



# Definition of a Montclair Organized Neighborhood (MON)



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# Montclair Organized Neighborhoods: The Power of Many

## Overview

The California Oakland Hills' Montclair area is unlike most other urban or suburban landscapes. Many homes are built on the hillside and accessed via narrow, winding roads. Most properties are covered by dense vegetation, and we are bordered on the east by regional parks and on the west by a major urban environment. Like anywhere, living in the greater Montclair area has both its benefits as well as its risks. The benefits include little violent crime, quiet neighborhoods, privacy and a connection with nature. The risks include a high potential of natural disasters such as earthquake and fire, difficulty of access, less inherent sense of community, and yes, some (usually) non-violent crime such as break-ins and theft.

One proven concept that can help reduce the risks of where we live, as well as increase the benefits, is that of an organized neighborhood. As an example, a neighborhood might organize in order to:

- Deter crime.
- Increase their ability to prepare and respond to natural disasters and emergencies.
- Improve parking and traffic safety in their immediate area.
- Clean up and beautify the neighborhood.
- Socialize and get to know their neighbors.

Of course, neighborhoods can be organized to address any or all of those issues. Once organized, a neighborhood can make major progress to improve the safety, beauty and overall quality of life within their boundaries, and can overcome the effects of increasingly dwindling City resources.

Organizations like the Montclair Safety and Improvement Council (MSIC) and the Piedmont Pines Neighborhood Association have set forth an ambitious goal to encourage every single neighborhood in the Montclair area to organize itself to pursue whatever areas of concern are most relevant to them. Their vision is to provide awareness, support and recognition for these organized neighborhoods.

For more information on the MSIC and what constitutes the boundaries of the Montclair area, please visit <http://www.montclairsic.org>.

## Why Organize?

Safe communities begin with well-organized and prepared neighborhoods. Our City resources simply do not stretch far enough to satisfy the public safety needs for 400,000+ people without help from residents. Consider that organized neighborhoods:

- Have power in numbers, leading to a stronger and more authoritative relationship with City officials.
- Have access to the City's intensive curriculum of neighborhood training to prevent crime and respond to emergencies.
- Gain more eyes and ears to detect and prevent crime.

- Pool labor, skill and knowledge to make an entire neighborhood less attractive and vulnerable to criminals.
- Know when something looks suspicious anywhere in the neighborhood and are trained to take appropriate action.
- Have access to support and resources from MSIC and the local neighborhood associations in Montclair.

The questions most residents ask are; “Why do I need to organize?”, “Won’t the police quickly respond to a crime or a suspicious event?”, “Won’t the City take care of me during a disaster?”, “Won’t we all instinctively know what to do in an emergency?”... and so on. Consider these facts about our City services and the area we live in:

- Oakland currently has, in comparison with other large US cities, far fewer police officers per capita.
- More Oakland police officers are assigned to other sections of Oakland that have much higher crime rates. During some time periods there is not a single patrol officer assigned to our Montclair area.
- Response times from the police can be much longer than expected, especially for minor crimes and crimes already committed (response times for serious crimes in progress have historically been quite good).
- The Hayward Fault runs through Montclair Village. A magnitude 7 earthquake occurring today on the Hayward would likely cause hundreds of deaths and almost \$100 billion of damage (U.S. Geological Survey). In the event of a major earthquake, the Montclair area may be without City services (police, fire, and rescue) *for 72 hours or longer!*
- The USGS reports that there is a 70% chance that one or more quakes of about magnitude 6.7 or larger will occur in the San Francisco Bay area before the year 2030.
- Wildfires are also a concern. The 1991 fire in the Oakland/Berkeley Hills resulted in the loss of 25 lives, along with 3,354 family dwellings and 456 apartments destroyed.

Of course organized neighborhoods will not eliminate these issues. But, organized neighborhoods, in conjunction with Neighborhood Watch, are a definite deterrent to crime, and knowing and looking out for your neighbors is a benefit to all. Being organized and CORE trained will go a long way toward being prepared to survive and to handle the aftermath of a major disaster. Organized neighborhoods foster a much greater sense of community and belonging, which typically results in nicer, better maintained properties and thus higher home values. There are almost no disadvantages to organizing your neighborhood, and many, many advantages.

## **What is a MON?**

Because neighborhoods can organize for many reasons, the MSIC has coined the term Montclair Organized Neighborhood (MON) to refer to any Montclair-area neighborhood that has organized for any purpose or combination of purposes, including crime prevention, emergency preparedness, beautification, socialization, etc. A MON can be (and hopefully is) Neighborhood Watch and CORE trained, however it may just exist as a social group. There is nothing unique about a MON compared with any other organized neighborhood group, except that it is located in the Montclair area and supported by the MSIC.

## **What is a MON Leader?**

A MON Leader is the point person who helps organize and/or lead their organized neighborhood. This role may also be referred to as a Block Captain. The MON Leader may have one or more Co-Leaders who assist with the leader's tasks. For example, in some large MONs that encompass several blocks, there may be one overall MON Leader and several Co-Leaders/Block Captains, each responsible for their own section of the MON.

The MON Leader role may be one person's on-going passion, or it may rotate among neighbors. The MSIC maintains a confidential roster of MON Leaders/Co-Leaders and their contact information, and manages an email list of MON Leaders for communicating information to be passed down through the neighborhoods. The MSIC also schedules MON Leaders meetings to discuss topics such as crime trends and upcoming emergency preparedness exercises, and to help MONs learn from the success of other MONs.

## **Support Structure**

MONs can receive as much help as they need to get organized and to gradually increase their levels of training and overall benefits. The MSIC's goal is to see all 8,000 plus households in the greater Montclair area organized into MONs of around 30 households each. Each MON elects a neighborhood MON Leader and/or Co-Leaders (or Block Captains), who become part of a Montclair-wide support structure. This support comes from the MSIC and/or from associations such as the Piedmont Pines Neighborhood Association or the Shepherd Canyon Homeowners Association.

Once a MON has developed its action plan, the MSIC and/or the Neighborhood Association can offer such support as:

- MON Leaders network – meets to provide organizing assistance, share ideas, motivate, build and sustain momentum, and to communicate and provide assistance between MONs as needed.
- Emergency Preparedness coordination – to motivate, pool resources, coordinate CORE training, coordinate Citywide exercise participation, conduct local drills, define radio communications procedures, and recognize achievement.
- Crime Prevention coordination – to detect/report patterns, improve OPD response, communicate crime information, coordinate Neighborhood Watch training, and to recognize achievement.
- Traffic & Pedestrian Safety coordination – to work with police, Public Works and other City agencies to address dangerous intersections, parking and access on narrow streets, potholes, safe pedestrian paths, etc.
- Beautification projects – such as coordinating Earth Day, Creek to Bay Day, Adopt-a-Spot activities, and local projects such as the Shortline Pocket Park.

**A lot of information on this topic of support, as well as documentation on MONs, crime prevention and statistics, beautification projects, emergency preparedness documents, contact information, etc, can be found on the MSIC Web site at: <http://www.montclairsic.org>**