

NEIGHBORHOOD GROUP GUIDE **ORGANIZING NEIGHBORHOOD GROUPS**

One of the things that have always made Woodbridge such an outstanding community to live in is our strong neighborhoods. As our lives have gotten more hectic, we are at risk of losing our neighborhood spirit. A neighborhood is not a geographical boundary or a group of homes, but rather a group of people and families who live within close proximity to each other, who know each other and who care about each other. The Woodbridge Township Neighborhood Group Program is designed to strengthen the ties within neighborhood.

This guide will provide your group with a list of ideas that you can start with. Each group will be different, some may be purely social, some may be cause specific, and some make take all of these ideas and expand on them. Whatever it is that you decide to do together, doesn't really matter; just do it together!

Getting started is not all that hard.

- ❖ It starts with one person who decides that he/she wants to get this program underway in your neighborhood and starts talking with a few other neighbors about it.
- ❖ It helps to have one person who is designated as the neighborhood leader. This person will coordinate the activities and serve as your liaison with the Woodbridge Township Office of Neighborhood Groups.
- ❖ Pick a date, time and place to get together to hold your first meeting. Distribute flyers to all of your neighbors and start to mention it as you see others.
- ❖ At your first meeting, get to know each other.
- ❖ Go over the guide and see what you would like to do next. Not everybody may want to the same thing - the important thing is that everybody does something.
- ❖ Set a date for the next meeting or activity.

As you move forward with your neighborhood group the Township will provide you with the following services:

- ❖ Assist residents in organizing neighborhood groups and facilitate ongoing activities if desired.
- ❖ A contact person who can provide you with any services from the Township that your group may need and schedule meetings with Township officials if desired. The contact is Caroline Ehrlich, Chief of Staff at caroline.ehrlich@twp.woodbridge.nj.us
- ❖ A Neighborhood Group link on the website where you can download the Neighborhood Guide and have an "idea exchange" between neighborhoods
- ❖ Maintain a contact list so residents can identify their neighborhood group and who to get in touch with.

- ❖ Welcome packets for new residents
- ❖ Copy machines for meeting notices and newsletters (only for registered neighborhood groups)
- ❖ Organize neighborhood groups competitions
- ❖ A Mayor, a Town Council and administrative staff who are more than willing to attend your meetings, participate in your activities and help your neighborhoods endeavors.

All you need to do to partake in these services is to register your group through Mayor McCormac's office.

NEIGHBORLY NEIGHBORHOOD ACTIVITIES

More than anything neighborhoods are about people getting together and having fun, helping each other and looking out for each other. In the end neighborhoods are not a group of houses but a group of people. This section focuses on activities that you can do for each other and with each other.

- ❖ Block parties
- ❖ Welcome Wagon-As new neighbors move in, welcome them to the neighborhood and the Neighborhood Group. The Township can provide you with a Welcome to Woodbridge packet that has a CD about the town and provides a directory of Township services.
- ❖ Read together-The Township and the Board of Education have partnered together to form Woodbridge Reads. To learn more about this program go to www.woodbridgereads.org.
 - Form book clubs
 - Form reading clubs when you and your children get together and read out loud to each other
 - Do book swaps
 - Take trips to the library together
- ❖ Game nights-Hold Neighborhood Group get-togethers to play games of your choice from Trivia Pursuit to Wii Bowling.
- ❖ Share your talents-Once you start getting to know each other, you will be surprised to learn about what each other does, what their skills are and what hobbies they enjoy. Discuss ways that you can build on each other's individual interests and incorporate them into what you are doing as a neighborhood.
- ❖ Volunteer as a neighborhood-Go beyond your neighborhood and see what programs need volunteers in the community and volunteer together.

- ❖ Adopt an elderly or disabled neighbor-Odds are in every neighborhood there is at least person living in their home that needs help but doesn't want to ask or know whom to ask for help. Throughout this guide you will see suggestions on how you can include helping you elderly neighbor as part of your group's activities. Other things you can do are:
 - Shovel their snow
 - Have children in the neighborhood work on a schedule for taking their garbage cans to and from the street
 - If they would like company. Take your children to their home and let them read to each other. (stay with your child)
 - Invite them to your social events
 - Taking part in Tooling Around the Town which is an annual Township program that is held on the third Saturday of April when volunteers get together to fix up the homes of elderly and disabled people who cannot do it themselves. By taking part in this program, their home gets beautified and so does your neighborhood. Reach out to the Town Hall Coordinator to see if the resident qualifies for the program.
 - Township services are available for the elderly and disabled. Reach out to the Town Hall Coordinator and she will get the Division on Aging in touch with the resident.

HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOOD ACTIVITIES

Regular exercise fights chronic disease and increases wellbeing. Exercising with friends and neighbors makes it more fun and brings an important layer of social support. Exercising with your children leads to healthier children and families and fights one of the biggest problems in our country today-childhood obesity.

Decide which forms of exercise your group likes to do and a time that is convenient for most of you. Make a schedule and a time and place to meet and just do it and make sure you have fun!

If you are walking, biking or running together, you can pick a destination like a local playground or restaurant. Additionally, the Township will assist by finding a walkable mile within your neighborhood and marking it for you. You can assist the Township by letting us know about obstacles to walking like overgrown shrubs and lack of sidewalks. To that end the Township will provide you with tools to do a Walkability Audit to the local schools and neighborhood destinations.

One of the healthiest and most enjoyable exercises you can do is organize a Walking School Bus. Instead of standing on the corner waiting for the bus, get together as a group and walk your children to school. You can set up schedules and have the adults

take turns supervising the walkers. Most importantly, you can help your neighbors whose work schedules keep them from participating by including their children anyway. The Township and the Board of Education would be more than happy to work with you in the formation of Walking School Buses.

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

- ❖ Walking together
 - Family walks
 - Group dog walking
 - Walking clubs
- ❖ Measured mile
- ❖ Walking school bus
- ❖ Neighborhood walkability audit
- ❖ Bike together
- ❖ Run together
- ❖ Work out together-Purchase or share your workout DVD's and meet in someone's home.
- ❖ Neighborhood healthy outing-bowling, miniature golf, swimming pool, the Community Center
- ❖ Exercising clubs
- ❖ Community Center neighborhood group discounts
- ❖ Neighborhood group competitions-Use the Neighborhood Group link on the Woodbridge Township website to challenge other neighborhoods. Possible challenges could be which neighborhood takes the most steps or loses the most weight.
- ❖ Take turns walking your elderly neighbors. Even if it's only a half a block, they need the exercise, fresh air and social contact.

The other half of leading a healthy lifestyle is eating wisely. Neighbors can encourage each other to make good food choices.

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

- ❖ Sharing healthy recipes
- ❖ Pot luck healthy dinners
- ❖ Make an agreement that when neighborhood children are playing at your house that you will only serve healthy snacks and beverages
- ❖ If you've identified an elderly person living alone in your neighborhood who has difficulty going to the supermarket, take turns doing the shopping for him/her when you do yours. Make sure that they are eating healthy too. SUSTAINABLE NEIGHBORHOOD ACTIVITIES

Woodbridge Township is proud to have been named by the League of Municipalities as the “Sustainability Champions” in the State of New Jersey. Preserving our environment and shrinking our carbon footprint can be done through town wide efforts and individual efforts. However, some of the greatest steps toward sustainability can be achieved through Neighborhood Group efforts.

SUSTAINABLE ACTIVITIES

❖ Tree Assessment and Planting

Trees are not only beautiful, but they are economical. They can lower your heating bills in the winter by 10-20% and your electricity bills in the summer by 15%-35%. Trees can increase the value of your property by 15%. But when it comes to the environment, trees are priceless. They purify the air, play a major role in storm water management and combat greenhouse gasses.

You can start off by surveying your neighborhood to see where you have trees and where trees could be planted. This is a great activity for families. The children can draw maps of their street with houses and trees.

Once you have determined how many trees you need and where you would like them to go, reach out to the Township and the Mayor and Public Works will see if your neighborhood qualifies to be part of our Urban Forestry Program

Neighborhood Groups can get together and buy small trees themselves and have planting parties

❖ Neighborhood wildflower garden

If there are vacant lots or areas in your neighborhood, planting a wildlife garden can be a fun neighborhood activity that will bring lasting benefits.

Sustainable Lawns

The charm of Woodbridge Township neighborhoods is our well manicured lawns. Neighborhood Groups can jointly decide that by making a few lawn maintenance changes they can keep that charm but be more sustainable.

- ❖ Hydroponic Gardening
- ❖ Composting
- ❖ Stream clean up-If you have a stream that goes through your neighborhood, hold regular stream clean ups. Contact Town Hall prior to doing this and we will provide you with the necessary assistance
- ❖ Carpooling
- ❖ Reuse-bartering; hand-me-downs

- ❖ Join the Green Team as a neighborhood
- ❖ Join the Mobility sub committee
- ❖ Take the Low Carbon Diet-“The Low Calorie Diet” is workbook written by David Gershon that walks individuals through a step-by-step process, from calculating one’s current carbon footprint, to implementing emissions saving measures, to tracking one progress along the way.
- ❖ Join the Green Neighborhood Challenge-Households within the Neighborhood Group can challenge each other as they go through the “The Low Calorie Diet” to see how has most success. Additionally neighborhood groups can hold a friendly competition with other neighborhood groups.

NEIGHBORHOOD AND GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITES

The formation of Neighborhood Groups provides a direct pipeline to Town Hall. Each neighborhood has its own set of issues but often does not know whom to go to in order to find solutions. Concerns from crime to garbage pick-up to road maintenance can be addressed in an informal setting in your living room with your neighbors, the Mayor and the appropriate Department head. Even if you are a neighborhood with no issues but just want to get to know the Mayor or find out how you can more involved as a neighborhood in community projects, you can schedule a time for Mayor McCormac to visit your neighborhood. In fact, his goal is to meet at least once with every neighborhood group in town. To go a step further, feel free to let the Mayor’s office know about activities that you are having where the Mayor can join in the fun. For example, if you have formed a dog walking club, the Mayor and his dog Wizard would have a great time walking with you. Good government only works with good communication. Bringing “Town Hall” right to your neighborhood makes that happen.

EXAMPLES OF NEIGHBORHOOD AND GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS

- ❖ Meet you elected officials-Mayor John McCormac and the Township Council will come to a neighborhood meeting so you can share your concerns and ideas with them.
- ❖ Meet Township Department Directors-If you would like to get a better understanding of any of our government services, the Department Director would be glad to attend you neighborhood meeting and answer any of your questions. These can concerns can vary from garbage pickup to how do you get a permit and what do you need a permit for.
- ❖ Neighborhood watch-If you have concerns about burglaries or any form of crime the Police Department will work with you to form a neighborhood watch and give you simple tips on how to make your home safer.
- ❖ Neighborhood speeding-The Township will work with you by putting up electronic speed measuring devices and if needed speed traps. Often though, speeding is done by people who live in the neighborhood. As part as the Neighborhood

- ❖ Group members can agree not to speed. Homemade lawn signs can be as effective as speed traps with reminders like, “Neighbors Drive 25” and “Thanks for not Speeding”.
- ❖ Green Neighborhood-The Township will help you facilitate actions that will help to reduce your neighborhoods carbon footprint. We supply materials, ideas and expertise.