

City Chandler, Arizona

Congress of Neighborhoods

San Marcos Resort, Chandler
January 29, 2005

Introduction

The Mayor and City Council of the City of Chandler invited representatives from City neighborhoods and home owner associations to attend a Congress of Neighborhoods on January 29, 2005 at the San Marcos Resort. About 80 residents attended the ½ day dialogue session. Why a Congress of Neighborhoods? At the beginning of the day, the Mayor welcomed the attendees with the call to begin a dialogue about the future of Chandler’s neighborhoods. He noted that the Congress was an open forum for the public to share ideas with the Council to better inform policy discussions regarding neighborhood issues. Attached to this report is a brief PowerPoint presentation that illustrates the flow of the day. Also attached is a copy of the Mayor’s introductory comments. Both are important to review along with this summary to allow the material presented below to fit well into a context. I included a few photos from the day. They were taken with a camera that did not adjust well to low light. However, I chose to leave them in as they represent some of the key activities and volume of ideas generated.

con·gress
Pronunciation:
'kă[ng]-gr&s
also -r&s, British
usually 'kă[ng]-
"gres
Function: *noun*
Etymology:
Latin
congressus, from
congrēdi to
come together,
from *com-* +
gradi to go --
more at
1 a : the act or
action of coming
together and
meeting
2 : an association
usually made up
of delegates
from constituent
organizations

Discussions

The morning moved at a good pace with the Mayor’s welcome and introduction, a presentation by Brian Bosshardt regarding the Chandler’s Office of Neighborhood Programs and the support it provides and a presentation by Cynthia Dunham regarding the educational and convening resources available through the Leadership Centre. The core of the morning session was the work done at a dozen tables to address three important questions that would give sense of the current state of neighborhoods and HOA’s in Chandler and provide fuel for more detailed discussion at future Congress sessions. (NOTE: There was no table #3 due to some consolidation.)

Discussion Topic #1:

How Is Your Neighborhood Doing?

- A. What makes your neighborhood special?*
- B. What are the greatest challenges facing your neighborhood?*

Table 1

- A.
 - Facilities – parks/ponds/trails

neighborhood

s

Pronunciation:

'nA-b&r-"hud

Function: *noun*

1 : the quality or state of being

neighbors (the people living near one another)

2 : a section lived in by neighbors and usually having distinguishing characteristics

- Space design - layout
- Proximity to freeways

B.

- Problem residents vs. problem renters
- Speed of traffic
- Traffic congestion
- Parking on secondary roads
- Lack of police presence

Table 2

A.

- People
- Location
- Diversity
- City Services
- Common Interests

B.

- Traffic
- Lack participation
- Uncontrolled rentals
- Legislation
- Nearby development

Table 4

A.

- HOA
- People – involvement; personalities
- Historical – living history; 75 year old neighborhood
- Volunteerism
- Location/size

B.

- Maintenance
- Rentals – investors buying out; not loving in neighborhood
- Utility easement issues
- Costs – insurance
- Apathy – people getting involved

Table 5

A.

- New growth
- Established neighborhoods
- Sense of community
- Original homeowners (although some renters too)
- Good neighbors and involvement
- Small
- Diversity

- B.
- No new development (downtown location)
 - City involvement – leadership help in developing neighborhood HOA setup
 - Diversity
 - Rental Compliance to HOA
 - Parking (disabled; on/off property)
 - Disengaged homeowners
 - Appearances/upkeep – common areas, as well as yards
 - Loud music
 - Nonresident interference (stressing resources)
 - Revitalization (need help revitalizing neighborhood)

Table 6

- A.
- Communication among neighbors
 - People who live there
 - Keeping and creating lines of communication open b/w the HOA and the City
 - Common interest and location – school, shopping, product, property values
 - Proper planning for the long term goal of the HOA (10-20 year plan)
- B.
- Renters – problems w/ enforcing CC&R's
 - Planning for aging communities
 - Nuisance noise, pets, etc.
 - City code enforcement
 - Late fees of assessments – city/state/county laws should reflect the HOA's CC&R's

Table 7

- A.
- Family/community involvement
 - Well maintained aesthetics
 - Neighborhood amenities
 - Good leadership
 - Open/available communication
- B.
- Rentals/pride of ownership
 - CCR/Application and interpretation
 - Communication w/ the city
 - Overall apathy – lack of participation
 - Compliance

Table 8

A.

- Diversity – economic, cultural, age
- Common area to meet
- Leadership
- Dues
- Amenities

B.

- Board training
- Community involvement
- Rentals
- City services
- Legislation
- Management companies
- Lack of place to gather
- Clear CC&R's
- Developed transition to HOA

Table 9

A.

- Location – historical
- Population diversity – age, ethnicity, interests
- Dealing w/ new issues w/ past experiences
- I live there!!
- New vs. old; gated vs. non-gated

B.

- Getting positive, active participation
- Preparing for aging common areas (reserves)
- Finding experienced, qualified board members
- Compliance to CC&R's
- Absentee ownership

Table 10

A.

- Diversity
- Location
- Community involvement
- Sense of neighborhood
- Initiative by HOA and communities

B.

- Turnover – rentals
- Safety – police, vandalism
- Transportation – roads, public transportation
- Management issues – i.e. property management companies
- Involvement

Table 11

A.

- Warm, friendly community
- Close to services; employment; transportation; downtown
- Influx of new people
- Children
- Diversity of design and lifestyle
- Size of community – small, number of units, affordable
- Unique/horses/irrigation/change of families (cycle)
- Ethnic diversity

B.

- Investors buying and leasing
- Graffiti
- Collection of HOA dues
- Neighborhood traffic
- Size of neighborhood
- Isolation/ lack of social interaction
- Stray animals
- Neighbors don't interact

Table 12

A.

- Our people (economic, ethnic, and age diversity)
- Desire to make things better
- Structure of neighborhood
- Location
- Gated or non-gated

B.

- Communication
- Participation (getting people involved can be difficult)
- Reaching goals
- Environmental efficiency
- Management company improvements
- Board transitions (training)
- Rentals

Table 13

A.

- Parks/open space
- Community garden
- Community events
- Environment/wildlife
- Neighbors

B.

- Meeting neighbors – getting people involved

- More involvement by City w/ HOA's – legal issues; management companies
- Empty school sites – building deadlines
- Community maintenance
- Surviving build out
- Signage - lack of enforcement

Discussion Topic #2:

What Will Make It Even Better?

A. What do you believe needs to be done by the residents and associations to strengthen your neighborhood?

B. What do you believe the City can do to assist in strengthening your neighborhood?

Table 1

A.

- Lack of participation
- Be more active/proactive in the community
- Local welcome-wagon
- Fight restrictive legislation (state)

B.

- City monitor bills in state legislature that impacts HOA's
- Forum for exchange of info – management companies, landscape
- Enforce dog do-do laws
- Form of escalation when city services are not getting done
- Stronger community police presence

Table 2

A.

- Participation
- Train and education of CC&R's
- Increase community activities
- Improve perception of HOA

B.

- Legislation
- Need regular Congress meeting
- Balance of City economics and HOA needs/concerns

Table 4

A.

- More involvement by residents/members
- More social involvement
- Consistency in enforcing HOA rules
- Neighborhood watch programs

- Keeping neighborhood informed/educated – social activities and security/safety
- B.
- City orientation for new HOA board members
 - Seminars by City to residents on starting HOA's, neighborhood associations, insurance, sharing collection methods, etc.; email communication b/w neighborhood and HOA
 - Better notification of changes affecting neighborhood – easements, highways, roads, etc.
 - City neighborhood services to be more pro-active in traditional/older neighborhoods
 - Better publicize City programs like: Police beat meetings, NPO, and Grants program

Table 5

- A.
- Build resident relationships – “meet and greet”
 - Resident neighborhood empowerment
 - Build a good sense of community
 - Block watch
- B.
- Acknowledgement of both good and bad – i.e. postcard, door hanger, return phone calls, timely response
 - Offer resources for assistance
 - Need code enforcement in older neighborhoods – inspectors to be proactive; both residence and business
 - Open channels of communication
 - More police presence

Table 6

- A.
- Getting non-board members involved
 - Getting the BEAT meetings to be the common thread b/w HOA and non-HOA residents – i.e. open communication b/w all parties
- B.
- The City and Chandler residents (HOA and non-HOA) need to have a common mission statement!
 - The City can help remove the negative images of HOA
 - City to notify HOA when a project is to be done in right-of-way

Table 7

- A.
- Education of new board members

- Stagger terms (balance
 - Social gatherings (ex: using fines for good things/rewards)
 - More personal contact b/w board members and residents
 - Educating and welcoming new residents
- B.
- Stronger enforcement w/ neighborhood services
 - Transition guidelines for builders
 - Recourse options, post-transition (developer needs to stand behind the property)
 - City involvement w/ HOA – more personal contact (maybe Crystal)
 - Legal boundaries b/w HOA/City/State

Table 8

- A.
- Communication – block watch, be a good neighbor, fire trucks and cop cars
 - Improve property management services
 - Increase community involvement
 - Board training and membership
- B.
- Developer/builder oversight
 - City services – participation in HOA meetings
 - Increased police presence
 - City website or email tool for HOA's – reduced duplication of effort
 - Oversight of property management companies

Table 9

- A.
- More active involvement of residents at meetings
 - Use outside resources to improve communication within community
 - More visibility of HOA members to residents
 - Interaction w/ other HOA's for feedback
 - Arrange neighborhood social events
- B.
- More active involvement between city and community
 - Increase visibility of neighborhood programs
 - Compile master list of HOA's – send to each HOA
 - Brochure to all communities of available city resources
 - Provide support/guidance on how to maintain effective reserves

Table 10

A.

- Accountability – HOA; management companies
- Increased involvement – scheduled events, attendance
- Training board members
- Consistent communication – web, newsletter

B.

- Make neighborhood services accountable for their job
- Follow through on mandate of requirement to have HOA's – i.e. require and subsidize HOA board member training; CC&R's need to be consistent among all neighborhoods (in sync w/ City codes, etc.); regulate management companies
- Notify residents about changes to general plan!
- Facilitate legislative concerns

Table 11

A.

- Communication and involvement
- Newsletter, website, list serve
- Get to know your neighbors – focus on safety and security
- Keep up-to-date on who your neighbors are
- Block watch organization

B.

- Web space and server access
- Continue neighborhood forums/congress
- Formal registration of rental housing – require annual inspection
- Public safety resources – neighborhood presentations by police/fire
- More police patrols
- Outreach to neighborhoods w/out HOA's – assistance w/ organizing
- System for monitoring HOA management companies
- Conducting neighborhood safety audits

Table 12

A.

- Communication
- Involvement
- Social gatherings
- Wireless internet access
- Education through newsletters

B.

- Website link
- Weekly updates in print publications
- Support neighborhood programs
- Community outreach – fire, police, mayor, council
- More support for the neighborhood programs

Table 13

A.

- Communication
- Get community involved
- Education of B.O.D.
- More social events
- Enforcement of rules and regulations

B.

- More programs like today
- Area to get information – resource list
- Assist w/community events
- Cooperation on state legislation re: HOA bills
- Resource availability provided by city

Discussion Topic #3:

Let's Get Specific: How Do We Proceed From Here?

What specific steps should be taken in the next year to address the well being of Chandler neighborhoods?

Table 1

- Upcoming legislation affecting HOA's communicated through website, Ch. 11, emails to enable neighborhoods to be proactive
- Enhancing communication among HOA's through neighborhood office
- City partnering to fund HOA board members participation in board development
- Information on what resources City has for neighborhoods

Table 2

- New HOA member orientation training (mandatory) – routine; City sponsored
- Turnover regulations (City ord); builder to HOA
- City standardized CC&R's (baseline)
- Require HOA board member registration w/ City
- HOA/CCR guideline resource website

Table 4

- Open/effective personal communication w/in the neighborhood – life events; social events
- Regular “walk-about” – interactive communication w/ neighbors; maintain “look” of neighborhood; listen to concerns/positions of people
- Social gatherings during the year – food/picnic; garage sales; night out
- Consistent maintenance/upkeep - evaluation of neighborhood and grounds
- Maintain positive financial goals and awareness of City activities and community help programs

Table 5

- Utilize and implement available resources
- Canvas our neighborhoods
- Establish community events (HOA, multiple HOA’s)
- Educating of neighbors
- Foster and encourage neighborhood committees

Table 6

- Quarterly forum of HOA’s board members to help resolve common problems within the communities
- Chandler needs its own Animal Control
- City program for rating community’s neighborhoods
- Mandatory registration of rental properties to the City
- Property management guidelines and regulations

Table 7

- Contact list of other HOA’s/leaders
- Regular communication b/w City and HOA/management companies – monthly, via email, including meetings w/ individual HOA’s
- Registry of management companies for information flow
- Self analysis of own HOA’s – right/wrong

Table 8

- Develop transition guidelines and regulations for builders/developers
- Develop standards for property management companies
- Develop mentoring program for HOA boards
- Establish a committee(s) to develop a plan to implement the top 3 issues discussed today
- Congress of Neighborhoods follow-up on a quarterly basis

Table 9

- Establish regular schedule of association meetings (Congress) w/ member representation
- City involvement w/ management companies to adhere to specific standards for HOA's
- Evaluation of City support services – i.e. police/fire support
- Available neighborhood City services communicated to each HOA
- Quarterly or periodic newsletters on HOA and neighborhood issues

Table 10

- Council form HOA advisory committee to make recommendations to begin work on CC&R's and items under 2-B
- Expand/rethink notification process for changes to general plan, etc.
- Schedule regular Neighborhood Congress meetings
- HOA – hold gatherings w/ other HOA's in local area
- Invite neighborhood services to HOA meetings/functions

Table 11

- Regular neighborhood forums – quarterly the first year; formalize community-wide organization of neighborhoods
- Better communication – make City Scope a communication tool rather than propaganda piece
- Opportunity for community earlier in the rezoning process – make zoning signs more readable
- Provide opportunity for neighborhood input into City budgeting and CIP process
- Program for monitoring HOA management companies

Table 12

- Police doing police work
- Link HOA websites to City
- Safety and security for neighborhood
- City involvement in HOA's
- Quarterly Congress meetings

Table 13

- Establish information clearing house
- Regular meetings that focus on Chandler's neighborhood issues
- Set up workshop w/ City and HOA's in regards to legislative issues and positions

- More rapid completion of infrastructure
- More safety/security programs such as free CPR classes

Summary

While it is very difficult to summarize a powerful conversation among 80+ people with different ideas, hopes and interests, it is important to seek common themes to simplify further consideration of major areas of collective interest. The following are summarized without the benefit of sufficient time to explore variations on the themes but with a general acceptance of the validity of the summations after review by the Congress attendees. In other words, the following is pretty accurate but calls for further thought and consideration. Further, the most important outcome of this first Congress of Neighborhoods is not so much the details of specific interest as it is the willingness and ability to gather, have good conversations about the future of Chandler, to get to know each other better, to share perspectives and find common ground and to look forward to future discussions to continue all the above. Of course, producing results is an imperative but those will come as the process of dialogue and responsible policy formation continue to progress in favor of the well-being of neighborhoods.

Question 1A – *What makes your neighborhood special?*

1. Our people – neighbors/friendly/diversity/shared
2. Unique character – location/horses/etc.
3. Amenities – parks/common space/shopping
4. Well planned
5. Variety – gated/non-gated/density

Question 1B – *What are the greatest challenges facing your neighborhoods?*

1. Renters
2. Management companies
3. Apathy – residents not involved/problem residents/hard to engage
4. Board issues – training/consistency
5. City services – public safety/oversight/zoning

Question 2A – *What needs to be done by the residents and associations to strengthen your neighborhood?*

1. Improve board skills – accountability/system
2. Communications – broad topic inside and outside
3. Resident relations – educate/social/welcome
4. Link w/ non-HOA – form alliance/share
5. Encourage resident and city involvement

Question 2b – *what can the city do to assist in strengthening your neighborhood?*

1. Common mission
2. Legislative leadership
3. Code enforcement

4. Support neighborhoods – programs/visibility/involved
5. Oversight of developers/builders – support concerns

Question 3 - *What specific steps should be taken in the next year to address the well being of Chandler neighborhoods?*

1. Gather regularly to discuss issues in detail and to continue this form of dialogue.
2. Develop ways to interact and communicate – inform/register/orient/seminars
3. Take lead in legislative issues
4. Follow through on today's discussion
5. Commit to strengthening systems that connect interests/missions

Conclusion

I believe the first Chandler Congress of neighborhoods was quite successful. The people who responded to the Mayor's invitation came prepared to wear the multiple hats of individual citizen, neighborhood representative and citizen of the larger community of Chandler. The attendees made it very clear that this was time well spent and they expect to do something like this regularly. The degree of support the Mayor and Council received from the Congresses makes it very important to be certain that information exchange loop is open and that attendees are kept apprised of what happens next. Future Congresses can blend general inquiry with specific problems to address showing both. As time goes on you can expect to see expansion of the self-selecting attendees and are encouraged to continually expand the invitees to cover all associations and neighborhoods. Perhaps you can add a small set of displays and a few resource staff to share information in an informal 'fair-like' fashion that can be set up to be accessed before the session, at breaks and after the session. There are many variations on the theme once you set a pattern of periodic gatherings. It has been a pleasure to serve you in this most worthwhile effort.

Respectfully submitted,

Richard A. Bowers