

Sustainable Neighborhood Application Form City and County of Denver

Narrative (max 5 pages)

Neighborhood Background

Congress Park Neighborhood (CPN) boundaries: Colorado Blvd to York St.; E. Colfax to 6th Ave. In 1890, Senator Henry M. Teller persuaded Congress to convert the existing cemetery at 8th Ave. and Josephine St. to a park. Graves were relocated, and Congress Park was born. During the 1920s, horse-drawn streetcars ran along 12th Ave. Commercial enterprises flourished around streetcar stops. These small, commercial hubs continue to anchor the neighborhood today. By 1924, Congress Park was an established community, boasting gracious homes, opulent mansions and tree-lined streets. After World War II, many of the area's beautiful residences were converted to boarding houses and apartment units. By the 1970s, parts of Congress Park were considered undesirable due to crime and decay. In the 1990s, the area began a resurgence when many older homes and buildings were restored to their original grace. Now, a quarter of a century later, 5280 Magazine recognizes Congress Park as one of Denver's most desirable places to live.

The Denver Planning Office adopted the name "Congress Park Neighborhood" in the 1970's. CPN includes two historic districts and two active Residential Neighborhood Organizations:

- 1) Congress Park Neighbors, Inc., a registered 501(c)(3) with boundaries as stated above
- 2) Seventh Ave. Neighborhood Association whose boundaries extend west beyond York St.

In 2014, The Piton Foundation's Community Facts estimated Congress Park's population at 10,538 with 5,769 households and 1,911 families. The population included approximately 82% Non-Latino White, 7% Latino, 5% African-American, 2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 4% of 2 or more races. The representative age groupings were: <5 = 5%, 5-17 = 8%, 18-24 = 11%, 25-34 = 27%, 35-44 = 19%, 45-54 = 10%, 55-64 = 12%, >65 = 8%. Average household income was \$88,189 with 11% percent of Congress Park residents in poverty.

History of Success and Collaboration

CPN has representatives in numerous community organizations, including **Inter-Neighborhood Cooperation, Colorado Boulevard Healthcare District and Denver Botanic Gardens** – evidence of collaboration with neighborhood and city. CPN also contributes substantially to the Teller Backpack Program, which provides food for hungry students. CPN hosts regular neighborhood meetings and an annual Ice Cream social, maintains a website and an email news service, and reaches 5,000 homes with its free, quarterly newsletter. In 1995, the Denver City Council approved CPN's "Congress Park Neighborhood Plan" to guide decisions affecting the future character of the neighborhood.

Community residents are independently proactive and have organized numerous neighborhood initiatives. For example, in 2010, one resident, in collaboration with Greenprint Denver, organized an Energy Blitz that contacted over 400 households in one morning. Of these, more than 60 neighbors made at least one commitment to sustainability. The annual Peace Pilgrim Neighborhood Walk, is another resident-initiated event and will celebrate its 10th anniversary in the fall of 2016. And in January of 2016, after a resident solicited interest on Nextdoor, the Congress

Park Neighbors Green Team (CPNGT) was formed as a committee of CPN, Inc. Approximately twenty people attended CPNGT's first official meeting. Attendees identified areas of interest for sustainable initiatives, appointed a steering committee and discussed creating an asset map to establish an inventory of "Green" resources in the neighborhood. CPN Inc. supports the Green Team with access to the CPN website, distribution of a Green e-newsletter, outreach to CPN's 700 subscribers and guidance with administrative and protocol issues.

Initially, CPNGT focused on organizing **Regeneration! Congress Park Earth Day Festival**. CPNGT was enthusiastically supported by Capitol Heights Faith Community, which hosted the event. The festival included more than 25 exhibits and presentations, including those by Teller Elementary, Good Shepherd Catholic School, and Boy Scout Troop #1. Exhibits by CPNGT focused on recycling, supporting pollinators, composting, gardening, tree hikes and community building. Presentations were given by **Certiably Green Denver, Fossil Fuel Free Denver, The Capital Heights Faith Community**, and **NOENEMIES** facilitated a song sharing. A total of 50 volunteers and 200 attendees shared information on sustainability.

The festival accomplished 4 important goals:

1. Established CPNGT's potential for accomplishment through the festival's success
2. Created collaborative bonds within community
3. Defined CPNGT's ongoing vision
4. Generated community support for participation in the Sustainable Neighborhood Network.

Congress Park has momentum and the Green Team is positioned to build on this positive energy!

Community Input for SNN Application

The Green Team solicited input for potential Sustainable Neighborhood Network (SNN) projects from within CPNGT and the wider Congress Park community. CPNGT meetings, Earth Day Festival feedback and a formal online survey (emailed to CPN members, to the neighborhood at-large, and posted on Facebook and Nextdoor) generated many project suggestions and allowed CPNGT to gauge interest in the SNN program. Green Team members submitted nine written proposals for projects they deemed important. In parallel, 99 people responded to the online survey and indicated their preference for various potential projects. Every project listed in the survey received at least 60% support, but a few projects were clearly favored:

- Planting new trees (87%)
- Alley Clean Ups (86%)
- Recycling expansion (86%)
- Water-wise landscaping education (82%)
- Gardening workshops (82%)

Based on all input, the CPNGT steering committee consolidated ideas and projects into initiatives, developed sustainability goals, and presented these to the CPNGT for final comments. The resulting initiatives are described below.

Sustainability Goals & Projects

The goals presented below reflect the priorities of the neighborhood and represent a combination of the projects and ideas submitted.

1. Connecting Community

SNN Target Areas: People

This initiative creates channels for engaging neighbors and local businesses in supporting sustainability, using novel approaches such as community based social marketing and more traditional neighbor-to-neighbor communication and relationship building. Major components include Green Asset Mapping/Sharing and continuation of the annual Earth Day Festival. The overall goal is to empower Congress Park neighbors to work as a community toward a common goal of sustainable living.

Green Asset Mapping and Sharing will create a dynamic inventory of Congress Park's green assets such as community gardens, food-producing trees, alternative transportation options, Little Free Libraries, community space, solar installations, energy efficient homes, local green businesses, recycling drop-off locations, composting sites, and a wealth of green expertise many knowledgeable neighbors are eager to share. The purpose of this inventorying is two-fold: 1) to promote the wider use of these green resources and 2) to establish a baseline of green assets from which to set our CPNGT goals and targets for expansion. To facilitate the mapping project, CPN donated ten large maps to CPNGT. Mapping began at the 2016 Earth Day Festival. CPNGT will promote the use and expansion of neighborhood resources at events (e.g., home energy workshops, alternative transportation workshops) and will make updated versions of these maps visible to the community using physical and electronic maps (e.g. a link from CPN's website to a Google map with pins). Assets will be added to the maps via events, map displays at local businesses, neighbor-to-neighbor contact and online.

Earth Day Celebration is an annual event observed worldwide with activities that demonstrate support for Earth's environment. CPNGT intends to establish a Congress Park tradition of celebrating Earth Day by organizing a community festival where neighbors gather to meet each other, celebrate sustainability-themed goals and neighborhood accomplishments, exchange new ideas and expand neighborhood commitment to sustainability.

Measures of success: Number of new entries on the Green Asset Map; usage of green assets; posting the map online; number of participants (organizers, volunteers, vendors, sponsors) in the Earth Day celebration; number of attendees at the Earth Day celebration.

2. Home Energy Conservation

SNN Target Areas Energy, People

The goals of this initiative are to help Congress Park neighbors improve home energy efficiency, increase use of alternative energy sources and create additional conservation actions.

Home Energy Workshops will provide energy-conservation education to homeowners on caulking, insulation, weather stripping, use of CFL and LED bulbs, window shades and clotheslines, as well as residential solar applications and community solar garden programs. We will encourage the tracking of home energy usage data using **Xcel** Home Energy Reports. A workshop facilitated by **Denver Energy Challenge** and/or in collaboration with **EPA** (see attached letter) will provide information about home energy audits and rebate programs, such as the **Colorado PACE** program. Workshop follow-up by CPNGT members will offer assistance to participants.

Home Energy Conservation Resources will be a list of local resources to assist Congress Park residents in facilitating home energy conservation. The resource list will be distributed at workshops and events and posted (including links) on CPNGT's webpage.

Measures of success: number of participants attending workshop; number of residents implementing energy conservation measures (based on surveys and feedback at events); energy savings achieved through before/after comparison of Xcel Home Energy Reports; and number of views and downloads of energy conservation resource list posted on the CPNGT's webpage.

3. Sustainable Landscaping

SNN Target Areas: Land, Water, Air, People

Congress Park residents have a wealth of "green" knowledge and expertise that includes gardening with native plants and xeric landscaping. The goals of this project are to promote water conservation, support pollinators, encourage stewardship of ecosystems, and build community.

Pollinator-Friendly Congress Park focuses on raising awareness of the plight of pollinators and offers simple steps urban dwellers can take for the benefit of pollinators and humans alike. In partnership with a neighborhood expert on pollinator-friendly gardening, as well as with **People and Pollinators Action Network, The Bees Waggle, Butterfly Pavilion and Denver Botanic Gardens**, this project will offer workshops, film screenings, a children's Pollinator book (in-progress), a guide to local resources, yard signs indicating participation and a "Make the Pollinator Promise" campaign to avoid chemical pesticides and to create and protect pollinator habitat.

Water-Wise Landscaping focuses on water conservation that can be achieved through xeriscaping and water-wise lawn and garden care. The project will emphasize educating neighbors on the benefits of xeriscape landscaping, minimizing water runoff and using rain barrels. CPNGT members will conduct xeric garden/landscape tours, and will partner with **Denver Water** to offer water conservation workshops.

REACH Academy Garden Development Support is a collaboration between CPNGT members, **University of Denver Landscape Architecture** students and the local **REACH Academy**, to design and build a garden on school property. The goal is to create a garden space that meets the needs of students with special developmental and physical needs. A larger, holistic outcome is to foster community engagement by creating a pleasant, accessible space for many users.

Future Projects: Neighborhood tree tours and tree-planting event with **Denver Digs Trees**.

Measures of Success: number participants in workshops; number of pollinator yard signs; number of neighbors making the pollinator promise; number of neighbors incorporating xeric and water-wise landscaping elements and household water savings as quantified by **Denver Water**.

4. Clean Neighborhood

SNN Target Areas: Water, Air, Land

The goals of this initiative are to help residents understand how to reduce the amount of waste they generate, dispose of waste properly, and promote clean streets and alleys. Green Team members will provide recycling and composting education and organize Alley Clean-Up events.

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle aims to increase the number of residences participating in Denver's recycle and compost programs and to educate residents on proper disposal of materials like batteries, CFL bulbs and other hazardous wastes. CPNGT will work with the **City of Denver** to determine the number of homes currently participating in recycling programs, and develop outreach to increase these numbers. We will also offer home-composting workshops. A Battery Round-up program will work with local businesses and schools (e.g. Teller Elementary School and their Terracycle project) to provide collection points throughout the neighborhood for household batteries. The project will have designated locations and drop-off days. A "how-to" for disposal of other materials (e.g., paint, household chemicals, prescriptions, etc.) will be developed and posted on the CPN website and published in the Green e-newsletter.

Clean Streets is an initiative that will build on existing programs such as CPN's Alley Cleanup Day and City street-sweeping. The aim of the program is to increase participation in the Alley Cleanup throughout the neighborhood by increasing awareness of this event, recruiting block captains, and providing information about where to dispose of various items. This initiative also aims to improve the effectiveness of the street-sweeping program through a creative yard signs campaign that reminds residents to move cars off the street on street-sweeping days and explains the impact of street-sweeping on keeping our waterways clean.

Future Project: Marking storm drains to reduce contamination from waste and dumping.

Measures of success: number of residents in Denver's recycling and composting programs; number of residents doing home composting as noted on the Green Asset Map; reduction in parking tickets on street cleaning days; number of blocks and streets participating in Congress Park's annual Alley Cleanup.

Summary:

The initiatives included in this proposal represent multi-year efforts. With the exception of the Connecting Community efforts which build our capacity to engage neighbors, we will phase in components of each of the initiatives. We will set targets from our baseline inventory efforts, measure improvements each year, and set new targets. We expect to learn as we go, looking at feedback and results, and using this to determine our next steps.

Neighborhood Support

Attached:

- 1. Signatures of support from Earth Day festival, door-to-door solicitation, clean-up day events, and online survey.*
- 2. Letters of support from the President of the CPN, Inc. Board, Wayne New, local school (Teller Elementary) and local businesses (Green Door Fitness, BarMax, New World Cheese, Humble Pie, Under the Umbrella, Wild Flowers, Lago Capital Investments/Aveda Salon, Eric Lovely/Sunrun Inc).*
- 3. EPA letter requesting to work with CPN, Inc. to reduce energy and water use.*