■ **T H E A R T O F S W A M P Y A N K E E P L A N N I N G** ■

M A K I N G P L A N S T H A T W O R K

I. I N T R O D U C T I O N

"Plans that work" are ones that effectively reflect the values and interests of the community for which they are written, that move beyond that to frame an action strategy, and that result in getting actions implemented. "Working" defined in that way critically depends upon the process that went into plan creation. This material focuses on those processes, rather than on the community outcomes, which "should" result. Another time we can talk about whether neo-traditional design should go back to Florida, whether affordable housing belongs on top of stores, and whether impact fees should be charged for transferable development rights. These materials deal instead with how to design and participate in a process allowing communities to decide about such things in a way that is likely to result in well-informed action appropriate to that place at that time.

Much of this material is near universal in its applicability, being equally apt in large Western cities and in small Northeastern towns. This approach has even been well received in a large Brazilian city. However, in some respects geography is critical, and when it is we'll try to flag it. There are many prescriptions for what a community plan should contain and still more for what *planning* (the verb) should cover. For example, in Massachusetts a State law (§81-D, Ch. 41 MGL) directs planning boards to prepare "Master Plans" and specifies the nine topics they should cover. More narrowly, following up on the Governor's Executive Order 418 an outline for what is to constitute a "Community Development Plan" has been developed, essentially covering four of the nine §81-D statutory topics. Still more narrowly, the Massachusetts Division of Conservation Services (DCS) prescribes what is to constitute an "Open Space and Recreation Plan" to qualify the community for open space and recreation grants, focusing on just two of the nine §81-D statutory topics.

The planning we have in mind in discussing these principles is the kind that bridges at least two interrelated topics, has at least a fairly long-term horizon, and has implementation as its explicit aim, rather than creating a utopian vision or simply improving community understanding, however valuable those may be in some circumstances. A plan for transforming the municipal telecommunications technology over the coming two years can probably succeed without respecting all that follows, since it is a

> Brief examples illustrating the text appear in boxes below. The "good" cases cited are hardly unique, but simply are ones where this author's involvement enables informed comment. The "bad" cases are from equally real places, are also hardly unique, but are spared from identification.

short-range single-topic plan. A housing plan, however, arguably really addresses intentions not only for housing opportunities but also for land use, among other things, so it still would benefit from this approach. A stand-alone "visioning" exercise, though long-term and multi-topical, by definition won't reflect some of these principles, so testing it against them isn't reasonable. On the other hand, taking note of these principles might lead to reconsideration of whether stand-alone "visioning" is in fact the best thing for the community to do.

II. PRINCIPLES

To be effective, community plan-making should center on preparing **a statement of intentions for the future of the community, making sure that it has been agreed to by all those whose actions it is meant to guide**. Plans that meet that simply stated but highly demanding standard are unlikely to gather dust on shelves or anywhere else. Instead, they commonly become an integral part of the community's way of guiding its future. That is the kind of planning and plan-making this report is about. Success with such planning depends heavily on observance of seven planning principles. Although they seem to be little more than common sense, they are far from universally observed.

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   A. **Be vision-based.** The planning should create and document a vision for the community that is vivid, engaging, and forthright, as well as being concrete enough to guide decisions.

   B. **Focus on place-centered intentions.** From the beginning, the planning should build connections and reconcile conflicts across subject areas and between broad intentions and concrete actions. That makes it an intentional plan, not a utopian one, with implementation as the goal.

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   C. **Be broadly inclusive.** Assure that the full range of interests, values and perspectives that shape town meeting (or other key decision processes) are so engaged in the planning and have such an effective voice in it that they recognize the resulting plan as being their own.

   D. **Make participation a solidly contributory experience.** Make the participation sound and worthwhile for both community and participants.

APPROACH

   E. **Test planning with actions.** Test the plans and the process through action during, not only following, the planning.

   F. **Plan through iterative cycles.** Do the planning through a number of planning cycles, not just one linear pass.

   G. **Seek convergence on agreed intentions.** Planning efforts are only useful if they lead to shared conclusions.

This manual is about those principles, why they are important, and how to follow them. In many ways, they are mutually reinforcing - following one serves each of the others - so there are special rewards for observing all of them, although often that isn't possible. Each of the principles also has merit independent of the others. If only one or two of the principles can be made applicable in a given case, there will still be benefits from applying them anyhow.

CONTENT

A. Be vision-based.

The planning should create and document a vision for the community that is vivid, engaging, and forthright, as well as being concrete enough to guide decisions.

Such a plan should have a resonance for people in the community, reflecting that this is really their community being planned, and not some generic one. Such a plan should present a future vision that can really be grasped, not just intellectualized. The presentation should engage and hold attention, not losing it through intrusion of materials more suitable for appendices or separate support documents. If it is the product of a good program, the plan presentation can be completely forthright about its intentions, not masking them with deliberately fuzzy language, hidden double meanings, and other "planner talk."

Assuring that the plan focus is on visions and intentions, not descriptions and predictions, helps greatly in making it engaging. Too many so-called plans are chiefly descriptive of what exists or is predicted to exist, with little or no expression of what is wanted or intended by the community. They are technician's documents in that they don't make explicit either the value-laden choices about what kind of future the community really wants, or the almost equally value-laden choices about how best to achieve that future. Instead, the "plan" simply describes what is likely to be, then states a series of seemingly determinate public responses to how to accommodate that unalterable future.

Further, some so-called "plans" may indicate intentions, but the intentions belong only to the authors, and the authors are not all or even a majority of those who have responsibilities for the actions cited in the plan. A quick clue: if the term "recommend" is heavily used in the plan document, the chances are it is a report drawn by one set of parties hoping to influence another set of parties, rather than drawn by a set of parties agreeing on what they themselves intend trying to achieve. You don't recommend to yourself. If intentions have been agreed upon, the term "recommend" will seldom still be appropriate in a plan. A good plan is a statement **by** a community, not a set of recommendations **to** it.

Rochester, MA documented its citizen-based planning effort with a concise plan simply written and hand-illustrated by the citizens that put it together. It powerfully captures the spirit and intentions of the community in a format allowing wide circulation at modest cost.

Westwood, MA, in common with some other communities, chose to shape the length and format of its plan to allow it to be reproduced in full in the local newspaper prior to its final revision and adoption. As has been true for others doing the same, it was rewarded with helpful community input.

Another town's 2+" thick comprehensive plan chiefly describes the town and the technically necessary accommodations to a future that is projected, not chosen. Almost no significant policy choices are made, and no real image of the kind of place that the community would like to be is conveyed. The plan has been ignored.

The way of planning described here puts the program emphasis on creating and framing intentions, gaining agreements on them, expressing those clearly, and connecting all that to action, rather than on collecting and analyzing data about land use or traffic or viewsheds. The most critical "data" in this planning concerns how the parties involved feel about their community and feel about how change should be guided. Well-expressed, that is much more engaging than

descriptions of what was true in the past and is likely in the future, because it centers on public choices.

B. Focus on place-centered intentions.

From the beginning, the planning should build connections and reconcile conflicts across subject areas and between broad intentions and concrete actions. That makes it an intentional plan, not a utopian one, with implementation as the goal.

A planning workshop for Albany and Madison, NH broke into groups; each made up of citizens supported with design professionals suitable to their tasks, working at far corners of a gymnasium. One team was designing a visionary new town center for Albany. Another, at the extreme opposite side of the room, was designing Route 16 corridor improvements faithfully complying with highway standards. Both were frustrated by complexities of access along a short stretch of the highway, one viewed through a site planning lens, the other through a highway design lens. When one Corridor design team member wandered across the room, saw what the Town Center folks were doing, and told them what the Corridor team was doing, there was a sudden epiphany for both. A common solution to both their problems quickly appeared, and is now a part of both the nascent idea for an Albany Town Center and the guidelines for Route 16 improvements. With teams working in separate rooms that breakthrough across topics to plan for a place might not have occurred.

−   Building across subject areas. The planning we are addressing is centered on places, not topics, fitting and reconciling topics such as housing and jobs and open space to make better places. The interrelationships among topics such as economic development, transportation, and land use are so powerful that planning for any one of them without also planning for the others should be unthinkable, but it is common. Without both political legitimacy and technical capacity in all three areas, for example, it would be near-impossible to achieve an innovative change in land use controls to promote more economic development within a business area, addressing otherwise preemptive traffic concerns through an innovative transportation demand management approach. For another example, in communities approaching land saturation, land use allocations among housing, business and open space is a zero-sum challenge among interests likely to be in competition. Reconciling intentions for housing, economic development and land use has a much better chance of success if those topics are being planned together than if planning for each is separated from the others by time or planning context.

Focusing on topical interrelations and place is easier said than done. Almost unavoidably, even within a comprehensive program, the effort tends to divide along topical lines reflecting skills and participant interests. Too many planning efforts lose the opportunity of developing synergies across topics by politely accepting topical reports and stapling them together into an "anthology plan." Ways of gaining such focus include these:

Land use studies during Lexington's comprehensive plan studies revealed only about 1,000 acres of remaining developable land. Housing advocates needed all of that and more to meet needs they identified, as did economic development advocates, while conservation interests felt that protecting all of the land would be beneficial. Dialog during the process resulted in complex resolutions leaving all interests satisfied with the plan outcome.

- Plan with capacities and legitimacy across as many topics as feasible. Planning for a comprehensive set of topics but doing so serially, one topic following the other, isn't really comprehensive planning because that ordering precludes the vital exchange across topics as they are being developed.

- Encourage a process of exchange across groups starting early. Searching for fruitful interconnections, and facing and attempting to resolve differences rather than "papering them over," can lift a planning effort from mediocrity into real accomplishment.

− Connections between goals and intentions.

When a plan is completed, every single goal statement or similar expression of intention should be supported with at least one significant implementing action that is within the potential reach of those for whom the plan is intended to provide a guide. Especially for planning that starts with unbridled brainstorming, that discipline may raise a number of challenges.

- Having "health care improvement" as the goal and no health care organizations as part of the planning effort (it happens) may demand broadening the set of organizations that are co-participants in the planning, or may suggest reconsidering how the goal is to be framed. "Strengthen advocacy for health care improvements" might be a more tenable goal, although perhaps a disappointingly modest one.

- There may be solid support for a stated goal, but none of the participants, including professional planners, may have concrete ideas about how to move it forward. The action intention then might become to simply carry out a later planning effort to develop a real plan of action towards that goal, involving different staffing and participants.

Similarly, no actions should be proposed that don't relate back to stated goals and objectives. "Classic" planning is deductive, working down from early-established goals through objectives and programs to concrete actions. Sometimes, however, there are actions for which there is wide support but for which a more abstract rationale is elusive. The inductive effort to trace back from actions to the more general purposes they serve doesn't just "tighten" the plan. It may well lead to new understanding of how intentions of seemingly unrelated actions really converge, possibly leading to generation of previously overlooked potential actions.

PARTICIPATION

C. Be broadly inclusive.

Assure that the full range of interests, values and perspectives that shape Town Meeting (or other key decision processes) are so engaged in the planning and have such an effective voice in it that they recognize the resulting plan as being their own.

Commonly planning and implementation are viewed as a "we/they" process: "we" who do the planning need to educate "they" who control town meeting and decision-making, or we can't get our proposals adopted. Broad engagement means abandoning that perceived duality, and instead making sure that the planning really does reflect the values and perceptions of all of the decision-

makers, including those not commonly drawn to planning exercises. It is no secret that those who are most easily engaged in planning processes often differ in values from other people who, although unlikely to be participants in planning, may well be participants in decisions. Once past the perception of a we/they duality, "outreach" becomes less about educating others than it is about creating opportunities for the whole diversity of participants to inform each other, all educating themselves in the bargain. Achieving that is perhaps the most demanding aspect of this process, but there are well-practiced ways of succeeding. These are two equally important sub-objectives.

‒ ENGAGE THE FULL DIVERSITY OF THE COMMUNITY'S RESIDENTS, BUSINESSES, AND OTHER LEGITIMATE INTERESTS (E.G. LANDOWNERS) IN THE PLANNING.

Getting participation which goes beyond the usual "town hall junkies" and which is not skewed requires pre-design and usually requires careful recruiting, rather than reliance on publicity and self-motivation. Be careful: the whole program can founder around this point.

- Identifying what appropriately constitutes "diversity" will often be challenging, and deserves a careful design effort with substantial community participation.

- The participatory design must not categorically exclude anyone, and must openly allow for corrections of any appearance of "stacking". Recruiting people of all ages from neighborhood A and business people, elders, and youngsters from all parts of the community leaves out all who neither live in neighborhood A nor are elders or youngsters, a large share of the community.

> A common participant omission is large landholders, especially non-resident ones. Both Groton and Westwood, MA reaped real benefits from a specific outreach to bring them into the process, making them part of the planned solution.

- Be sure that the process of engaging doesn't miss those having legitimate interests but voices so quiet that they are too often overlooked: kids, seniors, minorities, or just those who don't usually come out for public events.

- The next challenge is how to actually involve that diversity. Response to passive notices of events is seldom sufficient to gain real diversity. Well-designed telephone "contact trees" and other active recruitment efforts, though subject to question as "social engineering," really are a valuable way of reaching towards this objective. Sometimes the challenge of recruiting an appropriate diversity of participants suggests broadening the subject area in order to be attractive to a more diverse set of interests.

> Aquinnah, MA offered on-site day-care to enable participation by parents of kids too young to be left alone, let alone to participate. The caregivers wound up giving the kids exercises just like ones the "adults" were conducting in another room. At the end of the day, the process had added the little ones as another participant group. They proved to be by far the best received and perhaps the most imaginative group of all.

— ENGAGE A WIDE RANGE OF AGENCIES, ORGANIZATIONS, AND OFFICIALS SO FULLY THAT THEY VIEW THE PLAN AS THEIR OWN.

If the plan in question is a municipal one then the elected, appointed, and employed officials across local government are a crucial part of the community that must be reflected in the plan. The support of those individuals is important to gaining plan implementation. Just as importantly, their insights into the community and its decision processes can be of enormous help in doing the planning, and the values that they individually bring to the questions being considered have a special importance because of the time and commitment to the community that they have displayed.

The duality town hall/citizens is another one that requires overcoming. At the same time, the mechanisms for participation might well differ between those used for town hall folks and those through which others take part. The mechanisms for town hall folks should reflect the special background, different hours of availability, and different kinds of legitimacy that characterize town employees and officials. It often is best to engage town officials with a set of activities which parallel but don't duplicate those used for the other participants, together with a process for bringing the two paths together early and often.

D. Make participation a solidly contributory experience.

Make the participation sound and worthwhile for both community and participants.

Asking people to participate in planning for the good of the community is asking a lot in a society where people are hesitant to even join bowling leagues. Asking for participation a second time if the first time was a disappointment becomes an exercise in futility. For those reasons, it is important that those who participate will not only bring benefit to the community but also will gain real rewards for themselves. These are some of the ways of achieving that.

— MAKING PARTICIPATION CONSEQUENTIAL.

For some, the potential for effective advocacy that participating provides will be a major gratification for having taken part. That is strengthened when, for example, participants are recruited and organized by sub-area of the community, role as large landowner or business entrepreneur, or age group (kids, seniors). Participation then can be seen as helping to ensure good treatment for their particular "corner" of the community.

For such motivation to be gratified, participation has to be really consequential. First, the participant's role is shaping the planning should be a truly meaningful one. Being part of a large "yes" group isn't very gratifying. Too often participation is designed for community education and constituency building, rather than giving a real voice to those taking part.

Second, being part of a process that has real promise of making an impact on action is a powerful motivation and source of reward for participation, whether by individuals or by organizations. Connecting the process to real decisions should be part of its initiation. Participating in a "visioning" exercise which is unconnected to any concrete planning gives less promise of consequence than does being part of a committed process that provides assurance of continuing through plan-making and into implementation. Some sponsoring planning boards will even commit in advance to bringing at least some of the proposals from the planning effort to the very next town meeting. Playing a real role in those circumstances can be a heady reward.

Third, the alternatives being considered should be real and consequential. Much of planning is concerned with developing, testing, and synthesizing strategies across alternatives. A test for whether alternatives are real is whether they really have proponents, as opposed to being the nominal "straw men" that planners and designers often create to stand on either side of the alternative they intend to be selected. Participation in "straw man" choices isn't consequential. Further, even if an alternative has proponents it isn't "consequential" if it is an unattainable fantasy, such as moving the hated roadway into an adjacent community, which is okay for brainstorming but not for consequential planning.

In July 2002 more than 4,000 people participated in a planning exercise organized to discuss the merits of six "alternative" designs for redevelopment of the World Trade Center site, supported by state-of-the-art technology to facilitate exchange among a group of that size.

With almost a single voice participants replied "none of the above" to the choices among alternatives provided, and the process, as described by one of its organizers, "now has to start over again." Clearly the otherwise exemplary process was damaged by offering only minor variants, and not real alternatives in the sense that we are using that term.

– LEADING FROM THE SIDE.

For planning programs to succeed they need leadership that walks a fine line, doing more than passively "facilitating" but still allowing participants to develop the substantive content. Those leading should do so as co-equals with the other participants, simply having skills, insights and a role that complement those of the others. That kind of leading involves some technique, but most importantly it requires an attitude that can't be put on, though it can eventually be acquired. If participants are to take real proprietorship of the resulting plan, the content of the planning has to belong to them from the beginning.

These are a few things that can help in doing planning in this truly community-based way.

- Begin participation early and continue it throughout the process. The common statement "Its too early to involve the public, we aren't far enough along" is seldom accurate. The most consequential decisions in most planning programs are actually made early, for example in framing the study scope, so meaningful participation should also start early.

- Share information: avoid inadvertently centralizing it. For example, surveys inherently centralize information in the hands of the surveyors, rather than sharing it in the way that discussions do. Having all materials submitted to a single integrator is very different from circulating drafts. The wonderful e-mail button "reply to all" has the right spirit.

- Build participant understanding. At minimum, participants' understanding of their community should be deepened through their participation. Through participation they may also learn about some of the technical substance of the topics being planned. It isn't sensible to try to make traffic engineers out of all participants, but both participants and the process outcomes will benefit if some participants learn something about the basics of traffic, or housing, or whatever the topic may be. A good process neither asks

participants to act on matters about which they lack competence nor accepts as "given" the areas of competency that participants bring to the undertaking.

- Have participants play creative roles, not just reactive ones. That spirit, exemplified in "visioning," is important throughout. Enabling participants to act with competent creativity as the planning proceeds beyond brainstorming or visioning requires skill in devising how citizens and various kinds of experts can best complement each other in achieving results neither could achieve without the other.

- Keep the action in the participants' realm, not "back in the office." For example, agenda-setting for future meetings and synthesizing outcomes of meetings recently held are critical steps, and whenever possible should be done out in the sunshine of public participation. If this is to be the participant's process the participants need to be part of these key steps. Materials long held back from participants because they aren't ready for public review are symptomatic of a process that doesn't belong to the participants, and they know it.

- Match the pattern of participation and the pattern of decision-making. A process where sessions are "serial", each building on choices made at the last, is ideal if everyone is able to take place in all sessions. However, sometimes only the paid professionals can do that. If times for sessions can't be arranged so nearly all participants can attend all sessions, then sessions should be parallel, not serial, so that missing some sessions (other than final integrating ones) does not disenfranchise participants.

- Allow for briefing, perhaps both oral and written, before asking participants to act. This means walking a fine line: one person's "briefing" is another person's "brainwashing." Sometimes participants can help by both doing part of the briefing, and by suggesting what it should contain.

- Individual exercises, such as a well-designed community "scavenger hunt" or "awareness walk", can hugely improve understanding. Again, that requires care about inadvertent (or designed) manipulation of participant perceptions.

- Make the process fun! Brainstorming is fun, especially if it is carefully designed to be so. Drawing on maps is a hoot once people get over misplaced fear of being incapable. Sharing over food is a time-proven helpful program element. Meetings conducted with lightness, openness, clarity, dispute-avoidance, and assurance of civility all contribute to a positive experience. Tediously read materials, illegible overheads, "air-time hogging," and contentiousness can be near fatal to program enthusiasm for participants.

APPROACH

E. Test planning with actions.

Test the plans and the process through action during, not only following, the planning.

There are many benefits from designing a planning process so that implementing actions occur during the plan making and not only after it.

- The community sees the planning as really consequential even while it is ongoing, heightening engagement.

- Those doing the planning learn from outspoken participation by segments of the public and from officials who only become vocal participants when there are real actions involved. Many people won't participate at all in planning processes until the issues become concrete, such as rezoning the land next to their home. The quality of consideration given by most participants changes when "warm fuzzies" turn into proposals actually being deliberated for implementation. Action on concrete proposals is one of the most valuable pieces of learning in the entire planning process, but its educational value to the effort is small if it comes only at the end. Accordingly, planning and action need to be part of a unified process, informing and stimulating one another throughout the process.

- Artful selection of early actions can help inform the planners about where there is latent agreement within the community, and where divisions are deep. Over and over again, such early actions have outcomes that greatly surprise even veteran officials and activists, and that learning is an enormous benefit to the planning effort.

Westwood citizen participants in early comprehensive plan brainstorming concluded that a moratorium was vital to avoid the planning intentions being preempted by development. Dialog about that early action proposal led to an alternative set of actions, all taken to town meeting and approved. The results included land preservation, regulatory innovation, and creation of a new organization, each important in themselves. They were also critically important in demonstrating the previously doubted willingness of the town to take such actions. The experience of those early actions had transforming impact on the remainder of the planning program.

F. Plan through a number of cycles.

Do the planning through a number of iterative planning cycles, not just one linear pass.

For the above reasons and more, going through a full planning cycle, no matter how quickly, provides an improved understanding of where scarce study resources are most strategically spent in later more detailed planning efforts. In one community, doing a land use plan may depend critically on having a highly detailed land use inventory, together with nothing more than a cursory review of the community's land use decision-making structure. In another community, it might turn out to be the opposite: the key land use questions may deal with decision-making structure more importantly than with the locational matters that mapping land use helps with. A quick early planning cycle can clarify which is the case, and result in a more effective use of planing time and energy.

Building on that learning, the process itself can evolve, not being prematurely fixed on a course set at the front end, or a limited set of alternatives selected early in the process. The mid-course experience can help shape how scarce planning resources are to be allocated in next steps, what kinds of information are really needed, how communications should be designed, and what actors or new planning capacities need to be brought into the process. Commitment to such a cyclical process can also legitimize deferring planning choices that aren't ripe for decision. In this

A three-cycle approach to zoning recodification in Belmont began with "brainstorming" that surprisingly identified review processes as the primary area of concern, resulting in a major reorientation of efforts through the following two cycles. The second cycle developed major changes for those processes, while the third cycle addressed other concerns, all adopted at town meetings climaxing the second and third cycles.

approach, the decision isn't being ignored, but rather (1) it will be returned to in a subsequent cycle, and (2) the uncertainties raised by leaving it an open decision are explicitly taken into account in other aspects of the plan.

A planning cycle involves going from data to actions with goal setting and alternatives framing and testing along the way. A cycle can be completed in an hour, an evening, a month, a year, or as much as a decade in some ill-fated cases. A quick round of plan-making light on data-gathering but long on imaginative ideas can liberate creativity and make the subsequent making of a "real" plan a far-better informed process than would be possible without that first cycle of planning. Some call that first planning cycle "visioning" or "brainstorming" or "blue sky planning." Whatever it is called it is a valuable part of a well-designed planning process, especially if it includes not only visioning about how the place might ideally be but also includes explorations, no matter how preliminary, of the actions involved in getting from here to the vision. Some scorn any inclusion of actions in visioning processes as "inhibiting" to the free flow of ideas, which is nonsense if the process is a thoughtful one.

Having made that quick effort, the "real" planning can then proceed with a much improved understanding of what kinds of information need to be gathered, what sort of alternatives should be considered, and even some idea of what action proposals are likely to emerge and succeed. Because the process of consideration of action proposals is so rich in learning for the planning itself, what might otherwise be just "second cycle" planning sometimes is designed as "second and third cycle planning." That allows the third cycle to benefit from the learning that comes from implementation efforts towards the end of the second cycle. Sometimes the third cycle even has the temerity to begin with crafting actions, then backing into statements about the more general community purposes for which the actions are proposed. That reverses the classic deductive process of plan making, making it an inductive process instead, often to great benefit.

Done well, the second (and perhaps third) cycle(s) of planning usually produce a rich array not only of goals and objectives but also of action proposals that are likely to enjoy wide support. Unfortunately, that action array is often too expansive to be fully implemented. After months or years of planning effort there is an understandable reluctance to defer or, worse, drop from the Plan action proposals that have merit, and in the usual "second (or third) cycle" planning there is no equivalent to a "budget process" which actively forces such choices. The results commonly are unrealistically long lists of "to dos," rich material for remorse a decade later but ineffective as a guide to near-term action.

For that reason, a deeper set of choices really should be made as a part of the planning to organize action sets into strategic alternatives, and to make well-considered choices among them. One alternative might be predicated on key staff additions, while another might rely wholly on current staff levels and organizational structure. This "third (or fourth) cycle" process is just like the earlier ones, testing alternatives against goals, and making choices. The result should be a chosen strategic approach that can really be carried out within the limitations of the real world resources of funding, agency effort, and political support, specifically joining planning and implementation.

Doing planning in this way requires four things from those doing the planning; each of them especially difficult for people newly introduced to planning.

1. Be willing to advance proposals before all the data ever to be collected and analyzed is in hand. All the data is NEVER in hand. **Sufficient** data is what is needed. Proposals should be selected for early action in part on the basis of being ones for which early information is likely to prove sufficient for such an exploratory step.

2. Be willing to advance a proposal in one topical area before plans are complete for other topical areas. This means daring to appear to violate what comprehensive planning is all about. The overarching mind-set of comprehensive planning is that everything depends upon everything else, and that is why we plan comprehensively. But perfect understanding of everything is never achieved - the real test is whether the understanding is **sufficient** for competent action. It is critical to complement that mindset with another: that by selecting and shaping actions thoughtfully, it is possible to move some of them forward before that full comprehensive context is in place. For planners conditioned to the concept of comprehensive interdependencies, that is a tough step. However, seeking that **separability** of some actions consistent with commitment to observing **interdependencies** among actions is a critical part of connecting planning with the real world of political decision-making, which commonly is impatient for action.

3. Be willing to allocate scarce time and financial resources over a number of planning cycles, and not focused solely on one. Time and money for visioning may "trade off" against time and money for later phases of planning, but it is well spent. Time and money for designing action strategies as a third cycle of planning not only involves time and money trade-offs but is intensely political, so it may cost scarce political chips as well. All those costs for a multi-cycle approach are investments, and when allocated wisely, are powerful aids in gaining well-informed actions as the ultimate outcomes of the planning.

4. Be willing to forego the lure of "one step at a time" process decision-making. "Step-by-step" might mean doing visioning, following which support will be sought for conducting a regular planning effort, following which support will be sought for preparation of a strategic design. That is not at all the same as a process in which all three of those steps are woven together in an integrated effort, each informing the other. The quality of participation in early stages by both citizens and agencies will be colored by whether they see it as an abstract exercise or as an integral part of a truly coherent and consequential process.

G. Seek convergence on agreed intentions.

Planning efforts are only useful if they lead to shared conclusions.

Even processes with a linear rather than cyclical design often experience difficulty in reaching closure on intentions. To avoid that, explicitly seek out areas of agreement as the process goes along, document them, and build from there, rather than repeatedly returning to the same territory. Doing that soundly can be helped in a number of ways, including these:

- Focus on agreement, not on resolving disagreement. Find where substantial concurrence exists or is easily achieved, and consolidate it. Where there is disagreement, don't dwell on it, but rather simply agree on how to find agreement at some future time, and move on.

- Those managing the group process have to be careful to **accept outcomes** of that process even if not individually agreeing with some parts of it, unless the disagreement is one of fundamental principle.

- Use a **process appropriate to the style of the actors**. In small towns that seldom is formal, with structured voting on each step, but rather is informal and consensual, not majority-ruled. Sometimes, however, formality "fits", in which case use it.

- Look for how to break apparently interdependent choices into those parts which in fact can be considered independently. Yes, that is the exact opposite of the "comprehensive planning paradigm" where everything depends upon everything else so nothing can be decided until everything is decided. Focusing on interdependencies is a prescription for never deciding. Good planners don't ignore interrelations, but rather they look for solutions so robust that their elements can be acted upon separately.

- Every worthwhile meeting includes at least some agreement. Document it, preferably on shared documents liked marked-up maps and flip charts, ideally created by the participants during rather than after the meeting, and bring that agreement into the next meeting so that it can then be reconfirmed and built upon rather than being rediscovered.

- When hopelessly long lists of ideas are generated in brainstorming and other processes, don't shorten them by knocking people's suggestions down. Build new lists through positive agreement on items nominated by participants from their initial lists.

- Recognize and accept concurrence without holding out for unanimity. In this context, "consensus" on a given point may include some folks disagreeing, but being willing to stay quiet to allow progress. Don't impede that quiet agreement by needlessly polling the group individually or by voting things up or down, risking alienation of a group one vote shy of victory.

- Try "red dot voting" to set priorities. In "red dot voting" each participant might be given ten red dots to place wherever she or he wishes on wall lists of, say, thirty potential action items. Use that or any other voting scheme only after there has been enough dialogue for the voting to be well informed, and only with the caveat that it will be taken with a grain of salt, in light of less-than-perfect representation and understanding at the voting event.

- Make choices, such as choosing among alternatives, as early as competently possible. Too often planners struggle to keep all alternatives open as long as possible, but the key to success is getting well-informed closure, not never-ending debate. In doing that, sometimes it is helpful to use a classic salesman's approach, getting people on a roll of saying "yes." To do that, organize the sequence of decisions so that the things most likely to be approved are taken first, deferring until later the ones most likely not to be approved.

III. MAKING IT HAPPEN

This chapter describes a process that is guided by the principles of the first two chapters. This process could be used for any of a number of topics, whether preparing a comprehensive plan, designing a village center plan, preparing an economic development program, or developing new zoning bylaws. There are lots of other ways those principles could be applied, but this particular process is one that has been widely used with substantial success in a variety of contexts.

Even at this level of generality, not all programs can follow either all of the above principles or this outline. For example, some states mandate that comprehensive plans first be prepared, and only then may implementing actions, such as zoning change, be taken. That precludes the interweaving of planning and action that this outline calls for. In such cases, departure is unavoidable but still regrettable. These are the "classic" steps, expanded upon later in this material.

First, carefully **structure the program**, making such key choices as deciding whose program it is, defining topical and spatial scope, setting a schedule, and selecting key players.

Next, **organize citizen-based activities** to explore and build concurrence on the broad ideas involved. Typically, this might involve workshops to generate visions of the community's desired future, and strategies for achieving it.

If appropriate, also organize one or more smaller **workshops bringing town officials together**. These workshops would perform a technical reconnaissance of the topics being planned, would be operated in parallel with the citizen's workshops, and would be interactive with them. In many cases, these workshops might profitably perform a technical diagnostic of the town's organizational and planning preparedness for managing change.

Next, bring the results of those efforts together through presentations at a **Town-wide forum**. This is a means of reaching out to a broader audience, testing the ideas generated, and getting more of them. At that forum or shortly after it, frame a strategy for proceeding through the rest of the effort.

In the next phase, **further develop the proposals** identified and selected in the initial workshops. That generally will include organizing a new set of task forces, at this stage structured topically around the proposals. When ready, bring the proposals before **another forum** or similar widely participatory review. Then, see that those proposals are carried through whatever **hearings or legislative action** is needed for adoption.

Following that round of decisions, **assess where your program stands**, and then go through essentially the **same process a second time**, building on what has been done, structuring creative opportunities for community involvement, and crafting further action proposals. At an appropriate point, perhaps following that second round of the process, prepare a **document reflecting what has been done, and stating intentions** for future efforts.

A. STRUCTURE THE PROGRAM.

Nothing done later can offset wrong choices made in structuring the planning program, the very first step in the process. This is where decisions are made about who is in charge of the planning, how they link to others, exactly what topics are to be planned, who is to be involved, and how the program is to proceed.

A.1 Arrange who is to be in charge.

It may seem obvious that a "client" for the planning has to be established, and often that choice may appear to be so obvious that this step is trivial, but it seldom is actually that simple. Sometimes, rather than being initiated by a local organization which becomes the clear "client" for the work, planning efforts are pressed onto communities from outside of town government. Examples are state or regional agencies promoting programs, universities eager to give students opportunities, or citizens disenchanted with officials' inaction. In such cases, the client relationship may be quite blurred. Even when the effort is initiated within the local planning board, there are key agency relationship choices to be sensitively resolved.

There are four basic options for structuring agency relationships. The most common choice is for the program's operation to be centered in an **existing public agency**, such as a planning board, that makes all the key choices about program operation and outcome decisions, quite possibly supported by a network of citizen advisors. This is the presumptive right choice, but there are three key questions that require "yes" answers for this to be confirmed as the right approach.

- Should the planning be done from within town government? If not, a **citizens advisory committee** is the right choice (see below). If working within government is appropriate, then:

- Does any single agency have effective political domain as broad as the topic to be planned? If not, an **interagency task force** may be the right choice for managing the program. If, however, a single agency does have adequate domain, then:

- Does the appropriate agency have the time and energy to do the job, given its other mandated or perceived duties? If not, then an **interagency advisory committee** may be the right choice.

A **citizens advisory committee** is the appropriate client group where there is no initial hope of gaining town agency support for the kind of planning sought, or where politics dictates distancing the planning from distrusted agencies and individuals. Be careful: this choice more often leads to spirited and engaging planning events than to implemented change.

The classic comprehensive planning mistake is to believe that a topically centered agency (which is really what most planning boards are) can effectively plan for topics beyond its political domain. If no single agency can fully cover the range of topics to be planned, an **interagency task force** can be created, and given authority to run the program and make the key decisions. That is very different from inviting other agencies to review and comment on what a single managing agency is singly in charge of. This choice often appears to entail surrender of authority, but it seldom really does so.

If there really is an appropriate town agency with adequate domain, but it doesn't feel it has time to do the planning, then that agency might create an **agency advisory committee**, giving that committee at least some autonomy from the creating agency, and charging it with managing the planning effort, ultimately to report back to the initiating organization.

Keep it simple. Some federal agencies promote or even require a structure of one agency being in charge, reported to by both a technical advisory committee (TAC) and a Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). That's a lot of structure for a small town.

A.2 Define program targets and contexts.

A target topic is one on which you want to take action, such as "residential zoning". A context topic is one you should be considering, but aren't expecting the results of your planning to change. "Housing market forces" should be considered in planning for residential zoning, but zoning won't really change those underlying forces. Housing actions are the target, housing trends is the context.

The same principle applies spatially. The target geographic area may be politically bounded, but a larger contextual area may require study. Typically, it is a waste of effort to make a planning target of someone else's turf, but understanding what is happening in that "outside" context may be crucial to sound planning.

Both target and contextual topics and areas need to be carefully selected, taking into accounts all of these considerations.

- Make a "fit" between scope and planning organizational domain, as discussed above.

- Respond to imperatives of other organizations, such as state agencies or legislation which may have prescribed planning content.

- Address real topics and areas of concern, together with those which are inextricably linked to them, in the way that "hydrogeology" is linked to "wellhead protection".

- Reflect availability of financial and personnel capability for successfully doing the planning.

- If possible, arrange for the flexibility to revise selection of targets and contexts as the process unfolds. Learning from doing will often alter thoughts about what needs to be addressed.

A.3 Arrange for Resources.

Technical support can almost always be helpful. It may come from local staff, though few small towns have deep staff resources. It may come from a regional planning agency, if the agency has the capacity and is locally viewed as an appropriate resource. Sometimes excellent agencies may be inappropriate because of tensions over local versus regional political concerns.

Support may come at little or no cost from a university or non-profit organization. Often there are programs in such organizations eager to find applications in community-based projects. Finally, technical support may come from consultants, if funding will permit that.

A.4 Engage help.

There are critical choices to be made in selecting those who are to play lead roles in the planning program. Two positions or roles are critical. First, there has to be a local person to head the effort. Ideally, this is not a paid professional. With the "planner" leading only from the side, this person needs to have the abilities to run meetings, resolve conflicts, bring people to the process, and earn respect. In most cases this person should not be viewed as having a strong stand on the issues being considered.

Second, there needs to be a person to organize and run your meetings, and bring technical resources into the process. Typically, this person will be a paid professional. Ideally, that person has:

- Strong process skills for making meetings work and moving people towards agreement: no amount of technical understanding can substitute for ability to make group processes productive;

- Understanding of the content of what is being planned: "facilitators" without content background haven't proven effective at this kind of process;

- No stake in the outcome; and

- Respect of those who *do* have stakes in the outcomes.

Both the program leadership and technical management roles can be carried out by a single person, but be careful. It is rare for the necessary qualities all to lie in a single individual, and there are potential role conflicts down the road.

A.5 Make a Plan for Planning.

Laying out what is to be done, by whom, and when, means making a real plan, and deserves the same care, which the next cycle of planning will be given. Participation in this planning for planning should be as broad as possible, real alternatives should be weighed, and contingencies should be considered. Real commitments are critical: there should be a written outline of the program design, explicitly assigning roles and establishing mileposts along the way, agreed to by all participating parties. Planning is notoriously easy to extend. Realistic but respected time targets are a critical part of program design.

B. ORGANIZE CITIZEN-BASED ACTIVITIES.

At best, participatory activities are the vehicle through which citizens are able to take charge of the planning, fundamentally shape it, and take proprietary interest in it. At minimum, those activities should be the means through which citizen views are heard early in the program, not randomly, but through an information-sharing process of mutual learning.

There are a variety of models for these activities, with important differences in the parties they can succeed in engaging, and the types of exchange for which they are suitable. As a result, an effective program is likely to use a variety of models that among them achieve the coverage that is sought.

For many purposes, workshops are an ideal vehicle for participation, especially if structured to allow small-group dialogue. A tightly scheduled series of such workshops, sometimes called a "charrette" if structured around drawings jointly developed by citizens and professionals, has often proven highly effective.

Other techniques can also serve well, but each commonly has drawbacks. Sole reliance on big forum-style meetings or conferences doesn't allow much real interchange or regular-folks creativity. Attitude surveys reach lots of people, but don't improve their understanding, don't really allow for exchange, and centralize information in the hands of the surveyors. New

technology, such as interactive video or various computer-aided techniques are promising, but at this stage may still focus more attention on the medium than on the content.

If there are to be workshops, there are many models for how best to design them, the suitability of design depending upon community circumstances, the topics involved, and the capacities and style of those who are to manage the process. The principles they should follow have been cited earlier. Here in some detail is one approach to how such workshops might be carried out. Sometimes called "Ecologue" and sometimes called "Swamp Yankee Planning," it has proven to be highly effective in serving the intentions outlined in this material. Ecologue is an integrated set of planning methods developed at MIT in the 1970s, and refined over the years since then while being applied in a variety of contexts. The core of Ecologue is a set of workshops, with both small-group and all-together sessions. The small groups are assembled on a shared-interests basis, such as where in the community participants live, or their age-group (teen, elder, neither), or their economic interest (businessperson, property owner, developer). The work begins with as little topical pre-definition as possible, relying on the outcomes of brainstorming to provide definition of appropriate topics for further exploration.

This exact process is probably least appropriate where there is a single divisive issue in the community, such as proposed gambling casinos or race or housing tenure. It is probably best as a way into a broad planning program, investing the community deeply in that program and providing it with sound initial direction.

1. Organize Affinity Groups.

This process relies upon dialogue first within carefully structured "affinity groups," then between those groups, followed by dialogue across restructured groups, each containing a diversity of interests. Structuring the process to begin with small groups can avoid the intimidation and speech making which sole reliance on large-group sessions often produces. Structure the initial small groups to bring together people who are likely to be in agreement, keeping potentially adversarial folks in separate groups. In other processes small workshop groups most commonly are organized by topic, such as "housing" or "traffic," but at this stage in this process groups will function better if organized to allow like-minded people to support each other's ideas, rather than using this time for cross-interest dialogue. That cross-interest dialogue is vitally needed, but is better reserved for later, after people are better grounded in their own ideas and comfortable with the process.

There are important benefits of initially organizing by affinity rather than by topic. First, it gives legitimacy to the entire process by making clear that diverse perspectives have been given real opportunity to effectively participate. It often gives legitimacy to interests who initially don't have it: teen-agers, for example, or large landowners. Because group members are likely to "think alike," their discussions are likely to be free flowing and positive. Importantly, this approach sets up the possibility of discovering, when the groups reconvene, that supposedly polarized interests really have common ground and even have similar proposals, though perhaps for different reasons.

Finally, organizing by affinity rather than topic avoids the pitfall of the program managers predetermining outcomes by structuring groups around topics from their own agenda, rather than allowing topics of concern to emerge from the participants. Outcomes depend crucially upon how the initial groups are structured. That raises concern about "original sin." By "engineering" the process, those initiating it also shape the outcomes, despite wishing the outcomes to be only

those of the participants. The paradox can be mitigated, but not escaped, by giving participants as much opportunity as possible to shape the process.

Organization by interests also is very different from structuring groups by using existing community organizations: neighborhood associations, business groups, and other civic organizations, for example. In most cases those groups should be given an opportunity to play a role in the planning program, but substituting them for "affinity groups" is the wrong way. First, existing organizations never reflect the full diversity of the community. Second, having participants "represent" an organization limits their ability to exchange freely based on their individual views.

1.1. Design the set of affinity groups.

One of the important functions of these early workshops is to scope what topics the planning effort should focus on. Organizing groups by topic preempts that function, and also skews participation. Given the multi-dimensional nature of interests, even in a small community, designing a small set of affinity groups to reflect critical interest cleavages requires careful design. Organizing groups so that issue conflicts cut between rather than within them facilitates easy discussion and reaching agreements within each group. More importantly, our working presumption is that no matter how sharply interests may be divided between groups, there will be large areas of agreement among them. When consensus across such diverse groups is found, it has credibility as a **community** consensus, which could not be provided by groups structured around topics or organizations.

Commonly, affinity groups are structured around geography (different neighborhoods or districts of the community), social characteristics (newcomer or native, school age or golden age, homeowners or renters), or economic role (business operators, large landowners, downtown property owners), in various combinations and permutations. Limit the number of groups so that each can present its findings to the others in a single session, which means no more than about ten groups. Limit the size of the individual groups to allow comfortable discussion: five or six people is ideal, more than ten is undesirable.

When a potential set of groups begins to emerge, test it. Make sure that no one with an interest in what is being planned would be excluded because of being unable to fit into any of the proposed groups. Be sure that the major divisions in the community really are reflected in the group definitions selected. Commonly, it takes at least two meetings to arrive at agreement on a design for the groups, "brainstorming" at a first meeting, then more reflectively deciding at a second.

1.2. Recruit conveners.

The participants should be individually recruited, rather than relying on volunteers. To accomplish that, "conveners" are typically recruited by the lead agency. Conveners agree to recruit and then serve in an affinity group.

Note that this method of recruitment involves a network of personal acquaintances between members of the lead organization and the community of the planning. There is a corollary: the lead organization has to be connected with the place being planned: leadership can't be successfully provided by people from "away."

Conveners will tend to recruit people much like themselves, so there should be diversity among the conveners along dimensions, which couldn't be reflected in structuring the ten or fewer groups. For example, if geographic location is the primary group structuring dimension, it would

be good to include within the set of conveners both men and women, long term residents and newer ones, young people and older ones, the politically active and the politically inactive.

Conveners are just that, not group leaders. It is important that the conveners not inadvertently dampen discussion within the group by their dominance. For that reason, senior town officials shouldn't be selected as conveners, nor should others whose putatively superior understanding of the issues (or style) would intimidate inexperienced participants. Usually it is best if conveners not be persons with known strong positions on the issues in order that groups not be seen as pre-disposed towards answers. On the other hand, the conveners need to have the community ties, which will enable them to assemble their groups.

1.3. "Dry run" with conveners.

In an ideal process, the conveners will initially meet together with the lead agency. At that meet-ing, they will go through a rapid simulation of the process the groups are going to go through. Doing that enables everyone to better understand what they are asking recruits to agree to do. It enables the Planner to offer suggestions to the conveners about group management: how to make sure everyone participates, how to avoid anyone dominating, how to keep on schedule, how to guide the group towards closure, how best to graphically represent their proposals.

Given that introduction, better understanding of the nature of the process, and an expanded set of people to reflect on it, the program leaders, together with the initial set of conveners, can reconsider the structure of groups, and revise it if appropriate. Some groups may be dropped, others combined, still others subdivided, and wholly new potential groups may be identified.

1.4. Make final design of affinity groups.

At about this point, media coverage can be used to invite any groups not already made part of the process to contact the lead agency and request to participate as an affinity group. That is an important step, visibly assuring that the process is really open. In our experience, it rarely results in additional groups, but it defuses the common criticism that the organizing structure has been engineered to produce predetermined outcomes (back to "original sin").

1.5 Recruit affinity group members.

Each group should ideally have about six members, but any number from three to ten is tolerable. Conveners should not be told by name whom to recruit (although providing lists of possible names is okay). Many of the qualities that are considered in selecting conveners should also apply to each set of participants. In general, within each group there should be as much diversity as possible, again considering dimensions not reflected in the overall group structure, which might mean noting gender, age, length of residence, tenure, activism, and location within the area or Town. Special effort should be made to include many people not normally heard from, getting outside the small circle of consistent contributors to community dialogue. Those people will be heard from in any event.

Persons should be recruited as individuals, not as representatives of organizations or even of informal groups. It is important that participants be able to speak for themselves, without having to check back with anyone else. Participants should reflect diversity, but not **represent** its elements.

There often is skepticism about the ability of conveners to fill their groups, but experience has demonstrated how reliably they are able to do so. Potential participants need to understand that they really have all the competence that is required. Often people think knowledge of government or planning or mapping is required, but the key expertise is simply that of being a citizen.

Motivation comes in part from being personally approached, in part out of self-interest. Participating can be an important way to gain public policies and actions favorable to one's own concerns. Further, the involvement is relatively limited in time, requiring only a handful of meetings, and should be fun. Participants will be meeting with convivial people, playing with maps, brainstorming about a utopian future, while for once actually having officials listening.

2. Conduct Brainstorming Workshops.

The workshop series can be a set of back-to-back events taking place over just a few days, or can be extended over several months. The number of sessions depends upon many things, including judgement about likelihood of sustaining involvement, and available calendar time.

2.1 Conduct initial meeting.

There should be an initial meeting where all participants can come together, and all receive the same briefing. It also is important that the first meeting be more than just briefing. Arrangements should be made so that the individual affinity groups can separately meet, and begin their work within at least distant sight and sound of other groups doing the same. The planner and lead agency members can circulate among the groups, helping to iron out inevitable contingencies.

There almost always are surprises at such a meeting. Some groups may not materialize, some people not part of any group may show up, and some groups may turn out to be too large to be manageable. Accordingly, some *ad hoc* restructuring may well take place. Although being done extemporaneously, any restructuring should be consistent in principle with the initial structuring design.

One of the key things to take place at this initial meeting is to make clear (again) the "contract" binding the lead agency and the participants. Its nature will vary among programs, but commonly the agreement might include these elements.

- The calendar should be defined. Participants are expected to take part in all of the workshops in the series. They shouldn't begin if they aren't prepared to stick with it, especially since the series is a short one.

- The scope of the program should be made clear. In this outline the program charge is presumed to be a comprehensive plan or a strategic growth management plan, in which case the targeted scope should be described, but with as little limiting direction as possible. For example, it may be enough to explain that the scope is the whole range of topics, which the Planning Board can expect to impact in their implementing efforts.

- The lead agency may commit itself to draw its action agenda for the next year exclusively from the outcomes of this process. The agency probably can't reasonably commit in advance to support all of the outcomes. However, by agreeing to focus its energies for some time on these products the agency gives the process political relevance.

- Any compensation arrangements should be made clear. Sometimes it is possible to reimburse expenses for childcare or travel, usually not. But if the extra maps and the markers are free to be taken, say so. This may be a good time for briefing on background information, which is important for all participants to know about. Some of the early exercises will also contribute to that, but hearing basic things while all together is sometimes important to alleviate concerns.

2.2 Assign individual exercises.

Sometimes individual exercises are used to help participants prepare for the brainstorming. If program resources and participant interest permit, this can be a nice enrichment. For example, in Norwell, MA some years ago a group of teenagers designed a "Town Character" scavenger hunt for the later participants to individually pursue prior to the workshops.

2.3 Conduct small group brainstorming.

These brainstorming workshops are intended:

− To allow participants to broaden, through discussion, their own understanding of the town and the planning issues at hand;

− To allow participants to become more familiar with the spatial patterns of the town (one reason why maps are used);

− To facilitate interest groups developing a well-considered statement of their views;

− To uncover what participants believe the real topics of concern are; and

− To freely explore for creative ideas.

Real "plans" won't emerge from these steps, but concepts and individual proposals and expressions of policy will do so.

A structured series of steps is provided to the groups, typically through written instructions, since "staffing" each group is unreasonably costly and possibly inhibiting. The ordering of these steps is designed to build group ease and familiarity, as well as competence, while the dialogue moves from easy non-controversial material to ultimately seeking group consensus across difficult value-laden choices.

The primary medium for recording ideas is wall-size "poster-maps," maps of the town suitable for marking up with fat felt-tip pens. When possible, groups are given a same-scale map series, such as streets and property lines, topography, and zoning on separate maps.

Maps serve a number of purposes. They facilitate dealing with place-related topics, which for a physical planning program is important. Using maps influences choices of issues people will discuss, tilting it towards issues with which the usual planning agency can deal. For many people, maps are fun. Many have never seen such maps of their own turf, and they make many personal discoveries on them. Importantly, big maps can provide a physical rather than personal

focus for the dialogue. It is less confronting to disagree with what is on a map (or a poster-list) on the wall than to disagree with a notion only represented by a person.

By omitting some of the steps and by hurrying and working late, this entire process has sometimes been completed in a single evening. More commonly, it entails two or three evenings. Some groups have chosen to expand the effort, meeting up to a dozen times, conducting mini-"focus group" meetings in addition to their own.

These are the steps in the initial brainstorming. Generally each step should be recorded on a separate map, though sometimes two are collapsed onto one.

a.   **Introductions.** Each group member in turn should "sign-in" on the map indicating where he lives, introducing himself with a few comments. [Breaking ice, locating yourself on the map, getting to know each other].

b.   **Events.** Record on that same map the recent events which are related to the planning effort, such as an important rezoning, a singular recent building, or an area undergoing rapid change. [Information sharing, further acquainting, values creeping in but no group choices having to be made].

c.   **Good/bad.** On a second map, group members should take turns indicating what things each thinks are good (in green) or bad (in red) about the town. These can be places or relationships of the kind a map can show, but they also could be qualities that don't fit on a map, such as something about taxes. Just use the map and its borders as a poster in such event.

   Note that this map is a collection of individual views, not a group concurrence. If one person thinks the Prescott building is good and another thinks it is bad, just circle it twice, once green and once red. [Group members all induced to participate, values clearly expressed, individuals becoming a group but no need yet to confront divergences].

d.   **Utopia.** On a third map, each group should indicate how the town would be if that group could make all the decisions without worrying about other group's interests, or legal, political, or economic constraints. This is a real dream-map, as fanciful as you can make it.

   Don't quash ideas because they seem absurd: by definition there is no such thing as an absurd utopian notion. Put everyone's ideas on unless they really conflict with someone else's proposal. [Real brainstorming is very difficult: criticism is difficult to restrain, even for your own ideas, but this is a critical effort to <u>try</u> to be free and creative].

e.   **Actions.** On a fourth map, indicate the actions the group realistically thinks the town should take over the next half-dozen years with regard to guiding development, this time taking into account the realities of law, finance, and other people's interests. What actions should be taken to change zoning, to acquire property, to change town organization or staffing, to raise revenue, to develop facilities, or even to study, plan or educate people? [This map is the primary physical product of the workshops. Finally requires group concurrence, which by then is usually easy, sometimes by exhaustion].

f.   **Priorities.** As a final step, select the five or so highest priority actions from the array already developed. If time and patience are running thin, resorting to a nominating and voting scheme may make sense.

2.4 Make group presentations.

Following those workshops, have all the groups meet together, joined by any "outside" groups which have gone through a similar brainstorming effort. They will display their maps, browse among those of other groups, and present their initial ideas. The "brainstorming" ethic continues: no debate, everyone's ideas are OK. Town officials are encouraged to attend and to listen, but no major effort is made to solicit broad public participation, since this meeting is really for those who have gone through the structured brainstorming. Presentations should be mercifully concise and chiefly focus on actions, especially those chosen as highest priority.

2.5 Develop Concurrence.

At a later session, draw concurrence from participants based on the work they have developed to that point. Without fail, group workshops have produced an overwhelming array of proposals and ideas. Normally there isn't much conflict between ideas of one group and those of another, but the key is selecting those, which are of the highest priority.

Immediate agreement can be expected on some proposals, immediate "back burner" placement of others, and identification of a larger set of topics on which further study effort is warranted. That then will go far towards setting the agenda for the remainder of the planning effort.

Again, this session is intended for the brainstorming participants, with officials as observers and resource people, and with other residents really incidental to the effort. Managing this session requires real skill: the person to do it should be selected based on having that capability, not on formal role or position. Space doesn't allow outlining all the techniques for finding that concurrence, but these are a few observations:

− Finding concurrence should happen through dialogue at the meeting, not through analyzing participant's maps in some technician's or official's office. It is crucial that these delicate transformations from dreams to explicit public policy happen before everyone's eyes if the resulting plan is to be theirs, not the technician's.

− Attacking other people's pet ideas hurts, being stroked feels good. If possible, the whole process should be positive. Accordingly, it is better to seek nomination of items from the previous workshops for inclusion in the "short list" of major proposals than to delete items from a synoptic list. At this point voting isn't a bad idea. Judging where interest lies by the amount of discussion can be deceptive. Commonly, a little-discussed proposal will be on almost everyone's list of ten favored topics, while another item, which drew huge and largely supportive discussion, may not gain even its proponent's vote.

− The meeting manager needs to walk a fine line in both being a real participant, letting his or her own views be known, and not intimidating others from taking contrary positions. The manager may well have to reformulate what people are saying in order to give them a form around which agreement can be found. He has to listen extraordinarily well to what people are really saying, as well as to what people are **not** saying.

− It is critical that the concurrence be visibly recorded on maps or lists bold enough to be read, so that the session has a product, which later can be referred to. Meeting minutes or notes later distributed are a good idea, but don't substitute for evidence provided during the process.

The meeting manager may be the appropriate person to do the recording, but if possible, give that task to a second person. That will help lighten the manager's load, and also allow a second set of insights to come into play through creative recording.

C. ORGANIZE OFFICIALS' WORKSHOPS.

Just as it is vital to have citizens play a creative role in the planning, and to take a proprietary attitude towards its outcomes, it also is important for Town officials to be similarly engaged. Their efforts are absolutely essential to success in carrying out the intentions of the planning, and their insights are of enormous value. It is striking how often well-intentioned community-based planning fails to be effective because by inadvertence or, worse, by design, it leaves officials outside of the planning, creating rather than overcoming alienation.

Again, there are many models for how this might be done, with suitability depending upon the particulars of the case and the actors. A technique that has often proven useful is to organize a half-day workshop among appropriate officials to perform a diagnostic of the community's capacities for the topic being studied, whether housing or growth management. Using a carefully prepared diagnostic checklist, such as those developed by the National Trust and widely used across the Northeast[1], officials and staff can be drawn into rare dialog about what is working and what is not, and about priorities for addressing things that need improvement. Frequently, the actions surfaced from this process closely parallel those produced with citizen groups, and sometimes there are helpful instances where one process spots issues that the other did not. Either way that is a beneficial outcome.

D. HOLD A TOWN FORUM.

Unavoidably, steps to this point will have involved a relatively small number of those with interests in the community, so it is important to present the results to the broader public for comment and further development. A Town Forum is a good way of accomplishing that. At this meeting, everyone should be urged to come: earlier participants, agency officials, members of various civic organizations, and all the rest of the people who can be induced to attend. Local video coverage is a terrific addition.

Proposals at the Forum ideally should be presented by participants selected in the earlier sessions. Ideally, they are presented not as proposals of any interest group but as proposals of the entire set of groups, which have been involved. There should be room for lots of discussion.

E. DEVELOP TOPICAL PROPOSALS.

E.1 Organize topical task forces.

At this point it almost certainly will be appropriate to form groups organized around the topics which emerge as the ones for near-term action. This next phase is extraordinarily difficult. It is essential that citizens not be asked to act in ignorance. Brainstorming in programs such as Ecologue respects that, since it builds around people's community experience, attitudes, and values. However, topical studies and proposal development commonly require technical knowledge which resident participants may well not have.

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[1] See "A Diagnostic Checklist," prepared by Herr & James for CPTC's "Preserving Community Character" training module, revised September 30, 2002.

Accordingly, there needs to be careful selection of the topics so that the available technical support, whether planning staff or consultants, other agency staff, or volunteering citizens, can adequately cover all topics, which are now to proceed. The role for residents who are not expert in that topical area has to be sensitively designed to join their community understanding and caring about that topic with the technical skills which are needed.

Typically, these topical study groups will include some of the people from the brainstorming, but there should be no obligation for those doing the brainstorming to carry on into this phase. Further, there should be no obligation to find roles on those task forces for all of the brainstorming participants, in the happy event that there is a surplus of willing hands.

It is, however, crucial that the topical groups reflect the diversity of interests around which the initial workshop groups were structured. These topic groups provide a supportive setting for cross-interest dialogue aimed at finding consensus on real questions. To achieve that, the full array of interests needs to be part of the process.

E.2 Develop proposals.

From this point onward, the process is the familiar one. It can be hoped that some of the attitudes of the earlier brainstorming process will be continued, especially that of giving participants real and creative roles, which often entails a careful effort to parse subjects into technical and value-laden parts. For example, setting the design speed for a new road is a value choice. Translating that into sight distances and centerline radii is a technical one. Too often, both choices are coupled as being technical, leaving lay people with little real role.

F. HOLD A SECOND TOWN FORUM.

This Forum functions much like a public hearing. The workshop participants are the "applicants". The sponsoring agency, which absolutely must be in attendance, in effect is hearing public comment on the "applicants'" proposals, and at this point moving towards making them their own.

At this event, the lead agency is being called upon to lead. It must decide how to proceed through the next steps of proposal development, plan writing, starting a political bandwagon, or whatever. It may prefer that a staff planner take the lead on this, either through oral presentation or, more commonly, through a written report. Again, however, it is critical that the reality of authorship by citizens is not obscured at this point, and that if the "product" is prepared by a professional that it be thoughtfully endorsed by those who really generated its content.

G. FOLLOW THROUGH TO ACTION.

As proposals are developed, they will move into the normal process for adoption. Typically this involves public hearings and, perhaps, adoption by designated agencies. It is critical that the process results in those agencies being "invested" in the proposals and their outcomes. The intention should be that by the time of adoption (usually but not always by vote of town meeting or other legislative body) the agency will have become the sponsor for the proposal, supported by but no longer led by the citizens who helped in its development.

With a process such as has been outlined, town meeting or other legislative action often is almost anti-climactic, since by then it will be well known that the proposals enjoy wide support. Sometimes, however, proposals may be brought to a vote more for testing than with assurance of

adoption and without investment of organizational ego in passage. In such cases, legislative debate is being used as a vehicle for learning, no less so than when proposals are adopted.

The various hints about process earlier listed apply to the implementation process, as well, plus a few additional ones.

- Invest the necessary effort in **creative design** of proposals that really serve multiple interests, rather than settling for easier proposals which can squeak through with majority approval. Real concurrence comes as much from creative proposal design as it does from a careful process.

- Break big multi-part proposals into a number of independent but **complementary options**. Acting on them separately can reduce the likelihood of opposition accumulating, avoid excessive complexity of a single proposal, avoid delays because some one or two parts require further study, and preempt the appearance (or reality) of manipulative "bundling" of proposals in a "take it or leave it" package.

- Anticipate and **fast-track** (act in parallel on) the reasons for agency deferral of action on early steps, such as setting hearings: more proposals die of neglect and old age than are defeated.

- **Arrange the sequence of implementing actions** to take advantage of the learning which early actions can provide for later ones.   Debate on a specific area rezoning might better reveal local attitude towards housing policy than any number of studies, so scheduling action on that proposal before more sweeping ones would be helpful to the design of the later ones.

- Include in each set of proposed actions some which are **low-risk items**, very likely to achieve success, in order to make as unlikely as possible the destructive consequence of an action "wipeout:" even small success can help maintain program momentum.

- For each proposal, have a willing and competent individual **citizen spokesperson**.

H. REPEAT THE CYCLE.

In a well-designed program, there is the expectation of returning on several occasions to seek the adoption of proposals, among other things in order to take advantage of the learning that comes from experiencing the process and observing responses. Accordingly, regardless of legislative vote outcomes, it presumably will be appropriate to again go through a cycle of (re)considering appropriate topics for action, organizing citizen groups, whether affinity or topical or both, developing concurrence, and preparing proposals. That recursive path will, in time, bring you back to town meeting or other legislative body, not because of failure the first time, but because that was the design from the outset.

I. DOCUMENT RESULTS.

Too few people who make their living at planning recognize that the real product of planning is the development of agreed intentions, not a report. However, it also is possible to err the other way, and to be so intent on the ongoing process that there is inadequate documentation of those agreements. It really is important that the program be pulled together into some form of

documentation which can be used by those who will follow, as well as for regional, state, and federal agencies which are understandably obliged to rely on paper, not process.

Again, there are some useful hints.

- Carefully tie each specific proposal to a consistent policy context: no "floating" proposals just because the group likes them.

- Make explanations clear and simple but don't patronize people:

  - Don't expect most people to read much, but anticipate that some will read fully and carefully.

  - Don't expect most people to absorb lots of numbers, but anticipate that some will, with great insight.

  - Know more than you present: have a full additional layer of analysis available for explanation when asked.

  - Vividly describe the community that is wanted: picture pictures, word pictures, even data pictures, but not just dry analysis.

  - Try to make bright line hard edge statements, not mushy ones. Too many planning documents try to avoid dissent by blurring what is said. With a good process, that isn't necessary.

  - Exclude "stuffing". Consider separating the policy part, the statement of intentions, from the backup description and analysis. A comprehensive plan short enough to be printed in full in the local newspaper is a nice goal, typically made possible only by such separation.