

**La Plata County Children, Youth and Family  
Master Planning Process  
Committee Report**

**Key Focus Area: Neighborhood and Community**

**Committee contributors: (Facilitators in bold)**

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In addition to those who served on our committee the following contacts and information contributed significantly to our decision-making:

- Numerous La Plata County residents who were interviewed by committee members, usually right within their neighborhood.
- 972 students in grades 6-12 who were administered the Developmental Assets<sup>®</sup> survey
- 15 Escalante Middle School students participated in a neighborhood charrette

**What was the vision your committee used to drive its process?**

“Everyone contributes; Everyplace safe; Everyone belongs; Welcome Home!”

**How did your committee define thriving in relationship to its key focus area?**

The committee worked to define thriving for neighborhoods and community at its 10/24/07 meeting with the following words and concepts being generated:

*Health, well-being, well and getting better, found joy or true love, being outdoors and active, ability to pursue desires without worrying about basic needs, strength/empowered to live as one chooses, basic needs are met so one can dream and those dreams are possible, everyone can work as a team (like a family), uninhibited growth, freedom, ability to change, taking something that has been cast aside and give it momentum/meaning, taking risk or getting out of comfort zone, safety, being content with surroundings, but constantly looking forward.*

There are many interpretations of neighborhood, all of which can lead to a healthy debate on what boundaries are most useful in neighborhood planning efforts. Academically, every field has a different logic for their definition. Neighborhood associations/councils and community groups offer their interpretations. City and County Planning Departments often designate neighborhood boundaries along census tract boundaries. And community residents quite frequently have a very different mental map of their neighborhood than the officially designated neighborhood areas used by planners and policymakers. All definitions are important and meaningful. The question is how one begins to create agreement over the definitions so that the debate focuses not on boundary definitions, but on how to make positive changes and increase the likelihood of thriving in these “neighborhoods”.

While the committee did not formally articulate how it defines a neighborhood, we realize this will be important. We suggest that as this recommendation is implemented, those on the Neighborhood Commission along with others who have an interest, should come together and work on such a definition. At a minimum, we believe that those in the dialogue should include a diverse representation of residents (youth, youth adults and elders will need to be involved as well) from a diverse representation of “neighborhoods”, planners, elected officials, and those who in some way provide services, supports and opportunities to those within these “neighborhoods”.

The committee also contributed to, and supports, the following overall thriving definition:

“Thriving youth and adults are steadily growing towards and becoming people with a positive sense of self, nurturing and responsible family members, effective communicators, people who make healthy life choices, involved community members and responsible global citizens, innovative problem solvers and appliers of a creative process, exemplary workers and lifelong learners, and caring and ethical individuals.”

### **What is your committee’s strategic recommendation?**

*“Because strong communities arise from strong neighborhoods, La Plata County, with its towns of Bayfield, Durango and Ignacio, shall recognize and empower everyone from all our neighborhoods to create activities, places and organizations that help people find their voice. This will lead to closer-knit, more vibrant communities with happy people. These activities, places and organizations center around the idea of thriving relationships, where everyone contributes, everyplace is safe and everyone belongs.”*

**Recommendation Category:** This recommendation will need to have a **policy** that is approved to support it and an ongoing and comprehensive **initiative** adopted to ensure successful implementation.

**Policy recommendation:** Each municipal governing body (County Commissioners, Durango City Council, Bayfield Board of Trustees and Ignacio Board of Trustees) will need to adopt the following policy statement: (Each political entity will create their own appropriate wording, but it is recommended that each endorse a similar policy. We recommend that the wording follow the strategic recommendation.

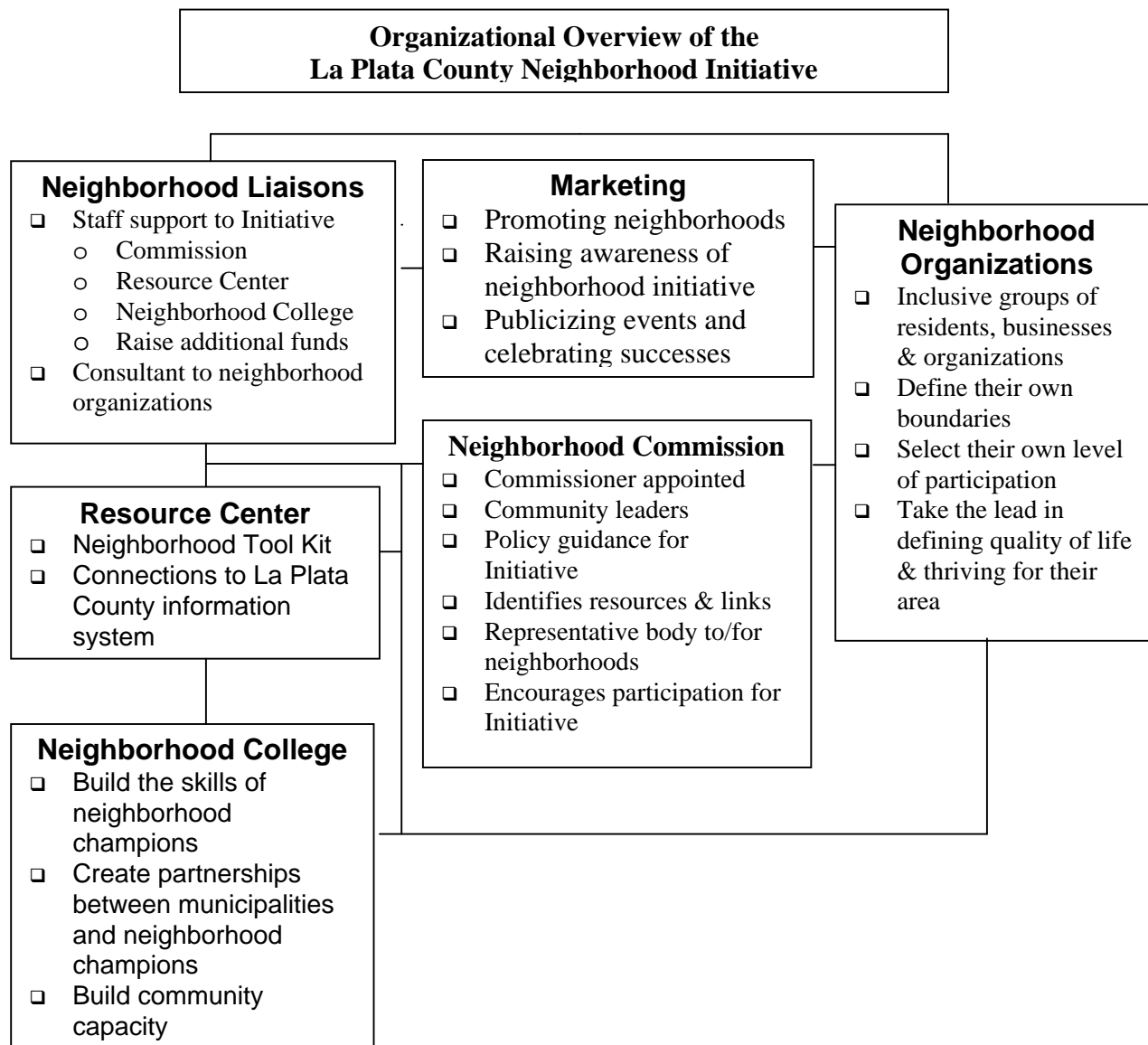
*“Because strong communities arise from strong neighborhoods, La Plata County has created the Neighborhood Liaison Coordinator’s position within the Citizens’ Liaison Department. This individual will partner with those living within our neighborhoods to ensure each resident is recognized, empowered and encouraged to lend his or her voice and resources to creating the activities, places and organizations that will build thriving relationships, where everyone contributes, everyplace is safe and everyone belongs. The Citizens’ Liaison Department will also work in partnership with the Citizens’ Liaison staff in Durango and the individual serving the Towns of Bayfield and Ignacio as well as the Southern Ute Tribe. In addition, the County will create a public private partnership known as the Neighborhood Commission that will have policy authority for this initiative.*

**Initiative Recommendation:** In addition to the policy recommendation the Neighborhood and Community Committee also believes that there needs to be a shift in how government supports and values its neighborhoods. This shift cannot be viewed as just a program, but rather an initiative that is but one component of a top to bottom overhaul of the way government works with neighborhoods in La Plata County. Indeed much of the success of this initiative will be rooted in the ability to mobilize government across functions and departments to work strategically, in partnership with the community, to achieve better outcomes for its neighborhoods.

The linkage between the neighborhood initiative and the city/town/county systems must ultimately focus on these basics:

- Ensure that the strategies for neighborhoods are reflected in the overall policies and procedures of the county and other municipalities, i.e., new development.
- Create internal governmental structures to engage all the departments that impact neighborhoods and their residents.
- Establish a framework to integrate the city/town/county government’s vision and interests with those of stakeholders and citizens, ideally through a Neighborhood Commission

- Use quantitative, qualitative and anecdotal data to understand what is happening in neighborhoods and continually focus on achieving better outcomes.
- Systematically design, convene, facilitate, and manage collaborative processes to build trust and working relationships among everyone, focus on tasks, and reinforce the basic hypothesis that government alone can not improve neighborhoods.



The committee recommends that a system to the chart above be created that will support neighborhoods by developing strategies that share the responsibility for increasing the likelihood that the children, youth and families living in the county’s neighborhoods thrive. This system will have a few comprehensive strategies that are designed to strengthen the system’s ability to respond to the needs of all neighborhoods and an unlimited number of important, but not necessarily strategic strategies, which neighborhoods can pick and choose from. Some of these important, but non-strategic recommendations can be viewed in the strategy section of this report. The strategic initiative recommendations are as follows:

- ❑ **Neighborhood Liaisons:** A Neighborhood Liaison Coordinator will be hired within the county’s newly created County’s Citizen Liaison Department. This individual will work closely with the newly hired Citizen Liaison Coordinator in Durango and the jointly hired Citizen Liaison Coordinator for Bayfield, Ignacio and the tribe. Individuals hired for these positions must be

generalists and quick studies, flexible, excellent at multi-tasking and able to move in and out of different roles (e.g., facilitator, monitor, project leader, policy analyst) with ease. They also need to be able to work effectively at multiple levels in the organization and the community, and be comfortable with non-traditional hours. Perhaps most important, an effective staff person needs to understand the “true nature of collaboration”.

These individuals will:

- Serve as staff to the Neighborhood Commission;
  - Create and maintain the Neighborhood Resource Center that will also be linked to the La Plata County Information System;
  - Help create, in partnership with the Neighborhood Commission, a state-of-the-art Neighborhood College;
  - Build inter-governmental partnerships and secure the support of all departments that in any way serve the neighborhoods of the county;
  - Identify and secure additional funding for the Neighborhood Initiative; and,
  - Serve as a consultant to the neighborhood organizations.
- **Neighborhood Commission:** Government-driven neighborhood initiatives often create a dilemma for citizens and neighborhood groups: Is the work being done with them or to them? Government employees often believe they bend over backwards to work with neighborhood leaders, while neighborhood leaders may continue to feel they are not full partners in the work, and may believe there are still reasons to be suspicious and cynical. If government representatives are unwilling to share leadership of the initiative with neighborhood stakeholders this distrust will likely continue. A Neighborhood Commission is a way for La Plata County to answer this challenge. The Neighborhood Commission provides leadership, policy guidance, and support to the Neighborhood Initiative. It makes many key decisions about the initiative’s direction and focus. The Commission is able to play that role because it is not like a typical advisory board, made up solely of citizens; rather it functions like a collaborative, bringing together citizens and other institutions with a stake in neighborhood efforts. In addition to the citizens who represent the neighborhoods, there needs to be representatives from each of the three school districts, each local municipality and the tribe as well as representatives from local institutions that provide services to neighborhoods. Those representing neighborhoods need to include youth and young adults in equal numbers to the older adult representatives. This structure allows differences of opinion between neighborhood leaders and city government to be discussed and deliberated. It is unlike an advisory board where citizens present their requests and city officials decide how to respond. When neighborhood leaders, youth, and institutions make decisions together, they represent a more potent strategic force.
- **Neighborhood College:** A neighborhood college combines basic citizen education principles with a focus on neighborhoods. This is a growing strategy being used in cities and counties across the county that are aware of the importance neighborhoods play in the well-being of the entire community. How often classes are offered, how many attend, and what is taught varies from community to community. Almost all offer sessions that focus on these topics:
- Understanding how local government is structured, how it makes its decisions and how its citizens can appropriately contribute to the overall wellbeing of the community.
  - How the public safety and policing systems work and how citizen/safety officer partnerships can be created to enhance overall safety.
  - Understanding from a neighborhood perspective, how schools determine their enrollment, the curriculum and extra curricula services and opportunities, and how neighborhoods can form partnerships with the schools their children attend to improve

educational outcomes.

- How the budget and finance departments are structured, how they determine their recommended budgets, and how citizens can play a proactive role in budget development.

Many Neighborhood Colleges also incorporate skill-building sessions with topics that include:

- How to make meetings work
- How to apply conflict resolution techniques to obtain better outcomes
- How to work more affectively with the multiple diversities that exist in any neighborhood
- How to be a good facilitator
- Becoming comfortable with public speaking and how to create informative and visually stimulating presentations
- How to building youth and adult partnerships that will benefit from the “gifts” of each group

Sessions would be taught by local government personnel and augmented by other community and school leaders and practitioners. We recommend that the Neighborhood College be free to those interested in participating. For young people interested in this experience we recommend that there be a separate “college” experience that is part of the youth engagement recommendation made by the Youth Development committee. The Building Youth and Adult Partnerships session would be a joint youth and adult session.

Neighborhood Colleges build community capacity. Graduates have a better understanding of local government, the community, and how to get things done. They have greater clarity about what it takes to lead in neighborhood organizations. Graduates also have an instant support network; a set of colleagues with whom they can strategize, reflect, and relax. Through the college, graduates also develop relationships with city staff, providing a basis for working together in the future.

- **Neighborhood Organizations:** How each neighborhood decides to structure their leadership group will be up to the neighborhood, but each should focus attention on ensuring that their membership is representative of the diversity of its residents, with special attention being paid to including youth, young adults and elders. It will also be important to have representation from those businesses and organizations that provide services and supports to the neighborhood. Hopefully each neighborhood that creates a leadership organization will build their skills by participating in the Neighborhood College. The leadership groups in each neighborhood should:
  - Take the lead in defining the quality of life they want to ensure exists within their neighborhood and to explore what can be done to increase the likelihood that all of its children, youth and families thrive.
  - Ensure that their neighborhood is connecting with the resources they need to implement their ideas, i.e., gardening materials and know-how from other community groups who are currently involved in community garden process, programs for snow removal for the elderly in rural areas, etc.
  - Give equal voice to all those living in the neighborhood helping to ensure interested individuals have the opportunity to be trained on how to facilitate neighborhood gatherings and be leaders within the neighborhood.
  - Build partnerships with Liaisons and Neighborhood Commission.
  - Serve as a connecting point to the information from our county, city and town leaders.
  - Help ensure that the neighborhood “keeps in touch with itself”, including tracking and recognizing neighbors moving out, moving in, new babies being born and celebrating the accomplishments of the children and teens in the neighborhood.

- ❑ **Neighborhood Resource Center:** Because not every resident in every neighborhood will have the time or inclination to attend the Neighborhood College, the committee recommends that a Neighborhood Resource Center be created and housed in the County’s Citizen Liaison Department. The Neighborhood Liaisons will work with the Neighborhood Commission to create a neighborhood toolkit which will include “how to” sheets that range from creating Neighborhood Organizations, organizing block parties, starting a community garden, assisting elders and increasing assets for neighborhood youth. The toolkit should also have information on or links that contain experiences of other neighborhoods as well as research that has been done to increase thriving. The Resource Center will also make sure that the information that will help neighborhoods is part of the La Plata County Information System recommended by the Youth in Transition committee.
  
- ❑ **Marketing:** The benefits of marketing are absolutely essential to the long-range goals of a comprehensive and effective neighborhood initiative, Neighborhood Commission and the neighborhood organizations supported by the initiative. The question that must be answered by the county/city/towns, the Neighborhood Liaisons and the Neighborhood Commission is “What are you trying to market or communicate and to whom?” We believe that the following are the answers to this question:
  - ❑ Neighborhoods to prospective home buyers
  - ❑ The neighborhood initiative to current and potential participants
  - ❑ An explanation of the work “behind the scenes” to those working in the neighborhoods, seeking transparency in program management
  - ❑ An explanation of the plans and projects in progress and inviting participation in those efforts, seeking transparency in community decision making
  - ❑ To promote and celebrate successes and events occurring in one neighborhood with other neighborhoods
  - ❑ To market the neighborhood initiative to community leaders who make important decisions that impact the initiative

The participating municipalities in this neighborhood initiative will need to squarely face the internal challenges that inhibit the success of neighborhood initiatives – turf, lack of connection to resource decisions, and difficulty in navigating organizational hierarchy and culture. These challenges are not solved (they never are), but they are lessened through the creation and support of appropriate internal bodies and by working to change the organizational culture. The importance of strong support from the Manager’s office and elected officials as well as a focus on outcomes remains critical. Once again, keeping focused on the basics helps drive the internal framework:

- ❑ Ensure all neighborhood serving departments are at the table, including those who do not yet know how to best serve neighborhoods.
- ❑ Create linked structures that bring the right people together for the right task.
- ❑ Identify work and decision processes with departments that inhibit neighborhood work and develop appropriate change processes.
- ❑ Create internal reward structures for team performance, not just individual performance.
- ❑ Keep neighborhood work fully connected to neighborhoods. The best work is not done for neighborhoods; it is done with neighborhoods.

**What was the support data used to arrive at this recommendation?**

The committee used a variety of information gathering techniques that included reviewing the literature and research within the field, individual interviews, planning charrettes, presentations by “experts” with insights into the issue, and surveys. The following are the highlights from these techniques:

- The committee conducted a non-scientific, information gathering procedure that asked committee members to interview as many neighbors as possible. These “door to door” neighbor interviews asked at a minimum the following 2 questions:
  - How do you define your neighborhood?
  - What suggestions do you have that would help us attain our vision?
- The committee did significant research into what was already working around the country regarding neighborhoods and neighborhood associations. We explored state-of-the-art information provided by NUSA (Neighborhoods, USA); the 2007 Child Trends fact sheet on Neighborhood Support Index based on the National Survey of Children’s Health and sponsored by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Department of Health and Human Services; the 2008 Child Trends fact sheet on Neighborhood Support and Children’s Connectedness; and the National League of Cities Overview on Neighborhoods and Communities.
- The 2008 Child Trends Fact Sheet on Neighborhood Support and Children’s Connectedness was an important source of data. This documents provided the following research-based insights:
  - Living in a supportive neighborhood can contribute to the successful development of children and youth. The research indicates that children and youth living in high-support neighborhoods are more likely to have strong connections in other contexts and children who live in low-support neighborhoods are less likely to have such connections.
  - Relationships and experiences in the neighborhood influence children’s outcomes; specifically, social ties and control among neighbors are related to higher levels of social competence and lower levels of problem behaviors.
    - Children living in a high-support neighborhood have a greater likelihood to have better interactions with their parents (77%) than children from a low-support neighborhood (69%).
  - Young people who volunteer are found to have more socially responsible attitudes and to be less likely to engage in problem behaviors than their peers who do not volunteer. If the young person’s neighborhood is supportive it can provide unlimited numbers of service opportunities.
    - Children living in a high-support neighborhood volunteer at a higher rate (64%) than children from a low-support neighborhood (46%)
  - Participation in structured after-school activities like clubs or sports contributes to academic achievement, enhanced social and cognitive skills, positive social behavior and fewer risky behaviors. Neighborhoods can be a huge source for after-school activities.
    - Children living in a high-support neighborhood spend less time watching television and are more likely to participate in after-school opportunities than children from a low-support neighborhood.
- The committee also explored how different communities celebrated their neighborhoods and those living in them, i.e. by providing annual events such as neighborhood day/week; by creating rewards for neighborhoods that improve their appearances or who find ways to go more “green”, or by providing training to residents interested in improving their neighborhood.
- The committee also benefited from the wealth of valuable information that was generated by the Search Institute Developmental Assets Survey. This survey was conducted in September 2007 to 972 students in 6<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> grade in all three county school districts. The survey asked young people to share their perceptions about both the external and internal assets they have in their lives. The external assets focused on how the community, schools, families, and the organizations they attend supported them, empowered them, provided them with clear and consistent boundaries and high expectations, and whether they provided enough opportunities to allow them to constructively fill their out of school time. The internal assets focused on the young person’s commitment to learning, their ability to use their personal values to make sound

choices, the level of life skills and social competencies they have, and whether they have a positive view of themselves and their future.

The following Developmental Assets results for La Plata youth highlight the need for neighborhoods that increase thriving (building assets) for all residents.

- 71% of youth see their families as the core of their support system
  - 40% believe their neighborhood provides a caring environment
  - 42% of young females and 62% of young males feel safe in their neighborhoods
  - 25% of youth perceive that they are valued by adults in the community
  - 46% believe their neighbors take responsibility for monitoring their behavior
  - 43% of youth place a high value on helping other people
  - 50% are comfortable with people of different backgrounds
- The committee also had access to the demographic data generated from the 2007 La Plata County Colorado Children’s Campaign. This campaign also surveyed La Plata County students and the results provided key insights into the risks that the youth of the county were exposed to as well as the percentages of those who were already involved in high-risk behaviors.
  - The committee also benefited from statewide information in the Colorado Municipalities article, *Children, Youth and Family Master Planning*.
  - The committee also conducted one Neighborhood Charrette with 8<sup>th</sup> grade students at Escalante Middle School. Neighborhood charrettes are hands on opportunities for participants to design their ideal neighborhood. This approach is especially effective for middle school aged youth.
  - The committee also was fortunate to have had three presentations made to them: Greg Hoch, the City of Durango Planning Director, shared his perspective on the importance of focusing on neighborhoods and the role that planning has in the decisions that impact both new and existing neighborhoods; LeeAnn Vallejos, the CEO of Del Alma, shared her perspective as to the influences that diversity has within neighborhoods, including economic, cultural, and language diversities; and Richard Goll also shared how neighborhoods can increase the likelihood that young people in neighborhoods can have a greater voice and more meaningful roles.

**Please explain your committee’s justification for selecting this recommendation?**

Based on the committee’s research, it became apparent that La Plata County’s neighborhoods are extremely diverse, both in terms of the people who reside within the neighborhood and the location of the neighborhood i.e. in town, which part of town, rural suburban, rural agricultural or ranch. We quickly realized that any policy or initiative that was recommended must respect, support and celebrate this diversity by ensuring that the residents of self-identified neighborhoods and areas of the county are given the power to interpret and act upon the activities that will strengthen the bonds between neighbors and enhance the overall health of their neighborhood. We believe that this can be accomplished by partnering with staff from the county and its towns; however, we felt that the residents must retain their authority in most decision-making situations. We believe that the Neighborhoods and Community recommendation meets this criteria.

The research also showed that La Plata County neighborhoods are not only diverse in terms of residents, but also in degree of bonding between neighbors, therefore, we believed a good strategic recommendation must make allowances for any recommended strategy or approach to be “expressed” very differently from one neighborhood to the next.

While the committee was unable to assess what proportion of La Plata’s neighborhoods would be considered high-support environments for its children, youth and families, the State of Colorado believes that only 11.6% of Colorado’s neighborhoods are high-support and for low-income children that percentage drops to only 6.7%. The committee believes that we can do much better than this in La

Plata County. In fact we believe that there is little choice when it comes to helping our neighborhoods become more high-support. As Greg Hoch, Durango's Planning Director put it, "*You build strong cities through strong neighborhoods.*" The committee believes that the recommendation and its accompanying strategies and infrastructure changes will in-fact increase the likelihood that an ever-increasing number of county neighborhoods will become high-support neighborhoods.

The results of the Developmental Asset Survey and the 2008 Child Trends Fact Sheet clearly indicate that even with no other external interventions, our young people will be able to increase their thriving indicators and reduce their high-risk behaviors if we invest in making our neighborhoods places where everyone contributes, everyplace is safe and everyone belongs and where thriving relationships are both supported and celebrated.

**What is this recommendation's overall intended impact on the healthy development of La Plata County's children and youth and/or how will it support its families?**

By increasing the number of high-support or thriving neighborhoods—places where everyone contributes; everyplace safe; and everyone belongs—La Plata County will greatly increase the attractiveness of its neighborhoods to new residents while improving the quality of life to all those living here. In addition, the research from Child Trends shows that positive relationships and experiences in the neighborhood influence children's outcomes; specifically, social ties and control among neighbors are related to higher levels of social competence and lower levels of problem behaviors.

This initiative will also greatly influence the following impacts:

1. An increase in the number of residents within each neighborhood who know and bond with one another will occur. Increased bonding leads to increased thriving.
2. An increase in the sense of wellbeing and connectedness of residents to the neighborhood and the community in which they live, making La Plata County a place they are proud to call home.
3. A decrease in the crime rate within neighborhoods as well as a decrease in the number of calls law enforcement must respond to that involve neighbor dispute will occur as neighborhoods begin to focus on the strategies recommended in this initiative.
4. An increase the number of caring adults who will feel comfortable providing appropriate supervision to the children within their neighborhoods.
5. An increase in the knowledge, skills and abilities of those in a neighborhood to identify and solve common problems and challenges. This will be a direct outcome of residents participating in Neighborhood Councils and the Neighborhood College.
6. As a sense of neighborhood increases, a decrease in the level of stress that children and adults experience will follow. This should lead to an increase in their physical and emotional health which in turn should lead to a decrease in the numbers of residents needing to access public health services and a decrease in the number of stress related incidents reported in the public schools.
7. As adults respond in new and supportive ways to the children and youth in their neighborhoods the young people in the county will report an increase in the number of assets they perceive themselves as having.
8. By increasing people's sense of belonging to their neighborhood and their recognition that they are not alone they will also increase their willingness and ability to ask for and receive help of all kinds. This will also increase people's resiliency--a primary component of health and wellness.
9. Insuring that young people have meaningful roles in the decision-making of the neighborhoods will lead to and increase in the positive perceptions adults have about young people. It will also increase the likelihood that youth and adults will work together more effectively. This skill for young people will be transferable to other aspects of community and school life.

10. By participating in the Neighborhood College residents will increase their understanding of how and why decisions that impact them are made. This will increase their ability to support city/town/county staff and their elected officials.
11. Having access to a “neighborhood tool kit” will greatly increase the likelihood that neighbors organize and work together to improve their neighborhood.
12. The number of cooperative endeavors, such as community gardens, ride-sharing, helping each other in and around the home/property and helping care for each other’s children will increase.
13. As the research indicates high-support neighborhoods can have a dramatically positive affect on lowering the level of stress that kids as well as adults experience. As stress levels decrease we can expect reduction of obesity and addictive and self-destructive behaviors in youth.

**Who needs to be part of insuring this recommendation is realized?**

The elected officials serving on the La Plata County Board of Commissioners, City of Durango Councilors, and Bayfield and Ignacio Town Boards must make a recognizable commitment to support the neighborhoods to which they are answerable. We recommend that they do so by approving the proposed policy, by making the staffing infrastructure changes needed to ensure that all neighborhoods have the professional support needed to thrive and by creating the Neighborhood Commission.

The managers and other designated staff from each entity will also need to support the recommendations approved by the elected officials. The Children, Youth and Family Master Plan recommends that a Citizens’ Liaison Department with five employees be established in the County and that a Citizen Liaison Coordinator be hired to work for the City of Durango and that a Citizen Liaison Coordinator be jointly hired by Bayfield, Ignacio and the Tribe. Since one of the County’s Citizen Liaisons will be a Neighborhood specialist and we expect that the two hired to work in Durango and the towns will have neighborhood experience, we recommend that these individuals work closely together to ensure all neighborhoods in the county are receiving professional support.

We hope that Fort Lewis College will be an important partner in this initiative. Their community-based learning and research (COBLAR) initiative will be able to provide a wealth of interns and those seeking service opportunities to help neighborhoods thrive.

The 9-R, 10JT-R, and 11JT School Districts may also be meaningful contributors in many ways. We hope they are willing to host neighborhood meetings and gatherings. The different school’s support staff can form working relationships with the neighborhood organizations where their students live. These relationships can go a long way to reducing unnecessary barriers to learning and thriving. They also will have three representatives on the Neighborhood Commission.

Since the United Way of Southwest Colorado and the Community Foundation of Southwest Colorado are both trying to adapt their funding strategies to be more strategic, this recommendation and others from the Master Plan will allow them to more effectively and efficiently distribute their financial support.

Local non-profits and for-profits that serve the county’s children, youth and families will be able to focus some of their time and resources to create services, supports and opportunities within the neighborhoods. When possible, this will be a far more effective way for service providers to respect their customers because they are willing to meet them where they live rather than asking them to travel to them.

There also should be a Neighborhood Commission that supports this initiative and the work of the Neighborhood Liaison Coordinator. This Commission should have a membership that is representative

of the neighborhoods and be one that includes high school aged youth, 20 – 30 year olds and older adults.

**For this recommendation to be successfully implemented what shifts or changes (if any) are needed in the county’s infrastructure?**

First and foremost, there needs to be a commitment on the part of the county and the other municipalities to honor the intent of the Children, Youth and Family Master Plan and its components and to integrate its recommendations into their comprehensive and strategic plans and to the evolving culture of how the county and the other municipalities partner with its residents to increase thriving for all.

It will be important that each municipality approve the recommended neighborhood support policy. This policy will send a clear message to those living in the county’s neighborhoods that their elected officials support increasing the livability and quality of life of where they reside.

The county will need to create a Neighborhood Commission that will serve as the Commissioners “eyes and ears” for all things related to neighborhoods. Appointments to this Commission will be made from those who are part of the local Neighborhood Organizations, schools, business, and service organizations. At least 25% of the Commission should be high school aged youth, 25% 20 - 30 year olds and the rest older adults including elders. This will be more of a policy Commission than advisory so this will take some getting used to as well.

In order to ensure that the recommendations can be implemented, a full-time paid staff person is needed at the county level. This Neighborhood Liaison Coordinator would be part of the new Citizen Liaison Department with a Department Head answerable to the County Manager. The Neighborhood Coordinator would serve as staff to the Neighborhood Commission, help create and staff the Neighborhood College, provide outreach to, and support of, the neighborhood organizations and the neighborhood champions - educating, advocating, bringing people together and helping them build their neighborhood networks. This position is crucial to the success of any of our recommendations. We also recommend that once the recommendation made by the Youth Development Committee has had an opportunity to build an effective and comprehensive youth engagement system and has trained interested young people, that the Citizen Liaison Department hire young people to provide their unique perspective to the department’s efforts.

Each County department should appoint one liaison from their department who will work with the Citizen’s Liaison Department staff to ensure that the efforts of other departments incorporate the input this department gains from their contacts with the county’s citizens.

The not-for-profit and for-profit service providers will need to adapt how they provide their services to ensure that at least some of them can be offered within neighborhoods.

The residents of the county’s neighborhoods will also have to adapt to their new role as a partner to the county and the other municipalities.

**What specific strategies for implementing this recommendation does your committee suggest?**

The strategic recommendations are highlighted in the description of this initiative. The following are recommendations that are not strategic, but still important possibilities for this initiative to consider.

- La Plata County and the other municipalities should officially declare a Neighborhood Day/Week to reinforce the commitment that they have to helping neighborhoods help their children, youth and families thrive. When this day/week is declared should be based on a recommendation from the Neighborhood Commission. (There is a national Neighborhood Week

observed the third week in September) Neighborhood day/week should be an opportunity to celebrate what is working in the county's neighborhoods.

- ❑ Consider utilizing existing organizations with community development experience, i.e., 4-H clubs, girl scouts) as organizers assisting neighborhoods that want to develop local initiatives. Another way to proceed is to identify one or two families to be contact people for their neighborhood. These youth and adults become the initial catalysts for change or “neighborhood champions” in their neighborhood. There should be an ongoing effort to identify, recruit and support the youth, young adult and elders “champions” in all neighborhoods.
- ❑ Ensure that the Neighborhood Liaisons are well connected to the Neighborhoods USA organization. This organization provides technical assistance to communities who have made a commitment to building thriving neighborhoods. Once the initiative is operational, the County or any of the neighborhoods can apply to NUSA for recognition of their efforts.
- ❑ Support the creation of year-round events that occur within neighborhoods. These events can be celebrations of any kind and for any reason. These events can become annual traditions that increase participation and bond neighbors to one another. These events should encourage creativity and may also produce by-products like community art or jointly grown and/or processed food.
- ❑ Make available training in Everyday Democracy (Formerly Study Circles Resource Center) to all interested neighborhoods. Everyday Democracy is a resource to increase neighborhood dialogues and increase problem-solving skills.
- ❑ Once there have been a number of completed Neighborhood College classes the College should consider creating an Alumni Association. This group would serve as support for subsequent classes of Neighborhood Colleges, organize countywide projects, and provide a set of neighborhood leaders who can be called upon for assistance.
- ❑ Partner with local not-for-profit and for-profit to identify and provide needed services, supports and opportunities to increase thriving.
- ❑ Make sure that young people, young adults and elders are involved in the process every step of the way. Neighborhoods will need to protect against enlisting only the “usual cast of characters” as their leaders.
- ❑ Work with local safety officers to develop a greater presence in each neighborhood. Explore proven methods such as the Community Policing Model.
- ❑ Develop and maintain a countywide transportation database including security measures for participants who want to set up shared rides or carpooling opportunities.
- ❑ Each neighborhood should attempt to develop a database for households to use in cases of emergency. The database could also be available for contacting neighbors about upcoming social events or as a heads-up for those who want others to know that they are home-bound, chronically ill or in delicate health, therefore, deserving of a little extra thought and attention. This data base may also be used to list special interest notices such as individuals who might have or be interested in having a community organic garden space on their property, helping with the support and care of pets, where on the property any gas lines are so they may be turned off in case of a fire, notice of neighbors who would like to employ neighborhood teens to do such things as babysitting and yard maintenance, etc., to identify “safe homes” so teens and younger kids know who's home is open for them to come and share conversation and snacks with a caring adult, and to identify which are the folks who have skills/talents who would be willing to share what they know/do with others in the neighborhood.
- ❑ Every new neighborhood, and when possible existing neighborhoods, should have safe parks or playgrounds that families and children can get to easily by foot or bike, and where children can gather with, and without, adults. These places should also be inviting to the elders of the neighborhood.

