

# Community Toolkit:

*A framework and some ideas for creating community in your neighborhood*



Across the US and the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharp focus the importance of neighborhood connection. While we all have our various communities, whether it be family, friends from work or a hobby, or other parents we've met at our kids' school, in the event of a widespread emergency or disaster, people geographically close to us are often the most able to provide help and support.

We have a lot of different types of neighborhoods in Auburn. Some of them were planned communities, new and old single family home neighborhoods, condo complexes, apartments, duplexes, blocks, cul-de-sacs and everything in between. Wherever you live, neighbors matter.

Some neighborhoods haven't quite connected. If this is your neighborhood, you'll find some ideas for how to get the ball rolling and help the residents in your neighborhood connect and prepare for any future emergencies.

Some of our neighborhoods have gotten to know each other during COVID. If this is you, the below toolkit can help you maintain that connection as our community re-opens.

If your neighborhood has always been tight-knit, this toolkit can still help you to make sure that your neighborhood keeps up the good work and can stay connected in times of need. You may find something new here.

## **Step One:** *Be a presence in your neighborhood.*

Take a walk around your neighborhood and see who else is out and about. Start using the "soft spaces" in your yard. These are places where you can spend time in the front of your house and someone walking by could stop and chat with you. It's a simple way to encourage connection and dialogue. If you already know a few people in your neighborhood, see if they'll join you in doing this and maybe, more neighbors will follow suit. Be a trend setter!

## **Step Two:** *Introduce yourself!*

Don't be afraid to be the instigator here, you will most likely find neighbors that will appreciate your efforts and support you in building a sense of community in your neighborhood. Some won't be interested, but that's ok. Focus on the ones that are! Walk around your neighborhood, knock on doors (during COVID, wear a mask, gloves

if you have them, and take a few steps back from the door to maintain some distance). Introduce yourself and explain that you're working on getting a list of neighbors together to help facilitate communication.

There are a few different ways your group can stay connected. What your neighborhood chooses will depend a lot on your residents and what they are comfortable with. Here are some ideas:

1. Old fashioned phone tree. If there's important information to share with your neighbors, you can gather phone numbers and create a phone tree to share the information. If members don't want to share their numbers, create a version where instead of a phone call, it's a quick knock on the door and a chat.
2. Email. An email list serve can be maintained by one or two residents and information can be shared with the group whenever there are important updates.
3. Community bulletin board. A place where notices, information, or just notes of support can be left is a great idea, especially in conjunction with another method. Don't have a community bulletin board? Talk to your neighbors about finding a good place to install one that is convenient for everyone. The City of Auburn offers a Community Matching Grant program that can help fund this project. All it requires is an application and a match (usually volunteer hours). More information is available online at [auburnwa.gov/matchinggrants](http://auburnwa.gov/matchinggrants).
4. Social Media. Facebook groups are a great way to connect with other social-media savvy people and keep membership to just your neighbors. Nextdoor is another social media outlet you could consider, but be aware that limiting who your connected with isn't an option like it is with Facebook groups.

### **Step Three:** *Get more specific.*

Either when you're out introducing yourself or at a later time, ask folks for ways in which they are able and willing to help out their neighbors. For example, Jane two houses down LOVES dogs and would be able to walk a neighbor's dog if the neighbor couldn't for any reason. COVID has resulted in an outpouring of this kind of support, residents helping each other get groceries from the store, for example. Keeping this information in a list form where the whole neighborhood can see it is a great way to keep this momentum going. Ourselves and our neighbors will all need help again at some point (thought we ALL hope it's not because of another pandemic).

- Emergency Preparedness note: this is a great step in which to also bring in some disaster and emergency preparedness planning. Make a note of who has what skills that might be useful in the event of a disaster. For example, Steve in unit 4 is a nurse and can help if there are any basic injuries in the event of a disaster. For small communities, perhaps 1 or 2 bedroom condos, the community can work together to all store a piece of the emergency preparedness puzzle so that everyone doesn't have to have everything. For example, someone can store water, someone else MREs, someone else may have a generator and another

- person blankets and candles. Make sure everyone knows who has what and how you'll all come together in the event of a disaster. Have regular meetings to refresh everyone's mind and introduce newcomers to the planning process.
- Take the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training: CERT is a free class offered by the City of Auburn's Emergency Management Division that helps communities learn how to be prepared in the event of a disaster. Trainings have been interrupted by COVID but will be back. Keep an eye on the website: [auburnwa.gov/CERT](http://auburnwa.gov/CERT) for up-to-date information on class offerings.
  - As an individual, you can make sure you're prepared in the event of a disaster by having some handy supplies described in this [handout](#) created by our Emergency Management Team.

#### **Step Four: *Gather.***

Once your neighborhood has become more connected, it's important to maintain that connection and refresh it every time someone moves in or out of the community. At a minimum, host yearly gatherings. If possible, get together in small ways even more often. Even during COVID, gathering is possible. Host a neighborhood BBQ where each family makes their own food in their driveway but everyone is outside at the same time. Hopefully soon, traditional BBQs and Potlucks can start back up but for now, be creative! Start a neighborhood walking group. During COVID, you can wear masks and maintain some distance but still get together for some exercise and socializing time with your neighbors.

- If you're interested in starting a Block Watch as a neighborhood, the Auburn Police Department has some resources that can help. Check out their [website](#).

#### **Step Five: *Just keep it up!***

Communities change and evolve. Keep up the momentum and don't be afraid to try new ways to connect with each other as the weeks, months and years go by.