

## **Bangor Innovative Neighborhoods Initiative**

### **April 20, 2016**

#### **Innovative Neighborhoods will:**

1. Enhance the livability of Bangor's neighborhoods through innovation
2. Expand volunteer service in Bangor's neighborhoods
3. Energize a "laboratory of democracy" in which citizens craft exciting, feasible ideas to move Bangor forward.

#### **The Goal**

Create an **earned** reputation for Bangor as the most creative, caring, and entrepreneurial small city in America using the most bold and evidence-based methods.

#### **Making a Strong Community Stronger**

In Bangor there is a vigorous if largely tongue-in-cheek pride in our neighborhoods, such as Fairmount, The Tree Streets, Little City, Bangor Gardens, and more. Some neighborhoods have instituted Facebook pages on which neighborhood topics are discussed. Bangor takes understandable pride in their local little league teams and other sports teams.

The Innovative Neighborhoods Initiative seeks to harness Bangor's energy and growing community activism -- and focus citizens on data-driven, grassroots innovation leading to a more creative, caring, entrepreneurial city.

#### **Utilizing an Excellent Tool To Start**

The City of Bangor is participating in an AARP Livable Communities Initiative. This survey, while focused on Bangor residents 50 and over, analyzes issues that appeal to all ages. In addition, this initiative will utilize the results of the recently produced Bangor Forward survey (which included many young people) to frame actions plans. These are excellent starting points for action based on community needs leading to service (expanding on a Village-to-Village model described in more detail in Section A) and innovation with the goal of a more creative, caring and entrepreneurial city.

#### **Innovative Neighborhoods will:**

1. Utilize surveys such as Livable Cities and Bangor Forward to spark creative thinking about improving Bangor.
2. Create a Steering Committee that structures Innovative Neighborhood teams and competitions in Bangor.
3. Expand the Village-to-Village model so that, under the Innovative Neighborhood's model, volunteers of any age can serve others of any age in Bangor.
4. Foster cohesive goal-oriented neighborhoods, possibly based on elementary school catchment areas.
5. Coordinate volunteer efforts in each Innovative Neighborhood.
6. Spark innovative ideas bubbling up from each laboratory of democracy via the Innovative Neighborhoods model.

7. Establish criteria for recognizing winners each year of the Innovative Neighborhood Award.
8. Coordinate a gala to celebrate Innovative Neighborhood winners.
9. Earn the reputation and reality of a city of vision, pragmatism and innovation.

### **A. A Strong Platform on Which to Build**

The Innovative Neighborhoods program begins with a solid, proven base, the Village-to-Village modeled on direct service. (On this base we will build cohesive Innovative Neighborhood teams that, in addition to direct service, spark innovation new initiatives for our city. This is further described in Sections C through G.) The Village-to-Village Program exists around the United States. Maine has the second highest percentage of seniors in America. Under Village-to-Village seniors are offered a greatly-enhanced opportunity to age in place. Specifically, in a program already proven successful, seniors pay fees on a sliding scale to get help (often from other seniors) with activities such as a ride to the grocery store or doctor, snow shoveling, companionship, and more.

For example, under the At Home Downeast Village-to-Village Program an individual pays between \$130 and \$1,000 per year on an income-based sliding scale. A couple pays \$150 to \$1,300 per year. (At Home Downeast focuses on people 60+. Innovative Neighborhoods expands the program to all ages). Under the current program seniors get four rides per month to medical appointments, a check-in from a nurse twice a month, weekly grocery and prescription delivery, a safety assessment of their home, and social gatherings. Many older people need just a small amount of assistance to remain safe at home. This successful program increases [self-reported](#) health improvements, social engagement, [increased knowledge](#) of local resources, and [decreased hospitalization rates](#).

Our base, the Village to Village model, has been credited with saving and lengthening the lives of older people. The Innovative Neighborhood model will coordinate and improve this methodology while organizing and sparking citizens to lead Bangor into an innovative future -- grassroots up.

Bangor, being more compact, offers some economy of scale and may be able to operate at a lower cost per person. Our initiative also offers the opportunity for an expanded brand of program: Innovative Neighborhoods.

### **B. Broadened Demographic, Increased Innovation**

Bangor lends itself to a new approach, large enough and compact enough to provide a model for other cities, small enough so Bangor's neighborhood feel and community spirit offer a strong cohesion in which gatherings to discuss a neighborhood challenge are a walk from one's door. This program envisions neighborhood teams based on four sectors of the city that include demographic and socioeconomic diversity. (Fairmont might be paired with Capehart, for example.) The team structure might correspond with Bangor elementary school catchment areas.

The same concepts that benefit older citizens can benefit a variety of younger people. This program can help a person who uses a wheelchair better live in place in the same way it can help an older resident live in place. There are parents of children with disabilities and other challenges who could benefit from this effort. Community Partnerships for Protecting Children is interested in working as a partner on this project. Thus Innovative Neighborhoods would expand the village-to-village model to a broader demographic.

The delivery of services to the disabled and the elderly and the ability to foster the dignity of living at home is essential. All of us benefit from walk-able neighborhoods, good parks, and smart municipal decisions. This coincides with AARP's livable communities model. The Innovative Neighborhood concept taps and organizes the growing energy in our city.

### **C. Cohesive Neighborhoods, Innovative City**

There has sometimes been talk that, with all the focus on downtown (a commendable focus), there has not been enough focus on Bangor's neighborhoods. This effort will formalize a city government interest in neighborhoods while fostering neighborhood cohesion and pride.

Some neighborhood-based Facebook pages have popped up in Bangor. Such pages can be the basis for something even more exciting – an organized effort that focuses citizens on results that improve the livability of the neighborhoods and inspire new ideas for our entire city.

A neighborhood watch might focus on the most recent burglary or a community group might mobilize around fixing potholes. Innovative Neighborhoods, while considering those issues, will go further, focusing residents' efforts not just on the latest complaint, but rather the newest idea -- and the associated design, activities and planning — that can make Bangor's neighborhoods, and the city as a whole, more livable and more attractive places to do business. The Innovative Neighborhoods concept challenges Bangor to find feasible, evidence-based creative ideas that will set Bangor apart as a great and innovative city.

### **D. Data Analytics Advisors**

Chris Dalton is a software developer from California who lives in Bangor. His firm is paid to engage in decision analysis for the pharmaceutical industry, and oil and gas firms. Lance Blackstone also lives in Bangor. He manages software development projects focused on large-scale assessment of students and professionals to support learning and career progress.

These two developers -- with decades of experience between them -- have offered to serve as advisors to the Innovative Neighborhoods initiative. Their advice would indeed help analyze and coordinate the (broadened) service delivery described in the village-to-village model above.

In addition, these software engineers will advise the four or five Innovative Neighborhood Teams in crafting goals drawn from brainstorming, the AARP livable communities survey, the Bangor Forward report, and a data-driven approach to analysis.

This initiative would benefit greatly from the creative involvement of city staff, particularly with regard to data and mapping information. The project will incorporate data analysis to consider any neighborhood challenges as discussed by neighbors.

Each Innovative Neighborhood team would be charged with cultivating the key people they think they will need in various areas they decide (data, planning, the environment, transportation, etc.) to work with their volunteer neighbors in general on crafting exciting and feasible ideas.

### **E. Institutionalizing a Big Vision**

The Innovative Neighborhood Teams can make recommendations informed by the Livable Communities survey or Bangor Forward, but also by whatever inspires the team that improves either their specific neighborhood or the city as a whole. This Innovative Neighborhood initiative is a pragmatic tool to implement exactly that type of big positive vision. The Innovative Neighborhood Teams might imagine things like; can we establish a permanent non-profit theater that shows independent films? Can we address the problems in a local watershed? How can we pragmatically welcome and entice foreigners to our community? How can we weatherize more homes? How can we establish a downtown, mid-sized music venue? How can we increase the rate of high school graduates going to college locally? How do we establish a maker's space in Bangor? How can we better connect businesses with the local higher education community so they can connect with the workers they need or get help with their latest innovation?

Innovative Neighborhoods teams could choose to tackle any number of other challenges. What the teams have in common is that, after selecting their challenges, they craft the most innovative, feasible plan to achieve the goal -- addressing logistics and financing while using an evidence-based, data-driven approach. The plans are not intended to be mere concept drafts, but a specific strategic plan that foresees a pragmatic business plan with specific realistic steps specified through to reaching the ultimate goal. Their plans will be judged by an objective, outside set of judges selected by the Steering Committee.

Most important is the problem-solving ethic that Innovative Neighborhoods aims to foster: using evidence to offer inspiring innovations that set Bangor apart as a dynamic city.

### **F. Light-hearted Competition, Innovative Results**

It is wonderful to root for the neighborhood little league team, but imagine Bangor with four Innovative Neighborhood Teams -- each focused on the problems their neighbors raise -- ranging from ways to improve the local watershed, ways to improve

walk-ability, coordination of neighborhood forums, volunteer service delivery, neighborhood revitalization, increased physical activity.

The teams would be charged with considering guiding criteria that don't force the topics or direction, but set guidelines that encourage creativity and innovation in each team. For example, teams might be encouraged to vet their initial ideas through crowd-sourcing, engage in "pre-mortems", utilize evidence-driven thinking, and be encouraged to imagine what will make Bangor a great city five years from now not just what makes other cities great right now, make sure that diverse voices are heard.

### **G. The Image Our City Projects Matters**

Some have, perhaps accurately, described Bangor as facing a tsunami of old people. Fair enough, but the best solution (and the smarter marketing method) is a community-wide approach that celebrates bringing people of all ages into a team that makes it fun to generate and carry out ideas that allow Bangor to compete more effectively for business, for young workers, for our creative and caring economy -- and through building a reputation as a city moving with confidence into the future.

### **H. A Most Useful Awards Show**

As advisors, experienced data and software thinkers Blackstone and Dalton, would work with AARP, Penquis and neighborhood leaders on structuring the Innovative Neighborhood program and offering, once per year, the Innovative Neighborhood Award -- with a festive annual gala presenting an Innovation Oscar to the Innovative Neighborhood Team that crafts the most exciting, pragmatic step forward for our City of Bangor. When seeking grants to support the entire program, the Innovative Neighborhoods Steering Committee could potentially allocate money as part of the award to the winning Innovative Neighborhood, but this could possibly be a more nominal amount to cover start-up logistics of an idea.

Generally, Innovative Neighborhood teams would be required to draft a plan that is feasible either because: a) it is inexpensive; or b) if significant costs are involved, the proposal specifies a realistic method of garnering sufficient funds, whatever the source. Prospects of a given plan would be further boosted were it the recipient of an Innovative Neighborhood prize.

There might be two Award offered each year:

- 1) The most Innovative Idea for a the city as a whole;
- 2) The most Innovative Idea proposed by each neighborhood to serve that neighborhood.

Thus the neighborhood will always benefit from ideas specific to that area, but the city as a whole will always benefit from big ideas that serve the entire community.

The Village to Village Model organizes retail service, person to person; The Innovative Neighborhood competition inspires wholesale change -- large-scale positive impact.

## **I. Our City and Community Organizations Lead Together**

Innovative Neighborhoods will set apart Bangor as a leading innovative city – tapping, organizing, and recognizing the talents and plans of our citizens.

The Fairmount School Innovative Neighborhood Team might be in the same sector as the Capehart area. Each of the Innovative Neighborhood areas will be economically diverse; each challenged to address a range of socioeconomic challenges. Consider the sheer fun and the challenge of community volunteers, from engineers to professors to software developers to teachers to mechanics being let loose to innovate. They might start their brainstorming with tools such as placemeter, <https://www.placemeter.com/about>, or Timebanks, <http://timebanks.org>.

Just as neighbors cheer on their school sports team, a new set of teams made up of innovators will engage in good-natured competition to improve our city while administering the community care that the Village-to-Village program offers and taking the concept to new heights: toward full community involvement and greater innovation, awarded and recognized. James Fallows, in a lengthy series in the Atlantic, notes that a key characteristic of successful citizens is the respect and recognition given community leaders by the general citizenry.

## **J. Earning an Innovative Reputation for Bangor**

The opportunity for media partnership and national recognition is strong if we work together. The Bangor Daily News COO Todd Benoit has met twice about this project along with Producer Dan MacLeod and Editorial Writer Matt Stone. Matt Stone has been designated to the Steering Committee for this project.

City politics and city government can sometimes get bogged down in inside-baseball disputes, petty rivalries, and retrograde thinking. The state and federal governments are widely perceived as gridlocked. Thus Bangor must lead.

Bangor has done a good job compared to other cities in taking a forward-thinking stance. Innovative Neighborhoods, if well-crafted, can garner attention in the media and around Maine, and possibly nationally, in a way that sets Bangor in a positive light. That is an economic development tool in itself.

## **K. Leadership Roles**

### Steering Committee

The City of Bangor (two members)

AARP

Bangor Daily News, Matt Stone.

Bangor Savings Bank

Lance Blackstone, Software Engineer

Chris Dalton, Software Engineer

Eastern Area Agency on Aging

Penquis

Bangor Fusion

The City has submitted a grant application to AARP that references and incorporates this concept. With the formation of this partnership (and additional partners as we strategize), we hope to boldly seek improvement of our city through stakeholder participation and citizen engagement and by garnering support from grant funders.

### **Next Steps**

This project will require collaboration. The Bangor City Council unanimously passed this measure.

Innovative Neighborhood Teams will be guided in part by using the surveys already completed by AARP for Bangor related to the Livable Communities initiative, by the information offered by Bangor Forward, and by new ideas offered by citizens.

Penquis can build on the proven record of Washington Hancock Community Agency with a similar initiative. Penquis has reviewed this proposal and expressly supports this project. Penquis has created a team of top leaders to participate in planning, including President and CEO Kara Hay, Housing Development Director Jason Bird, Child Development Director Heidi LeBlanc, and Housing and Energy Services Director Jennifer Giosa.

The partnership our city can have with the Bangor Daily News through Innovative Neighborhoods also presents a powerful and positive opportunity for a potentially transformational initiative.

We can build a dramatic success that will reflect well on all the participating partners and engage in truly creative change through the Innovative Neighborhoods Initiative. A well-crafted, well-executed program can deepen and broaden the livability of Bangor's neighborhoods and polish the reputation of our city in a way that is attractive to new citizens seeking an exciting, forward-thinking community in which to live. This initiative has the potential, if citizens pull together, to make Bangor the most creative, caring and entrepreneurial city in America.

*Sean Faircloth can be contacted at [sean.faircloth@bangormaine.gov](mailto:sean.faircloth@bangormaine.gov)*