

Protecting Their Turf

Neighborhood associations grow in the City of Trees

By Bob Evancho

There's nothing like a little conflict to bring Boiseans together.

Acknowledging the seemingly interminable growth in their city and subscribing to the notion that there's strength in numbers, Boiseans are mobilizing to protect the tranquility, safety and quality of their common living space. The result?

Neighborhood organizations are sprouting everywhere in the City of Trees.

Whether they're rising up against urban blight, unwanted development or excessive traffic, these groups have become effective neighborhood watchdogs and influential players in the city's political arena.

That's not to say such groups aren't sometimes formed simply for the betterment of already ideal surroundings, says Marianne Konvalinka, head of Boise's Neighborhood Alliance. "But typically," she says, "Boise's neighborhood associations have been formed in direct response to a single issue that is of concern to a particular neighborhood."



CHUCK SCHIEER PHOTOS

Or as Boise City Council member Anne Hausrath succinctly puts it: "Neighborhoods tend to come together when they think they're about to be stepped on."

Call it what you want: citizen involvement, neighborhood activism or civic awareness, the marshaling of neighborhood troops in Boise has led to a rapid expansion of such organizations in Idaho's capital city. Five years ago there were four neighborhood associations in Boise; today there are 29. And as Boise grows, the numbers are likely to increase.

"More people are becoming concerned about and looking out for where they live and where their children play," says Hausrath, wife of Boise State mathematics and computer science professor Alan Hausrath. "I think 'quality of life' is an overused term, but it's clear that these associations have been formed by people who want to maintain the livability of the place they have chosen to live."

Hausrath's fellow City Council member Paula Forney agrees. "I think a lot of these associations are forming because they want to protect the character of their neighborhood," she says. "I think more and more people are willing to stand up and say they've made an investment in their home and they consider their neighborhood an investment, too."

"And when you've had growth like we've experienced in Boise, there's always that fear that older, core areas like the North End are going to degenerate. I think neighborhood associations are being formed to make sure that doesn't happen."

So what do these groups do to preserve that livability which makes Boise such a desirable place to reside?

It depends on the burning issue of the day, says Konvalinka, whose Neighborhood Alliance serves as an umbrella association for all 29 organizations. "It's sometimes difficult to keep an association going when there is nothing for [its members] to rally around," she says. But given the many issues inherent in Boise's rapid growth, that's rarely the case, especially in areas where development — proposed or actual — is taking place.

One of the most publicized examples of a neighborhood organization in action was

the East End Neighborhood Association's role in curtailing development of the Morningside Heights subdivision near Castle Rock.

In the early 1990s developers sought permission from the city to build homes on a flat portion of the Castle Rock area adjacent to Quarry View Park — a plan that was met

The developers were eventually granted a permit, however, and began building homes on part of the Castle Rock area in 1996. (Proposed development in the Hulls Gulch area of the foothills met similar resistance from the North End Neighborhood Association a few years earlier. And like the EENA, the North End group mobilized to forestall such plans, coordinated fund-raising efforts and received financial help from the city to purchase some of the land earmarked for development.)

CHUCK SCHEER PHOTO



Dilley, far left, and Hanson, above, led successful neighborhood association efforts.

"I guess you could call it a compromise," says Hanson, who was the EENA's treasurer during the majority of the Castle Rock debate. "Certainly, people on both sides wanted more than what was agreed upon; we certainly wanted our voices to be heard."

"But that one project alone took thousands of volunteer hours during those two years. The frustration and fatigue involved with such an undertaking was unbelievable."

The long hours may deter many citizens

from becoming involved in neighborhood organizations.

But Boise Junior College alumnus Stan Dilley, president of the Franklin-Randolph Bench Neighborhood Association, isn't one of them.

"I agree with the concept that people need to get involved if they want to have an impact on decisions that affect our lives," says the retired pharmaceutical sales representative.

"And it can make a difference. Look at the North End [Boise Neighborhood] Association. It has been working for a long time on traffic control and issues regarding the foothills. That group has an impact on [city government] decisions."

Forney agrees. "I think some of the newer neighborhoods have seen what the North End [Association] has been able to accomplish," she says. "They figure they can take a page out of the North End's book and accomplish similar goals."

With more associations forming and more Boiseans joining those associations, Forney, a BSU alumna, says it's inevitable that those groups will enhance their political clout.

"I've seen a broader cross-section of people getting involved in local issues, and neighborhood associations are one of the primary ways to get involved," she says. "Obviously,

from becoming involved in neighborhood organizations. But Boise Junior College alumnus Stan Dilley, president of the Franklin-Randolph Bench Neighborhood Association, isn't one of them.

"I agree with the concept that people need to get involved if they want to have an impact on decisions that affect our lives," says the retired pharmaceutical sales representative.

"And it can make a difference. Look at the North End [Boise Neighborhood] Association. It has been working for a long time on traffic control and issues regarding the foothills. That group has an impact on [city government] decisions."

Forney agrees. "I think some of the newer neighborhoods have seen what the North End [Association] has been able to accomplish," she says. "They figure they can take a page out of the North End's book and accomplish similar goals."

With more associations forming and more Boiseans joining those associations, Forney, a BSU alumna, says it's inevitable that those groups will enhance their political clout.

They Know Idaho

By Edie Jeffers

When a group of Boiseans realized that local agencies and businesses were going elsewhere in the Northwest to get historical information about their home state, they decided to put their passion for Idaho history to work.

The result: Formation of the Arrowrock Group Inc. The group has strong ties to Boise State — Susan Stacy and Madeline J. Buckendorf are both BSU master's of history alumni; William Tydeman is a BSU adjunct professor and Barbara Perry Bauer is a 1985 history graduate and master's of history student. Elizabeth Jacox is the other member of the Arrowrock.

Named for the historical Idaho dam that was the highest in the world when it was built in 1915, the group does historical research for federal and state agencies, local governments, attorneys, corporations and individuals. With individual expertise in such areas as western land and water issues, urban and regional planning, flood control policy, cultural resource issues and historical records, the five decided that their combined skills would provide clients with an unparalleled source for Idaho historical research.

When the Arrowrock Group does research, it not only documents information about buildings and artifacts, it also learns about people. Stacy says that the way neighborhoods have been developed historically can tell us a lot about the prevailing attitudes during the time of development. "In the North End, which was developed beginning in the late 1800s, the streets

have a definite grid pattern. You can go forever north, forever south, forever east, and forever west," she says. "Compare that with subdivisions that were built in Boise since World War II on the west side of the city where they are designed with curving streets and cul-de-sacs in a kind of defensive posture against the world. That's different from the street design of the earlier part of the century where growth was welcomed."

Past projects include surveys of historic sites and structures in Boise's North End for the city of Boise, the documentation of historic mining sites in Owyhee County for Kinross Mining Co., architectural descriptions in Silver City for Owyhee County, and an oral history of the Hells Canyon area for Idaho Power.

Buckendorf says the group finds itself in many strange places looking for history. "The basement of courthouses are a repository for some of our most important sources of information," she says. "The county clerks often don't know about the early records because they change hands, and nine times out of 10 the early records are in the basement, usually in the furnace rooms."

"You learn where to look for things and you develop a detective instinct," says Buckendorf. "It's the closest to Nancy Drew that I'll ever get." □



Members of the Arrowrock Group. Sitting: William Tydeman and Barbara Perry Bauer. Standing left to right: Susan Stacy, Madeline Buckendorf and Elizabeth Jacox.

CHUCK SCHAFER PHOTO

with those kinds of numbers and with that kind of organization, most of these groups have done their homework before they come before the City Council and they usually are able to make stronger cases."

And such political developments are not exclusive to Boise.

Jim Weatherby, director of Boise State's public affairs program, says neighborhood associations are "a growing phenomenon with increasing political clout, particularly on land-use decisions" in the western United States.

Weatherby, who co-authored a book on the urban West with fellow BSU professor Stephanie Witt, says the increase in the number of neighborhood associations in Boise is similar in some respects to what happened in Portland and Phoenix, both of which experienced similar growth patterns.

"Some people perceive growth as a threat to the quality of life in a neighborhood," he comments. "Because of that I think neighborhood associations are an emerging part of the political scene in several western cities."

As Boise grows, perhaps the biggest concern facing neighborhood groups has become the increase in traffic in residential areas.

During the construction of the Cole-Overland Interchange, members of the Franklin-Randolph Bench Neighborhood Association grew increasingly uneasy about the flow of traffic and speed of those vehicles trying to get from Cole to Overland, or vice versa, through their neighborhood in an attempt to avoid the construction.

The association contacted the Ada County Highway District about the possibility of building speed bumps on Hummel and Brentwood, the two streets in the association's jurisdiction that linked Cole and Overland.

ACHD installed equipment that measured the traffic flow and the speed of those vehicles and determined that Hummel and Brentwood did indeed qualify for the speed bumps.

"It achieved what we were hoping for," reports Dilley. "At last count, the traffic flow decreased by 7 percent and the vehicles' average speed decreased by 5 mph."

Successful crusades like the one led by Dilley illustrate why neighborhood associations will probably grow in political clout, says City Council member Hausrath, who has taught sociology at BSU.

"I think as Boise gets bigger, neighborhood associations are going to play an increasingly important role," she comments. "Because they are closer to their individual concerns and can voice those concerns, they help the city maintain some of its small-town charm, and that is still what many of us value most about living here." □