

Neighborhood Board Retreat Empowers Residents to Achieve Community Goals

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Many residents living within neighborhoods want to establish a sense of community, and get to know one another, but it can be hard to know where to start. The Neighborhood Board Retreat (NBR) was established in 2012 by the City of Charlotte to allow neighborhoods and their leaders to come together to envision their future and establish goals to better serve one another.

The NBR provides a dedicated time, twice a year, for residents to create goals and connect to resources to be able to achieve said goals. This was especially helpful for the Coulwood Hills Community, which has seen an influx of younger people moving into their neighborhood. Striking

the balance of how to reach new residents while maintaining a connection with longtime residents requires strategic planning.

"It was great because already we were headed down that route, but [the NBR] really helped us put it in writing: 'Yes, this is what we want to do this year, and this is how we are going to do it,'" recalled Rhoxie Booth, Treasurer of the Coulwood Community Council.

Within the retreats, neighborhoods are supported as they set Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound (S.M.A.R.T.) goals. Coulwood decided to hone in on three goals: beautification, community engagement, and communication. During the retreat they learned of the City's Neighborhood Matching Grant program, which could help fund their goals. Given that this neighborhood has a voluntary Homeowners Association (HOA), these funds were critical in supporting efforts to better create community among neighbors.



Following the retreat, they earned a \$10,000 matching grant.

"It was really good just to hear about other resources that we had through the City and how we can utilize them. I mean, I would say definitely this year doing the matching grant was huge for us," Booth said. The HOA's biggest struggle is funds, so to have the finances to be able to put on events and improve our communication made a major difference, shared Booth.

The grant helped fund each of their goals set during the retreat. Regarding communication, they were able to pay for coordinated neighborhood signs. For engagement, they were able to fund their monthly event series and even purchased an inflatable screen to be able to host movie night in the park events. For beautification, they were able to add new equipment to the park in the center of their neighborhood, which laid the foundation for them to hire an architect to redesign this area that had not received many updates since the 1960s.



"It's just been great working with the City. We have nothing but praises to say, and our neighborhood is just so thankful for the City's support of us and helping us figure out, and come up with ideas. [City community engagement liaison] Aisha [Abdus-Sabur] has been a great resource to be able to ask lots of different questions," said Booth.

Booth learned of the Neighborhood Board Retreat through the City's Neighborhood Organization Contact List (</HNS/CE/CommunityInfo/Pages/Neighborhood-Organization-Contact-List.aspx>) (NOCL), which provides subscribers with information on grants, special programs, workshops, and more.

Although the retreat she participated in was virtual due to the coronavirus pandemic, the experience was still impactful. "I would say it's definitely worth your time. It was great, we did ours virtually, but it was really good to be able to think through things and all be on the same board . . . or the same page as far as what we were going to do and the direction we were headed," said Booth.

The next cycle of board retreats will begin in February 2022 and will also be virtual due to COVID-19. Following each retreat, neighborhoods will receive a summary from the session to serve as a guide for their workplans. The deadline to apply is January 24. [Learn more and apply here.](#)

All photos were provided courtesy of the Coulwood Hills Community

