The Citizen Planner Training Collaborative

CITIZEN PLANNER

TRAINING COLLABORATIVE

HANDOUT
Creating Master Plans

The Citizen Planner Training Collaborative:

University of Massachusetts Extension
Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development
American Planning Association, MA Chapter
Massachusetts Assn. of Regional Planning Agencies
Massachusetts Assn. of Planning Directors

www.masscptc.org

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Context for Community Planning in Massachusetts

In Massachusetts, Planning Boards are required to prepare a master plan for their communities. Under General Laws Chapter 41, Section 81D:

> A planning board established in any city or town under section eighty-one A[1] shall make a master plan of such city or town or such part or parts thereof as said board may deem advisable and from time to time may extend or perfect such plan. Such plan shall be a statement, through text, maps, illustrations or other forms of communication, that is designed to provide a basis for decision making regarding the long-term physical development of the municipality. The comprehensive plan shall be internally consistent in its policies, forecasts and standards...

Community planning includes more than master plans or comprehensive plans, but some principles and practices are almost universal. Furthermore, the community as a whole shapes the possibilities covered in other types of plans. Indeed, the master plan provides the foundation of community planning. Despite the statutory directive to Planning Boards, however, many Massachusetts communities do not have a master plan. Among the communities that have one, the plans are often outdated and sometimes they were never implemented. Creating a new master plan or updating an existing plan requires community support because without it, the likelihood of implementation is very low.

B. What is Planning?

Planning is the process of deciding what to do, and how, when, and where to do it. For communities, planning improves the quality of public choices and decisions. As the American Planning Association (APA) explains:

> Planning works to improve the welfare of people and their communities... It enables civic leaders, businesses, and citizens to play a meaningful role in creating communities that enrich people's lives. Good planning helps create communities that offer better choices for where and how people live. Planning helps communities to envision their future. It helps them find the right balance of new development and essential services, environmental protection, and innovative change.

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[1] Section 81A. Any city except Boston, and, except as hereinafter provided, any town may at any time establish a planning board hereunder. Every town not having any planning board shall, upon attaining a population of ten thousand, so establish a planning board under this section...

C.   **What is a Master Plan?**

Most people think of a "plan" as a report, maps, a statement of goals and policies, or some other type of document. These are products of a planning process, but they are not necessarily a real plan. A plan is a statement of intent - agreed to by all those whose actions it is meant to guide.

With this in mind, a master plan is a statement of a community's intent about what it wants for its future and a statement of intent to carry out the plan by those with responsibility for doing so. A master plan serves to guide the overall character, physical form, and evolution of a community. It describes where, how, and at what pace a community wants to develop physically, economically, and socially. It provides guidance to local officials when they make decisions about zoning, budgets, and capital improvements. A master plan looks forward, establishing new visions and directions, setting goals, and describing ways to "get there." In short, a master plan is like a roadmap to the future.

1. **Required Components**

Chapter 41, Section 81D calls for nine components or elements of a master plan (paraphrased):

- Goals and policies for a community's future growth and development, created through an interactive public process to identify community values and goals, and development patterns consistent with these goals.

- A land use plan that identifies present land uses; designates the proposed distribution, location, and inter-relationship of public and private land uses; relates proposed standards of population density and building intensity to the capacity of available land and planned facilities and services; and illustrates the community's land use policies on a land use plan.

- Housing element that identifies and analyzes existing and future housing needs; provides strategies for the preservation, improvement, and development of housing; and identifies policies and strategies to provide balanced housing opportunities for all citizens.

- Economic development element that identifies policies and strategies to expand or stabilize the local economic base and promote employment opportunities.

- Natural and cultural resources element that includes an inventory of the community's significant natural, cultural and historic resource areas and policies and strategies to protect and manage them.

- Open space and recreation element that includes an inventory of the community's recreational areas and open space and policies and strategies to protect and manage them.

- Services and facilities element that identifies and analyzes existing and future needs for facilities and services used by the public.

- Circulation element that includes an inventory of existing and proposed circulation and transportation systems.

- Implementation program that defines and schedules the specific city or town actions required to achieve the objectives of each master plan element, including the anticipated costs and revenues associated with expanding or replacing public facilities and circulation system components, and the process that will be followed to make the community's land use regulations consistent with the master plan.

2. **Other Components**

To address contemporary needs and concerns, some communities have included other elements in their master plans. For example:

- Governance

- Sustainability

- Villages or Neighborhoods

- Smart Growth

- Public Health/Community Health and Well-Being

Although some or all of these topics could be covered in one of the statutorily required elements under Section 81D, local officials often report that bringing attention to a specific local issue can help to bolster public support for the plan.

D.   Why Have a Master Plan?

Having a master plan makes sense because it:

- Helps communities discover what must be done now and in the future to achieve their goals and avoid costly mistakes.

- Requires working together to balance competing interests.

- Helps a community recognize its priorities.

- Serves the public interest by setting a policy framework for the rules and regulations that guide development.

- Helps private developers and builders understand the rationale for a community's land use goals and policies.

- Sheds light on the community qualities or characteristics that should be protected and others that should be changed.

- Educates people about their community.

- Provides opportunities for public participation in the decision-making process.

E.   Examples of Other Types of Community Plans

- Open Space and Recreation

- Affordable Housing

- Economic Development

- Downtown or Neighborhood Plan

- Historic Preservation Plan

- Growth Management

- Capital Improvement Plan

- Strategic Plan

II.   GETTING THE PUBLIC ON BOARD

A.   Why Public Participation Matters

A successful planning process hinges on a commitment to citizen participation. An inability to achieve public consensus about a community's future is often why planning fails. Plans that work reflect the needs and desires of the citizens who live and work in the community. However, one of the primary challenges that planning boards face involves developing effective ways to engage citizens throughout the planning process.

The strategies used to attract and retain citizen participants have to be tailored to each community, considering its political culture, its form of government, the factors that led to the planning process, and the type of plan. While several planning approaches or models are available to choose from, it is clear that "expert-driven" approaches do not work. The most effective public participation strategies involve the public and elected officials at the very beginning of the process.

All public participation efforts take time, money, and know-how. If done in a superficial or half-hearted way, they can raise expectations beyond the ability to deliver and simply fuel more cynicism about government.

B.   Basic Principles of Public Participation

Public participation is based on the idea that those affected by a decision have a fundamental right to be involved in the decision-making process. Effective public participation programs:

- Embrace a belief that citizens know a lot about their community and that a partnership between planners and the public will produce a better plan;

- Actively seek and facilitate the involvement of people potentially affected by or interested in a decision;

- Promote active, representative participation through the planning process;

- Engage participants in designing how they participate;

- Involve a promise that the public's contribution will influence decisions;

- Promote sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers;

- Give participants the information they need to analyze the physical, economic, social, environmental, political, and other impacts associated with alternative courses of action;

- Communicate to participants how their input affected the decision;

- Build political efficacy and capacity to implement the plan; and

- Reject token participation methods.

III. OVERVIEW OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION STRATEGIES

A. Steering Committees and Advisory Committees

1. The Steering Committee

In many communities, the planning board invites citizens to serve on a master plan steering committee that guides and oversees the planning process. The steering committee usually includes:

- Designees of the planning board and other boards such as the board of selectmen and conservation commission

- Citizens "at large" – ideally people with a variety of perspectives

- Local business owners

- Representatives of neighborhood associations

- Members of local interest groups and other stakeholders

- People viewed as "naysayers" or "gadflies"

By delegating oversight of the master plan process to a steering committee, the planning board empowers citizens to have a direct, ongoing role in shaping the content and major recommendations of the plan. Steering committees usually take charge of public outreach, schedule and plan major community-wide planning events, recruit other citizens to serve on master plan subcommittees, and provide support and feedback to the planning consultants (when consultants are hired). The steering committee approach often enjoys broad support because residents perceive it as legitimate citizen control. Caveat: set up a master plan steering committee only if you are willing to let them steer the process.

2. Advisory Committees or Working Groups

Planning boards that prefer a more "hands-on" role lead the planning process with assistance from advisory committees or working groups that focus on a particular section of the plan. The role of working groups ranges from helping with data collection and analysis to scoping out the content of a plan element and reviewing and responding to presentations and draft reports prepared by the consultants. This approach also benefits from broad support because it invites citizens to influence aspects of the plan that interest them, often without a substantial time commitment. Caveat: set up advisory committees only if you are willing to take their advice and recommendations.

B.   Community Planning Meetings and Events

A community planning process usually includes major meetings or planning events. One or more of the strategies discussed below may be built into the agenda of a major evening meeting, a series of evening meetings, or a continuous program of meetings, workshops, a charrette (if appropriate), and social activities during a "Master Plan Weekend." Some of these strategies can be used to engage a community's children in the planning process, too. Often overlooked by traditional planning methods, students know aspects of their communities that adults may not even be aware of, such as hidden but well-worn paths and informal play spaces that create bridges between disconnected neighborhoods. Funding, local capacity, the nature of the planning project, the project schedule, and political considerations usually determine the number and types of meetings held during a given planning process.

1. Visioning

Community visioning is an inclusive public process that often occurs as the kick-off event for a master plan effort. A shared community vision provides an overarching goal for the community: a statement of what the ideal future looks like. Visioning helps participants "see" the potential consequences of their ideas and becomes the basis for action under the master plan. In most cases, the process is designed to provide answers to key questions about where the community is headed, what values its citizens find most important, and what kind of future they hope to create. A visioning exercise has the potential to produce a tremendous amount of information, civic energy, and spirit. It accomplishes this by:

- Providing a focus, sense of purpose, and direction for the planning process – something the community can strive to achieve;

- Creating an incentive to mobilize assets and resources toward a shared vision of the future;

- Reinforcing the idea that community participation really matters;

- Inspiring and motivating people to implement the plan and keep it on track;

- Generating enthusiasm and excitement about the community and the direction in which it is heading;

- Showing participants with conflicting opinions that they do share some common ground, which helps to overcome turf issues and encourage sharing of resources; and

- Encouraging creativity by providing an opportunity for residents to think collaboratively and in innovative ways.

A visioning process consists of large- and small-group brainstorming and discussion activities in which participants explore desired change by describing what the ideal community would be like in ten years. To encourage a vision that is comprehensive and inclusive, the facilitator usually asks participants to think about categories of change such as people, housing, the environment, employment, health care, schools, transportation, public safety, and public involvement. Visioning exercises do not always adhere to the same format, but a typical one follows this type of approach:

- The facilitator presents a set of questions such as, "What would your community be like if you could make it any way you wanted? Where would people live? Where would they work? How would they get to school? To their jobs? On their days off, where would they go and what would they do? What kind of house would you live in? Where would you shop? How would you get there? How would air, water, and the environment be kept clean?"

- Participants break into small groups to brainstorm the future ideal community. The small groups may be random or organized by affinity group,[2] interest group,[3] or some other means.

- At the end of the breakout session, participants return to the large group. One member from each small group makes a positive statement in the present tense about how the community will be in the future. The facilitator or another meeting leader records each statement on newsprint so everyone can see it.

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[2] An affinity group includes people with similar life situations: senior citizens, parents of school-age children, the adult children of frail elders, homeowners, renters, seasonal residents, and so forth. It encourages people to speak from their personal experience.

[3] An interest group includes people with similar social, economic, or political interests such as farmers, developers, environmentalists, housing advocates, or small-business owners. By grouping people with shared interests, the planning board can capitalize on their accumulated knowledge and perspective.

- This step repeats so that another member of each group can speak, following the same format. The process can be condensed if ideas are being repeated or if time runs short. The facilitator will ask if there are any new ideas.

- Participants are asked to highlight noteworthy differences between now and the future they have created. The facilitator helps people move beyond obvious differences such as population growth and consider changes in attitudes and values about the community, the environment, what constitutes "progress," standard of living, and quality of life.

- The facilitator may ask participants to put themselves in the place of a resident fifty years ago and to try to imagine the likelihood of some of these changes. Would some changes be predictable? Others outside the realm of prediction?

- The facilitator spends about twenty minutes working with participants to group elements of the vision statements into common themes, noting areas of agreement and disagreement, and creates a new sheet that lists items with strong support from either the entire group or a subgroup. (Vision statements can include ideas that pertain to one segment of the community, e.g., "the community has developed a cultural center open to all with an exhibit of local art".)

- In final form, the shared or common vision statement may be a list of ideas or redesigned to include photographs, maps, and other images.

The visioning process goes to great lengths to achieve consensus and build public support. It is particularly useful for developing goals or "themes," which are compiled into a vision statement, or the preferred image of a community's long-range future.

2. **Taking Stock: A SWOT Analysis**

An inventory of a community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) is a structured, facilitated activity that works well with large or small groups. The popularity of SWOT stems from its simplicity, flexibility, collaborative approach, and speed. It focuses attention on important issues and ideas, which in turn helps to make later steps in the planning process more efficient, e.g., by clarifying the data the community will need for a master plan. SWOT involves examining both the internal status of the community and the external context in which it is situated. As its name implies, a SWOT asks participants to list (or brainstorm):

- The community's internal strengths: its physical and social assets, its competitive advantages, and qualities worth boasting about;

- The community's internal weaknesses, or problems that need to be addressed;

- External opportunities, or favorable conditions and trends that could be tapped to help the community become an even better place; and

- External threats, or unfavorable conditions and trends that could jeopardize the community's future success and prosperity.

Strengths and opportunities can help to achieve the goals of a master plan while weaknesses and threats can stand in the way of achieving them.

The facilitator typically begins by asking participants to name their community's strengths and records the answers on newsprint so everyone can read them. Once all of the answers have been recorded, the facilitator tapes the sheets of newsprint on a wall. Then, the facilitator asks the group to identify any items that need clarification and items that could be combined under the same subject, and consolidates points where possible. A prioritization process follows, with participants voting on their top three to five strengths. For ties or close votes, group members can discuss and modify their positions in order to arrive at a clear list of distinctive strengths. When the top strengths have been selected, the facilitator writes them on a fresh sheet of newsprint and posts it on the wall. This process repeats for weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.[4]

Ultimately, the SWOT results will be reported in at least two formats: a matrix that illustrates strengths on which to build, weaknesses to resolve, opportunities to exploit, and threats to avoid; and the prioritized lists of ideas. The information generated during a SWOT will have even more value for a master plan effort if the process includes reviewing and discussing each key idea's implications to the community. This occurs by comparing strengths and weaknesses with its opportunities and threats in order to identify potential strategies for helping the community achieve its vision. Often, meeting participants will be asked questions such as, "Could any of the opportunities help to overcome a weakness?" or "What if the community does nothing?"

3. **Participatory Strategic Planning**

Participatory strategic planning is an empowerment and consensus-building approach in which residents come together to explain how they want their community to develop over the next few years. The plan is relatively short-range, e.g., five years, and rarely covers all of the subjects found in most master plans. It tends to be a more focused, topic-oriented, and area- or neighborhood-based plan created by and for citizens, with little if any oversight or control from a planning board or other local officials. Community

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[4] There are variations to this approach. For example, some facilitators guide participants through an entire SWOT identification process before consolidating any ideas. Thereafter, participants receive colored adhesive dots to place next to the ideas they consider most important. Through discussion and voting, they reduce the highest-ranked ideas to three to five critically important ones. Also, opportunities and threats will sometimes be assigned a probability rating or "score."

organizers and community development organizations often promote participatory strategic planning in the communities or neighborhoods they serve.

Participatory strategic planning consists of a four-stage process that incorporates some of the practices discussed above and elsewhere in this handout:

- First, the group determines their vision for the future of the community;

- Second, they describe the obstacles that are preventing them reaching their vision;

- Third, they move on to agree methods that will help them get past the blocks and reach the vision; and

- Fourth, they develop an implementation plan with strategies and actions organized sequentially.

Each stage uses workshop formats with brainstorming to generate ideas, exploring the themes that emerge, and developing group agreement. The workshops involve a combination of people working individually, in small groups, and with the whole group. A participatory strategic planning process is usually intensive, occurring over two or three days, with scheduled follow-up workshops every six months for plan evaluation and shared problem-solving.

4. Open Space

Although most people associate "open space" with natural landscapes, the Open Space meeting technique is quite different. Open Space is a method for convening groups around a specific question or an important task and giving them responsibility for creating both their own agenda and experience. An Open Space meeting focuses on a theme – whether a community, a neighborhood, or a particular project - and within the context of that theme, the participants decide what to talk about, what decisions to make, and what actions to take. Four principles guide the Open Space approach:

- Whoever comes is the right people;

- Whenever it starts is the right time;

- Whatever happens is the only thing that could have; and

- When it's over, it's over.

The results reflect the priorities of those who decide to participate, which may differ from the priorities of the planning board or other government officials. It takes open-

minded leadership and a willingness to "let go" to make Open Space work in community planning. The process can be chaotic, but the trade-off for chaos is the excitement and energy of the group.

The community (usually through its planning department) provides basic meeting supplies (maps, easels, flipcharts, pens, colored dots, sticky pads, tape, presentation equipment), and refreshments and food, but otherwise "steps back" from the process. There are no agendas or guest speakers, but the meeting does have some structure, albeit a flexible one. A general facilitator starts the meeting, describes the process, answers questions, and keeps track of time, but does not guide the discussion. Instead, the participants take charge. By not having an agenda or a facilitator to direct every step, the participants discuss, debate, decide, and take action on matters they consider most important. Leaders usually emerge to take on a specific topic and form breakout groups. The participants choose the groups they wish to join. Each group may come to its own resolutions or decide on actions to take, and prepare a summary of its findings and recommendations.

The Open Space process runs for two or three days, often taking place in a community center, conference center, or school, or another facility with space for many people. As a guide, one Open Space day produces considerable discussion, two days provides time to capture what happens in a typed proceedings document, and the third day (usually a half-day) enables more formal development of plans for immediate action. The process generally involves the following steps:

- Set up a large circle of chairs in the meeting room and place flipcharts or paper, pens, and tape in the center of the circle.

- Hang several sheets of paper on the wall and label them "Marketplace of Ideas." The paper should be divided into 60- or 90-minute time slots with breakout areas such as separate rooms or corners within the meeting room.

- When everyone has gathered, invite participants to reflect on the issues and topics they feel passionate about.

- As people come up with items, they step into the circle, write their topics on paper, and announce them to the whole group. People who want to lead a discussion proceed to the "Marketplace of Ideas" and sign up for a time slot and place. When everyone who wants to post a topic has done so, the entire group signs up for sessions.

- Participants can choose, discuss, and rearrange times and places if necessary.

- New topics can be posted at any time, and participants can change groups at any time. This method of participant decision-making repeats each new day of the meeting.

- The groups fill out one-page summaries of their breakout sessions, including the topic covered, attendees, findings, and recommendations.

- At the end of the meeting, everyone reconvenes and the leaders from each breakout group offer a brief verbal report.

- Participants decide how to synthesize their breakout session summaries into a proceedings document and develop an action plan, following the same steps outlined above.

5. Group Mapping

Group mapping is a simple method of gathering information and opening discussions as people express their ideas graphically on a map. A creative approach for collecting feedback, ideas, and information, Group Mapping can help people discover more solutions than they thought possible, and it also can reveal more conflicts. It gives people the opportunity to visualize a resource in a different way, and can helps to make a plan or project feel more "real" – which in turn can strengthen support.

There are three common types of Group Maps:

- Memory maps: recording how a place used to look.

- Resource maps: identifying specific sites such as historic, geologic, recreation facilities, etc., as the first step in conducting a thorough inventory.

- Wish list maps: drawing future desires or ideas for trails, access locations, facilities, and protected areas for creating a shared vision or long-term plan.

Participants create a Group Map with tools (markers, pencils, colored paper) using a large-scale map of their area. A question is presented, and instead of responding verbally, everyone responds by drawing on the map, usually with a pre-defined key of colors or symbols. The result is a map or design for an area, created by community members and stakeholders with a valuable perspective and an understanding of the social and political aspects of a place.

The Group Mapping process requires the following:

- A facilitator, who may be a trained landscape architect, planner, historian, or resource expert, or simply a good facilitator.

- A meeting area with large tables or stations for posting maps on the wall, and space to accommodate breakout groups of eight to ten people.

- Large-scale United States Geological Survey (USGS) maps, markers and pencils, and construction paper cut into assorted shapes and colors according to a pre-defined key.

At the beginning of the meeting or workshop, the facilitator explains the exercise and how the information will be used, and provides guidance for reviewing the map (not everyone who participates will be an experienced reader of USGS maps). Thereafter, the facilitator presents one or more questions for participants to consider, divides the group into smaller groups, and gets people drawing and talking. One member of each group acts as a recorder. When the participants reconvene, the breakout groups present their maps and summarize their conclusions, findings, or recommendations.

6. **Charrette**

Long a mainstay of design professionals as an idea generator, the charrette has gained popularity as a citizen participation strategy. It is particularly appropriate for project or site-specific planning or planning a small area (e.g., a city block). Intense, highly interactive, and participatory, a charrette can be designed to present citizens with a real-world view of planning and the choices their community must make when deciding about future growth and development. Charrettes bring together experts in the field to generate maps and designs to address issues such as preservation, development, access, and use. The goal is to diffuse confrontation between residents, developers, and local officials and promote joint ownership of solutions to problems.

While there is more than one way to conduct a charrette, it is an involved process where the main activity often takes place over a weekend or several days, beginning with a walking tour of the site or area. A charrette event typically includes a vision process, alternative concept plans, the selection of a preferred plan, and final plan development, each involving a public meeting for input, review, and confirmation. However, the entire charrette planning process can take several months.

The basic requirements for a charrette include:

- A charrette planning committee or team, which organizes the event and does most of the lead and follow-up work. The planning team organizes subcommittees and recruits more volunteers to work on a variety of preparatory tasks (refreshments and food; promotions and fundraising; set-up and clean up; publicity; preparation of background materials for charrette participants; and maintaining a contacts database).

- A "desired outcomes" statement, developed through a consensus process, to identify products and outcomes from the charrette.

- A large meeting space with breakout rooms and a kitchen or food service area.

- A multidisciplinary charrette team that includes one or more architects, landscape architects, planners, transportation engineers, and specialists in environmental planning and preservation planning; local officials, business and industry leaders, non-profit organizations, diverse stakeholders in the community, and ideally the project proponents.

- An outreach process that may include press releases, surveys, newsletters, displays, and mass mailings.

- An orientation packet for each charrette participant, with background information on the project and goals, technical information about the site or area and issues participants should know about, photographs (current and historical), aerial photographs, maps, results of the community survey (if conducted), an agenda and project schedule, and a list of the participants.

- Meeting supplies.

- Event photographs to document the process and final display boards.

7. **Visual Preference Survey**

A visual preference survey a public opinion survey in which participants evaluate photographs or drawings of different types of development. Popularized in the 1990s by Anton Nelessen and Associates, which developed an image surveying methodology known as the Visual Preference Survey™ (VPS™), a visual preference survey consists of slides with photographs of buildings, streets, sidewalks, shopping centers, parks, and other examples of a community's built or natural environment. The images generally come from within the community (the survey area), but some images may be from other areas if the community has no usable examples of a given design principle.

Participants view the images at a public meeting and rate each image on a scale from –10 to +10 (or –5 to +5). The average rating and mode for each image is calculated after the survey. Images with the highest negative and highest positive averages indicate where there is the most agreement in the group. During a second viewing of the same images, participants learn the average score for each slide and discuss their rationale for the ratings they chose. The visual preference process usually generates spontaneous, high-energy discussion and debate.

The survey engages residents to participate in planning and informs them about the compromises inherent in design and land use decisions. Participants learn about the design details and characteristics that evoke strong reactions from their friends and neighbors. The discussion process allows them to consider new factors that may have been overlooked the first time, and the group as a whole comes to recognize features with broad appeal or universal dislike. The goal of a visual preference survey is consensus about what residents

would like to see in the housing, commercial areas, and streets in their community or neighborhoods.

8. <u>Appreciative Inquiry</u>

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) builds a vision for the future using questions to focus people's attention on past and future success. It differs significantly from traditional planning methods that focus on identifying problems and looking for solutions. The questions in an AI process typically revolve around what people enjoy about their community, their hopes for the future, and their feelings about their community and neighborhood. By design, the questions encourage people to tell stories from their own experience of what works. Discussing what has worked in the past and the reasons why helps participants to imagine and create a vision of what would make a successful future, grounded in the reality of past successes. AI advocates describe it is an intentional inquiry and a directed conversation and story-telling process that leads to a place of possibility. It rests on these assumptions:

- Focusing on what a community wants to achieve instead of what it does not want to achieve promotes effectiveness.

- Every individual, group, and community has positive qualities to be discovered. Focusing on the positive and working from strengths is more engaging to people than telling them they are a problem that needs to be fixed.

- People are receptive to being asked to share positive aspects of themselves through the process of telling stories.

- Communities are living social structures. Through telling stories, members of a community can co-construct the social systems they engage in daily and transform the way they communicate, resolve conflicts, and make decisions.

- Looking at what is good in a community will lead the community to discover how to become an even better place to live and work.

An AI process begins with a core group of people – a master plan committee or subcommittee – setting the focus of the inquiry and developing and testing the appreciative questions. The questions are used by many people in the community (sometimes in a format known as paired interviews) to gather information through stories and to set out their hopes and wishes for the future. The interview questions can be developed, tested, and analyzed in a few hours or in a workshop. Data from the interviews can be looked at and turned into information by a few people or, ideally, by a larger number of participants in a community meeting. Everyone can then decide collectively how to best go forward.

AI promotes positive thinking by identifying and building on what works and involving lots of people through outreach by the core group. It has potential to support a master plan process because AI works best when designed for participation by the entire community and where there is a long-term commitment to change.

9. **Community Profile**

Developed by the UNH Cooperative Extension, the Community Profile is a self-assessment process that helps communities develop an action plan to achieve their goals for the future. A Community Profile takes about six months to plan and organize and a weekend to implement. A Steering Committee oversees the planning phase, taking charge of scheduling, arranging refreshments and food, outreach and advertising, identifying and training facilitators, and evaluating the project's outcomes. The profile event itself kicks off on a Friday evening with a pot luck supper, presentations by the Steering Committee, and a structured discussion (such as a SWOT) led by a facilitator. By the end of the first night, participants have been introduced to several ways of defining a "successful community," such as:

- Effective Community Leadership

- Informed Citizen Participation

- Sense of Community

- Fostering Healthy Families, Individuals and Youth

- Lifelong Education and Learning

- Community Services, Facilities, and Utilities

- Recreation and Cultural Heritage Working

- Landscape and the Natural Environment

- Economic Vitality Growth and Development

- Transportation

The second day involves a review of the previous meeting's results, consensus about the key issues that participants had identified, and morning breakout sessions to focus on each key issue or related sets of issues. The breakout groups define problems, opportunities, and potential solutions, rate them on the basis of impact and feasibility, and choose three projects to present to the entire group. During the afternoon, participants meet in small groups again to work on action plans for projects selected by the entire group for

further review. Ultimately, a report of the proceedings is prepared and distributed to all participants, and made available in public locations such as the library and town hall.

10. Field Trips

Field trips can be an effective, fun way to interest residents in the planning process and have a dialogue about qualities of the natural and built environment that make their community a distinctive place. A field trip activity could be introduced in the early stages of the planning process or later, to keep public interest high as the process evolves. Whether a walking tour, a bus trip, or a canoe trip, field trips should be designed to include physical activity; an educational component that helps people learn about community resources; and a service component, which could be as simple as picking up trash or bringing school children to share the experience.

Using field trips as a public participation strategy involves careful planning and attention to logistics. This type of event needs:

- An event planning committee to take charge of the project - from scheduling to budgeting and arranging transportation, food, equipment, and publicity.

- Clear goals for the trip, which in turn should determine the itinerary. For example, if a field trip's purpose is a visual assessment of villages or historic neighborhoods that need special attention in a master plan, the trip could be designed to include a guided walking tour (physical and educational activity), handouts with background information (educational activity), and enlisting participants to help with documenting an existing conditions inventory for later use in the planning process (service activity).

- Advance notice to public safety personnel and residents of the area that will be visited.

- A system for participants to register, including emergency contact information and liability waivers.

- A plan to accommodate people with disabilities.

- Maps with the itinerary clearly marked, including rest stops and noteworthy sites.

- Periodic stops to regroup and share observations.

- A wrap-up activity for participants, such as refreshments and a keynote speaker.

11. Area or Neighborhood Forum

An Area Forum is usually held in a community center, church, school, or another location where neighborhood residents customarily gather. It brings the planning process out of a city or town hall and into the community, especially to reach, include, and empower residents who tend to be under-represented in a traditional planning process. Neighborhood residents need to be consulted ahead of time about the format and goals of the meeting; their role(s) and responsibilities; and who should attend from local government. Ideally, neighborhood representatives will form a planning and outreach committee and "take charge" of the process with assistance from city or town staff and master plan consultants. However, this may not be possible if the neighborhood lacks an effective association or has no relationship with other community organizations and institutions. Thus, understanding a neighborhood's capacity and needs is an essential part of planning for neighborhood participation.

C.   Working with Smaller Groups

1.   Conversation Café

A Conversation Café is an informal, hosted, drop-in discussion in coffee shops, bookstores, and other public places. It is useful for stimulating debate about a specific planning issue among interested people, meeting and building relationships with new people and groups, and taking part in conversations about the master plan.

2. Deliberative Workshop

A Deliberative Workshop is a facilitated group discussion, typically for eight to sixteen participants, to consider an issue in depth, challenge each other's opinions, and develop their views or arguments for reaching an informed end position. Though similar to focus groups, deliberative workshops tend to focus on deliberation. They can involve anywhere from a few hours to several days to conduct. Deliberative workshops give the planning board or master plan steering committee a greater understanding of what may lie behind an opinion or how people's views change when they have new information or deliberate on an issue.

3. Focus Group

A Focus Group is a guided discussion about a specific topic or issue by a small group of people, i.e., six to twelve participants. Normally a Focus Group is a one-time session, but several may occur simultaneously in different locations. A typical Focus Group lasts one or two hours. The discussion is facilitated and recorded, and the product is a report of the process and results. The participants receive a copy of the report. A few members of the planning board or master plan steering committee may sit in as observers, but they do not take part in the discussion. Focus Groups provide useful information about how people respond to particular issues. Since the activity is short by design, the agenda needs to focus on a narrow topic and the discussion questions should be explicit.

4. Scenario Workshops

The aim of a Scenario Workshop is to create a basis for local action. The workshop process is used to gather knowledge about barriers and participants' experiences and visions of the topic as well as their attitudes toward the defined scenarios. A Scenario Workshop typically involves different phases of involvement: (a) a critical phase of participants' experiences and views, (b) a visionary phase of possible scenarios, and (c) an implementation phase where a plan is devised for action and possible barriers established. During the workshop, time is allotted for brainstorming, discussion, presentation, and voting. Workshop participants typically include twenty-five to thirty local officials, technical experts, business leaders, and knowledgeable residents.

D.   Web-Based Participation

1. Online Forum

On online forum is a web tool that allows discussions to be held online. Participants can post their own comments online, which distinguishes it from one-way communication tools such as email bulletins. Sometimes referred to as message boards, web forums, or chat rooms, online forums provide a space for online debate and discussion. Participants have the option to sign in with their real names or usernames created as part of the registration process, which means the identity of a speaker is not always obvious to other participants. The discussions are usually organized as "threads," with the responses to an initial message or question displayed sequentially. Discussions can be hosted by the planning board or master plan steering committee, or by independent groups with an interest in the planning process. For example, the planning board might present several options it is considering to address a specific master plan goal and seek comments from participants. Alternatively, an online forum can be used to vet an issue before concrete options have been developed. Discussion forums also can be used as part of a larger community organizing effort.

2. <u>Social Networking</u>

The widespread popularity of online tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Google +, YouTube, SlideShare, blogs, and others make the web a potentially useful resource for engaging the public. For example, a Facebook page or group makes it easy for Facebook members to join in online discussions, register their opinions, respond to questions posted by the group manager (a city planner or master plan committee member), and receive quick updates on the plan's status. Linking a presentation on SlideShare to a planner's blog and Facebook can make information widely available. As the authors of a recent journal article note:

> Because online social networking and virtual reality tools allow information to spread quickly, it is possible to grow groups to thousands instead of holding a planning meeting for a few dozen people. Citizens may not even realize that they are engaged in a planning process when they "friend" a planning group on Facebook, but by doing so they are increasing awareness among their network.

E.   <u>Community Survey</u>

The community survey is one of the most basic means of collecting data and opinions from citizens and, as appropriate, targeted populations within a community. Depending on how it is administered, a survey has the potential to generate substantial and valuable input on master plan issues. It gives residents direct input into the planning process while maintaining their anonymity. A good survey uncovers ideas and opinions from a representative number of citizens in an affordable, well-organized manner.

For a master plan process, the mailed questionnaire remains the most popular surveying tool even though it can be expensive to administer. Other techniques include telephone or in-person interviews and, more recently, online questionnaires made available through web-based services such as Survey Monkey, SurveyTool, or ConstantContact's Online Survey. Each technique has strengths and weaknesses. Survey techniques can also be combined to collect specific kinds of data.

Here are some useful survey tips:

- Ask the questions that matter, and be concise. Long surveys that take more than twenty or thirty minutes to answer increase the risk of a low response rate.

- Make the questions easy to answer. For a phone survey or interview, the questions need to be short and uncomplicated. A survey distributed in written form should be easy to read and understand. A pre-addressed envelope with

adequate postage and alternative return methods such as drop-off boxes around town will help to encourage participation.

- Design the questions for "ready to use" answers, i.e., responses that can be tabulated and analyzed efficiently. Quantifiable results are the easiest results to understand and summarize. Whenever possible, go with multiple-choice items and use open-ended questions sparingly.

- For phone, interview, or paper surveys, consider surveying a sample of households instead of the universe. A properly drawn sample will yield important, statistically valid information without the expense of a community-wide survey process.

- Advertise the survey in advance. Send postcards, put a press release in the local paper, display posters in visible locations around the community, make announcements at public meetings, and post public service announcements on the local cable access channel.

- Provide incentives to respond: a coupon for a free cup of coffee for each survey returned or door prizes for the first one hundred respondents.

- Allow a reasonable amount of time for people to respond, such as two weeks for a mail survey.

- Make the results available as soon as responses have been tabulated. Citizens need to know that their time has yielded tangible results. Typical ways to "get the word out" include providing a survey synopsis to local newspapers and posting it on the city or town website.

F. Public Hearings

A public hearing is not very conducive to public participation because it occurs at the end of a planning process. However, it is an important step in the adoption of a plan regardless of whether the law actually requires one. By including citizens and building consensus throughout the development of a plan, support will already exist by the time the public hearing occurs. As a result, comments made at the hearing are more likely to be positive.

Planning boards can take steps to make a public hearing more inviting. In addition to publishing a standard legal notice:

- Announce the hearing in display ads that include the future land use map or other important graphics from the plan.

- Put posters on community bulletin boards and at the public library.

- Make announcements through radio, newspaper, local cable access television, and community's official website, the websites of local organizations, and social networking sites.

- Work with the local cable access station to televise the public hearing or broadcast it over the Internet.

- Provide for public comments not only in writing and at the hearing, but also through email and a planning board blog.

G.   Implementation Committees

Establishing an implementation committee can help to ensure that a plan thrives after the adoption stage. The implementation committee could be the master plan steering committee or a new group of volunteers who oversee or help to coordinate the implementation process. The roles and responsibilities of implementation committees vary by town, but generally they include tasks such as:

- Periodically evaluating the plan and proposing modifications, as needed, if conditions change or new information becomes available that could affect the implementation schedule;

- Collaborating with other boards, committees, and departments to stay on track with the implementation schedule;

- Providing progress reports to the Board of Selectmen and Town Meeting or the City Council;

- Helping to deliver support for proposed actions to implement the plan, e.g., reaching out to voters before a Town Meeting, mobilizing residents to speak at a City Council hearing, or gathering signatures on citizen petitions; and

- Continuing to work with boards, committees, departments, and residents on implementation tasks that require additional planning work.

IV. DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING

A. Guidelines

- Design the planning process to integrate vision, planning, and implementation from the beginning.

- Be clear about the purposes, goals, and scope of the project - as well as the budget - and design the process accordingly.

- Keep the process interesting and fun, and provide a variety of ways for people to participate. Holding one major community meeting at the beginning and a public hearing at the end is not a public participation program.

- Involve the public and the implementers. Those whose actions the plan is intended to guide need to be included throughout the planning process. When boards, committees, and departments charged with carrying out the plan's implementation program participate from the beginning, they are more likely to do so when they see the plan as theirs, too, rather than a plan imposed upon them others.

- Make participation opportunities convenient for the participants. Take the process to community, neighborhood, and business associations at times and in places that work for them, and let them do as much as they can – with as-needed support from the planning board – to plan and carry out meetings for members of their groups.

- Identify issues early in the process, and address needs that can be met quickly and easily. There is no need to wait for plan approval to make changes that require little effort.

- Planning often focuses on a community's problems. Remember the positives, too. A community's successes can provide important "lessons learned" that could be tapped for ways to overcome obstacles.

- Make information sharing a two-way street. Provide information to residents, and listen to the information residents have to offer.

- Provide an open, transparent planning process that earns and keeps the public trust.

- Respect the process and the people who participate in it. Present participants with real alternatives, not just minor variants that offer no meaningful choice.

- Connect goals and actions, making sure that every goal has one or more corresponding actions in the implementation program.

B.   Discussion

1.   Let the Community Take Ownership

How a planning process is designed (and by and for whom it is designed) can make or break a plan's success. Traditional planning methods often begin with data collection and analysis: steps that take a considerable amount of time, especially if they occur without any sort of direction about the key issues a plan should address. The process of analyzing data eventually leads to findings presented at a public meeting, followed by the development of master plan elements, goals and objectives, and plan approval. Implementation (if any) comes later. This type of approach may seem efficient, but it omits a critical component: the public. By contrast, a plan that begins with a community vision and continues to bring planning and action together throughout the process can generate lots of enthusiasm and support. People want to know that if they participate, it will be worth their investment of time and energy. They want to see results.

Toward these ends, the professional planner or facilitator has an important role: to help residents identify and express their desires for the future, find common ground, work together, and determine the best ways to achieve their goals. The planner's job is to guide the process, not to direct it. In "top-down" planning, the planner, the planning board, or another lead agency drives the planning process and presents a nearly final product – with key decisions already made – to citizens for review and comment. However, planning with community support requires a working partnership between the planning board, staff, and citizen participants. The planner and planning board have to be willing to let go of their own expectations about the plan's content and allow the plan to evolve. The reward can be a plan that works.

2.   Overcoming Skepticism and Disinterest

Designing a planning process for citizen and board participation and collaboration is critical. Those whose actions the plan is meant to guide need to be at the table from the beginning and still be at the table at the end of the process. One of the challenges in public process design is arriving at a vision that captures the diversity of people in the community. Another is maintaining citizen participation during the entire planning process – not just the first event. A third is getting people to show up at any meeting. Unfortunately, a history of weak participation and apparent disinterest can lead local officials to think public participation will never work in their communities.

Asking citizens to participate in a process that does not result in measurable change can reinforce feelings of cynicism about local government and planning in general. A plan with concrete outcomes tells residents and business owners that their involvement matters.

For this reason (and others), working on early action items during the planning process itself is important. It gives tangible evidence that participation can accomplish something in the community. Other measures to attract participation should include:

- Combining a planning event (such as a visioning activity) with a lunch or potluck supper encourages participants to relax, socialize, and meet new people. This can facilitate the process of coming to agreement on community goals and visions.

- Encouraging people with opposing views to participate from the beginning sets the stage for finding common ground. Often people just need to be assured that their views have been heard and considered. In addition, they may have an important perspective that has not yet been considered. It takes patience and good facilitation skills to let dissenters have their say while not allowing them to dominate a public forum. If people have been involved from the beginning and allowed to speak their mind, they will be less likely to be "troublemakers" later, when action proposals need to be developed, put forward, and evaluated.

- Making personal invitations to neighbors, friends, and "enemies" to participate in a planning process almost always works better than traditional outreach methods such as posters and press releases.

- Reaching beyond the "usual suspects," or people most frequently involved in public affairs, improves the prospects for citizen participation. If a community accurately identifies the affinities and interests of its population and broadens the definition of "stakeholder," the vision and goals that result from a planning process are more likely to reflect a vision for the whole community, not just the vision of one particular group.

3. Remember the Place

Identifying and finding agreement on a community vision early on helps to establish a sense of place: "Those things that add up to a feeling that a community is a special place, distinct from anywhere else." Keeping in mind a sense of place helps to develop a plan that makes connections across subject areas. Discrete planning topics do not stand alone; they are interconnected. One of the challenges of a single-issue or "topic" plan is that solving one problem sometimes leads to unintended consequences. For example, designing off-street parking requirements in a vacuum can frustrate downtown revitalization and lead to needlessly large parking lots in suburban commercial and industrial areas. Adopting stringent water resource protection measures without evaluating their relationship to other aspects of community life can make compact development impossible in areas without public water.

By definition, a master plan is comprehensive. It should explore the full range of issues in community life and the ways in which issues interconnect. Having a generally

agreed-upon understanding of sense of place can help participants identify these interrelationships and reduce the risk of conflicting or incompatible proposals. Some practical ways to do this:

- Evaluate all proposals early against place-based goals and objectives, which most often emerge during the initial visioning process.

- Keep groups that are working on separate topics in touch and exchanging information and ideas with one another. The master plan subcommittees charged with focusing on specific plan elements could hold joint meetings from time to time. Alternatively, the subcommittee chairs could have periodic breakfast meetings to share information and coordinate their efforts.

- Structure the process to resolve conflicting aims in a way that is non-confrontational.

4. Set Priorities

Setting priorities at the outset and working to develop an action plan that honors them can go a long way toward creating a plan that limits conflicts among priorities down the road. A visioning event offers the opportunity to set both the planning agenda and the priorities for action.

- An action plan cannot be completed all at once. It needs a schedule, typically from one to five years. Scheduling actions to account for available resources, logical sequencing, and additional planning time helps to reduce conflicts between competing priorities.

- Sometimes actions can be designed as a foundation for future actions that cannot be carried out right away. For example, a comprehensive overhaul of communications and financial management technology at town hall may not be feasible in the short run, but hiring a consultant with prior local government experience to evaluate existing systems and prepare a phased improvements plan would be feasible – and help the community avoid costly mistakes.

- Expanding the time horizon for an action plan is an effective way to address multiple priorities and reduce the risk of conflicts between competing priorities.

5. Keeping the Public Trust

Providing all information to the public and making key decisions in the open will go far to build and keep public trust. The credibility of a planning process can be comprised

if local officials act – however unintentionally – in ways that suggest they have a hidden agenda.

- Hold all meetings in public, providing proper public notice and informative meeting agendas.

- Create a master plan web page on the community's website, and use it as a clearinghouse for master plan information.

- Make information about the plan available in a timely manner. In addition to using the community's website for this purpose, provide print copies in public places such as the local library and the city or town hall.

- Provide meetings results in writing: regular meeting minutes (including subcommittee meetings), transcripts of community meetings, workshop summaries, and so forth.

C.   Gathering and Using Data

The timing of data collection technical assistance in a planning process is very important. Collecting large amounts of data before planning priorities have been set can waste precious time and money. It is more effective to schedule data collection after the initial visioning event, when community priorities are known. Commissioning technical consultants or special studies too early can have the appearance of "stacking the deck."

D.   Connecting Goals and Actions

In a completed plan, every goal statement should be supported with at least one significant, realistic action. Similarly, actions should not be proposed unless they relate to goals that have emerged from the planning process. It may be tempting for the planning board or steering committee to include actions they want to promote even though the goals developed through public participation suggest a different course of action. The risk of doing this is jeopardizing public trust and eroding support for the plan. Making clear connections between goal statements and implementing actions is an important part of what it means to respect the process.

E.   Resolving Conflicts

Conflict seems unavoidable in planning, but the key is to look for areas of agreement right away, as early as the visioning event. Areas of agreement may not be obvious, so they need to be identified and highlighted. The areas of agreement should include where possible both overarching vision goals and specific, concrete actions. Early action proposals can be designed based upon early areas of agreement. The value of focusing attention on areas of agreement is particularly obvious when different interest

groups begin to realize that other interests share similar goals, e.g., when conservation advocates learn that business owners also want to preserve open space. Careful design of the public participation program and the initial visioning event can bring this about.

V. CONCLUSION

- A successful planning process depends on citizen participation.

- Citizens can participate in a variety of ways: by serving on a project steering committee or an advisory committee, attending meetings, writing letters, joining an email list or a social networking site, responding to a survey, organizing a neighborhood meeting, organizing residents with similar interests to make sure the plan addresses their needs, and yes... even by being chronic "naysayers."

- Design a public participation process that is both clear and realistic in light of the purposes, goals, scope, and budget for the plan.

- Don't make promises you can't keep, and don't set false expectations. Make the public's role clear, and be honest about how much weight public input will have in the decisions that will eventually be made.

- A community's "lessons learned" from the past can be important for overcoming obstacles today. Remember the positives as well as the problems.

- Invite community, neighborhood, and business associations to participate in the planning process by taking meetings, events, and other activities *to* them - on *their* turf.

- Design the planning process to integrate vision, planning, and implementation from the beginning.

- Be good stewards of the public trust in government... and if your public doesn't trust government, use the planning process to rebuild better relationships.

VI.   LIST OF RESOURCES

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