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# Youth Engagement and Portland Neighborhood Associations

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Youth Engagement & Portland Neighborhood Associations

by

Kelly Sellers

An undergraduate honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Science

in

University Honors

and

Community Development

Thesis Adviser

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## Introduction

This research focuses on Portland neighborhood associations and youth engagement, specifically looking at perceptions of Multnomah Youth Commission members, using qualitative research methods and literature review. This exploration into the extent of youth engagement with Portland neighborhood associations, as well as young people's perceptions of these groups, will help inform future strategies for youth participation and engagement within the City of Portland and Multnomah County.

By covering background and context, the reader will have a better grasp on the information and setting surrounding this research endeavor. Subsequent review of relevant literature will provide further context into academic and scholarly views on subjects such as youth participation, civic engagement, and positive youth development. A discussion on academic context and research importance will provide additional grounding and meaning to this work.

Research methodology, results, and discussion cover research design, data collection, and analysis of findings. This exploratory research will provide a pulse on youth perceptions of and engagement with neighborhood associations, based on interview responses from Multnomah Youth Commissioners. In-depth interviews will allow Youth Commissioners space to voice their opinions and thoughts regarding neighborhood associations as a potential avenue for young people's civic engagement and youth-adult partnership.

Concluding remarks provide a glimpse towards the future, including recommendations and next steps in this area of research and civic engagement with

young people in the City of Portland and Multnomah County. Given the small sample size, my conclusions, based on research findings, function as correlations and ideas for the future, rather than causal relationships or concrete interpretations.

## Background

The City of Portland established its network of neighborhood associations in 1974 (Morris, 2009), originally named the Office of Neighborhood Associations (ONA). The first director of this office, Mary Pederson, battled distrust from both neighborhood residents and city officials while establishing the City's initial neighborhood association program (Witt, 2004, p. 90). Since "the program's inception, it has remained unresolved how much citizens shall be granted predominant authority to shape and influence decisions and actions that impact their lives and communities" (Witt, 2004, p. 87). Witt discusses the theoretical underpinnings of control and the evolution of Portland's neighborhood association system over time, dividing this history into five main periods: Capacity Building (1974-1984), Institution Building (1984-1989), Recapturing and Recasting (1993-1998), and Present Tense. One of the core proposals throughout this historical analysis is "that Portland's NA (Neighborhood Association) program has undergone significant change over the course of its history" (Witt, 2004, p. 89).

Despite these significant changes, decades "after its inception, Portland's NA system is, though altered, still in operation" (Witt, 2004, p. 85). These associations, in their ideal form, provide an avenue for neighbors to gather together and advocate important, place-based issues to local city government. The Office of Neighborhood

Involvement (ONI) organizes the 95 present-day neighborhood associations into seven district coalitions: Central Northeast Neighbors, Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods, Neighbors West-Northwest, Southwest Neighborhoods, Inc., Southeast Uplift Neighborhood Coalition, East Portland Neighborhood Office, and North Portland Neighborhood Services (City of Portland, 2014b).

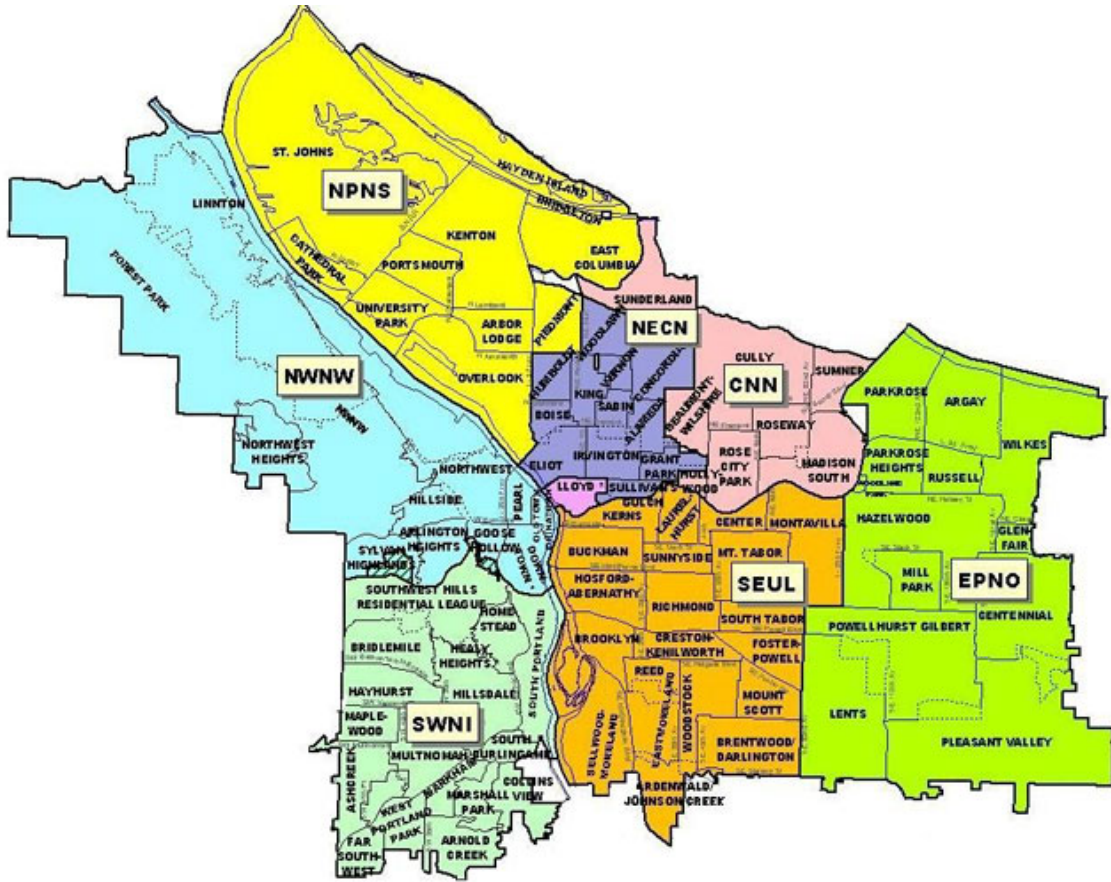


Image 1: City of Portland Neighborhood District Coalitions

This organizational structure of district coalitions gives neighborhood associations “access to staffing, funds...and other logical support services” (Witt, 2004, p. 85). A board of directors, comprised of individuals from neighborhood associations within the district, runs each coalition. This board serves as a liaison between the neighborhood associations and the City of Portland, as “they receive

funding from local tax dollars, contingent upon submitting annual work plans...[as well as] quarterly fiscal and operational accounting reports” (Witt, 2004, p. 85). Of the seven current district coalitions, both East Portland Neighborhood Office and North Portland Neighborhood Services have a rocky history. According to Witt (2004), in 1992 and 1997, respectively, ONA/ONI ended contracts with these district coalitions, due to internal conflicts within each board. Both instances led to ONI assuming more administrative control over staff and funding, while leaving policy focus areas up to the district coalition. This shift provides a concrete example of Witt’s discussion of the tension regarding control and power dynamics between government and residents, bureaucracy and grassroots, as well as internal tensions amongst residents of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds.

While these neighborhood associations offer unique leadership opportunities for some residents, not all people get included in this organizing process. Many segments of the population do not participate with a neighborhood association, for a wide variety of reasons. Engaging with Portland’s neighborhood association system at the district level, for example, requires a monthly Directors and Chairs meeting, held from 12-2 PM on a weekday (City of Portland, 2014a). While some individuals may derive sole employment from their respective district coalition, other residents may need to juggle other jobs, family demands, or other responsibilities. Communities of color, immigrant & refugee communities, low-income residents, and youth are four populations historically often left out of the outreach and conversations within neighborhood organizations.

The Office of Neighborhood Involvement recognized the historic marginalization and underrepresentation of communities of color, immigrant & refugee communities, and low-income residents, as evidenced by their report and office overhaul in the early 2000s, led by then Mayor Tom Potter. The mayor wanted “special attention [paid] to involving traditionally underengaged groups in the community” (Morris, 2009, p. 49). The subsequent process, called Community Connect, took place over two years, and featured mini-grants, focus groups, and other outreach led by a “diverse eighteen-member volunteer group” (Morris 2009, p. 49). After developing a rich understanding of challenges, effective practices, and community needs, Community Connect members presented their findings to City Council in 2008.

“The group’s recommendations included thirty strategies grouped into three goal areas

1. Increase the number and diversity of people involved in their communities
2. Strengthen community capacity
3. Increase community impact on public decisions” (Morris, 2009, p. 50)

ONI took these strategies seriously. Under a new director, the office unearthed the defunct Bureau Advisory Committee (BAC), and intentionally recruited to ensure a more diverse membership. ONI also infused Community Connect ideas and recommendations into all levels of civic engagement, both within its own Office, district coalitions, and neighborhood associations. Additionally, Morris (2009) describes new programs, such as the Diversity and Civic Leadership (DCL) Program, which featured a Leadership Academy and Organizing Project (51). This program has shown great success in building capacity through partnerships with organizations such as Latino Network, Urban League of Portland, and the Center for



Intercultural Organizing. Morris and other ONI staff continually work hard to equitably distribute resources and programmatic efforts to groups that bolster the voices of communities of color, immigrant & refugee communities, and low-income residents within the City of Portland.

One population left out of this conversation is young people. Morris (2009) does not mention youth or young people in her report outlining the overhaul of ONI to ensure investment in diverse civic engagement. While the focus on diversity does extend to several identity factors, the discussion does not include age, or investment in generations of future leaders. This absence runs contrary to the progressivism and civic engagement ethos within Portland. But, adults dominate these systems, so the lack of space for youth voice or engagement is not altogether surprising.

Similarly, Mayor Potter and other leaders invested in youth participation in other ways, through the now-defunct Youth Planning Program, as well as the Multnomah Youth Commission. These bodies provided, and continue to provide, in the case of the MYC, an avenue for youth empowerment and voice in local policy decisions that affect young people's lives. While the MYC works in partnership with many organizations, the commission does not engage with neighborhood associations, and vice versa.

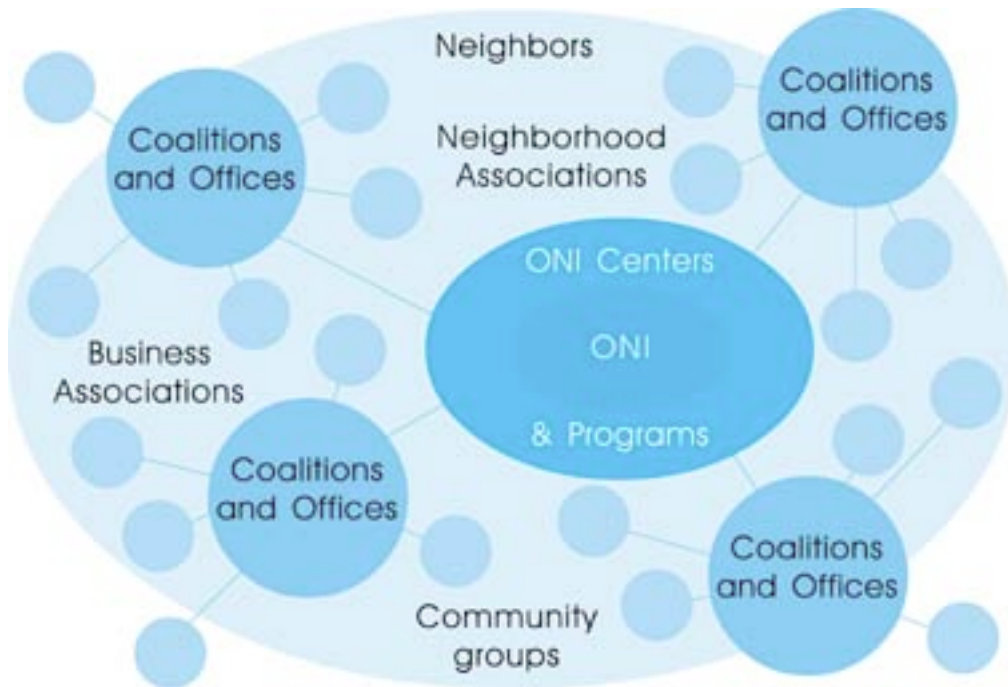


Image 2: Office of Neighborhood Involvement Map

The MYC recently moved across several City bureaus; initially the program lived within the Mayor's Office, and then moved to the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, and eventually to ONI. This final move took place fairly recently, just over the last year, with a Youth Development Coordinator hired within ONI by early 2014. While this shift makes sense on many levels, given the similar commitment of ONI and MYC to civic engagement and community participation, the programmatic efforts within the City of Portland still remain separate based on age. ONI simultaneously operates as the institutional and formalized mechanism for public participation – for adults – while also supporting the MYC, which provides a formal avenue for the civic engagement of young people. Given this recent change for ONI and MYC, the future of youth engagement and inclusive civic participation across age remains exciting and uncharted territory.

## Key Terms & Contextual Elements

The Multnomah Youth Commission serves as the official youth policy body for the City of Portland and Multnomah County. Supported by the City's Office of Neighborhood Involvement and the County's Office of Diversity & Equity, the MYC includes a maximum 42 Youth Commissioners per year. This group acts as a liaison between youth across Multnomah County and local City and County government. The MYC advocates for youth issues and keeps a pulse on priorities through community meetings and active engagement with youth across Multnomah County. Furthermore, the MYC intentionally creates a space for historically marginalized and underrepresented communities to bring their voices to the forefront of youth-driven policy in Multnomah County.

For the purposes of this research, I define youth as 13-21 years old, to mirror the focus of the MYC. However, Census data related to age often use 18 years as the cutoff point; thus, under 18 numbers will also be considered. Maps from Social Explorer utilize Census data to show the percentage of the population under the age of 18 at the Census tract level across the Portland Metro area. These maps show the movement of young people over a 10-year period, from 2000 to 2010, and highlight a decline in youth population within Portland's inner Census tracts.

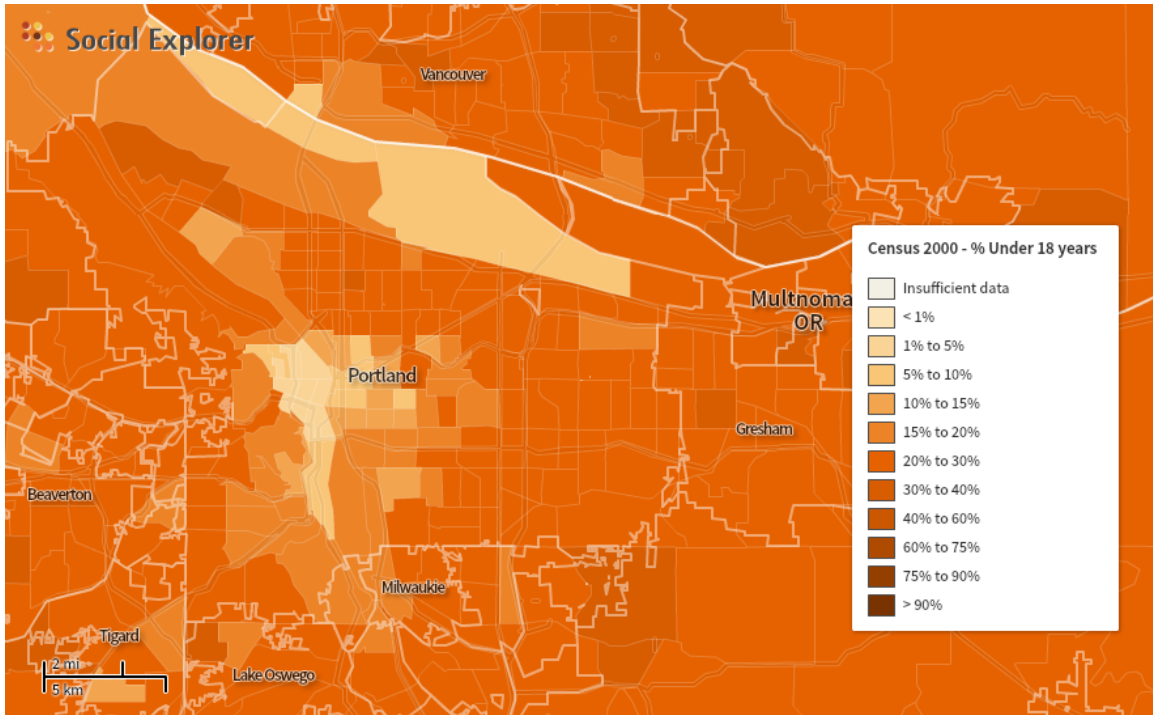


Figure 1: Census (2000) - % under age 18

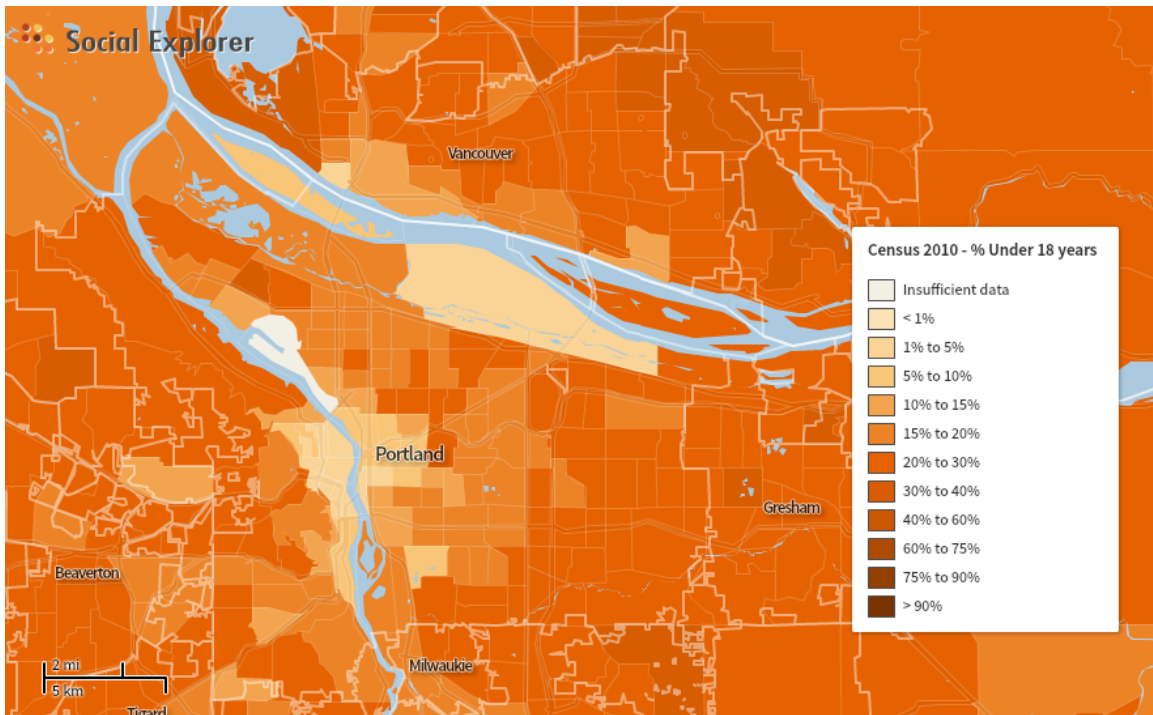


Figure 2: Census (2010) - % under age 18

While the MYC serves both the City of Portland and Multnomah County, the scope of this research will focus on Portland, to look at the city's neighborhood associations as a starting point. Future research should consider the wider context of Multnomah County, looking at neighborhood organizing in cities such as Gresham, Fairview, and Troutdale.

This research focuses on two main research questions, related to youth voice & engagement in the Portland neighborhood association system.

1. How do Multnomah Youth Commissioners perceive their neighborhood & neighborhood association?
2. How do Multnomah Youth Commissioners engage with this organization and its adult members?

The questions intend to explore the relationship between young people, their sense of place & space, and neighborhood organizing. The idea of making neighborhood associations more "youth-friendly" is a moot point if this avenue of engagement does not resonate with or appeal to young people. Exploratory conversations with Youth Commissioners, through semi-structured interviews, will provide an initial pulse on these issues.

## Literature Review

This aspect of research focuses on core theories surrounding youth participation and engagement, and neighborhood associations as a mechanism for public participation. I discuss relevant literature according to main subject area,

although some overlap exists in particular articles with a focus on both neighborhoods and youth. In relation to this overlap, the position of this research focuses on the intersection of youth engagement and neighborhoods. The larger scholarly conversation about youth participation and civic engagement provides a framework for this Portland-specific contribution.

### Youth Participation and Engagement Literature

Existing literature on youth participation and engagement spans a wide range of topics. For the purposes of this research, focus areas include positive youth development, youth-adult partnership, and youth participation in planning, as these areas relate most directly to youth engagement with the Portland neighborhood association system.

### Positive Youth Development

The Oregon Commission on Children and Families (n.d.) developed best practices regarding positive youth development, based on findings from scholars including Pittman, Catalano, and New York's Office of Youth Development. The Oregon Commission on Children and Families believes positive youth development "works best when entire communities including young people are involved in creating a continuum of services and opportunities" to help youth develop into healthy and informed adults (p. 1). Wraparound services, used in areas such as violence prevention and mental health services, follow a similar logic; one positive

effort to engage youth works more effectively in harmony with other efforts.

However, many challenges, such as funding, training, and institutionalized discrimination, exist between well-intentioned practices and the reality of opportunities for youth.

Scholars throughout the later part of the twentieth century built theory and research “associated with ideas stressing that systemic (bidirectional, fused) *relation* between individuals and contexts constitute the basis of human behavior and developmental change” (Lerner et al, 2002, p. 13). The shift away from individual-focused developmental theory provides a more holistic, less pathological view of young people. Lerner et al. (2002) specifically mention “giving young people the opportunity to contribute to and take a leadership position in community efforts to improve social life and social justice” (p. 17) as a beneficial opportunity for young people to develop skills and competencies associated with positive development.

Ginwright, Cammarota & Noguera (2005) offer a more critical analysis of existing youth development frameworks, which they classify as “the *problem-driven* and the *possibility-driven* approaches” (p. 25); positive youth development theory falls under the latter grouping. These scholars offer three main critiques of possibility-driven approaches:

1. Misplaced focus on “individual behavior rather than collective responses to marginalization”
2. Youth thought of “as objects of policy rather than as actors who possess the rights and abilities to shape policy”

3. When youth development scholars do address community, their portrayal is “often static, apolitical, and bereft of the underlying social and economic factors that create and sustain youth marginalization” (Ginwright et al, 2005, p. 30)

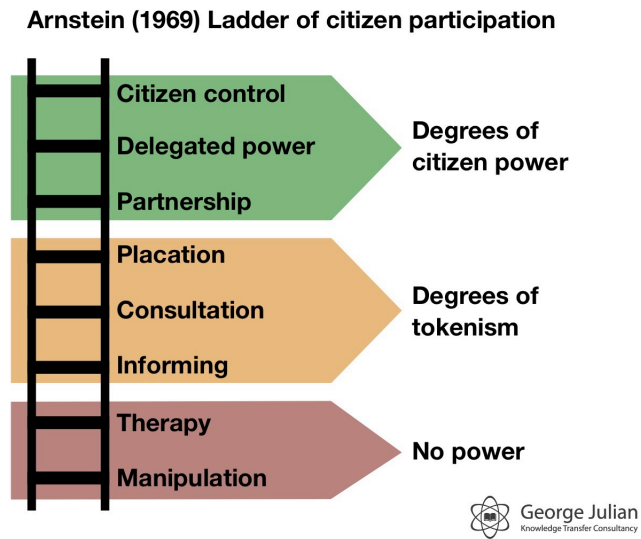
This critique extends to several examples cited in their research, as well as broader discussions of challenges and failures in youth programming efforts. However, the Multnomah Youth Commission provides an opportunity for youth to collectively respond to issues in our community, as agents and partners who possess the “rights and abilities to shape policy” Ginwright, et al. mention. The MYC also utilizes youth development and youth-adult partnership theory in its programming, while simultaneously addressing larger social and economic forces that impact the lives of Youth Commissioners and Multnomah County’s youth population. The MYC stands as an exception to many youth programs, given its unique role as the official youth policy body for the City of Portland and Multnomah County. Understanding the limits and critiques of positive youth development is helpful in determining appropriate next steps for future youth engagement in civic life.

### Youth-Adult Partnership

In discussions of youth engagement, scholars often cite the level of youth control as a controversial issue. Arnstein’s (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation places total citizen control on the top rung, as the highest degree of citizen power. Arnstein recognizes “the eight-rung ladder is a simplification, but it helps to



illustrate the point that so many have missed—that there are significant gradations



**Image 3: Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation**

of citizen participation” (1969, p. 217). Partnership also makes an appearance in the ladder, on rung six of eight, defined as that which “enables [citizens] to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with traditional powerholders” (Arnstein, 1969, p. 217). While Arnstein does not speak to youth participation directly, this construct carries over into design of youth programs and youth empowerment theory. In contrast, social service providers can take a problems-based approach, or contend youth need structure, help, and education from adults to developmentally grow. Other scholars, such as Zeldin (2010), see youth-adult partnership, with shared control and mutual learning, as the ideal for organizations and communities. Especially in the context of civic engagement, co-learning and shared decision-making between youth and adults could dramatically enhance policy outcomes for all stakeholders, as well as current and future leaders.

Jennings et al. (2006) emphasizes the importance of Critical Youth Empowerment as a critical social theory focused on community efforts to push

social change. Jennings et al. demonstrate the assets and shortcomings of four youth empowerment models in their research, synthesizing these approaches to arrive at Critical Youth Empowerment.

**Table 1: Dimensions of Critical Youth Empowerment across Models (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 42)**

AEC= Adolescent Empowerment Cycle

YDE= Youth Development & Empowerment model

**Bold: emphasized in model**

Plain: mentioned, but not emphasized as part of model

Blank: not mentioned in article

Dimensions	AEC	YDE	Transactional Partner	Empowering Education	Critical Youth Empowerment
Safe, supportive environment	Adults provide positive reinforcement.	<b>Adults, family support via high expectations, positive reinforcement.</b>	<b>"Welcoming social climate" emphasized.</b>	<b>Supportive environment emphasized.</b>	Environment must be safe, supportive, fun, caring, challenging.
Meaningful Participation	<b>Meaningful participation is critical for positive social bonding.</b>	Opportunity to learn skills, assume responsibility, participate in public affairs.	Structured process to develop and implement a youth-defined, community-based agenda	Structured experience includes interviewing, critically reflecting, and social action project.	Opportunities for youth to develop capacities in meaningful forum with youth responsibility and decision-making.
Shared Power	Shared power mentioned but not included in model.	Shared power mentioned but not included in model.	<b>Incremental transfer of power to youth as they gain competence and confidence.</b>	Adults and youths are co-learners; shared leadership discussed but not emphasized in model.	<b>Shared power critical, incremental transfer of power to youth as they gain capacity.</b>
Individual- and Community-level oriented		Focused on individual-level development through participation in community affairs.	<b>Individual- and community-level goals of esteem and capacity building.</b>	Individual- and community-empowerment viewed as interwoven.	Individual- and community-empowerment viewed as interwoven.
Socio-political change goals		Contribute to community affairs but not for goals of social change.	Contribute to community affairs but not for goals of social change.	Dialogue stage includes <b>societal analysis</b> and leads into social action projects.	Programs emphasize <b>societal analysis</b> and encourage social change goals.
Critical Reflection	Critical awareness mentioned but not demonstrated.		Critical awareness and reflection mentioned but not demonstrated.	Dialogue stage includes <b>societal analysis</b> through structured questions.	Critical reflection integral to CYE through varied youth-based approaches.

Jennings et al. (2006) emphasize the importance of choice and options for young people as a key tenet to youth empowerment. Zeldin (2010) reinforces this finding within youth-adult partnership theory. Rather than pigeonholing youth into one

option for a project or avenue of engagement, young people need an array of possibilities to reflect diverse interests, skills, and abilities. With the addition of mentoring and positive support from adults, young people can take on new responsibilities that matter, due to choice and options in initial interactions.

Another finding from Jennings et al.'s (2006) research highlights the importance of scale in youth empowerment efforts. Their exploration found “shared power [between youth and adults] may come most readily in smaller, localized sites where youth are fully engaged in the local community” (p. 46). In the context of Portland and other cities of similar size, neighborhoods could provide an ideal scale for these interactions between youth and adults. Thus, neighborhood associations offer potential for avenues of youth engagement and empowerment, with the assistance of adequate training for adults and youth working together.

### Youth Participation in Planning

One realm of youth engagement, youth participation in urban planning, has attracted more research in recent decades. This focus is important given the context of Portland and the role of its neighborhood associations in planning processes. According to Mullahey, Susskind & Checkoway (1999), “the unprecedented scope of change facing our communities today requires a broadly inclusive decision-making pattern” (p. 5). Mullahey et al. focus on youth within this decision-making in their report, *Youth Participation in Community Planning*. Within this report, Mullahey et al. give examples of youth involvement in community land-use planning, citing cases from Toronto, Salt Lake City, and Seattle. The researchers also highlight youth-based

initiatives working towards social change and youth empowerment, as well as examples of youth in policy making. These instances show the breadth of youth participation in planning, with the important undercurrent of young people's voices and action in decisions that affect their lives.

Richards (2011) discusses the incorporation of urban youth in planning practices in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois. She references the Youth Manual, written by Portland's Youth Planning Program (YPP), formerly housed in the City's Bureau of Planning and Sustainability. YPP wrote this manual in 2010, as a guide for adults working with youth in various capacities. The Youth Manual includes a dedicated section to specific barriers to participation experienced by youth. The authors separate these barriers into two main areas: personal (ex: internalized racism or self-doubt) and structural (ex: meeting inaccessibility). The five barriers Richards cites as relevant to her research are stereotypes, inaccessibility, powerlessness, education, and lack of appreciation of support of youth work (2011, p. 7-9).

In her research, Richards (2011) also discusses the broader concept of participatory municipal planning, and the value of planning as an open field of participation (p. 11-12). Richards cites Patsy Healey's book, *Collaborative Planning: Shaping Places in Fragmented Societies* to highlight the "importance of spatial planning to improve the conditions and quality of life through regulation of place-making" (2011, p. 12). In this same work, Healey also analyzes three important issues to youth involvement in planning. "First, one must be open to differences. Two, social justice is key in creating a safe space for urban youth in society. And three, public places have a strong component to creating spaces for dialogue and

conversation” (as cited in Richards, 2011, p. 13). This focus on place-making ties into neighborhood associations because these groups tend to focus on place-based organizing, and issues with a geographic component.

The emphasis on spatial elements recurs in literature focused on youth participation and community mapping. Several articles [Head (2010); Santo & Ferguson (2010)] highlight examples of this avenue for youth engagement. Santo & Ferguson (2010) document the Youth Neighborhood Mapping Initiative, a partnership between the City and Regional Planning program at the University of Memphis and neighborhoods, designed to increase civic engagement amongst teens, teach geographic information system (GIS) and planning skills to younger generations, and increase youth perspective and voice in local policymaking. Santo & Ferguson’s research discusses the “professional and moral imperative for involving youth in planning and community development decisions” (p. 52), as well as benefits related to planning outcomes and future leadership. If government considers neighborhood associations part of planning processes, another important reason to seek youth engagement with these processes is “to gain access to the unique insights that only young people can offer” (Santo & Ferguson: 2010, 53).

Frank (2006) contributes another important inventory of youth participation in planning. A mini-encyclopedia, with case studies from Italy, Europe, and the United States, Frank provides five lessons for effective youth participation, based on the experiences and analysis within the highlighted research.

<h3>Lessons for Effective Youth Participation</h3> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Give youth responsibility and voice</li> <li>2. Build youth capacity</li> <li>3. Encourage youthful styles of working</li> <li>4. Involve adults throughout the process</li> <li>5. Adapt the sociopolitical context</li> </ol> <p>Source: Frank, 2006, p. 367</p>	<p>Subsequent details for each lesson provide policy makers and adult community leaders with concrete ideas and steps to engage more youth in decision-making. Even so, many political, bureaucratic, and capacity-related challenges to this partnership and work still exist, which Frank acknowledges in discussion of challenges from the case studies included within the research.</p> <p>Cited extensively within Frank's literature review, and a contributing author to <i>Youth Participation in Community Planning</i>, Checkoway is a foundational scholar within the areas of youth participation, empowerment, social work, and related fields. Checkoway's article "Involving Young People in Neighborhood Development" comes closest to the focus of this exploratory research on youth engagement and Portland neighborhood associations. In this research, Checkoway (1998) demonstrates five main types of involvement in neighborhood development: "citizen action, youth action, youth development, neighborhood development, and neighborhood-based youth initiatives" (p. 765). These types vary based on levels of adult versus youth control, which is a key theme throughout research from Checkoway and other scholars.</p> <p>Much of the core theory that informs the work of Checkoway and other researchers remains relevant to present-day issues with youth participation and neighborhood associations. However, some of the references and examples cited in these articles no longer hold relevance, mainly because the organizations appear to</p>
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no longer exist. A preliminary web search into groups of interest, including the Youth Working in Communities Fund in Seattle (Mullahey et al., 1999), and the National Commission on Resources for Youth (Checkoway, 1998), revealed no promising leads. A recent attempt to revive similar federal policy (H.R. 2653 (111<sup>th</sup>): Federal Youth Coordination Act of 2009) by creating a White House Office of National Youth Policy died and was referred to committee. This demise raises questions surrounding the strength and longevity of promising efforts to engage youth in decision-making, and sheds light on the need for new research, as well as updates to previous endeavors.

### Neighborhood Associations & Civic Engagement Literature

While Checkoway's (1998) work often crosses over between neighborhood development and youth engagement, many examples of literature with an in-depth focus on neighborhood associations do not address young people in any regard. This lack of representation in the literature may reflect a larger absence of young people involved in conversations and decisions within neighborhoods and their associations. Literature focused on civic engagement promotes the value of public participation in government decisions, especially when those decisions directly impact people's lives. However, debate amongst scholars occurs over the effectiveness of existing methods of participation, especially in reaching underrepresented and historically marginalized communities, such as communities of color, immigrant and refugee communities, LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Transgender, Queer and Questioning), and low-income communities. In contrast to

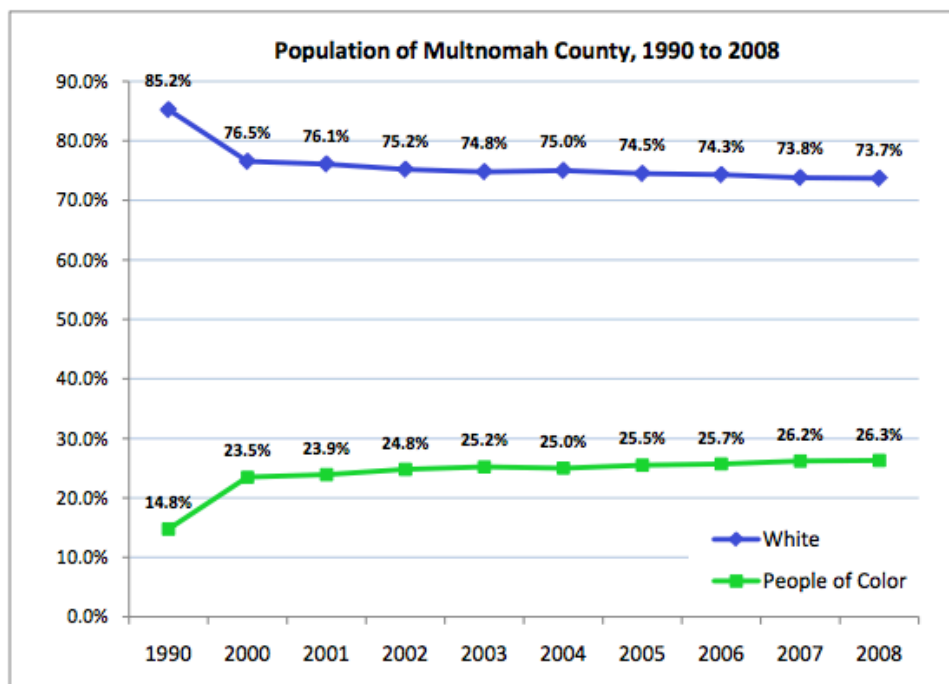
literature focused on youth participation in planning, much of the literature about civic engagement does not include young people as an underrepresented group that needs a voice at the proverbial table. A diminished presence in published work can often mean a lack of authentic engagement or value from members of the dominant culture; in this case, adults, and often white, middle-class, educated adults within active neighborhood associations.

In an article detailing the potential for neighborhood council involvement in local government, focusing specifically on the Los Angeles region, Cooper (1999) discusses benefits and challenges of citizen engagement. Although this research does not deal directly with youth, many of the challenges overlap across age categories. Specific examples of these hurdles include difficulties in defining participation and roles for citizens. The City of Portland's Bureau of Planning and Sustainability supported youth and adults in writing the Youth Manual, which documents benefits, challenges, and strategies related to youth engagement. In the manual, youth cite not having options, or a clear sense of their roles and responsibilities, as a challenge to interfacing with adult-driven organizations (Youth Planning Program, 2010).

Furthermore, many groups, such as neighborhood associations, that strive to increase civic engagement, often leave systems of power and oppression unexamined or un-scrutinized. These forces shape "how we view ourselves and each other...[as well as] behavior, expectations, and to a large degree, who people take seriously" (Adair & Howell, 2006, p. 11). Systems of oppression, such as racism, classism, sexism, and ethnocentrism, reinforce social hierarchies, which value the



voices of white, middle to upper class, straight men. This imbalance does not mean neighborhood associations deserve all the blame; “social power is [often] invisible, unacknowledged, and unexamined” (Adair & Howell, 2006, p. 11). To attempt to correct this imbalance, individuals and groups must “understand the dynamics rooted in issues of power, and do things which counter them” (Adair & Howell, 2006, p. 11), which can range from intentional facilitation techniques to new ways of thinking and organizing, to creating space for new voices and ideas. Given the increased diversity of younger generations, in Portland and nationwide, tensions between youth and adults also include elements of racism and ethnocentrism towards youth of color and immigrant and refugee youth within Portland.



Source: Author's calculations using data from Census Bureau & American Community Surveys, selected years

Figure 3: Graph sourced from the Coalition of Communities of Color

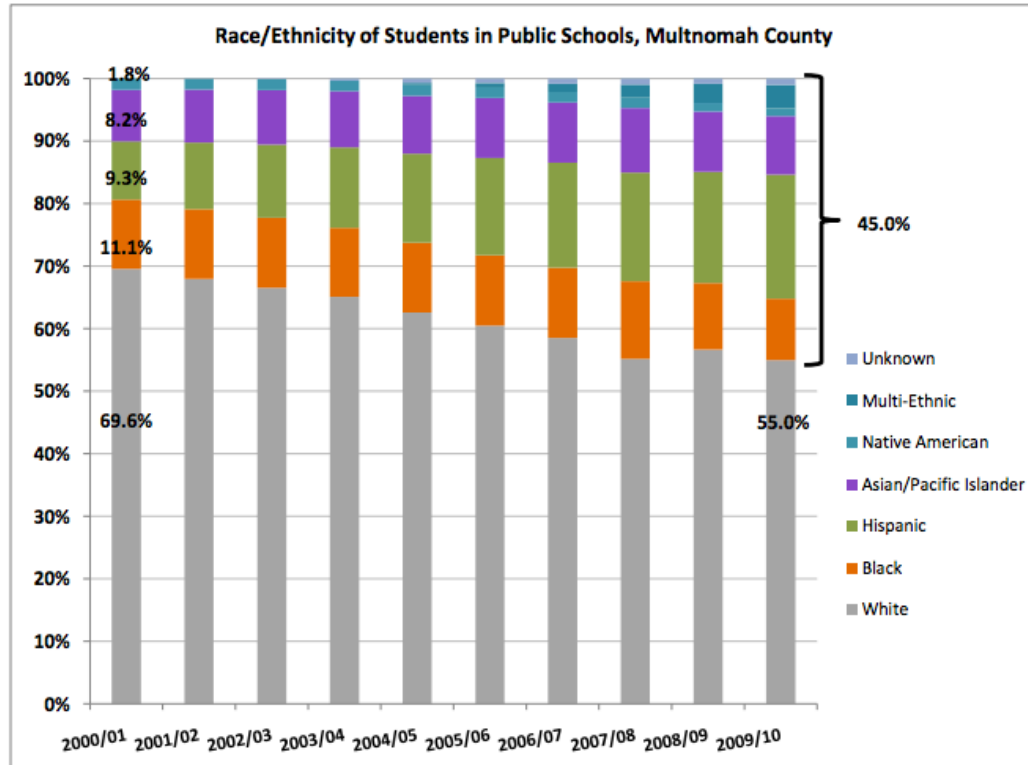


Figure 4: Graph sourced from the Coalition of Communities of Color

As seen in these graphs, the population of students within public schools in Multnomah County includes roughly 45 percent students who identify as a race/ethnicity other than white. This number exceeds the 26 percent of Multnomah County's population who identify as persons of color, highlighting the increased diversity of younger generations within our community.

## Methodology

This section will review considered methods used in this research endeavor. These details further assist in framing the research and its importance to the fields

of youth participation and civic engagement, with a focus on the following two research questions.

1. How do Multnomah Youth Commissioners perceive their neighborhood & neighborhood association?
2. How do Multnomah Youth Commissioners engage with this organization and its adult members?

The semi-structured interview process used for this research provides critical, exploratory information for next steps and future research questions. Given the exploratory nature of this specific research endeavor, I chose interviews to complement the small sample size and focus on initial perceptions. By using interviews, with open-ended questions, data collected during this research process can inform future closed questions on surveys, or more tailored questions in focus groups with relevant populations.

Due to both capacity and a focus on youth interest, the research design and questions center on Youth Commissioners. This specification allows for an exploratory pulse on youth perceptions within the City of Portland, and in no way attempts to generalize these findings to a broader level. The following questions were asked of all interviewees, in a semi-structured, conversational manner.

#### Interview Questions for Multnomah Youth Commissioners

1. What neighborhood do you live in? How well do you know your neighbors?
2. Are you involved with your neighborhood association? Why or why not?

3. Are adults in your life involved with a neighborhood association? Why or why not?
4. Why do you think the MYC is important? What is your favorite thing about being a youth commissioner?
5. On a scale of 1-10, (1 being not interested at all and 10 being excited & interested), please rate your interest in engaging with your neighborhood association. Why did you choose that number?
6. What are your top three concerns for your neighborhood?

I also asked Youth Commissioners basic demographic questions, including age, gender, and race/ethnicity. Racial and ethnic categories were not prescribed, to assure the comfort for the interviewee in self-identification. These questions remained entirely optional, which I made clear to each interviewee.

Ultimately, participatory research methods and theory assisted me in revising particular questions. I rewrote previously closed questions in a more open manner, to encourage greater participation of interviewees. Questions two and three were formerly closed questions. These revised questions now read:

- If you are involved in your neighborhood association, why do you participate with this group?
- If adults in your life are involved with your neighborhood association, why do you think they participate with this group?

I also revised question six to include a second part, focused on favorite things about the interviewee's neighborhood, so as to not solely focus on negative, or concerning, aspects of a neighborhood. An additional "Anything else?" question was

added; I wanted to provide space for additional comments or questions, to reflect the high value I place on contributions from Youth Commissioners in shaping this research process.

The following chart outlines concepts tied to each question, to provide additional insight into why I used these specific questions as prompts for further conversation with Youth Commissioners.

QUESTION	POSSIBLE RELATED CONCEPTS
1. What neighborhood do you live in? How well do you know your neighbors?	Relationship (type, depth) Name of neighborhood
2. If you are involved in your neighborhood association, why do you participate with this group?	Awareness Interest Youth-friendliness
3. If adults in your life are involved with your neighborhood association, why do you think they participate with this group?	Awareness Interest Inclusion
4. Why do you think the MYC is important? What is your favorite thing about being a youth commissioner?	Youth voice Sense of family, belonging Working on important issues
5. On a scale of 1-10, (1 being not interested at all and 10 being excited & interested), please rate your interest in engaging with your neighborhood association. Why did you choose that number?	Awareness Interest Time commitment Youth-friendliness
6. What are your top three concerns for your neighborhood? What are your top three favorite things about your neighborhood?	Physical infrastructure Relationships Services- type, access

## Results & Discussion

The context of original research intentions and existing literature helps frame results and subsequent discussion of findings within this research. I conducted three interviews with Youth Commissioners, ages 15-20. The interviews lasted, on average, 30 minutes, ranging from 22-44 minutes overall. All interviewees

identified as female youth of color; their specific racial/ethnic identities remain confidential given the small sample size.

### Interview Excerpts

Based on previous concepts, as well as undercurrents throughout the three interviews, I arrived at three subject areas to use for analysis of interviewee thoughts and responses. These areas of analysis allow me to cross-reference across interviews and look for commonalities or themes, which could form the basis of future research endeavors. These three areas include Neighborhood Perceptions: Location, Relationships, Positive Attributes & Concerns, Neighborhood Association: Awareness, Interest & Suggestions, and MYC Perceptions: Ties to Positive Youth Development. Full tables, which utilize these areas as column headings, include related excerpts, bulleted and color-coded based on interview (see Appendix A). Certain names or details were changed to protect interviewee confidentiality.

Many patterns emerge, even over the span of three interviews, based on individuals with different life experiences. These patterns can help form the basis of future inquiries or next steps to bridge the gap between youth and adults within Portland neighborhoods.

### Observations within Focus Areas

These focus areas allow for organization of excerpts and thoughts from Youth Commissioners. Comparing comments across interviews provides a clearer

sense of commonalities and subsections within these broad areas. These observations and analyses are not listed in a particular order.

### Neighborhood Perceptions: Location, Relationships, Positive Attributes & Concerns

One key takeaway within this focus area was that the Youth Commissioners interviewed preferred to use cross-streets and landmarks, as opposed to formal neighborhood names and boundaries. This observation raises questions as to whether neighborhoods as a geographic unit for organizing are particularly relevant for young people. Furthermore, all three young people interviewed expressed an interest in building relationships with neighbors, which counters stereotypes that paint youth as disinterested. Additional material that helps to dispel negative stereotypes about young people includes the focus in all three interviews on neighborhood concerns that mirror adult concerns (e.g. sidewalks, safety), which contributes to a broader opportunity for common ground and relationship building.

- **Definition:** range, from small scale (physical cross-streets) to neighborhood name to entire district/part of city
- All three interviewees used **cross-streets** in some regard
- **Importance of landmarks:** businesses, schools used in conjunction with cross-streets to describe place
- **Relationships with neighbors:** none to not knowing them well. Possible reasons cited for *not* knowing neighbors include lack of time living in current area and lack of free time in day-to-day life.

- Still a desire to know neighbors, build relationships. **Value of relationships** include people to count on, safety, and fun.
- **Activities:** desire for activities/events involving whole community, as well as youth-specific spaces
- **Neighborhood concerns:** all three interviewees cited sidewalks as a main concern. Other concerns mentioned were transportation-related (not enough bus service, speeding cars), violence/safety, and trash.
- **Favorite things about neighborhood:** opportunities for physical activity, access to transit, proximity of friends
- **Past neighborhoods:** two of three interviewees talked about past living situations very positively, citing community cohesion, youth-focused activities, and safety through relationships with neighbors as key aspects of this positivity.

### Neighborhood Association: Awareness, Interest & Suggestions

This focus area includes comments around current awareness, barriers to participation, and suggestions for future engagement. The fact that none of the interviewees had any prior awareness of or engagement with a neighborhood association suggests a lack of youth-friendly outreach on the part of these institutions. Furthermore, none of the interviewees cited adults in their lives who are engaged with neighborhood associations, which suggests entire families are left out of this engagement opportunity as well. The high degree of civic awareness and engagement amongst Youth Commissioners in other arenas points to a current



disconnect between MYC's avenues for civic engagement and advocacy versus neighborhood associations' organizing and outreach. The barriers to participation and future suggestions for engagement offer initial recommendations to help bridge this gap, to widen and deepen future opportunities for youth engagement.

- **No awareness:** all three interviewees had never heard of, nor engaged with, a neighborhood association. Their comments ranged from belief the group existed to doubting one existed in their neighborhood.
- **Adult engagement:** all three interviewees also did not know of any adults in their life who engaged with a neighborhood association, with the exception of one interviewee who felt she had seen parents of students at a local school participating in a neighborhood association.
- **Barriers to participation:** all three interviewees mentioned several barriers, either directly or indirectly.
  - No information about neighborhood association
  - Time commitment/lack of free time
  - Meeting accessibility (meeting time and location, how to get there/back)
  - Not adequately prepared to participate
  - Nervous about participation, due to lack of information about other people who participate, activities, and structure of association
  - Historical marginalization of people of color
  - Adults hold negative stereotypes of young people

- No youth currently at table; not interested in being the only young person there
- **Desired future engagement & adult characteristics**
  - Listening
  - Connecting with adults, sharing passion/investment in neighborhood
  - Meeting youth where they are at (ex: schools, MYC), and explaining possible opportunity to impact community
  - Informational sessions about neighborhood association
  - Getting other youth involved
  - Friendliness, welcoming youth to space/meeting
  - Youth-adult partnership theory & training for adults
  - Other modes of communication to reach residents: social media, online surveys
  - Establishing clear foundation of roles and expectations for youth and adult engagement

### **MYC Perceptions: Ties to Positive Youth Development**

Replies to questions asked about the interviewee's experience with the Multnomah Youth Commission provide an interesting window into possibilities and translatable practices for engaging youth in other avenues. These perceptions tie directly to psychosocial goals and competencies within Positive Youth Development theory. These tenets, with practical examples provided by Youth Commissioners,

can serve as part of a guiding framework for neighborhood associations or other associations trying to engage with young people.

- **Belonging & Membership:** value of having the same goal, working together, and discussion of youth-adult partnership within the MYC
- **Civic & Social Ability:** relationships, working together, friendships, value of consistent staff, value of working on policy issues, bringing youth voice into local government
- **Self-Worth:** value of youth voice, confidence in ability to engage with adults around policy issues
- **Cultural Ability:** engaging with diverse group, value of different viewpoints
- **Employability:** organizing large events through MYC, attending meetings with adults
- **Intellectual Ability:** discussion of youth development, youth-adult partnership, systems of oppression, civic engagement
- **Mental Health:** reflection on value of MYC, positive/negative aspects of neighborhood, future opportunities
- **Responsibility & Autonomy:** discussion of self-directed activities and engagement in MYC, other activities, policy work through MYC
- **Mastery & Future:** comments on skills/abilities gained through MYC, future involvement with MYC and broader community

## Researcher Reflections

One of the most striking realizations I came to during this research process was my own bias, through assuming young people had a sense of the meaning, construct, and actions tied to Portland neighborhood associations. I built several of my questions on a basic understanding that neighborhood associations exist within Portland. I quickly realized, both in my recruitment process and during interviews, I was way off base. Furthermore, I engaged with a group of young people who work from a very solid understanding of policy and civic engagement, through their role as Youth Commissioners on the Multnomah Youth Commission. While I believe all young people possess capacities and knowledge to share, this particular population of youth carries a great deal of expertise regarding local policy, into their work and their lives. Even so, all three Youth Commissioners I spoke with had never heard of neighborhood associations. Several additional Youth Commissioners, interested in my topic of research, asked me if their participation in an interview required personal knowledge about neighborhood associations. I clarified, to ensure Youth Commissioners knew they *did not* need to know about neighborhood associations, and restated my interest in their perceptions of and engagement with their neighborhood and the MYC.

I feel this oversight occurred as a result of my own privilege, as a white college student from a middle class background. Upon realizing the assumptions I made in designing my research questions, I tried to think back on when I first became aware of neighborhood associations, and how I used to define my

neighborhood before attending college. These reflections will help me better inform future practice and investigations into youth and civic engagement.

## Conclusion

This exploratory research provides insight into how young people perceive their neighborhoods, place, and civic engagement. The rhetoric around Portland's neighborhood association system touts these groups as rich opportunities for people to influence decisions that affect their lives. However, the definition of "people" in this context tends to only include adults and still struggles to make a welcoming space for adults from historically marginalized backgrounds. In contrast, the Youth Commissioners interviewed, who hold a great deal of knowledge regarding local policy and government activity, do not engaged with or know about these associations, raising questions of outreach strategies utilized by neighborhood associations, as well as the relevance of these organizations to current and future generations of young people.

If neighborhood associations do not resonate with young people, scholars need to further explore other approaches, to positively shape the future of youth engagement and participation in decisions that impact their current and future lives. Future research should include interested youth throughout the process, utilizing action research principles and youth-adult partnership theory. Perhaps neighborhood associations are preferable, given their localized scale, but need focused, cross-cultural and intergenerational training to help break down barriers

and negative stereotypes between youth and adults. Only young people can answer these questions, ideally in partnership with adult allies working to further youth civic engagement within the City of Portland.

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## Appendix A: Interviewee Excerpt Tables

Neighborhood Perceptions: Location, Relationships, Positive Attributes & Concerns
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yeah, Ruby [St.]</li> <li>• Ruby and 305<sup>th</sup></li> <li>• ...no one really knows where Ruby [St.] is, unless I say Twin Oaks Middle School.</li> <li>• Not quite, because I recently moved here, like in February</li> <li>• I have friends who live by me who I still interact with</li> <li>• ...only if there is, like, a problem</li> <li>• ...who you know around your neighborhood is what neighborhood means to me</li> <li>• Sidewalks...street lights [are neighborhood concerns]</li> <li>• ...many of the adults and students or friends, they go there, [to school's track], to support their siblings...one way for community to come together.</li> <li>• ...involved with each other. Knowing who lives around your neighborhood.</li> <li>• [Concern]: Sidewalks...if buses count...I don't know if neighborhoods would be able to do that, [change bus wait times], but I think that's an issue.</li> <li>• [Favorite]: the school...hosts a lot of free stuff.</li> <li>• [Favorite]: Houses are not that far apart so it's easier to go hang out with your friends.</li> <li>• [Favorite &amp; concern]: Super quiet neighborhood</li> <li>• I'd rather have, you know, there are houses with kids around...even though noises can be not good, you would just know that we were alive.</li> <li>• There's also not much to do</li> <li>• A movie night...it would be nice if they had it on weekends...outdoors...I think that would bring people, to come outside.</li> <li>• Pinegrove [neighborhood]...I don't know, [this part of] Portland, maybe?</li> <li>• I feel like it starts around, like, Jackson [St.], and then ends, like, towards Adams [Ave.]...I haven't lived there for that long, so I don't know.</li> <li>• [Regarding how well I know my neighbors], not that well. I just moved...I live by Lewis Middle School...so [I know] young people.</li> <li>• Can I say sidewalks? [as a neighborhood concern]</li> <li>• Can I say trash? Like just trash? Yeah, around my neighborhood...people litter, like, around the school and houses...water bottles...paper...food...leftovers and boxes, containers.</li> <li>• Cars...some of them ignore [bumps] and go really fast.</li> <li>• I feel like they should make more sidewalks...have a trash out on a corner where people can throw it away so they don't have to, like, litter...In my old neighborhood they did, but not this one.</li> <li>• [Favorite things about neighborhood include] bike route...playground and a track field...There's people around the neighborhood who use it. We usually play with our family.</li> <li>• [Having a] youth group for, like, youth could go and hang out...I liked that a lot [in my old neighborhood]...I became friends with some of the people around and I got to know more people in the neighborhood.</li> <li>• I liked [my old] neighborhood a lot. A lot of people got along and go out and hung out...they had lots of, like, gang problems there...I thought that was bad because a lot of kids live there.</li> <li>• I live in an apartment complex, but I don't know any of my neighbors at all. And I barely learned my manager's name because I had to ask, like, I asked him, "so I've known you</li> </ul>

**Neighborhood Perceptions: Location, Relationships, Positive Attributes & Concerns**

for 10 years, but I don't know your name."

- I don't know any of my neighbors...it would be nice if you knew who was around, if you knew your neighbors so you're not like, "I don't know who this person is."
- ...there's a lot of families, big families.
- Otherwise you don't really know people. It's not like you go, "hey where do you live?"
- You're doing your own thing. And people are doing their own thing. You never get to see each other or do anything together... [where I used to live], when people knew each other, because all the kids would all play together, so the parents knew each other and then some of them were part of the association.
- I was telling my parents, I was thinking the same thing, of having an event or something to get to know people. Because sometimes if you don't know who they are it's difficult to feel safe.
- [Where I used to live], whenever we would go on vacation or something, um, the neighbors would watch our house because we knew each other so well...really safe...since people knew each other, whenever there's a stranger, they can properly dismiss them.
- ...we don't talk to them, or we don't know their name, or we don't know where they live...maybe he saw something, or maybe he took them, [some items that went missing from outside the apartment]...neighbors downstairs took them and, like, kept them until they returned from work so that nobody else would take them.
- Yeah, they're nice, but we didn't know each other and I didn't think they knew where we lived...if we had known each other, then it would have been a straight, "hey," or leave them outside our house or whatever.
- I don't know the boundaries...I never really considered my neighborhood where I live...I've never, like, oh I live in the Washington neighborhood.
- I'd just say I live on 7<sup>th</sup> and Highland by Wendy's.
- It's easier than, like, saying, it's the Cully neighborhood, it's the whatever neighborhood...it's easier if you just say, "oh I live on whatever street."
- ...in California there's, like, a lot [of people of color who work in government], but there's also a lot more people of color in California.
- ...especially for old people, there's a lot of that same mentality and feeling of like, "oh people of color shouldn't be here." And, like, I don't know, it gets portrayed that Portland is so liberal and accepting.
- [Focus/neighborhood concern] has been preventing youth violence.
- [Neighborhood concern]: sidewalks... [And drains]. There are a lot of them that get clogged up...it's really difficult to walk through there.
- [Favorite thing about neighborhood]: nothing...I don't have anything that I'm like, "oh my god this neighborhood is to die for!" Maybe, I guess, having access to bus 108 and 216. I like that. If there was more buses near that would be cool.
- [I like that] because it allows me to get to the places I need to go...I [having easy access to] both.

**Neighborhood Association: Awareness, Interest & Suggestions**

- I think it, [my neighborhood association], exists; I just don't know about it
- Students of the school, like, parents of the students [engage in the neighborhood association]

### Neighborhood Association: Awareness, Interest & Suggestions

- I think my mom would want to be in it...to have friends...be able to have people you can talk about issues in the neighborhood and how to improve it would just be nice for her.
- I would love to, but I don't think I would have time for it.
- I would even try to get people to get involved in it...If I don't know what it is, how am I supposed to reach out to people?
- I think meetings; if you come together and talk...like a conversation...talking about [an issue], how to improve it...listening to each other.
- ...if we all agree on it, then there has to be something done, you know?
- ...most meetings, if there's adults involved, it's more, like, adult heavy.
- I want to be heard. I don't want to go to meetings and just sit and listen and do nothing about it.
- I want my voice to be heard. I think if there was, like, a balance, or an adult and youth partnership, then that would make, just the involvement much stronger.
- ...adults assume that we're, like, naïve, like we don't know what's going on.
- ...what they see we might not see, and then what we see they might not see. So it's helping each other.
- We're all different; it's just that they assume if one youth is doing one thing, every other young person is doing it. And I think that's not okay.
- I just think who they, [adults in a neighborhood association], are. What person they bring to the table and why they're there...if I know they're passionate that will help me connect with them more than if I don't know them.
- ...an eight, [out of a scale of 1-10, tied to degree of interest in future involvement]...if I'm involved in something I'm passionate about, I'm more likely to be engaged in, to go to meetings, and to do the work, whatever it is.
- If I see whatever I'm doing is making a change in my neighborhood, I would want to do that.
- I'd rather have friends or someone I know go with me, [to a neighborhood association meeting], than just adults.
- ...usually if I know things I like to bring someone else to come with me.
- Reach out...go to places where youth are there...actually, like, talk to them...just make it exciting.
- ...spreading the word out about what they do.
- ...depends on when it was. Or where it was located. Just time-wise.
- No, [I don't engage with my neighborhood association]
- [To me, neighborhood means]...the people around your, like, neighborhood, like, who you talk to and engage with, I think.
- No, not anyone I can think of, [is an adult who engages with their neighborhood association]
- ...a five, [out of a scale of 1-10, tied to degree of interest in future involvement]...I don't know my neighbors that well so I would be, like, nervous about it, I guess. About, like, the people, I guess, people. And what we'd be doing and how it would look like.
- ...knowing if there were going to be, like, youth there too, not just adults. If I knew what they did...if, like, neighborhood associations came to, like, a thing with just youth and talked about, like, the stuff they do.
- ...getting youth together and talking about what they do and doing an activity together or something like that.
- [Coming to]...the Youth Commission...schools.

### Neighborhood Association: Awareness, Interest & Suggestions

- [In previous residence outside Portland], all the leaders of the neighborhood kind of made decisions together about what was going to happen regarding the neighborhood...we had, like, a board...president, a secretary.
- Because I didn't even know they, [neighborhood associations] existed!
- And they're supposed to help improve our community, our neighborhood
- Nope, [no awareness of youth or adult engagement with neighborhood associations]
- I mean you can, you technically can show up to the meetings, but what 15 year old is gonna show up to an adult-heavy policy meeting, you know? And even if you're in college.
- I think it's kind of intimidating as a young person to go into an adult-heavy world...you might get questioned...if you've never been to them and you don't know what they're about, it's even more scary to just, like, show up.
- [being] the only young person here...you have no clue what they're talking about
- I think if people acknowledge the fact there is disparities within their community then they're more likely to be working on them and trying to figure out how to make everybody on the same page.
- ...people of color are always, like, disempowered in the system, in the US system...Portland has a really bad history with, like, racism.
- ...there's still a lot of work that needs to get done. Like, [Portland] might be liberal and wonderful if you're...a white person...but if you're a person of color, it's a lot more challenging.
- There's no youth at the table [in neighborhood associations]
- I don't know what they do. So, if they do get to influence policy then, yeah, they matter.
- Most people don't know about them. Meaning that the people that are in them are probably...they're most likely going to be privileged people...who have good jobs. Who has good jobs? Mostly white people. Why is that? Because they have more access to resources. So, how do they expect to, you know, reach more people?
- Explaining to youth how they can help impact their community...some [youth] have a lot of other stuff to worry about...not going to go and sit at a meeting with a bunch of adults and talk about your neighborhood [if you do have free time].
- Because, like I'm saying, who's going to be the people who go to those? People who have free time, so, like, either really old people or people who have really good jobs.
- I don't even think we have a neighborhood association.
- Public minutes...electronic input...if there was something that they wanted to know from the community...like Survey Monkey or Facebook...Facebook is a good platform.
- I don't know, just letting people know what's happening. Because if you don't now, how can you expect people to be engaged?
- You wouldn't return again because, like, well, I don't even know what is happening; I'm just wasting my two hours.
- [I would not want a youth-only space] because you need the adult allies in order to make change. Because a lot of people still don't take youth seriously, so it's better if you have adults who are willing to support you.
- Having adults welcome you into the space...a lot of adults just...there's, like, a place where, like, your presence doesn't even get acknowledged.
- Having adults be welcoming and friendly and not all, like "oh young people."
- I feel like a lot of adults have this mentality and idea that young people are bad and troublemakers.
- Youth-adult partnership trainings but those are kind of hard to do with all the adults we

### Neighborhood Association: Awareness, Interest & Suggestions

- have
- An informational session
- ...an eight [out of a scale of 1-10, tied to degree of interest in future involvement]...because I am interested and I like to be involved in my community and stuff. But, at the same time, I haven't heard from them at all.
- I am [interested] but, at the same time, I don't know how active or what type of stuff they do, so I'm not like, "oh my god!"
- Knowing what type of work they do, the issues they focus on, how they will incorporate youth into this, so knowing exactly what my role would be if I were to get involved.

### MYC Perceptions: Ties to Positive Youth Development

- [I like the MYC because of its] community base...we all have the same goal...one of the most important things, having a goal.
- [On the MYC], we're all friends...try to get the same thing done...connections help us get our work done. Definitely.
- [I like the MYC] because MYC provides voice for youth and gets them engaged in policy...doing youth and adult partnership...service-learning projects...youth and adults coming together and listening to one another...listening to each other's opinions and, like, coming up with an idea together...making a decision together.
- ...adults helping us
- I think it's, [the MYC], a good model because it shows policy people that youth need to have a voice in decision making.
- My favorite thing about being a Youth Commissioner would be learning about local government and the summit planning...I'm a youth and, like, I'm working with local government to provide a voice for youth around my neighborhood, and not just me.
- [The MYC is important] because it allows young people to have a voice in their community and in government...to meet [elected officials and community leaders]...you just get to meet so many people that you otherwise wouldn't get to meet.
- [The MYC] allows young people to become involved in that process.
- ...before the MYC, like, we never really talk about race, ethnicity, power, and privilege...outside of the MYC you don't really have those conversations.
- I like being able to build relationships with the people that we work with.
- [The MYC is] not something you can leave that easily.
- How cool is it that this guy who is Chief of Police calls you boss lady, when I'm, like, so much younger than him?
- It wasn't as intimidating, you know, because I'm like, "hey, I'm the only youth, so?" So I'm valuable. My voice matters and, like, that's an empowerment that I've received from being in the Youth Commission...You're going to have a voice and your voice is going to matter.
- Bring a friend [to a meeting]!
- [Adults outside the MYC] questioning how we came up with that information...we put so many hours and work into doing it and for them to be, like, questioning it just because we're young people...we're not experts on the work but we're trying, you know.
- [Apologized later] but it was, like, too late; you know that was already done...now they've seen how much work we've done.