Teaching Aid with Scenarios

for

*Ethical Dilemmas in Planning*

Video

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INTRODUCTION

This "Teaching Aid" contains the texts of the scenarios presented and discussed in the video. The video has four scenarios.

If you are using the video for instructional purposes, you can use the video in the following way. Make copies of the scenarios in this "Teaching Aid" and distribute to the class. Start the video and listen to the introduction and description of the first scenario. Before the panel begins to discuss the scenario, turn off the video and ask the class to discuss the scenario. At the completion of the discussion, turn the video back on and follow the panel discussion. Follow the same procedure for the next three scenarios. You may wish to extend the analysis by having the students respond to the panelists' comments as well.
SCENARIO ONE

Issues: Deception vs. honesty; honesty vs. the public interest

The Situation: Ollie Olmstead works for the Shady Valley Regional Council of Governments. He is working on a regional fair share housing plan. Martin Moses, an experienced and savvy planner who has worked for the regional planning agency for ten years, is the head of the agency's comprehensive planning division and Ollie's supervisor. He tells Ollie Olmstead that he just met with the agency director, Gus Van Nest Black, who wants the staff to put a couple of "expendables" into the draft of the fair share housing plan. These expendables (throwaways) should be recommendations that although plausible and that we could live with, if adopted, would be the kind that would likely be opposed strongly by some opponents of the plan.

"Gus Van Nest Black and I," Marty tells Ollie, "know that it will be very difficult to get the Shady Valley COG Board, which represents all the counties, cities, villages, and towns in the region, to adopt such a controversial fair share housing plan. By putting these controversial recommendations into the draft plan report, these expendables might be able to be traded off later on, when it comes time for the COG board to vote on the plan, so we can get the support of some of the COG commissioners who now oppose the plan for the underlying principle of the plan that every community accept its fair share of the regionally determined need for the affordable housing."

"Ollie," Martin Moses says, "I want you to draft a couple of expendables for the plan."

The Dilemma: I'm Ollie Olmstead and I say to Martin Moses, my supervisor: I won't do that. Putting "expendables" into the plan so they can be traded off later on for support for the fair share plan is a form of deception. It's unethical.

What do you think?
SCENARIO TWO

**Issues:** Honesty vs. loyalty to agency; professional integrity vs. loyalty to duly appointed policy board; the public's right to know vs. loyalty to agency and board

**The Situation:** Mary Mumford, granddaughter of the legendary Lewis Mumford, recently was hired as a principal planner for the Muddy Waters Council of Governments. Right before she was hired, the Muddy Waters COG board voted to approve a 3 million dollar light rail transit plan for the regional. There was strong support but also some opposition to the proposed rail system plan in the region.

Mary, who had a solid reputation as a transportation planning analyst in her previous jobs and also was philosophically inclined towards more mass transit to deal with regional transportation problems, read carefully the technical report done by the planning firm of Smart and Smart, which justified the need for the rail transit system, soon after she joined the staff. She came to the conclusion that there was something really fishy about the projections used by Smart and Smart in estimating the number of passengers who would use the rail transit system and the costs to build and maintain the system.

On the one hand, she was convinced that the planning firm’s estimates of the number of passengers who would use light rail were way to high, and on the other hand, their estimate of costs for the system were much too low. She felt both estimates were based on faulty assumptions. Since a lot of the powers-that-be wanted a light rail system given the federal dollars that were there for the taking, she reasoned that the Smart and Smart firm probably came up with these forecasts to make the proposed rail transit scheme look more attractive so that it would get more support.

Mary Mumford thought long and hard about what to do: should she keep quiet about her findings or should she do something? She decided to speak to her boss, Ben Bettman, the Muddy Waters COG Director, telling him that the proposed rail transit system was a poor public investment. She cited data to show that inappropriate methods and assumptions were used by the planning consulting firm to derive the high passenger demand and low system cost estimates. Then Mary said to Ben Bettman that he should tell the COG policy board the truth about the plan, that a mistake was made because their decision on the light rail transit plan was based on faulty technical work. She went on to say that that’s "the ethical thing to do."

**The Dilemma:** I’m Ben Bettman, the COG Planning Director, here’s what I’d say to Mary Mumford, granddaughter of the legendary Lewis Mumford. "Mary, I understand what you’re saying, but sometimes planners must support proposals,
even if they have questionable technical merit, because the proposals have been approved by the politically appointed policy board of the organization that the planners are responsible to, and in this case that happened."

If you were Mary Mumford, what would you say to Ben Bettman, your boss?
SCENARIO THREE

Issues: Protecting those who have the least resources vs. loyalty to agency; protecting those who have the least resources vs. deception and leaking an unauthorized report; loyalty vs. deception

The Situation: Roland Rouse, who is African-American, got a job soon after graduating with a masters degree in planning, in the comprehensive planning division of the planning agency of Oldport, the city where Roland grew up. Roland lived all his life before going to college in the Lowside neighborhood of this city. His parents, who still live in Lowside, were poor and so were most of the folk who lived in Lowside when he was growing up.

Recently, Roland found out that the city's neighborhood planning division was preparing a plan for the Lowside neighborhood. He got a copy of the first draft of the neighborhood plan and read it. He was very upset because there was a proposal in it for Exemplar College, which sits on the western edge of the Lowside neighborhood, to expand onto two blocks of the neighborhood. This would mean clearing about 50 units of low cost housing inhabited by poorer, working class African-Americans. In checking around, he learns that the college needs more land for its growing engineering campus and that the only direction it can expand is into the Lowside neighborhood. In the past 5 years, Exemplar College purchased most of the land and property on these two blocks abutting the campus area. The college also has an option on about 400 acres of land in the nearby suburb of Toptown to build a new campus. It made it known to Oldport city officials that it would build on this land in the suburb if it didn't get the land it needed to expand its engineering campus in the Lowside neighborhood. The city obviously wants to keep the college from moving to the suburb of Toptown.

Roland knows that housing at affordable prices is scarce in his old neighborhood. He does not want to see these units torn down. After thinking a lot about this issue, he decides to show a copy of the draft plan to the president of the Lowside neighborhood organization, who is an old friend of his family's from long ago.

The word gets out that the draft plan has been seen by members of the neighborhood organization and that they are pretty upset. Beatrice Burnham, the planning director, suspects that Roland Rouse gave the plan to the neighborhood organization president.

The Dilemma: You are Beatrice Burnham, the planning director. You call Roland into your office and you say to him...?
SCENARIO FOUR

Issues: Obligation of the locality to its neighbors in the region vs. obligation of the locality to its own citizens to keep costs down. Is regional responsibility an ethical obligation of planning?

The Situation: Nora Nolan is involved in the technical assistance program of the same Shady Valley COG that Ollie Olmstead works for. One of her jobs is to assist one of the growing suburbs in the region, Bedrock, prepare a land use and growth management plan. Bedrock must decide along which of two alternative corridors it should invest its limited funds for capital improvements.

Nora Nolan does an evaluation of these alternative growth patterns and concludes that if Bedrock permits and encourages growth along the "east" corridor, it will encourage spillover growth in the adjacent community of Pleasant View. This spillover zone is an area of prime farmland which Pleasant View wants to protect from urban encroachment. While only non-intensive uses are now permitted by adjoining localities like Pleasant View, once Bedrock growth creeps in this direction it will surely create pressures to modify or circumvent these restrictions, and to permit higher density uses. In addition to the prime agricultural land that is threatened, this underdeveloped area in Pleasant View also serves as a protective buffer for its source of water--a large lake. If development moves towards this area, Pleasant View's water supply would also be in jeopardy.

Nora Nolan recommends that Bedrock encourage development in the west corridor, where the land is more difficult to build on, thus major public improvement costs will be greater for Bedrock, but no harm will come to the adjoining communities on the west. She goes before the Bedrock city council, chaired by Mayor Sand Stone, and says that Bedrock has an obligation to minimize harm toward its neighbors in making its own growth management policy. But the Bedrock city council decided for cost reasons to designate the east corridor, where Pleasant Valley is located, for its future growth zone.

The Dilemma: Is Nora right in saying that a city like Bedrock has an "obligation" to minimize the harm to its neighbor when it makes a planning decision?

Was the Bedrock city council wrong in the decision it made?