



COMMUNITY VISION: Dayton, Ohio Has Its Priority Boards in Order

City of Dayton **Priority Boards**

The voyage of discovery is not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.
Marcel Proust

By Ed Democracy

Since 1975, Dayton, Ohio's 166,000 residents, in 65 neighborhoods, have charted their common future via it's 7 Priority Boards. While many other "model cities" were busy hacking and slashing mercilessly, Dayton was doing the real deal. They have built and maintained a real, live, honest-to-goodness infrastructure of the people, by the people, and for the people. It would be hard to imagine a better model. The Citizen's Handbook offers several of the best such models known. The following is their summary of **Dayton's Priority Board System**:

From the **Citizen's Handbook** (www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook):

Structure

The City of Dayton has established 7 Priority Boards across the city as the "official voice of Dayton's neighborhoods". Each Priority Board must elect its members and must ensure that each neighborhood within the Priority Board area is represented. The representation plan varies from Board to Board but all representatives must be registered voters. The usual term is three years. Priority Board members participate in vari-

ous committees and task forces as the official representative of the neighborhood. There is a Division of neighborhood Affairs which supports the work of Priority Boards and neighborhood groups. Boundaries for Priority Boards are established by the city on the basis of precincts or electoral boundaries. City commissioners are elected on a city-wide basis.

Scope of Activities

A resolution of the City Commission (council) established Priority Boards "as the official voice of Dayton's neighborhoods, although the City Commission carries the ultimate responsibility for public policy decisions." Activities have ranged from budget recommendations to liquor license renewals to zoning decisions to neighborhood park design.

Priority Boards make recommendations to the Commission and City Administration on planning and zoning decisions; responsiveness and effectiveness of city services; appointments to boards and agencies which provide services to neighborhoods; Liquor License renewal, transfers and other changes; surplus land sales.

Priority Boards also "identify and present the neighborhood view as to

which public services require continuation and which could be cut or reduced; make recommendations as to neighborhood variations in service or expansions as appropriate; review and comment on proposed plans to reduce City services". Priority Boards are the official information dissemination vehicle for the City as well as other public agencies and community groups. Boards also undertake a wide range of self-help projects that vary from neighborhood to neighborhood.

Each Priority Board sends a representative to the Community Development Block Grant Task Force who make recommendations to the City Manager on the application for and disbursement of federal Community Development Block Grants (CDBG).

Resources

Each Priority Board is provided a staff complement of 3 mid-management staff and 1 full-time clerical position by the City of Dayton. Each Priority Board has a site office equipped with computers, photocopiers, fax machines, etc., which are available to neighborhood groups for newsletter production. Distribution of material is the responsibility of the neighborhood. Community Development Block

Grants may be targeted to specific neighborhoods or Priority Board areas. neighborhoods are required to match funds according to the nature of the project and the neighborhoods' needs.

History and Comments

Priority Boards were established in Dayton in 1975 as Dayton's citizen participation vehicle. The City Manager played a key role pursuing this initiative. The Priority Boards are now an established partner in doing business in Dayton. The city sees citizen participation in decision-making as essential "to encourage a sense of control and self-determination". The city sees the Priority Boards as providing a useful service to civic departments in channeling information on the whole range of city government activities.

"As a result of the Priority Boards, Dayton city government has been more responsive to its neighborhoods. City government officials have been in a better position to understand what citizens want and expect, while Dayton residents have developed a greater appreciation for the capacities in City government."

FMI: www.can-so.org/chartingdemocracy

HELPFUL LINKS

- The Priority Board System** www.cityofdayton.org/html/priority_board_intro.asp
- Overview of Dayton's Priority Boards** www.cityofdayton.org/html/priority_board_overview.asp
- Neighborhood Leadership Institute** www.cityofdayton.org/planning/CP_NLI.asp
- Department of Planning & Community Development** www.cityofdayton.org/planning
- CITIZENS' HANDBOOK A Guide to Building Community** www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook
- Models of neighborhood Participation in Local Government** www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook/models/M_Models.html
- Dayton, Ohio - PRIORITY BOARDS** www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook/models/M_08_dayton.html
- COMMUNITY VISIONING & IMPLEMENTATION** www.sustainable.org/creating/vision.html
- CommunityVIZ** www.communityviz.org

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MHNO, 92 Congress St., Portland, ME 04101 **Thank you!**

