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Small Town and Rural Planning Series

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Faculty

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The following articles were printed with permission of the publishers:


"Elements of Leadership" by Vernon E. Jordan, Jr., *ITT*.


"Gender Differences in Commuter Travel in Tucson: Implications for Travel Demand Management Programs," by Sandra Rosenbloom and Elizabeth Burns, in Transportation Research Record 1404, 1993.


Land Use Law Reporter, Pace University School of Law, December 1993, Series 1, No. 4, pp. 1-8.


*The Business Opportunities Workbook* by Barbara A. Cole, Rocky Mountain Institute, pp. 5-7, 21-22, 51, 75.


*The Scanner* by Gordon Cullen, fig. 9-8 and 9-9.


PRESENTATION OUTLINES: PHILIP HERR

APA Planning and Zoning Institute
Small Town and Rural Planning
June 4, 1994

CASE STUDY: WILLIAMSTOWN

1. The setting and the problem addressed.

2. The process:
   - affinity group brainstorming
   - broad forums
   - topic group proposal development
   - legislative adoption
   - recursive cycling
   - incremental process
   - action-centered.

3. The outcomes:
   - adopted actions
     - institutional
     - regulatory
     - infrastructure
   - style exemplar
   - leader development.

EXERCISE: AGREEING ON TOPICS

1. Sorting participants by level of public intervention-tolerance (self-scoring responses to slide-supported questions).

2. Individual selection of topics for later discussion.

3. Small-group break-out (faculty facilitating):
   - collecting individual selections
   - nominating and organizing topic proposals.

4. Group presentations to entire class, display.

5. (At later break) red dot voting.
VISIONS AND PARTICIPATION

1. Final selection of topics for Wednesday (illustrating process proprietorship by participants, not leaders).

2. Collection of common themes from morning cases.

3. Leading from the side.

4. Intentional plans.

5. Recursive process: learning from action.

6. Designed participation.
   - organization
   - recruitment
   - creative tasks

7. Strategic design.
I. INTRODUCTION

Planning which goes on in cities is one thing, but the planning which goes on in small Northeastern towns is another, never to be confused with city planning. This material specifically focuses on planning which works in that small-town context, where it is typically, though not always, dominated by Swamp Yankees.

Swamp Yankees are regular folks. They are usually found in smaller communities, often outside metropolitan areas. They commonly know their community astonishingly well, and understand political process about equally well. Few have ever heard of "disjointed incrementalism" or "recursive processes", but most practice them regularly. They don't take to outsiders telling them what to do with their community, but they respect real technical expertise. They can be young or old, hold a PhD or be a high school drop-out, have lived there forever or be a new arrival. Most are not WASPs. "Swamp Yankee" here is a term of admiration, not a pejorative one, despite planners commonly being at loggerheads with various of them.

These materials are about processes which work in that context, not about the community outcomes which "should" result. Another day 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 transferrable development rights. These materials deal with how to design and participate in a process allowing smaller communities to decide about such things in a well-informed way.

Much of this material is near-universal in its applicability, being equally apt in large Western cities as in small Northeastern towns, but some of it is not. Where geography is critical, we'll try to flag that.

II. BASICS IN BRIEF

For a planner to be of help to Swamp Yankee planning, there are some basic principles which have to be observed. If you find any of these troubling, you will probably find all the rest of this material troubling, as well. Here is what the successful Swamp-Yankee planner must do.

1. Lead from the side.

Effective Swamp Yankee planning requires "leading from the side". You will be in deep trouble if your image of what the planner should do is to stand at the head of the column and lead the charge, as is often appropriate for city planners. At the same time, you need to be more than a passive "facilitator". You should be able to make contributions beyond process support, but you should do it from the side, as a co-equal, with skills and insights which complement those of the others you are working with. This type of leading involves some technique, but most importantly it requires an attitude which can't be put on, though it can eventually be acquired, even by many trained planners (but sadly, it seems not by all).

A key intention is that residents should make the planning their own, to take full "proprietorship" of it, not as something which they have accepted, or contributed to, but rather as something which is theirs. If that is to be the case, it has to be the intention from the beginning, and must be reflected at every step.

A Swamp Yankee commenting on a citizen-initiated planning effort recently said, "We figured that if the people led the way long enough, the leaders would follow". That captures it.

2. Discover and rely on latent agreement.

There is a huge area of latent agreement among people in any place worth calling a "community". In the usual case, the job of Swamp Yankee planning is to help the community discover that area of agreement and act on it, not to "enlighten" or "reform" or "shape" community opinion. Given a competent process through which to act, community residents are unlikely to be collectively wrong-headed. They certainly are unlikely to be more wrong-headed than the planners are. Remember, planners are the ones who promoted the zoning, subdivision, and renewal practices now widely
regarded as counterproductive in these settings. "Unenlightened" residents are the ones who resisted. Now we both should know better, and between us we ought to be able to make real improvement in how town planning is done and implemented.

Just as with "leading from the side", relying on local insights requires walking a fine line. Lots of planners come into any community with strong views about "good" solutions, involving both the dimensions of change which should be addressed and usual sound prescriptions. For example, few of us don't bring predispositions towards cluster zoning or nitrates and water quality or community land trusts. We need to both enable the community to benefit from our understanding of those topics and allow it not to be manipulated into accepting our prescriptions or even our agendas.


A real plan is a statement of intent, agreed to by those whose actions it is meant to guide. Meeting that seemingly simple definition is crucial and far from common. Many documents labelled "plan" fail that test, on either of two grounds.

First, some so-called plans are chiefly descriptive of what exists or is predicted to exist, with little or no expression of what is intended. 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 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 accommodating that unalterable future.

Second, 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 party hoping to influence another party, rather than a set of actors 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.

The way of planning advocated here puts the

program emphasis on digging out 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.

4. Plan to Plan in Cycles.

Some objective data-collection and analysis is absolutely crucial for competent planning. Understanding what is crucial and what is not is important when resources of people's time and funding are limited. However, the planners only know what they need to know after they know what the community wants. The trouble is that the community should have had the benefit of the information before settling on stating what it wants.

The answer to the paradox is a cyclical process: initial intentional planning based on a limited amount of data-gathering, followed by another cycle with more focussed and better-informed information work and intentions-stating, possibly followed by yet another cycle, all within a single designed program.

5. Integrate Planning and Action.

Action is not only the intended outcome of planning, but also is a critical stimulator of serious consideration. 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 process, but its worth is minimal if it comes only at the end. Accordingly, planning and action need to be part of a unified process, informing and stimulating one another, not sequential activities. That has troubling corollaries, such as not ever being able to wait for all the ducks to get into a comprehensively ordered row before taking action. Many trained planners find that attitude heretical.

That integration of planning and action further supports "Planning to Plan in Cycles": win or lose, action outcomes wonderfully focus what information is needed next.
6. Design Participation

People, including Swamp Yankees, really can become active partners in planning for their own community, but engaging the full diversity of the community won’t happen automatically. There is unavoidable “original sin” in designing participation, because that design will impact who participates, in turn impacting outcomes. However, that design has to be made, and is as critical as any other design dimension of the planning. Provided that one is willing to “intervene” by “manipulating” participation, there probably is no community in which the common apathy and divisions cannot be overcome.

7. Respect Uncertainty.

In an inherently unpredictable world, good plans recognize uncertainty and plan with it. There are lots of techniques: contingency plans, separable proposals (rather than the “we all sink or swim together” attitude of naive plans), and careful use of timing, so early actions can reduce the policy or market or technical uncertainties surrounding later actions.

Most really effective rural planning programs respect most, if not all, of those seven principles, and most planning programs which really incorporate them perform well. Virtually everything in the following materials can be traced back to one or more of them.

III. MAKING IT HAPPEN

In briefest outline, here is a process suitable for Swamp Yankee planning 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. Even at this level of generality, not all programs can follow this outline, but in most cases they should. 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 which this outline calls for. In such cases, departure is unavoidable but still regrettable.

These are the 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. At that forum or shortly after it, frame a strategy for proceeding through the rest of the effort.

In the next phase, further develop 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. Following the final 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 at the first step of the planning program, its structuring. 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 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, whether by 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, which 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 which require "yes" answers for this to be confirmed as the right approach.

- Should the planning be done from within town government? If not, a civic planning organization 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 agency advisory committee may be the right choice.

A civic planning organization is the appropriate manager 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 spirit-ed and engaging planning events than to imple-mented 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 it 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, such as "housing market trends", which should be considered in planning for residential zoning, but which zoning won't really change. The same 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" area may be crucial to sound planning.

Both target and contextual topics and areas need to be carefully selected, subject if possible to revision as the program evolves, taking into account such things as these.

- 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 inextricable 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.

A.3 Arrange for Resources.

Technical support can almost always be helpful. It may come from local staff, though few rural 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 (excellent agencies may be inappropriate because of local/regional political questions). It may come from a university or nonprofit organization: often there are programs 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 are critical. First, there has to be a local person to head the effort. 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, though sometimes that in fact is desirable.

Second, there needs to be a person to organize and run your meetings, and bring technical resources into the process. 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.

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.

In the plan for planning, it is important that sound planning at least not be precluded, at best be made very likely. Many of the most important principles have already been discussed. These are a few more.

• Arrange for real alternatives. Good planning involves consideration of real alternative choices, not choosing between a single choice and straw men. There are many ways of assuring this, such as the Ecologue process of organizing groups and allowing each of them to develop and advocate its own alternative, as described in detail later.

• Arrange for sharing, not centralizing, information. Surveys concentrate information in the hands of the surveyor. Good workshops develop shared understanding.

• Assure that participants play a creative role, rather than simply reacting to proposals by others. The Ecologue process does that, but many workshops do not.

• Arrange for participant learning. No one should ever be asked to participate beyond their area of understanding, but neither should programs accept current understanding as the limits of participant capacity. Good programs are designed to allow par-
participants to learn from each other, from dialogue, from associated professionals, and from the experience so as to become more capable in the course of their participation.

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, they 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 elements of the community they can engage, and the types of exchange for which they are suitable. As a result, an effective program is likely to use a variety of models which among them achieve the coverage which 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 "charette" if structured around drawings, 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 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. One model which has proven highly effective, the "Ecologue" process, is outlined below in Part V.

There are some things which good workshop designs (at least in this business) share. Among them are these.

- 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.

- The participatory design must not categorically exclude anyone, and must openly allow for corrections of any appearance of "stacking".

- There must be clarity in advance, repeated at the sessions, regarding how conclusions are going to be drawn from the effort, and what standing those conclusions are to be given in the processes which are to follow.

- Each event should have a physical product, ideally created by all the participants, but if not at least created within their view: a wall map, a listing of agreed points noted on big sheets, a model, or other recording of what was accomplished.

- Integrating across workshop events should take place not in some back office but right there with the participants participating. The same goes for setting agendas for follow-on events. If this is to be their process, the participants need to be part of those key steps. They seldom are: this is a tough rule to adhere to.

- When possible, it is helpful if participants can go through an individual exercise first, ideally before the workshop, but if not, at its beginning, allowing them to record their own thoughts responding to some structuring, before the cognitive strain of discussion makes it more difficult.

- When possible, structure the workshops so that small groups can hold discussions, avoiding the intimidation and speech-making which sole reliance on large-group sessions often produces. Small groups most commonly have been organized by topic, but at this stage they usually would be better if organized so as to allow like-minded people to reinforce their ideas, rather than using this time for cross-interest dialogue (which is needed, but is better reserved for later).
There are important benefits of doing that, including giving legitimacy to the entire process by making clear that diverse perspectives have been given real opportunity to effectively participate, giving legitimacy to interests which sometimes initially don’t have it (teen-agers, for example, or large land owners), and setting up the possibility of discovering that supposedly polarized interests really have similar proposals, perhaps for different reasons.

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. In Part IV there is description of one relatively new model which is proving effective, the Project PREPARE diagnostic report card.

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, and ideally are presented not as proposals of any interest group but as proposals of the entire set of groups which have been involved if that is really the case. There should be room for lots of discussion.

E. Design a Strategy for Action.

Following the Forum presentations, the steps to follow are to be designed, ideally while still in a forum context (maybe a follow-on event, maybe the last step in a long event). In rare cases that design job will be simple, based on what has gone before. More commonly, however, there will be a confusing welter of initiatives demanding action, with inadequate time, resources, and political chips to carry out all of them. These are some thoughts about how to sort through them.

- Ask for nominations of action items. That is hugely better than trying to eliminate proposals from a pre-listed set, since it calls for positive support for nominations, rather than an attack on someone else’s idea in dislodging it from a list.

- Respect where participants do and don’t make proposals or otherwise express interest, but don’t simply accept that. At this point, those managing the process properly become participants, and appropriately make suggestions towards an agenda they think is sound. The way to do that is as part of a dialogue, not by shifting the agenda after the meeting. Be careful: those running the meeting have enormous positional advantage, and often have advantages of skill and reputation as well. Given that, it is all too easy to dominate, in the process undermining some of participants proprietary feelings about the program, and leading it substantively astray as well.

- If you depend on volunteer efforts to carry the next stage forward, be careful about matching selections with expressions of interest and available skills. Wide support for preparing a noise ordinance, unless accompanied by people or funding to do the job, doesn’t merit adding that to the next stage agenda.

- Red dot voting can be an informative technique, but again be careful. In “red dot voting” each participant might be given ten red dots to place wherever she wishes on wall lists of, say, thirty potential action items (or to swap them with other participants). Use that or any other voting scheme only after enough dialogue for the voting to be well-informed, and only with

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the caveat that it will be taken with a grain of salt, in light of less-than-perfect repre-
sentation and understanding.

- Wherever possible, focus on agreement: go with consensus-backed proposals, bypass-
ing areas of conflict. There probably is more than enough to do just in developing proposals in areas where agreement has already been found. Agree to return to the conflicted areas on another day (and subsequently respect that agreement: it is easy to forget about returning to tough issues in the flush of victory on easier ones).

- Choose 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.

- At this stage, "bundling" a number of proposals into a single package proposal is okay. That is a way of not saying "no" to some folks' minor favorites, and avoiding too many items being on the agenda. Keep in mind, however, that down the road "unbundling" may well be necessary to actually get adoption.

- Where it can reasonably be done, initiate action on parts of a program even before agreement is reached on the comprehensive whole. That offends the traditional comprehensive planner's way of doing things, but it gets things done, provides visibility and accomplishment for the effort, and gains early battlefield learning for the participants and their hired helpers.

F. Develop topical proposals.

F.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.

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 to proceed now, and 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, and 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 need to be part of the process.

F.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.

These are some hints about the process which the topical study groups might use.
• **Focus on agreement**: guide the discussion to refinement within areas of prior agreement, don’t dwell on areas of divergence.

• Group leaders should accept outcomes of the group process even if not agreeing with some parts of those outcomes unless, in their view, doing so violates some fundamental principle.

• In small groups, 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-rulled. Sometimes, however, formality “fits”, in which case use it.

• Where agreed process rules permit it, allow silent acceptance by some members of study groups to suffice, without pressing for voiced concurrence.

• Using a classic salesman’s approach, get people on a roll of saying “yes”. 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.

### G. 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 the Planner take the lead on this, either through oral presentation or, more commonly, through a written report.

### H. 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 result 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 which 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.

• If possible, structure the implementation sequence so that early consideration is given to proposals on which the process of
consideration will be instructive for other proposals; if debate on a specific area rezoning will reveal a lot about the local attitude towards housing policy, scheduling action on that proposal before that on more sweeping ones would be helpful to all involved.

- Again if possible, include in each set of proposed actions some which are low-risk items, very likely to achieve success, 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 (not the Planner).

I. 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 which 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 concurrences, 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.

J. 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 specific proposals to a consistent policy context: no “floating” proposals just because you like 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 which 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.

IV. PARTICIPATION

Maintaining an appropriate role for all parties impacted by the planning is central to Swamp Yankee success. That requires a process which is more than “open” to people who wish to take part, but rather requires one which is actively inquiring, reaching out to solicit views and involvement.

There are many principles and techniques for carrying out an inquiring process. Choices about how to proceed depend largely upon the motivation for participation, and to a lesser degree upon circumstances. Here we will assume the best of motivations, being a belief that participation is the best way of getting sound decisions, and is an essential element in a democratic soci-
ety. Incidental to that are other motivations, such as constituency-building, cost-effective information gathering, or satisfying political or legal mandates.

Surveys illustrate the relationship of motivations and technique. Surveys are a wonderful means of building community awareness of the planning effort, and of giving people a sense of (and reality of) participation, so can contribute more strongly to constituency-building than can workshops involving a recruited sampling from the community. However, if building participant understanding is an important motivation, workshops are a far better choice.

Organizations carrying out a planning effort have lots of reasons to be hesitant about participation, most commonly concerns that:

- this particular community has a long history of apathy: people won't participate, or if they do, it will be the same old voices;
- broad involvement will be expensive in calendar time, staff time, or funding for consultants;
- involvement will lead to divisiveness, rocking the technician's or town official's boat;
- participants can't possibly know enough to meaningfully participate;
- it is too early in the process for participation, since there isn't anything yet to involve the people around; or
- it is too late in the process for participation, since the key answers have already been determined.

A number of the most important means of addressing those concerns have been discussed earlier. Among them are these.

MAKING THE PROCESS ENGAGING

- Start participation early in the program. The key decisions commonly get made or made inevitable early in processes, and participants can sense when it is too late to be effective. Their contributions should start as soon as those of professionals or key officials.
- Provide for clear agreement in advance regarding how conclusions are to be drawn from the effort, and the standing which those conclusions will have in the steps which are to follow.
- Make the process as consequential for the participants as possible. Planning Board agreement to sponsor any zoning amendments which may be suggested through the process makes the process much more consequential than if all that is involved is another report.
- Assure creative, not just reactive, roles for participants. Listening to "key people" present their solutions and responding to them is very different from being charged with developing solutions yourselves.
- Make the process action-oriented. Planners used to love "Goals for Myville", now it is "Visioning Myville 2020", but getting something done about encroaching business or really committing funding for open space is much more engaging.
- The process should be fun. Making maps, diagrams, doing exercises, exchanging with others (especially in small non-threatening numbers), all can be engaging if well designed.
- "Brainstorming" is a wonderful mechanism for dialogue. Remember, in brainstorming criticism of the suggestions of others is strictly not allowed: all ideas are good ideas.
- Eat together. There is magic in sharing food and conversation.

MAKING A "CONVERGING" PROCESS

- Focus on agreement, not on resolving disagreement. Find where substantial concurrence exists or is easily achieved, and consolidate it. Where there is disagreement, simply agree on how to find agreement at some future time, and move on.
- Develop "short list" priorities by nominations of items to put on a blank sheet, not by deleting items from a list; in other words, find the positive, avoid anyone hav-
ing to be negative about someone else's idea.

- Look for how to break apparently interdependent choices into parts which in fact can be considered independently. Yes, that is the exact opposite of the "comprehensive planning paradigm" where everything depends upon everything so nothing can be decided until everything is decided. Focus 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.

- Each event should produce a physical product: a map, notes on a chart, or other group-produced artifact which can be carried forward to the next event.

- Try for consensus at every step. In this context, "consensus" on a given point may include some folks disagreeing, but being willing to stay quiet to allow progress. Let them to do that by not poll the group individually, or by voting things up or down.

- Voting is an efficient way of gaining a sense of priority among items on a list, once the list is established, so long as there has been adequate discussion for the items to be understood.

- 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 all interests are able to take place in all sessions, but 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) doesn't disenfranchise participants.

BUILDING PARTICIPANT UNDERSTANDING

- Arrange for sharing, not centralizing, information. In workshop settings, participants share among themselves what they know and feel, adding to the understanding they all have. In home surveys, those questioned share what they know with those doing the survey, but don't come out of that knowing any more than they did initially.

- 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 both by 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, and again require care about inadvertent (or designed) manipulation of participant perceptions.

- Be clear about the distinction between "choices" and "chances". What is happening to the community from outside of it, and all the uncertainties which it imposes, constitutes "chances". What the community should do, and the uncertainties about that, constitutes "choices". Participants can help with both, but can do so better where it is clear when they are forecasting outcomes and when they are choosing actions.

BUILDING PARTICIPANT 'PROPRIETORSHIP'

- Process facilitators must be willing and able to "lead from the side".

- Integration across separate events, developing conclusions, should take place with the participants, not back in the office out of their sight.

- Deciding about calendar, agenda, and procedures should be as participatory as the other parts of the effort: done with participants there, not later by a few.

- If at any point there is a map or text which the "key people" think isn't ready for the participants to see, for fear of being premature, there probably is something wrong with the process. We call it the 'secret map syndrome'. It is far better if what you see is what there is.
DEVELOPING SOUND OUTCOMES

- Design participation to reflect the full diversity of interests likely to be affected by the planning. That involves more than relying upon volunteers, it requires designed recruitment.

- Check to be sure that the participatory design doesn't systematically exclude anyone, and that it allows for corrections of any appearance of "stacking".

- Avoid asking participants to act beyond their area of understanding. Most are not technicians, but are really expert on living in that community. With effort, questions can be parsed into technically determinate components and value-laden ones: the latter always belong to the participants, and sometimes the former do, as well.

V. ECOLOGUE: ONE SPECIFIC TECHNIQUE

The following is a "cookbook" outline of how to carry out an "Ecologue" workshop process, one specific technique employing many of the principles discussed. 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 ideas of Ecologue can make an important contribution to Swamp Yankee Planning, as well as being applicable in other contexts.

The core of Ecologue is a set of workshops, with both small-group and all-together sessions, the small groups having been assembled on a shared-interests basis, such as where in the community they live, or their age-group (teen, elder, neither), or their economic interest (businessperson, property owner, developer). The work begins with as little topical predefinition 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, whether position on 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. Outcomes will depend crucially upon how those groups are structured, raising 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, as outlined below, giving participants as much opportunity as possible to shape the process.

1.1. Make initial design of the set of groups.

Groups are to be convened reflecting all of the important interest cleavages in the community. That is very different from the more common structuring of groups around topics: a housing group, a traffic group, and a schools group, for example. 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.

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.

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 groups could not be pro-
vided 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 land owners, 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 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.

The Planner should always rely upon the judgment of members of the local lead agency to make the decisions about how to structure the set of groups, though he should provide advice about how to do it. 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 are to be individually recruited, rather than relying on volunteers. To accomplish that, "conveners" are typically used, that is, persons selected by the lead agency, who agree to assemble and 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 provided by people from "away", or it will fail.

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 as 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 are persons with known strong positions on the issues in order that groups not be seen as predisposed 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 Planner and the lead agency. At that meeting, they will go through a rapid simulation of the process the groups are going to go through. 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
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 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: they'll be heard from in any event.

Again, 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. People need to understand that they really have all the competence which 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: 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 series 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:

- 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, but 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 child care or travel, usually not. But if the extra maps and the markers are free to be taken, say so.

• This may be a good point for briefing on background information which it is important that all participants know. 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 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 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 try 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].

2.4 Make group presentations.

Following those workshops, have all the groups meet together to display their maps, browse among those of other groups, and present their initial ideas, joined by any “outside” groups which have gone through a similar brainstorming effort. 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.

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
invent reformulations of 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, giving that task to a second person will help lighten the manager's load, and also provide a second set of insights to come into play through creative recording.

VI. HELPFUL REFERENCES

The following bibliography is a work in progress, heavily reliant on that in the National Trust's Saving Place.

BASIC BOOKS

The following four books all are in print, and would be worthwhile investments for any community with serious interest in Swamp Yankee planning. Those marked with *** are available through the American Planning Association Planners Bookstore, 1313 E. 60th St., Chicago, IL 60637. Sources for all others are annotated.


SMALL TOWN PLANNING COOK-BOOKS

Each of these propose an approach to small town planning, with interestingly little overlap with each other or with this material.


Cole, Barbara A. and Philip B. Hersh, High Stakes Decision-Making: Understanding the Choices Your Community Can Make, (1993), and Managing Change: Coping with the uncertainties of unpredictable growth, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Denver, 1993. High Stakes covers how communities can decide about huge choices such as allowing gambling, using techniques much like those of this manual. Managing Change walks through management techniques, especially impact prediction, following such choices.


Duany, Andres and Elizabeth Plater-Zywicki, Towns and Town-Making Principles, Pizzoi Inter-


Hester, Randolph T., Jr., *Community Design Primer*, Ridge Times Press, Mendocino, CA, 1992. Exercises not only for communities to go through but also for designers to go through for self-assessment.


**GENERAL MATERIALS**

These materials are also of interest, but are either less readily available or of narrower use than the above citations.


Craighead, Paula M., *The Hidden Design in Land Use Ordinances*, University of Southern Maine Swamp Yankee Planning


Herr, Philip B., *Massachusetts Place*, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Boston, 1992. Parallel 100 question diagnostics were written (same author) for New York and the other five New England states.


Klein, William R. et al, "Visions of Things to


McGregor, Gregor L, Esq., Guide to Environmental Law, McGregor, Shea & Doliner, P.C., 18 Tremont St., Boston, MA 02108. A rich guide to sources of authority and their application, especially at the Federal level.


Mackin, Ann and Alex Krieger, A Design Primer for Cities and Towns, Massachusetts Council on Arts and Humanities, Boston, 1989. More city than rural, but nicely done.


National Trust for Historic Preservation, Information: from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, various issues, especially #19 "Rural Conservation", 1984.


Swamp Yankee Planning
The Sacred Structure in Small Towns:

A Return to Manteo, North Carolina

by Randolph T. Hester Jr.

When bridge building opened access to North Carolina’s Outer Banks in the 1950s, the new highways to the beaches passed the island town of Manteo by. For the next 30 years, the beaches thrived as summer playgrounds for the metropolitan mid-Atlantic: Manteo plummeted from the region’s primary trade center to a near ghost town. With unemployment and tax rates among the state’s highest, Manteo typified communities classed as depressed, high risk and desperate. The contrast with the “go-go” economy of nearby beach towns provided Manteo with a certain poetry, but little else.

During 1980 and 1981, I developed a plan with the townspeople that we hoped would bring Manteo new economic purpose and prosperity, yet not sacrifice traditional lifestyles and valued landscapes. Today, most of our plan has been implemented. Grassroots community development has revived Manteo’s once-decayed village charm. The town is home to a new state historical park and a reconstructed ship reminiscent of the vessel that carried Sir Walter Raleigh’s lost colonists on their ill-fated journey here 400 years ago. Local artisans built the ship at a new boat building center on the waterfront, and the center continues to build wooden vessels and hold classes where traditional shipwright techniques are taught. Enough tourism has been attracted to restore failing indigenous industries. Unemployment has been cut.

In some ways, Manteo’s recovery is familiar. A small dying town takes an economic U-turn by capitalizing on its smallness, intimacy, natural beauty, village character and rural past. Panacea for poverty! Unfortunately, for many communities, this turnaround spells the demise of community traditions, destruction of valued places and their replacement by a phony folk culture.

Recognizing the pitfalls associated with inviting new development, Manteo took unusual steps to avoid both a tourist takeover and a junk culture. As the town’s community designer, I helped residents identify and preserve their valued lifestyles and landscapes. Once identified, important social patterns and places, which locals called the Sacred Structure, inspired our plan for community revitalization.

Uncovering Valued Places

Manteo originally hired me to redesign the village waterfront, but it took only a few days to realize that a waterfront park would be a cosmetic cover-up. With over 20 percent seasonal unemployment and declining tax base, Manteo needed a new economy. On the day I discussed this with Mayor John Wilson, the downtown hardware store closed and moved to a nearby resort. Wilson, a young architect and also a native, saw the town through the eyes of both a professional designer and a local insider. He loved the place. He wanted the town to recapture the spirit he experienced as a child playing on its bustling docks.

However, not even nostalgic boyhood memories could deny the hardware store’s message. We agreed that day to expand our contract. I outlined a holistic community development process, no mere pretty park. The town board approved the idea and I moved my office to Manteo. We began immediately a community-wide discussion to design a strategy to overcome Manteo’s problems.

As I talked to more community leaders, I realized that everyone shared the mayor’s passion for the place. I was struck not only by the emotion with which the people talked about how special Manteo was but also by how clearly they articulated the subtle qualities of the place.

This was a happy coincidence. In my community design work I search for social nuances to inspire form. I had just finished designing a day care center where I used hypnosis to help the staff discover the spatial qualities they wanted in the...

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The city of Manteo originally hired the author just to redesign its waterfront and encourage a revitalization of the stagnant economy. But, soon after arriving, he realized that the town’s situation demanded a far more comprehensive solution. Manteo residents needed to guide possibly massive recreation and resort development while still maintaining their unique sense of community. Finding appropriate solutions demanded a thorough analysis of the elements that made the town special and also made the town work in order to guide the new development. Ideally, local people would gain new jobs while still remaining comfortable with the town. To accomplish this, planners needed to define the landscape and land use elements that residents wanted to keep unchanged.
The Sacred Structure is often composed of seemingly mundane elements—but they are vital to community life. Top: local people talk about one of their boats. Many elements crucial to maintaining residents' strong relationship with the waterfront and the sea have been identified as crucial parts of Manteo's Sacred Structure. Left: This cross was salvaged from the ruins of the old high school. Any attempt to remove it from Jule's Park would have a profound effect on the community's shared values. Below: Manteo residents identified the righthand portion of this building as part of the town's Sacred Structure. When the owners decided to remodel, they decided to build a compatible addition that preserved and enhanced the original elements.
In order to fully realize Manteo's redevelopment, local people needed to visualize what would actually happen to their valued sacred places as development proceeded. The landscape architect needed to legitimize activities found at the sacred places and let residents know that development would conserve the places and activities they held dear. "Hanging out at the docks" is a good example of this process since it consisted of a large number of small scale social interactions including adults watching people fish and crab, girl and boy watching, swimming and teens viewing all of the other activities from their cars. Once Manteo's residents received reassurances that these activities were an important part of community life, they could devise ways to incorporate the sites into the Sacred Structure and steer development so that it would upgrade the waterfront area and still respect the community's rituals.
showed the Sacred Structure survey results that said 65 percent of the town people preferred improved boat ramps and docks for locals over more docks for tourists. The private marina was delayed.

Throughout the planning process the Sacred Structure played a critical role. Because these sacred places embodied the existing social life, habits, rituals and institutions as well as the collective memory of life there, they were singularly useful in describing the essence of life in Manteo in ways applicable to decision making.

How the Sacred Structure would fare over time, however, remained a serious question. Was the notion of sacred places so transcendent that the idea would soon be forgotten and be overtaken by economic considerations? I have repeatedly asked myself that since I left Manteo and it was on my mind recently as I returned there to evaluate my work.

The Town Today: The Processional Entry

Getting to Manteo always revealed the town's essence. In 1584 it required a several month long sea voyage. Even today with freeways and bridges, the final 30 miles emphasizes the isolation and enhances the mystique and romance of the place. The landscape elements are so bold and simple that they establish a pilgrimage processional, a ritualistic rhythm. Open fields extending to the horizon alternate with enclosed, even-age pine forests until both give way to the totally exposed expanse of the Alligator River.

Once over the river the landscape is again enclosed by pine forests with a drainage canal of black water paralleling the road. After two left turns, more open water exposes Roanoke Island in the distance. On the island the pine forest once more totally encloses with womblike clarity and primeval forest fear. In accordance with our plan, the state legislature has designated this an historic corridor. Newly planted but sizable live oaks form a five mile long allée. No development, not even a modest billboard, can be seen from the road. Near the town limits the allée changes from grand and wild live oaks to more domesticated crape myrtle. This whole extraordinary experience is owed to Jim Greenhill and Phil Hinton (a landscape architect for the North Carolina Department of Transportation), both of whom understood our overall intent and labored to effect that part of it.

The entry processional and the juxtaposition of unconquered wilderness with the town's built environment, so important to the town's identity, are more dramatic than when I last visited, thanks to the sensitive implementation of the historic corridor legislation. This guarantees preservation of important parts of the Sacred Structure and that the town will maintain a clear edge between the built and natural environments. It prevents sprawl and encourages the infill which is apparent everywhere. As I drive along the main highway through Manteo, I estimate that a quarter of the entire development is new infill giving strip development a continuous, near urban, quality.

The Town Today: It's Health

Manteo looks healthier than at any time since I have known it. Once empty stores are bustling. I can't find any vacancies downtown (25 percent of the properties were empty eight years ago).

There is a lot of life on the streets. People are out walking, shopping. An older couple passes on their daily exercise walk. I remember their pattern from before, but can't recall their names. There are people who appear to be locals and tourists, from lower to middle income levels. There are Blacks as well as whites, plus teenagers on bikes. And this is a bitter cold winter day. Merchants, even ones who opposed the plan initially, consistently told me they had excellent business now.

The city clerk informed me that the tax rate has remained basically unchanged since our plan was conceived. Its implementation has stimulated enough successful development that the rate, once among the state's highest, is now appropriately average.

Many more people are working. The former 20 percent unemployment rate has been halved countywide. Jobs come from the boat building industry, tourism and other new businesses, the state park and county government. Locals have also gained employment from the plan's implementation (except for several large projects that needed to use outside construction firms).

The poorer and Black neighborhoods have received public investments but are luckily not being gentrified. Streets have been paved and people have fixed up quite a few houses. A new park provides both recreation and a commemoration of important Black history on Roanoke Island. The community just finished about 100 units of subsidized housing to provide for elderly and moderate income people who would otherwise be squeezed out as the town prospers. As a bonus, the new subsidized homes fit well into their neighborhood context—small yards, porches and a pine forest backdrop like most of Manteo's other homes. One local official, however, tells me that rising housing costs is the town's biggest problem.

There is everywhere a pride in Manteo. It shows in dozens of small improvements in businesses and homes. One person told me "there is a pride in being part of a great vision that makes everyone from doctors to garbage collectors want to do their job well."

The Town Today: The Sacred Structure

Much change has occurred in Manteo, but as I looked around I noticed that the sacred places are unscathed. I counted them off. They are all there largely unchanged. The Spartina marsh remains untouched, reminding me how critical the water's edge is in defining the town's northern limit. The town launch has been rebuilt with a new concrete launching pad. Across the street the post office has its familiar congestion because people still lingered to meet friends and
Manteo's new boardwalk has reconnected the town to its waterfront. Formerly, marginally economic warehouse buildings stood between the downtown and the bay, but now waterfront and downtown activities are fully integrated. The photographs to the immediate left are both taken from the same spot. The top photo looks towards the docks and the bottom one towards the busy downtown. The photograph at the far left shows how the boardwalk serves as a fine, mellow place to hang out. After looking in numerous catalogues for appropriate street furniture, the designer decided to give a local furniture builder, Roger Meekens, the contract for the portable chairs. The contract was Meekens' biggest ever and kept local dollars circulating in the local economy. People love his comfortable and homey design.

exchange news. Old men were checking out the water from the gravel parking lot. Local festivals are still held there. Teens hung out at the docks as always. Judging by these places it appears that life has not changed at all.

Jule's Park, the homemade labor of love smack in the middle of all the new development, houses a new playground and the recycled brick rubble edges have been cemented into place. But the concrete cross that Jule Burns found in the old high school's ruins remains the waterfront's focal point. And, the overall quality of this homemade park establishes the design style for the entire waterfront, as any new development must pay respect in its design form to Jule's Park. This has prevented new projects from being too pretentious or up-scale and probably explains why local people feel comfortable in and patronize the stores in the recent commercial developments.

Other local actions reveal the Sacred Structure's importance. Fearings Soda Shop, identified as a sacred place, burned beyond repair in 1981. Defying economic projections, the owners rebuilt it because they said it provided a daily gathering spot essential to the town's life.

When the owners renovated another sacred place, the Duchess Restaurant, they considered removing a counter and circular table where locals gathered every morning for coffee and political discussions. The local architect and interior designer—well aware of the Sacred Structure's importance—suggested an alternative that saved them both.

Community members have consistently taken similar actions to save and enhance what they now call the sacred spots. When consultants recently proposed an expansion of the county facilities that would have altered three sacred places, local people immediately responded with incredulous head shaking. One resident remarked "those out-of-town consultants just never heard of our sacred spots." The plan was quickly scrapped.
Part of Manteo's economic development strategy was to encourage local people to engage in their traditional crafts. Top: For centuries Manteo residents had built fine wooden boats, now they build them again as tourists watch. But, most importantly, their boats are in great demand. Bottom: A leather worker shows a child some of the techniques of his trade during a recent living history show in Manteo. The redevelopment has enabled the man to continue to engage in his craft in his hometown and realize a good profit from his work.
of financing, material and service supply and jobs.

The success, however, is subtle in Manteo. For example, at a recent tourist event attracting nearly 10,000 visitors, local people still could walk to the post office, crab and swim at the waterfront and have a leisurely breakfast at the Duchess in the section reserved for locals. Such nuances are likely to be lost on the six o'clock news.

The Sacred Structure also allows the community to maintain its identity as it changes: to look like itself. One striking thing about Manteo is that it is not as unified visually as most towns that cater to tourism. The healthy tension between the aesthetics of Jule's Park and that of the new development must signify to locals that this is still their town. To the extent that the design of the built environment concretizes values, the emerging community of Manteo looks unusually like what its residents wanted, thanks in large measure, I believe, to using the Sacred Structure as both a preservation device and as an inspirational design precedent for new buildings and landscapes.

Observation Two: The Need for Legislation to Protect Sacred Places

Clearly, communities need new legal mechanisms to help preserve their social structures in the face of rapid tourist development. Zoning, appearance, historic district and Coastal Management mechanisms do not preserve the "place" essence of the social and cultural life of small towns. By providing land use separation, zoning protects Manteo's sacred places from the grossest incompatibilities, but little else. People like former Mayor Wilson and planning commissioner Suzanne Scott continue to advocate the sacred places in land use and design debates, but without people like them, the sacred spots would inevitably be lost.

Local governments desperately need state legislation that will facilitate preserving valued landscapes and lifestyles that represents not just their sense of place but also significantly supports the community's social life. Sometimes existing mechanisms actually work against protection for the locally valued landscapes, as in Manteo, where the Lynch-based image-of-the-city mapping (frequently used as the basis of appearance legislation) identified landmarks that lacked significant meanings to locals. In the same way, many suburban standards, unwittingly adopted into small town or city ordinances, likewise undermine sacred places. Similarly, historic preservation legislation protected only 10 percent of Manteo's sacred places. And, although North Carolina Coastal Zone Management laws mandate identification of sites of local cultural importance, the laws only protect historic and ecologically fragile sites.

The conditional use system has worked well in Manteo for five years, with all new development conforming to the guidelines, but problems remain. The planning board relied on a professional planner for the first few years in order to administer the process—an expense unaffordable in most small towns. Furthermore, the Sacred Structure protects only place-specific social institutions; it neglects many vital social traditions and ownership patterns.

Observation Three: Questions About Equity

One troublesome question arises from this type of social preservation: can the preservation of valued places reinforce undemocratic social patterns such as economic or social segregation? In some cases this is likely, in the same ways that towns use zoning and historic preservation to exclude "undesirables" directly or psychologically. Topophilia might provide a polite and updated justification for racial segregation. Even in Manteo, the new highway strip development is more racially and economically integrated than the village, where most of the Sacred Structure is located.

A post-occupancy evaluation of town use suggests that the plan has had a positive influence on accessibility, particularly for teenagers, Blacks and poorer citizens. However, this is likely due to factors other than the Sacred Structure. We made a special effort to involve these groups in the planning process, and addressing environmental injustices was a major force of the overall community development plan.

In communities with widespread injustices, the preservation of sacred places would likely prolong them. And in communities trying to overcome an unhealthy past, or in suburban communities suffering from environmental anomic, Sacred Structure identification might be a painful and divisive effort. But for many small towns in transition, the identification and preservation of sacred places can be a key to a successful metamorphosis that builds on rather than destroys the existing sense of community.

5 From a telephone conversation with Mayor John Wilson, August 1984.
6 Marcia McNally, Guide for Development (University of California, Berkeley, 1983).
8 From personal conversations with residents July 15, 1984, I learned that in July 1984, the town board terminated the planning position to lower the operating budget. They since reinstated it.