



A technique for the integration of citizen participation into the planning process.

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This outline is designed to convey my understanding of public participation as a constructive component in the total planning process. The approach has developed out of a background of community development, engineering, sociology and adult education.

#### What – the nature of public participation

For me, the public always participates in major decisions which people feel are important to them — but too often this participation is too little, too late and too negative to be constructive. Planners can therefore hardly choose whether or not to have public participation, but they can influence it to take a positive character.

For us, public participation in planning a project is a systematic process which provides an opportunity for citizens, planners, elected representatives and members of relevant area agencies to share their experience, knowledge and goals, and to combine their energy to create a plan. This plan can then reflect their knowledge and best judgment at the time and will be understood and actively supported by most of those affected by it.

#### Public participation is happening when :

- \* planners listen to residents concerning their attitudes, goals, fears and factual suggestions;
- \* citizens find early and convenient opportunities to make positive contributions. ("Citizens" may include visitors as well as residents.)
- \* citizens learn from planners and others a broader and deeper knowledge and understanding of their environment, its potential and its fragility;
- \* individuals, interest groups and agencies are identifying their own positions, recognizing those of others and working towards a win-win solution co-operatively rather than becoming locked into a destructive win-lose or lose-lose syndrome;
- \* relationships between planners, politicians and other people are strengthened so that communication barriers are breached, and mutual trust increases as a foundation for communities to function more effectively in every way.

#### Public participation is NOT:

- \* selling a pre-determined solution by public relations techniques;
- \* planning behind closed doors when information can be shared;
- \* one-way communication, e.g. planners telling people what is best for them;

- \* public confrontations between "people power" versus the bureaucracy;
- \* bypassing elected representatives or impairing their freedom to exercise their decision-making responsibilities.

#### Why – rationale for public participation

There are a number of reasons for engaging in public participation, ranging from technical considerations to political factors.

- 1 *Additional data*, important to planners, can be provided by persons who often have decades of year-round experience of the environment. When official records are often recent and the project does not permit a full year of original data collection, the systematic recruitment of local observations can supplement other data sources.
- 2 *Technical expertise* in the key subjects of the project is often possessed by residents of the area. They can contribute this valuable resource in support of the project or if alienated, can conspire powerfully against it. Constructively involving these people is a survival skill essential for project success!
- 3 *Creative capacity* for perceiving solutions to problems is not a prerogative of technical experts. Indeed, their training often equips them with as many blinkers as insights. Concerned laymen can often see sound alternatives which experts do not. e.g. a technically sound alternative route for No 417 in Ottawa was identified by a Citizens' Group; many teams of specialists had considered the problem for years without noticing this technically sound and widely acceptable solution.
- 4 *Data on goals*, attitudes, values preferences and priorities are a crucial input to the planning process. Their only valid sources are the citizens affected. Attempts to give people what planners think is best for them, or what planners think they want, have led to one debacle after another. Such disasters leave behind the original problem, a heavy financial expenditure with little to show for it and a corrosive residue of ill-will.
- 5 *Involvement* in planning is demanded by increasing numbers of citizens who want to experience the process of creation as well as its product. Often they have a substantial sense of ownership in their part of the environment — to ignore this is dangerous.
- 6 *Managerial* solutions for environmental problems (as opposed to purely structural solutions),

require changes in people's behaviour. The likelihood and ease of changing behaviour is greatly increased if people systematically become aware, interested, informed and thus convinced that new behaviour is needed. Placing new recommendations into traditional mentalities maximizes the need for regulatory legislation, enforcement procedures and a needless proliferation of a law and order society.

#### How – core elements of the program

The program must be based upon knowledge of the area, its people and its institutions and, as in any responsive program, is subject to revision as new information is obtained and new developments occur, especially in the technical side of the planning process (see chart). A typical 12 month's program is as follows :

- 1 *Introduction and start-up phase* (1 month)  
Recruit, select and orient fieldstaff.  
Prepare introductory brochure for mailing and use with initial contacts.
- 2 *Initial data collection* (3 months)  
Fieldstaff contact key people and organizations to discover the character of the communities, citizens' goals and their implications for the project, local issues, and knowledge of study Subjects important to later decisions. (*Note* — where possible, meetings needed would be called under the sponsorship of an appropriate local organization. Committee members would be informed of these meetings and, with the concurrence of the sponsoring organization, would be able to attend as resource persons or observers.)
- 3 *Mutual education* (6 months)  
Following a preview by the Committee and a briefing for elected representatives and their guests, this phase would commence.  
Background data on study subjects assembled by the research team, together with several known alternatives, would be summarized in a 4-8 page tabloid newspaper supplement distributed through the local press. Assistance would be given to radio and television stations to foster complete coverage including some preliminary advertising to alert citizens to the forthcoming publication.  
  
Contents would include the purpose of the study, background data on core subjects e.g. population, land use, etc. On the final page, readers would be invited to :