a neighborhood and who to get in touch with for information.

Throughout the fall the Board and staff worked with the Municipal Planning Department in developing a citizen involvement plan for the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Development block Grants program.

In November a major change in funding was made, shifting from full funding from the ACTION grant to a majority of the funding from the local government. The bylaws and legal papers were reincorporated which reflected evolving changes in the program and the name was changed from ACTION Council to the Federation of Community Councils. Board members were now representatives of formally recognized Community Councils, rather than community members at large.

The second edition of the BLUE BOOK was researched and printed.

The year ended by the new Federation of Community Councils joining the University of Alaska Affiliates program and producing another workshop, the "Citizen Effectiveness Workshop."

Councils recognized by the Assembly during 1976 included Fairview, Glen Alps, Chugiak, Northeast, Eagle River, Eagle River Valley, Girdwood, and Birchwood.

## **1977**

Virginia dal Piaz resigned as Director and Jean Buchanan was named the new Director as the year began. The first four months were spent with intensive involvement with the HUD Block Grant public meetings. The staff and Board worked very hard evaluating the input with the Planning Department and recommended suggested projects for funding to the Municipal Assembly. For their superior work and efforts, Anchorage was recognized as having one of the top citizen participation plans in the nation.

Under the Charter, a new Community Council Ordinance was passed. It was virtually the same as the original Borough ordinance.

Several workshops were done during the year: a community wide publicity workshop, a Community Council publicity workshop, and one on the Municipal budget process (how citizens can participate effectively).

There was a meeting with Governor Hammond at which most Councils were represented, where responsibilities of the state to Community Councils was discussed. The Governor pledged to direct his administration to work with councils in the planning process and to notify councils in a timely manner when any state directed activities occurred within council boundaries. Outcome of this meeting was that Jessie Dodson of the Governor's office was named as a liaison between councils and the state government.

A list was done of all Municipal advisory Board and Commission members by Council area and new editions of Getting the Word Out and Citizen Effectiveness Workbook were completed.

Radio Station KHAR program "Spectrum" developed a Community Council in-depth interview section once a month where various people from the different councils talked to the host about their councils or a special problem in their areas.

A work session was held with the Municipal Assembly, mainly concerning funding.

The Neighbor to Neighbor newsletter circulation grew to 1000 people.



VISTA'S included Stuart Finer, Jody Voss, Cheryl Cole, Jim Duffy, and Waiter Porter.

A major project of the year was the rewriting of the Federation of Community Councils bylaws by the Board. This was a long and involved process that reflected the changes in direction and evolution of the role of the Federation in relation to the Community Councils. The new purpose included:

1. Assist with organizing and reorganizing of Community Councils;
2. Act as a resource and information center for Community Councils;
3. Sponsor conventions and workshops;
4. Provide communications between councils;
5. Work towards coordination between the Municipality of Anchorage and Community Councils and;
6. Assist with enforcing the rights of Community Councils and citizens as outlined in the charter of the Municipality of Anchorage.

Board membership changed to voting members being representatives of each recognized council, non-voting members from organizing areas and advisory members.

The volunteer of the year was Gary Thurlow.

Councils recognized in 1977 included North Mountain View, Spenard, Russian Jack Park, Hillside East, Downtown, Old Seward/Oceanview, Girdwood Valley, North Star and Taku/Campbell.

## **1978**

This year a proposal by the Councils was adopted by the Municipal Assembly where the Community Councils contacted to provide services to the Municipality.

"It is proposed that this program be administered by contract to the Federation as an incorporated agency. The Federation is a non-partisan organization. Every recognized council has a voting seat on the Board and every organizing council has a non-voting seat. The Board does not direct the action of any council, but meetings serve as an opportunity for councils to share information, resources and common concerns. Participation on the Board is not mandated in order for any council to use the materials, office or resources furnished by the staff; and staff works for the councils...In addition, it eliminates the duplication taking place between the Municipal and Federation efforts by combining and streamlining the function of the two."

Community Council defined:

- Responsibilities of the Municipality to councils;
- Responsibilities of the councils to the Municipality;
- Responsibilities of council leaders to the council;

Responsibilities of council members; and  
Responsibilities of the councils to each other.

The appropriation spent on services to councils was now managed by the councils rather than the administration as had been previously done.

The revision of the Getting the Word Out Workbook was completed.

The VISTA project was changed to emphasize working more directly with a few councils. The Federation was now operating with increased volunteer support from the community. A new VISTA this year was Rebecca Graham.

The administration, under the special direction of Municipal Manager Doug Weiford, initiated regular monthly meetings with community councils. The purposes of the meetings were:

1. To increase the flow of information between councils and the administration;
2. To build better understanding and;
3. To solve any problems should they arise.

The Federation's role was to help establish the agenda for the meetings by coordinating suggested topics from the councils.

The Federation of Community Councils obtained a non-profit mailing permit which reduced the cost of Community Council mailings from 9.5 cents per piece to 2.4 cents per piece.

The Community Council page, featuring what's happening in Community Council, meeting dates and announcements, was initiated on a once a month basis in both newspapers.

Volunteers of the year were Pegeen Herman and Bill Miernyk.

In June the program moved to new, spacious offices at 801 W. Fireweed Lane. The new program provided for offices in which councils could conveniently and less expensively do publicity materials. Complete reproduction equipment was available to help councils produce newsletters, flyers or letters.

The Federation of Community Councils received national attention by having their Citizen Effectiveness Workbook reviewed by a national magazine, Grantsmanship, and having the Director invited to participate as a resource person in a National Conference on Neighborhoods in Portland, Oregon.

Councils previously recognized: Airport Heights, Eklutna Valley, University Area

and Tudor Park, expanding their boundaries.

Councils organized in 1978 were Mid-Hillside, Upper Rabbit Creek Road, Abbott Loop, Huffman/O'Malley and Rogers Park.

Councils were now maturing, flexing their muscles, and recognizing the power they Has earned. Now there was a Community Council Center to provide them with the resources needed to increase the level of involvement and effectiveness.