

NEIGHBORHOOD BLOCK CAPTAIN

Toolkit

Division of Economic & Neighborhood Services
Community Services Section
City of Charleston



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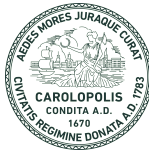
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From the Desk of Mayor Cogswell

Congratulations and thank you for accepting the role of block captain within your neighborhood! Your commitment to serving our community is truly commendable and greatly appreciated.

As a block captain in a neighborhood association, you play a vital role in fostering a sense of unity, safety, and well-being within your neighborhood. Charleston is a special place because of people like you.

In this toolkit you will find resources to help support you in your role.

- Introduction to your role: An overview of block captain responsibilities and the importance of your role in community engagement.
- Communication Guidelines: Tips and templates for communicating effectively with your neighbors, organizing meetings, and addressing concerns.
- Community Building: Suggestions for organizing events, fostering neighborly connections, and promoting a sense of belonging.
- Promoting Safety & Livability: Information on neighborhood safety protocols, emergency contacts, and resources for improving livability.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to our Neighborhood Services Manager at 843-853-7237 or hopkinsr@charleston-sc.gov with any questions. We are here to support you every step of the way.

Thank you again for stepping up to serve our community. I look forward to seeing the positive impact you will make!

Best regards,

Mayor William Cogswell

What is a Block Captain?

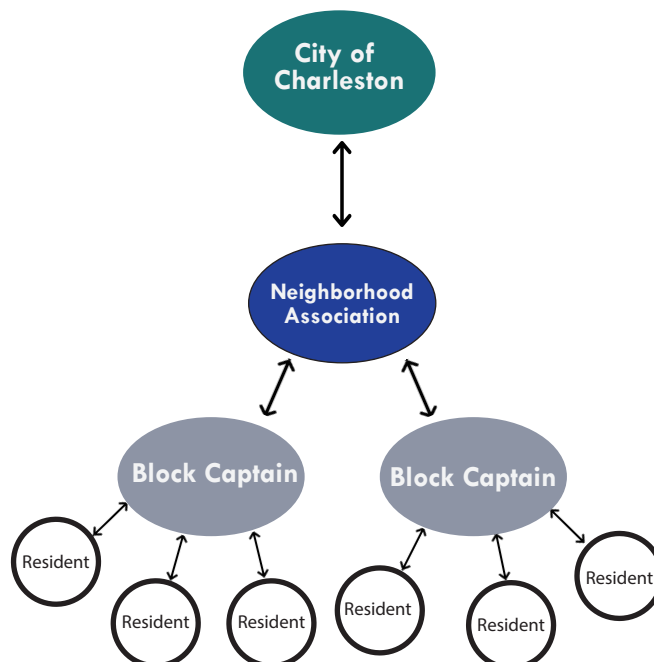
A block captain serves as a point of contact for a specific block within a neighborhood association.

The City of Charleston has more than 120 recognized neighborhood associations in our Neighborhood Council program. Each active association has a president and a board. The role of a block captain is to support communication between block residents and association leadership.

It is helpful if a block captain has the following qualities:

- **Responsible:** Takes ownership of their block and community (i.e., is willing to solve problems themselves when possible).
- **Persistent Problem Solver:** Willing to do a little digging to solve problems.
- **Outgoing:** Comfortable making contact and building relationships with neighbors.
- **Organized:** Able to keep a list of residents and City/County contacts up to date.

Pictured: Communication Chain Between City and Residents



Effective Block Communication

One of the most important jobs of a block captain is to facilitate and encourage healthy communication between residents, the neighborhood association, and City staff.

How Do You Communicate with Neighbors?

People like to communicate in various ways, so it is useful to get comfortable with a few different types of communication. For example, some people may prefer email or text, while others may prefer phone calls or face-to-face interactions. On page 10, you will find a template to collect contact information from your neighbors.

What Should You Communicate to Neighbors?

You should work with your neighborhood association board to convey information about anything that may impact your neighbors. This may include the following:

- A sample welcome letter to new neighbors (see template on p. 10)
- Your contact information, and your association president's contact information, or block phone tree contact information (if relevant)
- Helpful contacts, and/or information about regular services (like garbage collection or street sweeping)
- Neighborhood updates (events, street closures, changes to City services or programming)
- Opportunities for community input to City policy or programming

What Should You Communicate to Association Leadership?

If there are ongoing issues that need to be communicated with City staff or elected officials, you should let your neighborhood president know, as they are the designated point of contact. If you would like to contact staff or elected officials yourself, it's helpful to loop in your neighborhood president so they can stay informed.

Communication (Continued)

Building a Phone Tree

A phone tree is a valuable tool for quickly sharing information in urgent situations or emergencies with people who are less comfortable with email or text. Here is a step-by-step guide to help you set up a phone tree as a block captain. There is a template to help you get organized on p. 11.

- Gather contact information. Make sure to respect privacy concerns and only share the contacts of people who have agreed to participate.
- Organize the information. Consider grouping neighbors who live next to each other.
- Decide on how your tree will be structured. Typically this involves dividing neighbors into smaller groups or tiers. Each tier will have a designated person responsible for contacting the next group.
- Make and communicate a plan. Determine whether this will be used only for emergencies, or for other events.
- Test the phone tree! Run a test drill to make sure everyone understands their role and that it works efficiently.

Creating a Welcoming Block

Block captains play an important role in making their block welcoming for residents. Below are some things block captains can do to build community on their block!

Adopt-A-Block

Organize monthly or quarterly block clean-up events for your neighbors to socialize while keeping their block safe and clean. Keep Charleston Beautiful is a good resource regarding conducting a safe and successful litter clean-up. Go to www.charleston-sc.gov/264/Keep-Charleston-Beautiful to learn more!

Block Events and Engagement Activities

You can work with your neighborhood association to support broader events, or organize events for your neighborhood block. This is an opportunity for residents to be creative and find fun ways to connect! In the past, neighborhoods and blocks in Charleston have done the following:

- “Art walk” where residents placed artwork in their yards.
- Halloween decoration contests, with signage placed in the winner’s yard.
- Block parties or cookouts in parks.
- Yard-of-the Month Club, with signage placed in the winner’s yard.
- Holiday golf cart parade, where residents decorated golf carts.
- Little free libraries or blessing boxes.
- Rotating monthly food truck.

Make sure to always check with City staff to see if you need a permit to host an event, whether that is a park or a public street!

Adopt-A-Neighbor

If there are residents on your block who need a little extra help due to mobility or other issues, consider pairing them with a neighbor “buddy” who has capacity to help. This could include light yardwork, or just checking on the resident during emergencies.

Safe & Livable Environment

Block captains can significantly improve the safety and livability of their block, just by paying attention to hazards and reporting them. Here are some ways you can help create a safe and livable environment.

Crime Prevention

Encourage your neighbors to keep their vehicles and homes locked with regular reminders. For information about establishing a crime watch program in your neighborhood, call 843-769-7407.

Take Ownership

Identify potential hazards such as potholes, damaged signs, obstructions in the street, dead tree limbs, and vacant/unsecured homes, and report them to the City via the Citizen Services Desk at 843-724-7311.

When it is safe to do so, pick up litter and debris from the street so that it does not impede motorists, bicyclists or pedestrians.

Help Reduce or Prevent Flooding

Read up about what you and your neighbors can do to reduce flooding in your neighborhood, and educate your block! Go to www.charleston-sc.gov/1978/You-Can-Help to learn more!

Adopt-A-Drain: help prevent nearby drains from becoming clogged. Go to www.charleston-sc.gov/1984/Adopt-A-Drain to learn more!

Emergency Preparedness

During extreme weather and immediately after, rescue crews and EMS may not be able to respond to calls right away due to unsafe conditions or impassable roads. It is important to be prepared in emergency situations, and a block captain can be a leader in helping their neighbors prepare as well.

Hurricane Preparedness

Make sure that you and your neighbors are familiar with Charleston County's Hurricane Season Guide. You can find this and other resources at www.charleston-sc.gov/hurricane-information.

Check On Your Neighbors

Use your contact list or phone tree to check on your neighbors. Make sure to pay extra attention to residents who have mobility issues or other disabilities. This is a great time to use the Adopt-A-Neighbor buddy system referenced on p. 5.

After the Emergency

When it is safe to do so, clear brush or limbs from roads and drains.

Call Dominion, Citizen Services, and/or Charleston Water System to report issues such as water and power outages or downed power lines. See p. 8 for important numbers.

Numbers & Links to Know

Emergency Consolidated Dispatch: 911

For issues requiring first responders, call 911.

Non-Emergency Dispatch: 843-743-7200

For issues such as after-hours noise complaints, please call the non-emergency dispatch number.

Citizen Services Desk: (843) 724-7311

If you're not sure who to call, or you have a livability complaint or work order request, call the Citizen Services Desk or go to www.charleston-sc.gov/citizenservices.

Report Downed Power Lines or Power Outage 888-333-4465

Report Gas Leak: from a safe distance, call 911, and then call Dominion Energy at 800-815-0083

Report Streetlight Outage:

<http://account.dominionenergysc.com/streetlightrepair>

Track tides & road closures: <http://gis.charleston-sc.gov/tideeye>



Block Contacts

Family Name	Contact Member	Email	Phone Number	Address	Notes

Welcome Letter Template

Welcome to the Neighborhood!

Dear [Resident's Name],

Welcome to [Neighborhood Name]! I'm [your name], the block captain for our street, and I just wanted to drop you a quick note and let you know we're happy to have you here!

If you need anything as you're settling in please don't hesitate to reach out! Here are a few quick tips to get you started:

- Garbage, trash & recycling pickup is on [weekday]. Download the CHSTrashTracker app for reminders!
- Neighborhood Association meetings are generally on [dates] at [time & location].
- A good number for City work orders (like for filling potholes or reporting downed limbs) is 843-724-7311!
- Local favorites! If you're looking for a good spot to grab a bite, [restaurant name] is a popular choice, or you can't go wrong with [restaurant name].

Again, welcome to the neighborhood! Please do not hesitate to reach out to me at [your number] with any questions! I look forward to getting to know you!

Best,

Phone Tree Template

PHONE TREE NAME:

