

Regional Development and Sustainability Committee Briefing

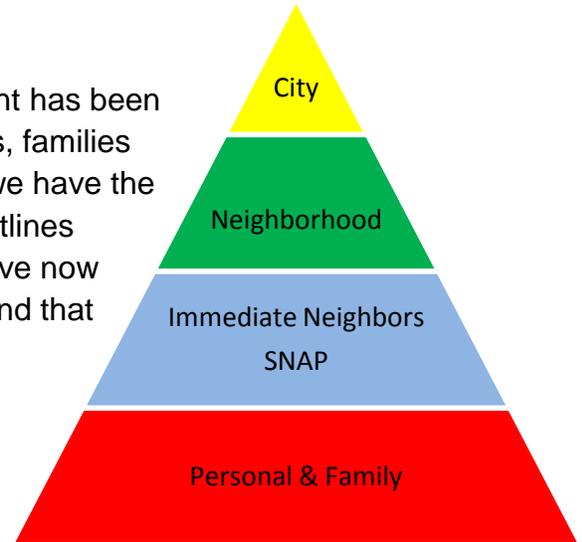
June 4, 2010

Neighborhood District Disaster Planning Initiative

History

For the last 15 years the Office of Emergency Management has been promoting the importance of being prepared as individuals, families and among immediate neighbors. At the city-wide level, we have the Seattle Disaster Readiness and Response Plan, which outlines how the City will operate and respond to disasters. We have now begun filling a gap in preparedness planning in the City, and that is at the community, neighborhood or District Level.

If Seattle were to experience a disaster similar to the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile, the City's response capabilities are likely to be overwhelmed in the first few days. Day-to-day basic services may no longer be available and normal modes of communications will not be functional, meaning that community members will need to rely on each other for extended periods of time until these services are restored. This is will occur between immediate neighbors as well as at the larger community level. Also, with this level of disaster, we will have individuals who step forward to "Help" and those who "Need Help". By preparing at the community level, we can develop plans to bring neighborhood people and resources together to help one another.



Three Pilot Districts

With the recognition that neighborhoods may be isolated for several days following a major disaster, OEM began working with community members in a few areas of the city to help develop or support efforts for District-level emergency preparedness planning, starting with **West Seattle** and **Queen Anne/Magnolia**.

- West Seattle Preparedness planning, led by Cindi Barker, had a vision for how the communities in this area of the City could be better prepared for the type of major earthquake that we know could occur at any time.

- A sub-committee of the Queen Anne/Magnolia District Council took on the challenge from Emergency Management to develop a District wide emergency plan. Two key members of the Planning committee are Lise Kenworthy and Frank Gaul.

These districts realized they faced some common challenges and vulnerabilities. Both communities, for example, include extensive areas which could be impacted by landslides, liquefaction, and tsunami inundation during major earthquake. Additional areas of concern for both West Seattle and Magnolia include the fact that they are bridge-dependent; if these bridges become unusable after an earthquake, these districts could be geographically isolated from the rest of the city. Also, neither of these areas have hospitals located in their community, which causes additional concern about the availability of medical services.

A third city neighborhood, **Wallingford**, joined the emergency planning effort.

- Over two years ago, Mary Heim president of the Community Council and active in Sustainable Wallingford learned about the Emergency Preparedness planning efforts in both of the two areas mentioned above and decided she wanted to have similar planning for Wallingford.

The emergency preparedness plans developed by these three communities all center on the establishment of pre-identified “**Emergency Communication Hubs**” that will be staffed by community volunteers for the purpose of sharing information and resources within the community following a major disaster. These Hubs are typically outside locations selected by the planning committees in each area as a physical place to come together. Once each Hub is activated they will be able to assist the City by providing information on the conditions in the community and identifying resources that are needed.

One of the significant benefits of these groups working together is that other communities can learn and replicate from the experiences of the three.

Current Progress

Council Funded Projects

During budget preparations for 2009, the three communities came together and requested funding from the Council to assist them in their efforts. Council funded a grant of \$21,000 (\$7,000 per community) through the Department of Neighborhoods, which was to be used to 1) **equip the Hubs** with radios and emergency supplies and 2) to **conduct community outreach** about their emergency preparedness planning efforts. Specific achievements include:

- West Seattle spent \$4520 to equip the nine Hubs which have been established. This includes nine hand held General Mobile Radio Service (GMRS) radios, which allow for two way communications over short distances. They also paid for licenses for seven radio operators (two operators have their own license), a repeater station, and supplies for emergency bags for each hub. They spent \$2298 for outreach, which included printing brochures, advertising the plan in both the West Seattle Blog and West Seattle Herald and two years for the web hosting domain name: <http://westseattle.bepreparedseattle.info>
- Magnolia/Queen Anne/Interbay spent \$4230 to equip eight Hubs. This includes eight GMRS radios, eight licenses and a repeater. For outreach, \$2510 was spent to develop and print a brochure (19,000 copies) for both Magnolia/Interbay and Queen Anne for distribution throughout these communities. They also spent \$260 for the development of a web site: <http://epc-mqadc.com/>
- Wallingford spent \$4168 to equip seven Hubs. This includes two hand held Ham radios, eight GMRS radios and license for both types of radios, as well as supplies for emergency bags for the seven Hubs. For outreach, they printed a brochure, purchased advertisement about the Hubs in the North Seattle Herald Outlook and Wallyhood blog and created the website: <http://Wallingford.org/prepare>.

The direct result of this funding is that the three planning groups have identified and equipped (including radio communications) **twenty four “Emergency Communications Hubs” and developed various types of outreach materials tailored to their districts.** The three community groups have also made a commitment to share their knowledge on designing this type of preparedness plan with other interested community individuals and organizations.

Leadership Team

One of the outcomes of the groups coming together to request the funding is that they have chosen to continue their collaboration by sharing information and approaches. This led to the development of a Leadership team made up of representatives from the three groups. The purpose of this Leadership team is to standardize the approach (e.g. the establishment of Emergency Communications Hubs), yet allow the flexibility to modify based on the unique characteristics of each community. This Leadership Team will add members from new communities as they become part of this Planning effort.

Planning “Summit”

On April 17th the Leadership Team and OEM hosted a “Summit” at the EOC to bring together those from each of these communities who have either been identified as a

Hub volunteer or possible key community resource. Invitations were also extended to representatives from **Capitol Hill, View Ridge, Belltown and Green Lake** communities who have expressed interest in developing a Community Preparedness Plan.

This Summit had the following goals:

- Motivate volunteers to keep working on community preparedness
- Inform everyone on the overall Emergency Preparedness work that is being done and where preparing at the community level fits into this effort.
- Provide an overview of where each community is and their vision on where they want to go.
- Identify some current issues /challenges
- Identify ways to maintain interest and create a sustainable structure.

In addition to providing an overview of the approach that is being used by the three groups, the 45 community members attending also participated in breakout sessions where they



discussed the following: **Hub site functionality, radio functionality and outreach and support from partner organizations.**

Break Out Session on Outreach and Partner Organizations

Future Intentions

In the near future these three communities will be focusing on the following:

- Continued Hub site develop, staffing plans and training of Hub site volunteers;
- Outreach and promotion of the Plan to the general community and potential community partners:
- Continued development of the Leadership team:
- Sustainability of this Preparedness approach

The Magnolia/Queen Anne/Interbay and West/Southwest Seattle group have spent over four years on their planning effort, Wallingford has been involved with this for approximately two years. The individuals who are participating in this level of emergency preparedness have spent considerable hours working to better prepare their respective community. As additional communities expand their levels of emergency

preparedness planning, it is important to recognize that it requires a very dedicated group of community members who are willing to commit a considerable amount of their time working on emergency preparedness.

To-date, Capitol Hill, Belltown, Green Lake and View Ridge have formed planning groups to begin work in this area of emergency preparedness and presentations have been given to the North and Northeast District Councils, Eastlake, and Phinney Community Councils. OEM Community Planning Coordinator, Mark Howard, met with the Department of Neighborhoods and their lead Neighborhood Planner to learn more about the active organizations in the Central and Southeast Districts. As we begin to expand, we are encouraging groups that are interested in this type of emergency preparedness planning to consider using the various Neighborhood Matching Fund opportunities through the Department of Neighborhoods

Benefits to the City

In addition to empowering citizens to help one another after disasters, District-level emergency planning brings many benefits to the City, including:

- Facilitates two way communications between impacted neighborhoods and the City
- Helps city deploy resources and services more efficiently with the knowledge of where citizens will gather
- Allows city responders to prioritize the most urgent needs, knowing that neighborhoods are more prepared to help themselves

Adding this level of preparedness in the City increases our readiness for disasters as well as increasing the awareness in the community that they will have a significant role in helping us respond and recover from this type of disaster. These planning efforts also help promote preparedness at the personal, family, and immediate neighbor levels. The adding of “Emergency Communications Hubs” will also improve communications capacity as each community develops their protocols for transmitting information between the Hubs and the City. Communication plans were recently tested on May 22, 2010 during our **spring communications exercise “Rattle in Seattle,”** during which the Hub sites and their community volunteers played an active role in using radio communications following a simulated earthquake.

As we move forward with this level of emergency preparedness planning it is going to be important that city staff from other Departments become familiar with these Communication Hubs so they



can either respond to the Hub to assist the community or if they need assistance they will know where to go in the community. Also, since communication is critical in the immediate time following the disaster, many city staff are equipped with radio communication abilities with their Department. This level of communication can be used to further assist in transmitting and receiving information which can be vital to the community. Key Departments include Police, Fire, Parks and Seattle King County Public Health. For Police and Fire it will be important for them to know where community member will be gathering following a disaster. The individuals coming to a Hub might have critical information about where specific Police or Fire resources might be needed in the community. Since many of the Hubs are being located on Park's property it will be important for any Park employee working in that community to know what is occurring in the area following the disaster. For Public Health the Hubs will provide central locations in the community which can be used to aid in the distribution of either medical services or resources. Other City Departments will be able to use the Hubs as sources for resource or information distribution coordinated through the Emergency Operations Center.

On behalf of the communities we want to thank the Council for helping to fund these three groups in 2009. The investment has assisted in the development of a vital emergency preparedness effort at a level that had not been developed.

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