**Case Study Title:** Community Building 2.0: Connect Neighbors; Strengthen

Neighborhoods; Build Community

**Cast Study Category:** Community Building

**Jurisdiction Name:** City of San Jose in partnership with Nextdoor (Alliance

Corporate Partner)

**City Manager Name**: Debra Figone

**Considered for an Innovation Award:** Yes

**Project Leader:**

Kip Harkness

Assistant to the City Manager

City Manager’s Office

408-535-8501

[Kip.Harkness@sanjoseca.gov](mailto:Kip.Harkness@sanjoseca.gov)

200 East Santa Clara Street

**Each Presentation Team member:**

1. Kip Harkness

Deputy City Manager

City Manager’s Office

408-535-8501

[Kip.Harkness@sanjoseca.gov](mailto:Kip.Harkness@sanjoseca.gov)

1. Ed Everett

Senior City Strategist for Nextdoor/ Retired City Manager

650-868-0854

[ed@nextdoor.com](mailto:ed@nextdoor.com)

**Connect Neighbors, Strengthen Neighborhoods, Build Community**

The City of San Jose and Nextdoor have collaborated on the all-important mission of connecting neighbors, strengthening neighborhoods and building community with the use of technology. This is a positive way of dealing with the “new normal” economy.

Participants will understand the:

* Power of community building
* Usefulness and positive impact of community building on cities and neighbors
* Effectiveness of using technology to help build community
* Nuts and bolts of how to build community.

**Project Intent**

The intent of this project is to:

* Change residents from being blaming, complaining, demanding customers to engaged citizens\* who help solve problems and care about the wellbeing of the community.
* Change the role of cities from a top down, paternalistic power relationship that tries to solve all problems and provide all services to an equal partnership with citizens.
* Provide safer and healthier neighborhoods and improve educational test scores.
* Change the isolation that many of our neighbors feel in their own neighborhoods.
* Provide cities of all sizes with a new way of dealing with the “new normal”: less revenue, fewer staff, reduced services with the same high expectation from residents.

**Costs**

Many will say that the objectives listed above cannot be accomplished with or without new resources and revenues. This session will prove that the opposite is true: a city of any size can achieve significant results within their existing, limited resources through community building.

**San Jose Evolution: Community Building 2.0**

In the first years of the new millennium, the City of San Jose, the Capital of Silicon Valley, began a bold experiment in community building and engagement, known as the **Strong Neighborhoods Initiative**. Backed by an initial $100 million in Redevelopment funds and encompassing 250,000 residents, the Strong Neighborhood Initiative followed three guiding principles:

1. Listen to neighbors
2. Build on neighborhood strengths and assets
3. Respond to neighborhood priorities.

*\*We use the term “citizen” not in the legal sense but to describe anyone who lives or works in a city.*

In collaboration with teams of City staff, 19 newly organized Neighborhood Action Coalitions developed comprehensive neighborhood plans. A unique component of each plan was the "top ten list" where residents themselves prioritized the ten most important projects and changes they wanted to make in their community. The result has been astounding, over 170 completed projects including new parks, community centers, streetlights, sidewalks, housing rehabilitation and even a charter school. As important as the physical capital, Strong Neighborhoods built social capital, connecting thousands of neighbors to each other, and the City.

The great recession and the resulting decline in City revenues and the State's elimination of Redevelopment funding was a sea change for Strong Neighborhoods. Over the course of just 18 months over $40 million was cut from the budget and staff reduced from 50 to 5. Following the guiding principle of "Listen to neighbors", staff convened a community conversation with community leaders and asked the question: "*What is most important?*" The amazing results of this conversation was that neighbors, who were all too aware of the effects of the recession, said that the two most important things were for the City to:

1. Focus its limited resources on keeping the most fragile neighborhoods safe (even when that was not their own)
2. Awaken neighborhood capacity across the city to take action, share resources and gifts, and address their own problems.

This concept of awakening neighborhood capacity represents a radical and powerful shift. A shift from treating residents like customers where City services are the answers to all their problems, to respecting them as citizens, who have the responsibility to be a part of the solution. But how do you awaken neighborhood capacity in hundreds of different neighborhoods across a city of 147 square miles? Even with a staff of 50 it was impossible to reach all the active neighbors in a City of a million people.

The answer was in our own back yard, Silicon Valley. Technology, and in particular online social networks, is increasingly effective at engendering trust among strangers and connecting resources to needs. If the strengths of online social networks can be connected to neighborhoods, then there is the very real potential to awaken the capacity of every neighborhood in the City. The City of San Jose's collaboration with Nextdoor.com is a large-scale effort to use technology to awaken neighborhood capacity by connecting neighbors to neighbors, and providing them tools to share and collaborate.

The interactive presentation will first set a context by defining community, the barriers to building community and the role of cities in developing a sense of community. The presentation will also candidly explore this collaboration between the City and Nextdoor and tell the story of the promise and the pitfalls in using technology to awaken neighborhood capacity. We will describe and demonstrate Nextdoor and why it works with any size city.

**Outcomes/Data/Real World Practicality**

The presentation will provide specific data about the San Jose/Nextdoor collaboration for the period August 2012 to April 2013. We will also provide specific data from over 100 cities that use Nextdoor.

**Obstacles**

We will identify what worked and what didn’t work in getting all neighborhoods in San Jose using Nextdoor. We will highlight our successes and share the learning from our failures.

**Presentation Style**

The session will be a fast-paced, innovative, fun, interesting, interactive, and will challenge assumptions. It will be a guaranteed homerun!

We will have the participants (“neighbors”) sitting around tables (“neighborhoods”). The neighbors will engage in 2 different, interactive activities within their neighborhood as follows:

1. Get to know each other and develop relationships
2. Help each other by exchanging goods or services in their neighborhood.

We will use:

* **Power Point** to explain some important concepts, data and “how to’s”.
* **Videos** to describe Nextdoor and to hear testimonials from San Jose neighbors about the transformational power of community building.
* Five powerful **real life stories** that will convey the power of using Nextdoor to build community.
* Appropriate and useful **handouts**.
* A lively, 20 minute **Question and Answer** period for specific learning to individual situations.

Kip and Ed will use engaging and interactive exercises, videos, stories and presentations to facilitate the participants learning about community building and how to use technology to connect neighbors, strengthen neighborhoods and build community.