



City of Palo Alto City Council Staff Report

(ID # 9279)

Report Type: Consent Calendar

Meeting Date: 6/11/2018

Summary Title: Community Engagement Block Program

Title: Approval of a 1.5-year Contract With the Empowerment Institute for \$25,000 for Community Engagement Block Program (Continued From April 2, 2018)

From: City Manager

Lead Department: City Manager

Recommendation

Approval of a contract with Global Action for the Earth (the Empowerment Institute) for \$25,000 in direct costs for the Beta 2 Pilot of the Community Engagement Block Program (Cool Block) to assist with neighborhood participation in Citywide initiatives.

Executive Summary:

In an effort to create a program to better connect the community to one another and the City, staff brought a report (CMR [#8716](#)) to the City Council on March 5 and April 2, 2018. The report recommended the adoption of a contract with the Empowerment Institute for continued support of the *Cool Block* program. The report prompted additional questions from the City Council and community which resulted in the City Council continuing the item to a future meeting. This current report revises the program proposal in response to expressed concerns, answers many of the concerns (Attachment A), and provides details about the next steps of the recommended *Beta 2 Pilot Cool Block* program. The revised proposal is a smaller investment for the City and leaves the maximum amount of flexibility for the City to determine what to do after the Beta 2 Pilot. Lastly, if successful, it provides the City with helpful tools and builds the City's capacity to connect with the community better than before.

Background:

The City and the Empowerment Institute began working together in 2012 to think outside the box and develop a block-by-block citizen engagement program to build social capital through encouraging a low carbon lifestyle, green living, livable neighborhoods, and disaster resilience. In 2016, the program was renamed "the Cool Block" program and the City Council formally agreed to participate in the program. The program aligns with other City programs (e.g., Know Your Neighbors Grant Program).

Cool Block had two pilot programs with the City of Palo Alto: the *Alpha* Pilot program and the *Beta* Pilot program. The Alpha Pilot program was conducted in 2016 with 15 community members volunteering as block leaders in their respective neighborhoods. While the participants focused on many of the Cool Block action topics, neighbors getting to know one another was the most valuable benefit of the pilot program. Participants were able to track their progress and also had a web platform with resources necessary to help achieve the actions they chose to complete. Some actions were done as individual actions and others were Cool Block team actions.

The second Cool Block pilot, the Beta Pilot program, was conducted in spring 2017. The Beta pilot program took place over four and a half months with 24 blocks participating, representing approximately 175 households. The program goal was the same as the Alpha Pilot (engaging residents at the block level to learn, share and act to live a low carbon and environmentally sustainable lifestyle, increase disaster resilience, and enhance the livability of the block). The program consisted of nine meetings led by a block leader and largely self-directed by a team of five to eight households on a block.

Revised Cool Block Proposal for Beta 2:

In response to the concerns raised by the City Council and some of the community about the Cool Block program, staff revamped the program design for the Beta 2 Pilot program. The key changes to the Beta 2 Pilot program in comparison to the previous report to the City Council are:

1. Pilot Name: the previous report referred to this new pilot as a “new pilot” program. To help clarify the different pilot programs, staff and the Empowerment Institute renamed this pilot program as the “**Beta 2 Pilot**” program, building on the progress of the Alpha and Beta pilot programs.
2. Lower Cost: The Beta 2 Pilot program will be a lower direct cost to the City at only \$25,000 and in-kind staff time not to exceed \$75,000 in time and value (compared to the previous direct costs of \$100,000). The \$75,000 in-kind time and resources are aligned with existing staff efforts to promote Cool Block goals.
3. Staffing: In the previous Cool Block proposal, staff recommended spending \$100,000 which would include \$75,000 for resident leader, Sandra Slater, as a subconsultant for the Empowerment Institute. In this revised Beta 2 Pilot program proposal, and as mentioned above, staff recommends the usage of existing staff to learn the program and implement the program in alignment with existing and complimentary City efforts as part of the City’s investment in this program. The Empowerment Institute will pay for its subconsultants.
4. What happens after the Beta 2 Pilot (year 1): With the revised Beta 2 Pilot program, the City has much more flexibility over what to do upon the conclusion of the Beta 2 Pilot program. The proposed Beta 2 Pilot agreement does not

automatically commit the City to a Phase 2 of work although the Empowerment Institute has offered some suggestions for what that partnership might look like.

5. Creating a Finite End with a Built in Next Step: In the previous proposal, the City would have been requested to spend over \$1 Million for Phase 2 upon completion of the Beta 2 Pilot program and it was less clear of how the City could take this program forward without such an investment. In this revised Beta 2 Pilot proposal, the cost of Phase 2 (after year 1) would be significantly less. Additionally, the program is now built for existing staff to learn the program, build capacity to operate the program, and prepare for the City to run this program independently for broader community engagement.

Beta 2 Pilot Program Details:

The Empowerment Institute will advance, in partnership with the City, a Beta 2 Pilot community engagement block program that builds social capital (defined here as a network of quality, supportive relationships among people who live on the same block). Through this contract, the City plans to progress a comprehensive program that connects several City priority interests for building and strengthening community. The Empowerment Institute will help to target and engage groups of residents that live together on a block or in another defined area of approximately 25 adjacently connected households. Many City departments (Utilities, Library, Public Works, Administrative Services, Community Services, and the City Manager's Office, especially the Sustainability Office) are already advancing their work through the Cool Block program and look forward to further opportunities for growth.

Beta 2 Pilot Program Goals:

The community engagement goals of this strategic partnership between City and the Consultant include:

1. Increased residential participation in the City's Sustainability Implementation Plan and Utilities Strategic Plan to reduce the city's carbon footprint with an emphasis on Electric Vehicle (EV) uptake, building efficiency and electrification.
2. Increased residential participation in the City's Emergency Preparedness Plan to increase household and block disaster resiliency and recruitment of volunteers for the Emergency Services Volunteer Program.
3. Increased residential participation in the City's Healthy City, Healthy Community Initiative to address the social determinants of health through greater neighbor-to-neighbor connectivity, community and social capital.
4. Increased residential participation in City programs addressing the following topics: carbon reduction, energy efficiency, transportation efficiency, solid waste reduction, water stewardship, emergency preparedness, safety, health, community building, and social cohesiveness.
5. Increased community engagement through helping strengthen the partnership between Palo Alto residents and the City government.

Beta 2 Pilot Target Metrics:

The Beta 2 Pilot program follows two previous pilot programs, the Palo Alto Cool Block Alpha and Beta pilot programs. In those pilots, 24 blocks and 175 households participated. The Beta 2 pilot program target metrics are based on results of those previous pilot programs and translate the Beta 2 goals into measurable targets. Both partners will evaluate the results of the Beta 2 pilot against the pilot goals along with the Alpha and Beta 1 results achieved on 24 blocks. These metrics are as follows:

1. Carbon savings per household: minimum 25% reduction.
2. Emergency preparedness per household: minimum of 7 priority household actions.
3. Livability improvement per block: minimum of 3 livability improvement actions to increase the health, safety, beautification, greening, resource sharing and community building on the block.
4. Social capital per block: minimum of 2 post program block level actions to sustain the social capital generated by neighbor-to-neighbor connectivity and collaboration during the program.
5. Participation in City programs: awareness of relevant City programs by Cool Block participants to help evaluate resident engagement levels in these programs through feedback from Cool Block website click-through rates to City programs.
6. Citizen engagement per household: minimum of 20 Cool Block actions across the topics of sustainability, resiliency, livability and civic engagement.

Note, the “actions” are defined as a list of specific tasks that Cool Block participants can choose to do in each of the subject areas.

Beta 2 Pilot Program Budget:

In an effort to be shared partners, the Empowerment Institute and the City are sharing investments in the Beta 2 Pilot program. This shared investment is shaped as a staffing investment from both the Empowerment Institute as well as the City, in addition to \$25,000 additional investments from both parties for a 9-month period with 30 blocks anticipated participation. The combined budget for Beta 2 is as follows:

- City of Palo Alto staffing: City to contribute existing staffing in an amount equivalent to \$75,000 (For community organizing which includes recruiting, training and coaching block leaders; and program integration into participating city departments).

- Empowerment Institute local staffing: EI to pay \$75,000 (For community organizing which includes recruiting, training and coaching block leaders; and training and interface with City staff).
- Empowerment Institute Management Fee: City to pay \$25,000 (For use of The Cool Block platform; training and consulting on EI's community engagement and citizen empowerment strategies and tools; project management; and administrative costs).
- Research: EI to pay \$15,000 (Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory for development of a Palo Alto specific cost/benefit study regarding Cool Block's demand management benefits on the City's infrastructure, service delivery and S/CAP Sustainability Implementation Plan costs; and the cost/benefits of disaster resiliency, social cohesiveness and social capital).
- Communication: EI to pay \$10,000 (For program related videos showcasing the city's high priority Cool Block actions).

The total investment from each party will be \$25,000 in direct costs and \$75,000 in staffing costs.

Phase 2 of the Beta 2 Pilot Program:

The City has full discretion over how to proceed with the Cool Block program after this year of the Beta 2 Pilot program. A thorough evaluation report about the program will provide the City with necessary information to determine next steps to help with community engagement.

Timeline:

Phase I of Beta 2 Pilot is estimated for completion either in calendar year 2018 or 2019.

Resource Impact:

The Beta 2 Pilot program will cost the City \$25,000 in direct costs and an equivalent of \$75,000 in costs for existing staff. Staff recommends using the City Manager's Contingency fund, which has a current balance of \$44,766, to fund the Beta 2 Pilot program and the in-kind department support will be absorbed with existing resources.

Policy Implications:

The Cool Block program relates to three Major Themes of the Comprehensive Plan: Building Community and Neighborhoods; Keeping Palo Alto Prepared; and Providing Responsive Governance and Regional Leadership. Cool Block touches each of these themes through connecting citizens on a block level and strengthening their connection to city government.

Comprehensive Plan Goal 5-C, Policy C-5-7 references the Healthy City, Healthy Community Resolution. The Cool Block program contributes to this goal. One sub-goal of Health City, Healthy Community is to promote a healthy culture where the City

“promotes and provides opportunities for social interaction.” Another sub-goal is to promote a healthy environment where the City “supports, protects and connects Palo Alto to the natural environment and cultural resources.” Cool Block contributes to these goals by creating the opportunity for Palo Altans to have neighbor-to-neighbor interactions to advance other safety, cultural, and environmental goals.

Other relevant plans include the Sustainability Implementation Plan and the S/CAP.

Environmental Review:

This contract is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under section 15061(b)(3) of the CEQA Guidelines. (See Cal Code Reg., Title 14, Chapter 3, § 15061(b)(3)).

Attachments:

- Attachment A: Responses to Concerns about the Cool Block Program
- Attachment B: Alpha and Beta Pilot Program Results & Testimonials-2016-17
- Attachment C: Public Letters to Council

Responses to Concerns Submitted to Council about the Cool Block Program

When staff took the Cool Block proposal to City Council in March and April 2018, the City Council and the community relayed some concerns to staff. The information below includes staff responses to the most commonly expressed questions. The responses factor in the suggested program changes of the updated Beta 2 Pilot proposal.

Q1. Why is the program cost so high?

A. Staff negotiated a new program pricing structure upon hearing Council's concerns about the previous cost. The March/April proposal to City Council requested \$100,000 of the City and \$100,000 (in-kind) from the Empowerment Institute. As shown in this June report, the new Beta 2 Pilot cost for the City is \$25,000 direct funding, and in-kind *existing* staff support equivalent to \$75,000.

The City Return on Investment for this program can be seen over time through:

- Potential longer-term savings on the City's infrastructure and service delivery expenditures from increased residential energy efficiency, transportation efficiency, water stewardship, and solid waste reduction.
- Potential increased intake related to the City's estimated multi-million-dollar yearly investment in its S/CAP implementation from significant reduction in the residential carbon footprint.
- Potential increased intake in the number of residents prepared for natural disasters and able to achieve deep household emergency preparedness and disaster resilient blocks that include support for the elderly, infirmed and disabled which helps the City recover more efficiently after disasters.
- The City's investment in creating greater collaboration and social capital among neighbors living on a block or in a building, and civic engagement and citizenship within the community.

Q2. What is Phase 2 and how much does it cost?

A. As explained above, Phase 2, which would come after the Beta 2 Pilot program, is at the sole discretion of the City Council in determining next steps. With the updated Beta 2 Pilot program, it will cost significantly less than the March/April staff report referenced.

In the March/April 2018 staff report, staff included additional information about the Cool Cities Challenge, which, from early estimations, could have cost over \$1 million. But with staff working with the Empowerment Institute to refine the details of what a Phase 2 could look like, the Phase 2 cost is much lower. More importantly, the City does not have to engage in a Phase 2 unless desired at the completion of the Beta 2 Pilot. If the City continued to partner with the Empowerment Institute for Phase 2 to have 375 blocks (25% of Palo Alto's blocks) participate in the program, the City is not obligated to use the Empowerment Institute to further build this program, especially with City staff learning the program during the Beta 2 Pilot.

Responses to Concerns Submitted to Council about the Cool Block Program

Q3. Why is this a separate program from existing organizations or programs, such as Palo Alto Neighborhoods, Emergency Service Volunteers, or the Sustainability Implementation Plan?

A. The Cool Block program is intended to create a space for neighbors to get together, create social capital, and to learn from one another and guests. It is multi-disciplinary and thus does not fit squarely into any one City department. It also allows the Cool Block groups to be nimble as a smaller group instead of a whole neighborhood convening. The program is complementary of existing City efforts, especially in the energy and waste reduction realms as it expands the City's direct contact reach and provides a space where neighbors can discuss their individual progress and encourage neighbors to consider changes as well.

Q4. Other programs (such as the Emergency Services Volunteers) do not receive financial investments from the City, why should this program?

A. Other City programs, such as the Emergency Services Volunteer program, have dedicated existing staff support and resources through City departments. The proposed amount for the Cool Block program is significantly less than the staffing support provided to similar volunteer-based programs.

Q5. My neighbors are already connected, why do we need a program which purports to do the same thing?

A. While some neighbors and blocks are very well connected, the National Citizen Survey, annually conducted by the City of Palo Alto, has shown that the overall sense of community in Palo Alto has decreased over time. In 2003, the survey results showed that 70 percent of survey respondents found that the sense of community in Palo Alto was good or excellent. In 2017, only 56 percent of respondents found the sense of community to be good or excellent. In the period in between 2003 and 2017, the average satisfaction rate (rating it as good or excellent) was 66 percent. These survey results, as one data source, reflect the growing need of neighbors' desire to feel connected to one another. When asked in the National Citizen Survey what "Sense of Community" means, the most common answer was "[being] Friendly/neighborly, offering helping hands and working together." Forty-two percent (42%) of those respondents offering comments provided this response.

The survey also showed that respondents feel that the "Neighborliness of residents in Palo Alto" has decreased. It was 64% in 2014 and only 60% in 2017.

Q6. What will the Empowerment Institute be putting forward for this program if the City has to put up money?

A. The Empowerment Institute will contribute the same amount as the City: one staff person as well as \$25,000 in direct costs for the Beta 2 Pilot program.

Responses to Concerns Submitted to Council about the Cool Block Program

- Q7.** Explain the City Manager's connection to the Empowerment Institute.
- A.** The City Manager has been part of the conversations between the City of Palo Alto and the Empowerment Institute about potential partnerships going back to 2012 along with City Council members. He did not participate in the RFP process.
- Q8.** Why don't the Alpha and Beta Pilot results reflect all previous participants? How is the carbon reduction calculated? Why do you allow blocks to pick whatever actions they want?
- A.** As with any program, 100% of participants do not respond to surveys about their experience, nor submit all documentation about their experience. This is why only 97 of 175 households are accounted for in the metrics shown for the Alpha and Beta Pilot programs. However, since the Alpha and Beta Pilot programs, the Empowerment Institute has changed their online interface to make the 'action-tracking' tool into an easy-to-interface online platform. With this upgrade, the program participants will be able to more easily track their actions instead of needing to fill out paper forms and submit them. This should help with increasing the "reporting household" numbers.

Carbon reduction is measured by the carbon calculator in the toolkit on the Cool Block website. It is a modified version of the carbon calculator provided by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). It is used to measure the difference between a household's energy usage at the start of the program versus at the end of the program. The usage is measured on a per household basis and is not compared to any larger data point such as city/county/state, etc. The goal is to help households to be able to have a tangible way to estimate how their behavior changes contribute to changes in their overall carbon footprint which contributes to the City's larger sustainability implementation efforts.

Lastly, the program is designed to let each block group determine the actions that are most fitting for their specific block instead of mandating that each block across the whole city perform the same actions. This leaves the flexibility for each block to address their specific needs. This also allows each block to determine tangible actions to pursue based on the availability and bandwidth of the individual household participants.

Pilot Program Results and Participant Testimonials

Source: *The Empowerment Institute*

The City of Palo Alto Alpha and Beta Cool Block Pilot Programs achieved the results summarized below.

Key Program Results:

- Number of Palo Alto Cool Blocks: **24**
- Number of participating households (approximate): **175**
- Number of household member participants (approximate-2.5 per household): **440**
- Average households participating on Cool Block teams: **6.5**
- Percentage of households on a block participating on a Cool Block team: **41%**
- Average recruitment rate per block (people invited who participated): **55%**
- Average carbon reduction per household: **7 tons** (14,000 pounds)
- Average CO₂ reduction per household: **32%** (goal was 25%)
- Average number of disaster resiliency actions taken per household: **9** (goal was 7)
- Average number of program actions taken per household: **27**

Participating Blocks: The Empowerment Institute formed Cool Block teams on 24 diverse blocks in a variety of neighborhoods including Professorville, Community Center, Duveneck/St Francis, Triple E, Midtown, Cal Ave, Barron Park, Palo Verde, and St. Claire Gardens.

Household Recruitment Results:

Recruitment Results Achieved on Participating Blocks	Percentage
Interested Blocks <i>(Percentage of households who agreed (said Yes) to an in-person information meeting)</i>	67.9%
Followed Through <i>(Percentage who showed up of those who said Yes)</i>	84.5%
Information Meeting Recruitment Rate <i>(Percentage who agreed to join a team, of those who showed up)</i>	67.4%
Overall Recruitment Rate <i>(Percentage who agreed to join a team of those who said Yes to the information meeting)</i>	54.9%

Actions Taken:

Results of Actions	Total	Pilot Average*
Pounds of CO ₂ Saved	1,306,707	13,471
Total Actions Taken	2,625	27
Average % CO ₂ Reduction		31.8%

***With 97 Households Reporting**

Attachment B

Theme of Actions	Total Actions Taken
Carbon Reduction	787
Water Stewardship	585
Resiliency	949
Livability	298
Empowerment of Others	26

Action Analysis:

- The most popular **carbon-reducing actions** were reducing waste, using less hot water in personal and kitchen use, moving toward a vegetarian diet, efficient lighting, shopping less, ensuring an efficient car. In addition, over 25% of reporting households did retrofit actions.
- The most popular **resiliency actions** were creating seven-day stores of food and water, establishing an alternate lighting and news source, and preparations for fires and earthquakes.
- The most popular **water-reducing actions** were reducing water used in personal care, gardening, and car washing. Many households (35-40%) also acted to reduce toxins in the environment.
- The most popular **livability actions** taken up at the block level were safety, block parties, tool-sharing, and helping neighbors when needed.

Partnership with the City of Palo Alto: The Palo Alto Cool Block Program Manager gathered over 65 local resources for the program. These resources span four key themes addressing carbon reduction (20), resiliency (30), water stewardship (3), and livability (10). Each resource was mapped to relevant Cool Block action recipes and made available on an action-by-action basis through the Cool Block [website](#). The City provided in-person demonstrations and videos at the team meetings to encourage uptake of the City's various programs. These included demonstrations on Zero Waste, energy auditing, emergency preparation, and a short video on keeping toxins out of the City's watershed.

Software Platform: A new and improved user experience was designed for the Beta Pilot, and a strong level of data reporting was achieved. Improvements were identified and will be addressed through software evolution in the next phases of the Cool Block Program.

Coaching: Four volunteer coaches emerged from successful alpha pilot teams to support beta pilot teams. This enabled beta teams to sustain their commitment and achieve good results.

Cultural Adaptation: The Empowerment Institute added Google language translation functionality into the Cool Block website. It supports a wide range of languages. As a result of this functionality, program managers received feedback that it allowed non-English speaking residents to engage with the program in a meaningful way.

Participant Testimonials

Victoria Thorp, Cool Block Leader:

“The Cool Block program has surpassed my expectations on every level. I was worried that it would be difficult to recruit neighbors, but I had more people eager to join than I could ever have anticipated. And the group that we have formed has supported each other to reduce carbon and energy, shared ideas for water reduction and provided helpful support for disaster preparedness. But more than anything, we’ve built lasting relationships between neighbors who may have never otherwise met each other, allowing longtime residents to connect with newcomers to Palo Alto. Our group has already shared expertise about drip irrigation, exchanged homemade bread and borrowed tools, and we are just beginning to tap into the knowledge and skills of the people all around us. Our team-and the many others across Palo Alto – are proving that the most powerful engine of change may indeed reside right here in our neighborhoods.”

Lorrie Castellano, Alpha Cool Block Leader/Beta Coach:

“I was ready to move,” Cecilia tells me. “There was no sense of community here.” I smile, happy I persevered knocking on my neighbors’ doors.

Cool Block has changed things in our neighborhood. Not only have we lowered our carbon footprints and prepared our block for any emergency, but we actually talk to each other, wave to each other and get together regularly even after the program is over.

There was some grumbling when I told them that the Cool Block Pilot required meeting 9 times. There was more of a gasp when they saw the size of the book we’d use to get the hard work done. But that all melted away once we sat down over coffee and sweets for our team-building meeting and we found we actually liked being with each other.

What I saw was that people are hungry for community and that’s what the Cool Block offers. But it is so much more. We helped each other go through lowering our carbon footprints as individuals and as a group. And once we learned we’d need each other in an emergency, we prepared our block by stocking food and sharing information about who has a generator, tools, things needed to survive.

It’s been a year but we don’t want to stop. We meet once a month for Happy Hour, we have a Cool Block Book Club and we are more involved in the City of Palo Alto. We come to City Council Meetings and other political gatherings as a group. The benefits have been far more than we ever expected.

This is a program I believe in so I continue my participation as a Coach for the next pilot phase, the Betas. And my neighbors keep thanking me for taking that first step to bring them together. I’m happy I persevered and knocked on that first door.”

Attachment B

Monica Stone, Beta Cool Block Leader:

“They reached out to me to ask me to lead my block in the Cool Block program. My first task was to walk my block, ring doorbells, and ask my neighbors to come to an informational meeting at my house. Many of my neighbors I had never met before!

Now as my Team Holly Oak Cool Block ends our 4.5-month journey, I have changed my perspective on living in Palo Alto considerably. I feel more a part of the community through participating in various endeavors to reduce our carbon footprint, get organized for disaster and work together in a way that makes me feel very connected to my neighbors and my city.

Many of us have reduced our carbon footprint by 25%, saving the city energy costs, have put together our emergency preparedness kits in our homes and cars, ensuring a better recovery for the city from disaster, and participated in city-wide activities together like the Earth Day celebration.

The social capital we have built together makes me feel great. I know my neighbors, call them by name, and truly now feel comfortable borrowing the eponymous ‘cup of sugar.’”

Carnahan, David

From: A.C. Johnston <ac.johnston@me.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 29, 2018 10:28 PM
To: Council, City
Subject: Cool Block Program
Attachments: Letter to City Council re Cool Block.pdf

Dear Mayor Kniss, Vice-Mayor Filseth, and City Council Members,

Please see the attached letter regarding the City Council's consideration of the Cool Block program.

Respectfully,

A.C. Johnston

A.C. Johnston
325 Channing Ave. #301
Palo Alto, California 94301

May 29, 2018

City Council
City of Palo Alto
250 Hamilton Ave.
Palo Alto, CA 94301

Re: Cool Block Program

Dear Mayor Kniss, Vice Mayor Filseth, and City Council Members,

I understand that you may shortly be considering a proposed contract between the City of Palo Alto and the Empowerment Institute for funding regarding the Community Engagement Block Program (Cool Block). I urge you to approve the contract and support the Cool Block pilot program.

I am a member of the Utilities Advisory Commission, but I am writing as an individual citizen and not on behalf of the UAC. A number of my comments, however, reflect issues that the UAC has been discussing.

Early this year, residents of the condominium in the University South neighborhood in which I live agreed to participate as a Cool Block beta site. I believe we were one of the first "vertical blocks" in Palo Alto. Since then we have had 8 meetings over nearly 4 months following the Cool Block curriculum. Eight of our neighbors participated in nearly all of the meetings. Based on my experience with the program, I believe that it was very effective for our Cool Block, and I believe it will be very effective for others as well.

Overall, the goals of the program are to help households:

- reduce their carbon footprint
- conserve water
- become more disaster resilient
- create healthier, safer, greener, more socially connected blocks

In addition to being "the right thing to do," these goals are right in line with many of the City's goals as reflected in the City's Sustainability/Climate Action Plan and the Sustainability Implementation Plan, the CPAU's effort to reduce water usage and to conserve electricity and natural gas usage, and Zero Waste Palo Alto.

We asked each of the participants in our group to take responsibility for one of the meetings and to present on the topic for that meeting following the Cool Block curriculum. In addition, we had Wendy Hediger and Sarah Fitzgerald from Zero Waste Palo Alto come to one of our meetings to discuss composting and recycling and give us clear guidelines for doing so. We will also be inviting Scott Mellberg, the Home Efficiency Genie sponsored by the City of Palo Alto Utilities, to attend our last meeting to demonstrate more things that we can do to make our residences more energy efficient.

Since we began the program, residents in our building have reported that they have replaced incandescent light bulbs with LEDs, reduced hot water use, reduced water use in toilets, and greatly increased use of composting. Individuals have purchased and stored emergency supplies, and the homeowners' association Board is putting together a list of emergency supplies that we will buy for our whole community. We have identified secure locations within the building for storing these supplies. We have also begun a "phone tree" to be sure that everyone in the building can be contacted in an emergency and prepared a booklet with emergency information for our residents such as how to shut off water and gas to our units in an emergency. We are also investigating options to install solar panels on our roof.

Best of all, however, has been the sense of community that the program has fostered within our building by encouraging residents to meet together and discuss how to solve both individual and community problems. The fact that we have sat down together to discuss ways we can meet the program goals and to report to each other on what we have done, individually and collectively, to fulfill those goals has definitely created a sense of accountability and group support. There is no pressure like peer pressure to encourage behavior change!

I understand that the Cool Block contract may be on the consent agenda for a council meeting soon. I may not be able to attend that meeting in person, but I strongly hope that the City Council will approve the proposed contract with the Empowerment Institute and take the steps necessary to allow the Cool Block program to reach more Palo Alto neighbors. We will all be the better for it.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,



A.C. Johnston