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City Auditor

TNT Audit
Neighborhood Planning
Community Development

Introduction:

As authorized by the City of Syracuse Revised General Ordinance 48, Section 48-7(b), an examination into the Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today (TNT) program for the period November 1, 2004 through August 31, 2007 was undertaken. The referenced section of the ordinance provides that "every two years, reviews shall be conducted by the City's Auditor and the Neighborhood Planning Office, or its equivalent."

A copy of the original enabling ordinance, approved by the Common Council on December 6, 1999, is attached for reference.

Although the City of Syracuse Revised General Ordinance 48 was adopted in late 1999, there was no review of the program undertaken by either the Office of the City Auditor or the Neighborhood Planning Office, or its equivalent, until the fall of 2004. At that time, under the direction of the newly elected City Auditor, the Office of the City Auditor undertook a review of TNT for the period of November 1, 2002 through October 31, 2004. Additionally, in September 2004, the City's Department of Community Development contracted with the Enterprise Foundation to conduct a program assessment, with the Foundation acting as the agent of the Neighborhood Planning Office.

The first audit completed by the elected City Auditor for the TNT Program was issued on May 18, 2005. It included a significant number of findings and concluded that the TNT Program held the potential to be a major tool for the government and the taxpayers of the City to use in unison to create the healthy neighborhoods we all desire for Syracuse. *Among the most troubling of the conclusions was the recognition that the Office of Neighborhood Planning had failed to provide the needed guidance and leadership that would assist the TNT councils to flourish and succeed.*

Based on the number of findings in the first TNT audit (13), and the substantive nature of many of the recommendations that were made at that time by both the Office of the City Auditor and the Enterprise Foundation, we provided a longer period of time for implementation before starting a second audit of TNT; it was hoped that this would give the Office of Neighborhood Planning more opportunity to enact the enhancements that were being recommended to strengthen the program.

This examination was administered in accordance with the *Government Auditing Standards*, issued by the Comptroller General of the United States and *Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing*, as circulated by the Institute of Internal Auditors. These standards require that the audit is planned and performed to obtain a reasonable assurance for the judgments and conclusions regarding the function under examination. The management of the City of Syracuse, New York, is responsible for establishing, maintaining and complying with the internal control structure and for compliance with applicable laws, regulations and contracts.

This report is intended solely for the information of the Mayor, the Common Council, the Department of Community Development and the TNT planning councils of the City of Syracuse, New York, yet it is understood to be a matter of public record and its distribution is not limited. Further information regarding this audit is available at the City of Syracuse's Audit Department

upon request. The Audit Department would like to thank the many individuals, departments and organizations who assisted and cooperated with us during our audit.

Background Information:

Planning for the TNT program began in 1995, and Rochester’s Neighbors Building Neighborhoods program was used as a benchmark. One of the driving forces behind the program was the perceived need to stabilize the neighborhoods in the City of Syracuse. One of the primary goals was to enhance citizen involvement in allocating the City’s resources at a time of diminishing means. Additionally, the strategy was to achieve neighborhood plans that were citizen driven while utilizing the assistance of professional planners.

Through Ordinance 48, the TNT program was formalized by law in 1999. The City was separated into eight planning areas, each with corresponding planning councils. The areas were numbered one through eight and are titled respectively: Downtown, Westside, Southside, Valley, Eastside, Eastwood, Northside and Lakefront. Please refer to the last page in the ordinance for the map of the area boundaries.

The mission of the program is to create “a comprehensive process for involving all neighborhood residents, businesses, and organizations in planning for their neighborhoods that identifies and builds upon community assets and helps direct the city’s resources into priority areas in the most cost-effective way,” as stated in Section 48-1(c) of the ordinance. The broadest definition for membership eligibility are people who “live, work, own property or business within the area,” Ordinance 48, Section 48(a). Also, each neighborhood association within an area, with at least ten members, has a representative seat available on the corresponding council.

The major functions of the TNT planning councils are to 1) create area plans that reflect long term goals for their area 2) serve as community roundtables 3) facilitate differing points of view to reach solutions for all 3) advise city government on neighborhood issues 4) develop neighborhood directories 5) sustain the organization and 6) gather annually, city-wide, to discuss general issues.

Community Development’s Office of Neighborhood Planning has the primary responsibility of providing all the needed support for the planning councils. Also, representatives from the City’s operating departments are required to attend meetings and advise the planning councils. Along with the technical support and advisement, it is also required that the Office of Neighborhood Planning present, on an annual basis, the planning councils’ area plans to the relevant city departments for consideration in their annual and capital budgets. The Board of Education also has the right to designate district members to serve on the councils in a non-voting capacity.

Scope:

The original scope of the audit entailed reviewing the TNT program activities for the period November 1, 2004 through August 31, 2007. As noted in the Introduction, the Office of the City Auditor intended to provide the Office of Neighborhood Planning with a practical period of time to implement the changes that could come out of the recommendations made by the Office of the City Auditor and the Enterprise Foundation in their reports from 2005. Hence, the period for this review was greater than the customary two-year period. The audit was financial and performance in nature.

The Scope was expanded during the course of the field work when overpayment of salary to the Office of Neighborhood Planning was discovered. In conjunction with the expanded scope, the period reviewed in the audit was extended into November, 2007.

Scope Impairment:

The methodology employed in gathering information as part of this audit included getting feedback from area facilitators by means of a questionnaire that is mailed out and is expected to be returned. Out of the thirty-one questionnaires mailed out to facilitators in all eight Areas, only eleven were returned in a completed state. *Sixty-five percent (65%) of the volunteer facilitators failed to respond to the audit of TNT.* This impairment resulted in the inability to ascertain whether the required number of Facilitators was met for each area.

The lack of completed questionnaires from some of the facilitators only impaired the ability to confirm the number of facilitators in each area as compared to what was reported by the Office of Neighborhood Planning.

Objectives:

- Determine the accuracy of the program's receipts and disbursements from November 1, 2004 through August 31, 2007.
- Determine whether the program is in compliance with the rules and regulations as set forth by General Ordinance 48.
- Make recommendations on any improvements to the program.

Methodology:

In preparation and throughout the audit process, discussions with current and previous Community Development personnel, members of the TNT planning councils, and other related individuals and organizations were used to obtain a better understanding of how the TNT Program was functioning during the audit period. To obtain further insight into the program, questionnaires were completed by the facilitators. Also, actual observation at the planning councils' monthly meetings was conducted from 2004 through 2007.

For the financial element of the audit, the Audit Department tested the period of November 1, 2004 through August 31, 2007. For this period, a sample of financial transactions was selected to test for accuracy, appropriateness and authorization. Out of thirty-two transactions in the audit period, sixteen (50%) were chosen for further testing.

For the performance element of the audit, documentation for the period November 1, 2004 through August 31, 2007 was analyzed. Information pertaining to the annual written agreements between the councils and Community Development, reviews conducted by the Audit Department and Office of Neighborhood Planning, training made available to the facilitators, monthly meetings, facilitator coordinating council meetings and city-wide conventions were evaluated. For the monthly meetings, a sample of ninety-six was selected for further testing and the minutes, sign-in sheets and agendas from those meeting were requested. Additionally, from the annual plans provided, one hundred and four recommendations were selected for further testing. The annual plans are a list of recommendations for the City's operating departments and as outlined in Section 48-2(a) of the Ordinance 48, they are a subsection of the area plan.

Conclusion:

For the period November 1, 2004 through August 31, 2007, the Department of Audit uncovered a significant number of violations against the City of Syracuse's Revised General Ordinance 48, City of Syracuse job description/personnel practices, as well as additional inadequacies within the TNT program.

The audit scope was expanded to include a review of payroll and compensation as a result of conflicting information that was supplied to the Office of the City Auditor. As a result of the expanded scope within this audit, the Office of the City Auditor discovered overpayment of salaries to staff members of the Office of Neighborhood Planning. *The City Auditor deems this to be a highly material finding that requires immediate attention.* The situation uncovered by the payroll review portion of this audit as it relates to record keeping and the need for adequate checks and balances in daily adherence to payroll policies and procedures is of extreme concern to the City Auditor.

The Auditor examined time records and reviewed accumulated earned time off, comparing that data against employees' actual salary earnings to ensure there was no overtime or compensation time paid or earned. Since the employees under examination belong to the executive salary bargaining group, they are therefore not eligible to earn overtime or "comp" time. As a result of this investigation it was determined that no individual was eligible to be paid or due any accrued time or money for attending after hour meetings.

During this review it was determined that various staff were incorrectly paid for hours not worked. It was determined that at least three staff members were paid for hours not worked.

The Office of the City Auditor could not accurately reconcile the amount of monies paid to all of the staff members of the Office of Neighborhood Planning for time not worked. However, we were able to determine that:

- A staff member was incorrectly paid-in-full for 12 more days of what should have been unpaid leave.
- Two other employees were overpaid by one day each.
- Seven employees had missing timesheets, yet were paid in full for those periods.
- One staff member was paid for all available sick, personal and other miscellaneous time off.

This did result in overpayment of salaries to these employees. We were not able to quantify the exact amount that was overpaid to some of these individuals due to the absence of their basic timesheet recordkeeping.

The proper support and participation from city government is critical to the success of the TNT program. It is especially important during this time of shrinking resources in city government to utilize the TNT program to its fullest potential. The TNT program is a valuable method for the city government to gain input from neighborhood residents, businesses and organizations on the residential improvements they believe are necessary.

In addition, many TNT Facilitators failed to reply to the Office of the City Auditor's request for information related to this audit. This does not bode well for TNT as an audit of the program will lead to valuable suggestions and recommendations to strengthen the TNT process.

As the primary department responsible for supporting the TNT planning councils, the Office of Neighborhood Planning must fulfill its leadership role to ensure the health of the program. As required by the Community Development Block Grant funding and Ordinance 48, one of the office's main functions is to support the planning councils. The planning councils volunteer their time and efforts for the purpose of assisting the City while it is ultimately the responsibility of the paid city staffers to keep the councils on course with the ordinance's objectives.

It was also noted that many staff members who provide support to the groups attend numerous after-hour meetings. This is an integral part of their job description. *Nonetheless, the discovery of what appears to be an inordinate amount of sick time being taken by staff members gives the appearance of the using of sick time not for the purpose it was intended for, but rather as a tool to compensate staff for the extra evening hours that are worked.*

While the City Auditor is aware that burn out can result from an excessive schedule, it is also equally clear that it is not appropriate for some employees to use accrued time inappropriately or illegally while other employees abide by the proper work rules. Staff members should balance the realities of jobs that they willingly applied for, and were hired to perform, against the responsibilities of the position and act in a responsible manner.

The City Auditor wants to make it very clear that this observation is not a criticism of every staff member in the Office of Neighborhood Planning. Unfortunately, in stating this caveat, we are highlighting that there were inconsistencies in what was observed, and such inconsistencies can be interpreted to be indications of favoritism. When employees violate the specific parameters of their jobs, they create a number of problems - problems for proper management to be accountable, problems impacting fellow employees who do take their job responsibilities seriously, and issues related to perceived fairness and favoritism.

Additionally, it should be noted that several of the Findings which appear to be violations by the planning councils, are actual inadequacies on the part of the Office of Neighborhood Planning. The Office of Neighborhood Planning is accountable for guiding the councils, keeping the councils well informed on the rules and regulations for the program and ensuring the councils are meeting the requirements set forth by the ordinance. It was found that the Office of Neighborhood Planning failed to do so, which resulted in additional violations of the ordinance.

The responsibility of the planning councils is noteworthy and should not be understated. It is imperative for each planning council to maintain a current area plan for their area to ensure success for the program. We found that only three (3) out of eight (8) had up to date area plans in place. In the previous audit ending in 2004, only one (1) out of eight (8) had an up to date area plan in place. This is a marginal improvement.

As noted above, it is the responsibility of the Office of Neighborhood Planning to support the volunteer planning councils in making the area plans a reality. These long-term plans were created in the program as the primary tool in determining where the City's resources should be prioritized to, and to act as blueprints for all future decisions regarding the area.

The TNT program is a vital conduit for the government and taxpayers to use in creating the thriving and vibrant neighborhoods we all desire for Syracuse. TNT is a vehicle whereby the city government, city residents, neighborhood businesses and community organizations are working collectively to define a shared vision for the City of Syracuse.

Many of the Findings within this audit period are the same Findings from the previous audits that were conducted by the City Auditor, as well as the Enterprise Foundation. In addition to repeated Findings, there are more Findings in the current audit than were in the previous audit.

In 2004 it was recommended that the Office of Neighborhood Planning carefully review their internal controls relative to financial reimbursements. There is no evidence that this was implemented. Additionally, there appears to be a continued lack of support by Neighborhood Planning as it relates to proper recordkeeping of Minutes and Sign-in sheets. One set of requested Minutes was simply a duplicate from a separate different meeting with a crossed out date on the Minutes itself. Additionally, the previous audit found that area plans were outdated and that remains a Finding in this audit.

While the Audit Department does not have an opinion on the qualifications of the current Office of Neighborhood Planning staff, it was noted that of nine employees reviewed, only two had semi-related educational background. One employee has a Masters in Public Administration and the other a Masters in Landscape Architecture.

Community Development may want to reassess the resources at the Office of Neighborhood Planning to ensure that there is adequate expertise to accomplish its mission. Providing the proper support services to the planning councils is vital to the program's health.

The City Auditor did note that the Office of Neighborhood Planning has conducted Facilitator training; a previous Finding. This is a vital building block to help strengthen the TNT program. We also noted that there was concerted effort to provide the Office of the City Auditor with requested items quickly. It was apparent that the Office of Neighborhood Planning wants to enhance their role in supporting the TNT program. We did notice a reduction in the missing Minutes. In 2004, twenty-six (26) out of forty-seven Minutes were missing (55%). In 2007, ten (10) out of ninety-six (96) were missing (10%).

Findings and Recommendations:

Finding 1: Overpayment of Salaried Staff

During the course of the audit, records were examined to ascertain the attendance of the Neighborhood Planning staff members at TNT meetings. The Office of the City Auditor discovered that there were missing timesheets. This prompted a review of timesheets to sign-in/sign-out sheets, which also pointed to potential discrepancies and overpayment of salaries to the Neighborhood Planning staff.

During this review, it was determined that various staff were paid for hours not worked. The Office of the City Auditor could not accurately reconcile the amount of monies paid to some staff members of the Office of Neighborhood Planning for time not worked *due to a lack of basic timesheet recordkeeping required to be maintained and reviewed by management.*

One staff member was paid for all sick, personal and other available time-off in addition to being overpaid 12-more days of unpaid leave. Two other employees were overpaid by one day each. Seven others had no timesheets evidencing whether or not they showed up for work.

Despite this, they were all paid in full for those time periods.

- A staff member was incorrectly paid-in-full for twelve (12) more days of what should have been unpaid leave.
- A staff member was overpaid by 29 hours in January of '07 that was later "taken off" actual hours worked in March of '07 to "pay back" the city.
- Two (2) other employees were overpaid by one-day each.

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- Seven (7) employees had missing timesheets, *yet were paid in full for those periods.*

The Administration of the Office of Neighborhood Planning has a system whereby employees are paid whether they submit proper documentation or not. This is a high material weakness and has resulted in citizens' tax dollars being spent for what has essentially turned into employee no-show situations.

Recommendation: No staff member should be paid without a proper review of timesheets by authorized personnel. Any staff member who wishes to take time off should see their supervisor to ascertain if they have any available time and to ensure there is proper coverage by other staff members.

In addition, any time an employee is absent the supervisor should take note of the absence of his or her staff and report this on his or her own as an integral and basic managerial practice.

The Supervisor should communicate to the Payroll Department all time worked and all time taken off on a regular basis. The Payroll Department is located off site and rightfully relies on the records submitted by the Office of Neighborhood Planning to determine actual hours worked.

Finding 2: Improper Use of Accrued Time

The Auditor pulled time records and examined accumulated earned time-off as compared to each employee's salary to ensure that there was no overtime or compensation time paid or earned.

As a result of this investigation it was determined that no individual was paid or due any time or money for attending after-hour meetings. However, other issues became apparent such as every staff member has used a vast majority of available sick time.

Sick time is provided to give employees the ability to be paid for the time when they are truly sick. Each staff member earns 15 sick days per year and the City's policy is only to allow for the use of sick time when an employee is actually ill, and does not provide this credited time for employees to use as compensation time at their discretion. It was noted that staff have been using what could be readily determined to be an excessive amount of sick time.

- **One staff member was paid for all available sick, personal and other miscellaneous time off.**
- **One employee took an average of 15 sick-days every year on average (the maximum available)**
- **Another staff member took 11 sick-days on average per year**
- **A third staff member used up on average 8.5 sick days per year out of the maximum of 15 days.**

Recommendation:

The Supervisor should require that each staff member fill out proper time sheets. These should include proper coding for actual hours worked in addition to sick time, vacation, et al. These records should be maintained by a staff member in the Office of Neighborhood Planning, even if done on a simple Excel spreadsheet that would then auto-calculate.

In order for this to be accomplished, each employee is strongly reminded that they must fill out a timesheet indicating hours worked. The Supervisor should sign those timesheets on a weekly or bi-weekly basis and then submit those forms to the designated staff member who would record the hours worked and accumulated time off available. Clearly, this would avoid the instance in Finding 1 (paying a staff member for days not worked) and would provide a tool to monitor time off.

Employees in the Planning Department are on the Executive Payroll Program. They are salaried and do not earn compensatory time or salary for any work performed beyond their normal 72.5 bi-weekly hours.

Comparing the sick time taken to the time spent at after-hour meetings, it became evident that staff members are using sick time inappropriately.

- The staff had a collective 786.25 days of accumulated sick time available
- The staff was paid for 603.92 sick days.

77% of the available sick days granted to staff members have been used up and paid to staff members from the Office of Neighborhood Planning. It defies logic that this department could have that many days of actual, sick, staff members.

Neighborhood Planning staff should be reminded that this is not normal practice throughout the city. A vast majority of City employees understand and acknowledge that the amount of sick time given is very liberal and that it is to be used for actual sick time and that a significant portion of sick time can be banked. There is no justification for 603.92 sick days being paid. Getting paid for an excessive amount of sick days strongly gives the appearance of using sick time as a form of “comp” time. Sick time is never to be used as “comp” time.

This practice should come to an end via a better tracking system by Management as well as meeting with staff and clearly outlining appropriate use of time off.

Finding 3: Lack of Communication and Support from the TNT Facilitators

Using the questionnaires given out to each facilitator as a basis, the Audit Department found that only eleven out of thirty-one forms were completely filled out and returned by the facilitators. A low response rate indicates a lack of communication on behalf of the facilitators as to the status of their designated Areas. This also resulted in a scope impairment as noted above.

The unresponsiveness of facilitators is suggestive that they have not been properly trained to recognize the importance of the inter-relationship between the City's leadership role, the community leadership role of Facilitators, and the role of program review assigned to the City Auditor by Ordinance 48.

Recommendation: TNT's success is strongly dictated by the participation and feedback from each Area's elected facilitators, as well as the proactive and energetic involvement of the volunteers who participate in the TNT process.

Finding out what is working and what needs to be fixed is imperative to the continued and elevated effectiveness of TNT in this city.

In addition to the tireless efforts that the volunteers expend working on the TNT level, it is imperative that they are proactive with audits of the TNT process. Any audit of this process can only result in better TNT-planning and development.

Therefore, in the future it is recommended that the TNT Facilitators use the questionnaires handed out for this audit as a necessary platform to voice their opinions on this program and help contribute to the necessary changes that are needed to improve TNT operations.

Finding 4: Lack of Internal Controls for Reimbursements to the TNT Planning Councils

Although it was found that the sample of receipts and disbursements were free from material misstatement, the Department of Audit could not be assured that the disbursements were properly authorized. One voucher out of the sixteen that were sampled failed to include an authorizing signature and seven vouchers were not dated; therefore, the Department of Audit could not determine when the signature took place.

Recommendation: The authorizing person should sign and date all vouchers in order to ensure proper internal controls.

Finding 5: Lack of Support from the Office of Neighborhood Planning

Out of the ninety-six monthly meetings tested, the Office of Neighborhood Planning could not provide any information for three (3) of them. In addition, minutes for ten meetings (10%) and sign-in sheets for eleven meetings (11.5%) could not be supplied by the Office of Neighborhood Planning or the planning councils.

Recommendation: Support from the Office of Neighborhood Planning is required to ensure the planning councils are getting the assistance mandated by law.

The Office of the City Auditor found in 2004 that 55% of the monthly meetings tested were missing required supporting documentation. In this audit timeframe, that was reduced to 11.5%.

In 2004, the Office of the City Auditor stated that better accountability concerning the Office of Neighborhood Planning is also essential to ensure the achievement of its intended goal. The

Community Development Block Grant funding is to provide technical assistance to each of the city's eight planning sectors as well as developing the consolidated plan, administering neighborhood plans, and environmental studies.

The Office of the City Auditor notes the success of the Office of Neighborhood Planning exhibited by reducing the missing documentation by 43.5%. However, the Finding remains in the audit because no records should be missing.

Finding 6: Required City Representation Not Met (Violation of Ordinance 48, Section 48-4(b))

This section of the ordinance requires that, “the Mayor, or his/her designated representative, shall appoint a representative from each of the City’s operating departments to attend and advise the Neighborhood Planning Councils.” It lists the departments as “Code Enforcement, Economic Development, Neighborhood Planning, Parks & Recreation, Police and Public Works.”

For seventy-eight of the ninety-six (96) meetings, documentation led to the determination that there was not sufficient city representation present. For three (3) meetings out of ninety-six selected for testing, the Neighborhood Planning Office could not provide sufficient data for the Audit Department to make a determination on the level of city representation present.

- *Only fifteen meetings (16%) out of the ninety-six sampled were determined to have the proper city representation in attendance.*

The Audit Department’s observations at the monthly meetings confirmed that from 2004 through 2007, there was a lack of city representation in several cases.

Recommendation: Adequate participation from the City Departments is vital for the program to meet its mission. Personnel from the departments listed in the ordinance should be designated city representatives for each planning council and these representatives should be made fully aware of their responsibilities.

Finding 7: Outdated Area Plans (Violation of Ordinance 48, Section 48-2(a))

This section of the ordinance mandates each council to “create an asset-driven, continuous five-year plan for its area which will include a comprehensive vision for the diverse neighborhoods within the area, 5-year goals and objectives, prioritized action plans, resource requests, budgets, recommendations to operating city departments, and timelines for completion.” It appears that the planning councils currently provide this plan in two segments, a five year area plan that states goals and objectives and an annual plan that states prioritized recommendations and budget requests for the fiscal year to operating city departments.

It was found that Areas 1, 2, 3, 5, and 8 had five-year plans that were outdated over one year. It was found that Area 8 did not have annual recommendations for *all* the fiscal years in the audit period.

Recommendation: Using staff support from the Office of Neighborhood Planning or its equivalent, each planning council should update its five-year area plan and issue annual plans on a regular basis to comply with the ordinance. The area plan should be a coordinated effort between the two parties, with the Office of Neighborhood Planning providing the professional expertise and the planning councils representing each area's views.

Area Plans are important tools for each TNT group. This was a Finding in the previous audit period and should be seriously reviewed by Neighborhood Planning. Without an up to date area plan, a loss of direction could ensue. This could result in a decline of interest and participation in the TNT process, thereby resulting in weakening TNT as a whole.

Finding 8: Current Area Plans Not Distributed Annually (Violation of Ordinance 48, Section 48-5(a) and (b))

These sections of the ordinance require the appropriate city departments to annually receive each area's area plan for consideration in their annual budgets. As noted in Finding 4, it was found that Area 8 did not have an annual recommendation for all of the fiscal years in the audit period, and their five-year plans were outdated as well.

Recommendation: Henceforth, the Office of Neighborhood Planning should send the current area and annual plans to appropriate city departments for consideration in the annual budgets to comply with the ordinance. These plans should be up to date.

Finding 9: Lack of Rules and Procedures for each Planning Council (Violation of Ordinance 48, Section 48-1(g))

This section of the ordinance mandates that the "Neighborhood Planning Office, or its equivalent, shall support each of the eight planning councils in the development of rules and procedures for their operations."

The Department of Audit was pleased to find that Community Development submitted a Policies and Procedures manual for TNT participants on a global level. This was done in response to the previous audit of TNT.

Each Area should have their own manual that addresses the rules and procedures for the operations for each individual planning council.

Recommendation: Using staff support from the Office of Neighborhood Planning or its equivalent, each planning council should develop and adopt written policies and procedures for their organization in order to comply with the ordinance. Having written rules and procedures would be beneficial for new members, facilitators or city personnel in understanding the organization's conduct.

Using the requirements set forth by the ordinance as a starting point, each planning council should develop procedures that are tailored to meet their area's specific needs. Being that the TNT program has been established for many years, the planning councils can now look to the past and retain procedures they found to be the most advantageous.

Finding 10: Written Agreements between Community Development and Planning Councils Not Completed (Violation of Ordinance 48, Section 48-5(e))

This section of the ordinance mandates each planning council “enter into an annual written agreement with the City’s Department of Community Development for the proposed services to reflect items which may be included in the annual City budget or Community Development Block Grant Funding.” It was found that for the period audited, the planning councils and the City’s Department of Community Development had informal agreements, but did not enter into any written annual agreements.

Recommendation: For every funding year, each planning council should enter into a written agreement with Community Development in order to comply with the ordinance.

Finding 11: Required Facilitators Not Met (Violation of Ordinance 48, Section 48-3(c))

This section of the ordinance requires each TNT planning council to have “not less than two and not more than nine members to serve as the facilitator team.”

Due to a lack of response from many of the facilitators, there was a *scope impairment* that prevented the City Auditor from determining that there were an adequate number of facilitators.

In addition, the Office of Neighborhood Planning presented a listing of facilitators. Not all Areas had the minimum required number of Facilitators as outlined in the ordinance.

Recommendation: Using staff support from the Office of Neighborhood Planning, the councils should make an intensified effort to increase participation to comply with the Ordinance. Due to the scope impairment, the Office of the City Auditor cannot state with certainty if TNT and the Office of Neighborhood Planning is compliant with the Ordinance. However, the Office of Neighborhood Planning did provide us with a report that indicated that not all Areas had the minimum required number of Facilitators during the audit time period.

The Office of Neighborhood Planning should take a lead role and remind the volunteer citizens of the importance in cooperating with audits of TNT.

Finding 12: Lack of Corroboration Involving Annual Plans

From the 2005-2006 annual plans provided, fifty-two (52) recommendations were selected for further testing. Out of the sample, sixteen (31%) were not implemented and five (9%) were not implemented due to suitable reasons. A total of thirty-one (60%) of the

recommendations were implemented, partially implemented or were in the process of being implemented.

For the 2006-2007 annual plans provided, fifty-two recommendations were selected for further testing. Out of the sample, none (0%) were acted upon.

The City Auditor determined that the annual recommendation process could be handled more effectively and efficiently.

Recommendation: Increased support and communication is needed between the city government and the TNT councils. The Audit Department is aware that not all of the recommendations are feasible, yet in these cases, having the mandated city representation at the meetings would have been valuable in the avoidance of wasting the councils' time and efforts. Having proper city representation could have prevented the councils from planning a recommendation from start to finish, only to have the project be rejected for reasons already known to city departments.

The City Auditor notes that there was a slight improvement in the processing of the recommendations for the period of 2005-2006 as compared to the TNT Audit for the period ending in 2004.

However, there was no apparent activity by The Office of Neighborhood Planning to process requests in 2006-2007.

In addition, to further improve communications, the City Auditor suggests the corresponding city departments provide written responses addressing the annual recommendations. For the recommendations that are adopted, written progress reports on a quarterly basis are also a suggested practice. Both the progress reports and written responses should be filed with the Office of Neighborhood Planning and reported to the TNT Planning Councils.

Finding 13: Board of Education Did Not Utilize Representative Seats on Councils

In our audit investigation, the Audit Department found that the Board of Education did not appoint representatives from the district to serve on the planning councils. It was found that only two areas had a Board of Education representative regularly attend the TNT meetings. Although this is not a violation of the ordinance, which only states this is an option available for the Board to utilize; the Audit Department believes this option should be exercised to provide additional support to the TNT planning councils.

Recommendation: As the school district is a primary stakeholder in the community, it is recommended that the Board of Education designate at least one district member to serve on each of the planning councils. This would provide another communication link between the residents and the school district. As stressed previously, participation from all of the community's stakeholders would only serve to increase the program's effectiveness.

Therefore, in the future it is recommended that the TNT facilitators use the questionnaires handed out for this audit as a necessary platform to voice their opinions on this program and help contribute to the necessary changes that are needed to improve TNT operations.

Philip LaTessa
City Auditor
December 27, 2007

Subsequent Events:

- Following the meeting with the Office of Neighborhood Planning, the staff indicated that there is an increase in participation by City Officials in 2007. The Office of the Auditor concurs that in 2007 there appears to be an increase in participation of TNT meetings by the required City Departments.
- At the meeting with the Commissioner, a general discussion regarding employee responsibility regarding record keeping of their hours worked ensued. The Commissioner feels, and the Auditor concurs, that staff members bear responsibility. Each salaried person should monitor their time available and their requests for time off. No staff member should be receiving compensation for hours not worked. Staff should be cognizant of available time and clearly should never accept pay for unpaid time.

Each staff member should be responsible to hand in time sheets that are properly completed on a cycle that coincides with payroll; so that payroll never issues out a check

Concurrently, systems should be put in place whereby without a properly filled out timesheet that has an authorized counter signature, payroll does not issue out a check. This should be default mode versus the current system of issuing out pay without timesheets properly filled out. This system clearly has resulted in discrepancies related to pay that resulted in over paying staff members.

- Sick time was also discussed. There is a pattern of using up sick time – 67% of the staff used up over 82% of their available sick time. This is in addition to holidays, vacation days and other time made available to staff members. It must be noted that some did require extended time off for personal reasons. However, factoring in those extenuating circumstances, the department still utilizes sick time heavily and in a manner that appears to be taken in return for time spent at after hour meetings. The staff needs to remember that they accepted their position with the caveat that they attend evening meetings and that sick time is to be used for sick time only.