G3810

# Comprehensive Planning and Citizen Participation

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*Cover photo: Courthouse dome, Darlington, Wisconsin*

# contents

Section 1

# Introduction to comprehensive planning and citizen participation

Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning and Smart Growth Law of 1999 requires all communities in the state to develop a comprehensive plan by January 1, 2010 if they intend to make any decisions affecting land use within their jurisdictions. The law also mandates that all local regulations and ordinances affecting land use be consistent with the comprehensive plan. Finally, the law calls for the development of written public participation procedures to foster citizen involvement at every stage of the plan preparation process.

Passage of the Comprehensive Planning and Smart Growth Law has created statewide interest in the development of appropriate local responses to the law—chiefly in regard to approaches to comprehensive planning and citizen participation.

A comprehensive plan is the adopted official statement of a legislative body of a local government that sets forth (in words, maps, illustrations, and/or tables) goals, policies, and guidelines intended to direct the present and future physical, social and economic development that occurs within its planning jurisdiction. It includes a unified physical design for the public and private development of land and water (American Planning Association, 1998). A citizen participation plan defines how the public will be engaged in every step or stage of the comprehensive planning effort.

## Purposes of this publication

This publication has three primary purposes:

1. To help local elected officials better understand comprehensive planning.
2. To help local elected officials ensure purposeful citizen participation throughout the comprehensive planning process.
3. To provide a detailed guide for how to get started with comprehensive planning.

To that end, this publication lays out specific responses to the requirements of the Comprehensive Planning and Smart Growth Law, and provides a framework for local elected officials to help guide their communities through a comprehensive planning process.

## Intended audiences

Primary audiences for this publication are:

- Local elected officials and municipal staff members
- University of Wisconsin-Extension community-based faculty and staff

Secondary audiences for this publication are:

- Planning practitioners
- Educators and scholars across the United States and beyond

## Where this publication will be relevant

This publication is intended to help community leaders across the State of Wisconsin address the requirements of Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning and Smart Growth Law. It is intended to provide a basic understanding of the components of a comprehensive plan and the basic underpinnings of an effective citizen participation plan. In both cases, our methodologies are crafted in direct response to the Wisconsin law. While application of these methodologies outside of Wisconsin is clearly possible, take care to adapt them to fit local circumstances.

**Passage of the Comprehensive Planning and Smart Growth Law has created statewide interest in the development of appropriate local responses to the new law.**

**Ideas generated by citizens can shape the planning process.**

## How this publication prepares readers to facilitate citizen participation

This publication is designed to provide an understanding of the comprehensive planning process and the complementary role that citizen participation plays throughout the entire effort. You will be presented with content-based information related to comprehensive planning and citizen participation, examples of its application in real communities across the state, and resources that will help you work your way through the development of a citizen participation plan for your community—a plan that walks in lock-step with your comprehensive planning approach.

## Overview of the publication

To help understand comprehensive planning, Section 2 describes a nine-step comprehensive planning approach. In addition, this section illustrates a number of other processes that take place parallel with comprehensive plan development; namely, citizen participation, education and learning, and evaluation. This section also introduces links between steps or stages within the comprehensive planning approach and typical citizen participation methods.

Section 3 looks at the rationale for and benefits of involving citizens in comprehensive planning. The official requirements of the Comprehensive Planning Law, which mandate citizen participation at every step of the plan preparation process, are detailed.

Section 4 examines 14 commonly used methods and techniques for involving citizens in comprehensive planning, and provides a worksheet template that is useful in designing the citizen participation component of a comprehensive planning process.

In Section 5 of this publication, resources that help communities to get started in developing a comprehensive plan are presented. Two critical first steps are highlighted: 1) preliminary education and diagnosis; and 2) the plan for planning. Together, these two components provide the foundation for local comprehensive planning efforts. Worksheet resources are included in this section that will help facilitate discussion within the community related to the development of appropriate local approaches to comprehensive planning and citizen participation. In addition, examples are included to illustrate how these steps have been applied in communities across Wisconsin.

Meeting the requirements of Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning and Smart Growth Law will be a challenge for communities across the state. However, we hope that this publication will serve as a tool that helps you make good local decisions regarding comprehensive planning and citizen participation.

The University of Wisconsin-Extension has committed itself to providing educational programs, materials, outreach, and group process support to local officials who would like to increase the likelihood of success with comprehensive planning efforts in their jurisdictions. While University of Wisconsin-Extension educators **do not** write comprehensive plans or citizen participation plans, they may be able to help facilitate local citizen participation plan development and educational efforts. Comprehensive plan development is best handled by public planning officials and private planning consultants.

Feel free to share this publication with others in your community. If you have questions, don't hesitate to contact us.


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Section 2

# Context of comprehensive planning: Gaining an understanding of comprehensive planning

In this section, the required elements of Wisconsin's Smart Growth Law are organized and described in relation to a nine-step planning process and examples of the types of "output" that could be expected at each step. This can help determine when and how citizen involvement fits into the overall comprehensive planning approach.

Relevant historical context, definitions and examples of various other approaches will be illustrated.

This section also provides an overview and detailed description of a nine-step comprehensive planning approach, along with the justification for choosing it.

Another purpose of this section is to describe other concurrent processes that take place during development of the comprehensive plan. The parallel processes include citizen involvement, learning systems and evaluation mechanisms. This section also provides examples of how the required content elements in Wisconsin's Smart Growth Law can be integrated into the overall planning effort.

## Historical context of comprehensive planning: the early days

The roots of comprehensive planning in the United States are traced to the "City Beautiful" movement of the late 1890s. This movement is epitomized by the plans developed in Chicago for the Columbian Exposition and World's Fair of 1893, as well as the 1909 Plan for Chicago (Hollander, Pollock, Reckinger and Beal, 1988, and Kelly and Becker, 2000). The "general development plan" has been the cornerstone of American planning theory and practice ever since, and many different names have been used to describe this type of planning, including comprehensive plan, development plan, city plan, master plan and growth management plan (Hollander, et al., *ibid*., 1988).

Common characteristics of the traditional general plan or comprehensive plan are:

- It is a physical plan, with a reflection on social and economic values.
- It is a long-range plan, usually five years or more.
- It is comprehensive, encompassing all the functions that make up a community.
- It is a statement of policy, covering community character, geographic considerations and change features (Hollander, et. al, *ibid*., 1988).

Local development planning grew rapidly in the 1950s. Planning concepts were shaped by two planning educators, T. J. Kent, Jr. and F. Stuart Chapin, Jr. (Kaiser and Godschalk, 1995). Chapin focused on methodology and conceived of the land use plan as the foundation for the preparation of a general or comprehensive plan (Kaiser and Godschalk, 1995).

**"Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing…"**

*—Daniel Burnham*

## Refinements in comprehensive planning

Critiques of comprehensive planning can be documented from the 1950s through the present. A fundamental criticism of comprehensive planning is that the process needs to be more relevant to policy and should incorporate "decision-relevant planning information and analysis" (Kaufman and Jacobs, 1988).

In partial response to critiques of comprehensive planning, contemporary "hybrid" plans are being prepared. The traditional "land use design plan" component of the comprehensive plan has been integrated with verbal policy plans and development management plans (Kaiser and Godschalk, 1995). In addition, since the middle of the 20th century, the nature of comprehensive planning has seen a shift from plans developed primarily by experts to "a framework for community consensus on future growth" (Kaiser and Godschalk, 1995). The emergence of consensus building as a method of deliberation provides opportunities for reformulating comprehensive planning (Innes, 1996).

# Integration of strategic planning concepts in comprehensive planning

Researchers and planning practitioners recognize the value of using strategic planning notions in public sector planning. This is a relatively recent development in the evolution of planning (Kaufman and Jacobs, 1988). Strategic planning frameworks have ways to address identified shortcomings of traditional comprehensive planning in that strategic planning emphasizes:

- Policy development
- Involvement of more and different types of people in the planning process
- Planning within a realistic assessment of the systems and networks of which they are a part (external environment)
- The idea of identifying and acting on strengths and weaknesses (internal environment)
- Pulling together of steps in a coherent process or approach (Kaufman and Jacobs, 1988).

## Context for a proposed comprehensive planning approach

The University of Wisconsin-Extension Citizen Participation Team has extensive experience in developing and guiding both comprehensive and strategic planning processes. Based on this experience and extensive research on various comprehensive planning approaches, a comprehensive planning approach has been developed and presented at several Comprehensive Planning/ Wisconsin Smart Growth conferences (Grabow, 2000).

The proposed comprehensive planning approach responds to the requirements of the Wisconsin Smart Growth Law (1999 Wisconsin Act 9), and provides specific steps to make this approach more "policy relevant." This proposed approach incorporates several features based on strategic planning and purpose-based planning concepts, including:

- A specific step for initial education and diagnosis of a community's readiness to plan
- A well developed "plan for planning" or detailed planning system design stage. Determining the people to involve (stakeholder analysis) is an important part of this step
- A trends and assessment step that includes an external and internal assessment of the environment
- A specific issues and visioning step
- Strategy formulation steps that enable the generation, organization and selection of preferred strategies after the development of alternatives. The process acknowledges the importance of both traditional "land use design plan" alternatives and narrative or "verbal" policy-oriented strategies.
- Plan management steps including plan review and approval, implementation and plan reassessment

The approach also describes a three-step mini-process that occurs in each step of the comprehensive planning approach. The process is:

1. Generate or search (ideas)
2. Organize or synthesize (themes)
3. Select (determine preferences)

This three-step mini-process is fundamental to the planning and design approach (Nadler, 1998), and the strategic management approach (Backoff and Nutt, 1988). Different planning and facilitation techniques are required for each of these mini-steps.

## Examples of other planning approaches

The Citizen Participation Team has researched a variety of planning approaches that possess similarities as well as important distinctions. The approaches reviewed include Stuart Chapin's process, widely used as a reference for planners since 1957 (Chapin, 1970). Also researched were approaches from the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) (So and Getzels, 1988), several American Planning Association (APA) publications (e.g., Daniels, Keller and Lapping, 1995), a community visioning approach from University of Wisconsin-Extension researchers (Green, Haines and Halebsky, 2000), and other approaches published by faculty and staff of the University of Wisconsin-Extension (e.g., Dresen and Kozak, 1995 and Ohm, Merrill and Schmidke, 2000).

# Use of the proposed comprehensive planning approach

The variety of approaches illustrates the many ways possible to carry out the planning process. The Citizen Participation Team's approach to comprehensive planning is not suggested as the only or the recommended process. However, there are several reasons why it generally applies when teaching about comprehensive planning:

- The approach pulls all steps together into a thorough and coherent planning structure.
- It is based on approaches that have been widely used by planners for many years.
- It introduces concepts that address criticism of older, conventional general plan processes—that is, it draws from strategic and contemporary hybrid planning and integrates design, policy and management.
- It can be a yardstick to assess and consider other approaches.
- It can be abbreviated and adapted.

## Definitions

Listed below are important planning terms and definitions from the American Planning Association's *Growing Smart™ Legislative Guidebook*, Phases I & II Interim Edition (APA, 1998). References for how these terms are used in strategic planning are included for several definitions.

**Plan**—A document adopted by an agency that contains in text, map and/or graphics, a method of proceeding based on analysis and foresight that serves to guide, direct or constrain subsequent actions to achieve specific goals. A plan may contain goals, policies, guidelines and standards. *(Note: A generic definition of a plan is a detailed formulation of a program of action.)*

**Comprehensive plan—**The adopted official statement of a local government's legislative body that sets forth (in words, maps, illustrations and/or tables) goals, policies and guidelines intended to direct present and future physical, social and economic development that occurs within its planning jurisdiction and that includes a unified physical design for the public and private development of land and water. *(Note: The Wisconsin Smart Growth Law lists and describes nine elements that must be contained in a comprehensive plan.)*

**Policy—**A general rule for action focused on a specific issue, derived from more general goals. *(Note: A related term from Strategic Planning is "strategy," defined as a pattern of purposes, policies, programs, actions, decisions or resource allocations in response to strategic issues.)*

**Goal—**Means a desired state of affairs to which planned effort is directed. *(Note: The APA's definition of a goal is very similar to the term "vision," which is defined as a description of a desired end-state.)*

**Guideline—**An agency statement or declaration of policy that the agency intends to follow.

**Standard—**A criterion that defines the meaning of a policy by providing a way to measure its attainment.

## Other definitions

Two other definitions developed by the University of Wisconsin-Extension Strategic Planning Team follow.

**Approach—**Behavior and methodology designed to make certain principles operational. May employ several or many steps; all use a variety of tools, techniques and skills.

**Generate—Organize—Select —**A three-step "mini-process" that occurs both formally and informally in each step in planning approaches. A group may use various tools to *generate* values, ideas, solutions, measures, issues, strategies, etc. Other tools and techniques are used to *organize* what is generated into meaningful and more useful forms or formats. Tools of a third type are used to choose or *select* the items or actions that actually become part of the plan.

# Summary of steps in the proposed comprehensive planning approach

This nine-step process represents a step-by-step methodology to help you in developing a comprehensive plan. Each step should lead to action, results and outputs. The descriptions of Steps 1 through 9 are followed by a series of figures that describe each step individually, illustrate how each is linked to the Wisconsin Smart Growth Law elements, and provide examples of output (workshops, reports, tools and techniques, graphic representations, etc.) from each step (figures A-D).

## Step 1: Preliminary education and diagnosis

The purpose of this step is to provide basic education and to determine, through community diagnosis and assessment, whether the community should proceed with comprehensive planning. Prior to committing to comprehensive planning, considerable time may be needed to gain assurances of the community's readiness and capability to undertake this major effort. Both those leading a proposed planning process and the community can help determine the readiness to plan by learning about:

- Initial community concerns, issues and values
- Power and influence networks (key people or leadership groups) that can either help or hinder a planning process
- Change dynamics in the community
- The community's chances for success by assessing barriers to a successful planning process (Rizzo, 2000) and (Bryson, 1995)

Other initial educational efforts that can help prepare a community for planning include a review of existing plans and an assessment of their effectiveness. A review of accepted principles of sound comprehensive planning also helps prepare community leaders and citizens for potential community planning.

At some point, the community and its leaders will have to determine whether or not they want to go ahead with a planning effort. Examples of the type of criteria that should be considered include:

- The extent to which there are strong supporters, champions and political support for a proposed planning effort
- The availability of resources to carry out the planning effort
- The likelihood that the process has real value with tangible benefits to the community (Bryson, 1995)

## Step 2: Plan for planning

The purpose of this step is to develop an agreement among key leaders about the scope and plan output for the comprehensive planning effort. An early task is to identify key community decision-makers and then identify the persons, groups and organizations that should be involved in the effort. Preliminary stakeholder analysis is recommended.

Some form of document or agreement should outline the "plan for planning" and should also contain:

- The purpose of the effort
- Preferred steps in the process
- The form and timing of reports
- The role, functions and membership of any group or committee empowered to oversee the effort
- The role, functions and membership of the planning team
- The commitment of necessary resources to proceed with the effort
- Any important limitations or boundaries on the effort

The initial education and diagnosis step will likely reveal the need for continued education and learning opportunities for community leaders and citizens. A general guide for these anticipated learning needs should be outlined. In addition, you should consider evaluation mechanisms to determine how the planning process is proceeding at this early step. A periodic "check-in" on the effectiveness of the plan process is desirable, and should be deliberatively considered during this step.

The Wisconsin Smart Growth law also requires written procedures to foster public participation in every stage of comprehensive plan preparation. These procedures should be developed during Step 2.

Since both Steps 1 and 2 lay the foundation for creating or building the plan, considerably more detail is provided in Section 5. Section 5 provides suggestions for moving your community toward plan development with an emphasis on how to involve citizens in meaningful ways during all stages of plan development.

## Step 3: Background information and inventory

The purpose of this step is to provide pertinent and appropriate data than can help frame subsequent issue identification, community visioning efforts and strategy development.

Profiling existing conditions is a routine early step in most comprehensive planning approaches. Typical information gathering includes population and demographic inventories, documentation of existing land use and development patterns, description of physical and environmental features, as well as socio-economic conditions. To help limit random data collection, findings from the community diagnostic step should be used to focus data inventory on information that will likely be used.

## Step 4: Trends and assessments

The purpose of this step is to provide additional and refined assessments to help determine the community's strengths and weaknesses, as well as opportunities and threats that it faces. Step 4 represents, in part, a continuation of the data collection from the previous step. Population, demographic, economic and growth trends are both assessed and projected into the future. Likewise land use and development demands are analyzed and projected.

This step also includes a provision for external and internal environmental scanning. This provides a transition from looking at what has already happened to what is currently happening. Initial considerations for what could happen or is desirable for the future can be raised at this time. This step can provide an overall systems view of the community and factors that affect it. These assessments can provide valuable clues for identifying issues and effective strategies.

## Step 5: Issue identification and visioning

In this step, the fundamental questions and key challenges facing the jurisdiction are determined. This step often makes apparent the iterative nature of the comprehensive planning process, since information on concepts discovered in earlier steps may reemerge as important issues.

By definition, issues are considered strategic if they represent fundamental policy questions or critical challenges that affect the community's values, mission, stakeholders, citizens, service level, costs or management. This issues step is aimed at focusing the community on what is truly important for the prosperity, quality and effectiveness of the community.

Also included in this step is the opportunity to develop a community vision or a description of what the community wants to look like at some point in the future (a description of a desired end-state). This is a clear and succinct description of what the community should look like after it successfully implements its strategies (Bryson, 1995). There are a variety of optional tools and techniques for developing a community vision (Green, et al., 2000). Developing the vision involves imagination, but is grounded in the reality of community values, community profiles and assessments, and identification of important community issues (Oregon Visions Project, 1993).

While partial efforts to describe a desired end-state or vision occur throughout the steps of the comprehensive planning process, a richer and fuller vision is more likely to emerge in the mid to latter stages of the approach. This step is often considered the focal point of a planning process and the step where serious planning and forward thinking occurs.

## Step 6: Strategy formulation

This step is broken into two sub-steps—Step 6a and Step 6b. The purpose of strategy formulation is to determine possible patterns of major initiatives, programs and key actions that address the key issues and respond to the visions in Step 5.

Step 6 breaks the three-step mini-process of "generate-organize-select" into sub-components. Step 6a provides for the generation and organization of possible strategy alternatives. For land use components that affect the landscape, graphic alternatives are suggested as a means for communicating the implications of each alternative for the land.

Policy-oriented issues or vision statements will likely need only narrative or "verbal" strategies. Economic development issues and/or visions may only require narrative strategy alternatives. However, strategies dealing with agriculture and rural residential growth may require alternative graphic scenarios to describe the strategy alternatives.

Step 6b represents the "select" mini-step, and this is where the preferred strategy alternatives are determined. At the conclusion of Step 6, you can compare details of the plan, and a compilation of Steps 1–6 can represent a draft comprehensive plan.

## Step 7: Plan review and approval

Steps 7, 8 and 9 represent the "plan management" stages of the comprehensive planning approach.

After strategies have been formulated, the planning team should obtain official approval from the jurisdictions for which the plan is being prepared (Step 7). Approval of strategies at this point is important to make sure that everyone is in agreement on the recommended alternatives. After this review, which typically involves citizen review as well, the jurisdiction(s) is ready to move on to the implementation of the recommendations

## Step 8: Plan implementation

Just creating the comprehensive plan does not assure that the called-for changes will happen. The adopted strategies must be incorporated throughout the community's political systems and organizational structure. The following activities need to be detailed to put the plan recommendations into practice:

- Responsibilities of implementation bodies, organizational teams and individuals
- Specific action steps for follow-up
- Schedules and milestones
- Resource requirements and a communication process

The land use component of a comprehensive plan typically involves the development or amendment of zoning and land division ordinances as a primary plan implementation activity.

## Step 9: Plan monitoring, reassessment and amendment procedure

The purpose of the final step in comprehensive planning is to review and evaluate the effectiveness of the implemented strategies. This assessment looks at what is working and not working and provides an opportunity to suggest plan amendment procedures. It also sets the stage for a new round of comprehensive planning.

# Concurrent processes

There are several activities that take place concurrently or on a parallel track with the comprehensive planning process.

## Citizen participation

A main purpose of this publication is to provide a guide for helping communities develop citizen participation plans for the comprehensive planning process. Figure E illustrates the concept of a citizen participation process directly related to the steps of the comprehensive planning process, as well as to the "Education and Learning" and the "Evaluation" process.

## Education and learning

In looking at planning and consensus-building research, mutual education or joint fact-finding is described as a critical first step in generic decision-making processes. (Godschalk, Parham, Porter, Potapchuk, Schukraft, 1994). Accordingly, the proposed comprehensive planning approach includes initial education as a component of Step 1.

As the planning process proceeds, the community will be faced with making decisions throughout the approach. (Remember: generate, organize, select.) To make intelligent choices, it is essential that policymakers and citizens are well informed (Barrows, 1993). As the planning process evolves, the need for additional learning will change, too. Any or all of the steps in the process are appropriate for providing educational programs and methods (Barrows, 1993). Figure C (page 15) illustrates that the approach for "Education and Learning" should be determined early (Steps 1 and 2), and this educational process occurs concurrently with the nine-step planning strategy.

## Evaluation

Similarly, there needs to be routine evaluation of how well the comprehensive planning process is going. Early on, a procedure for evaluating the planning process should be developed, and opportunities to "check-in" on the processes should be determined and then carried out (figure C). Figure D (page 16) provides a simple schematic of these concurrent processes.

## Integration of the elements

The planning literature is limited in providing guidance for integrating the elements (agriculture, housing, transportation, etc.) into an overall comprehensive planning approach. The Wisconsin Smart Growth Law merely says that, during implementation, there shall be a description of how each element "will be integrated and made consistent with the other elements." While this section is not intended to be a "how-to" guide, some general observations about integrating the elements are offered.

In best practice, the elements should be continually tested for consistency or contradiction throughout the process, including the assessment, issue and visioning, and strategy development steps. In fact, one of the primary purposes of comprehensive planning is to coordinate the development of "community-wide plans" for a variety of content elements (Hollander, et. al, *ibid*., 1988). Therefore, determining consistency with other elements is a logical criterion for selecting options in the planning process.

Several conceptual ways to integrate the required "content elements" are generalized (Figure E, page 17). Example 1 illustrates the preparation of individual elements by carrying them out one at a time. This pattern would require some kind of overall reconciliation stage after all elements have been prepared.

Example 2 illustrates how individual elements are fully developed in parallel with the other elements during three steps (background, issues and vision, and strategy formulation). This example option helps ensure that complementary or contradictory features of each element are recognized during these steps of the process.

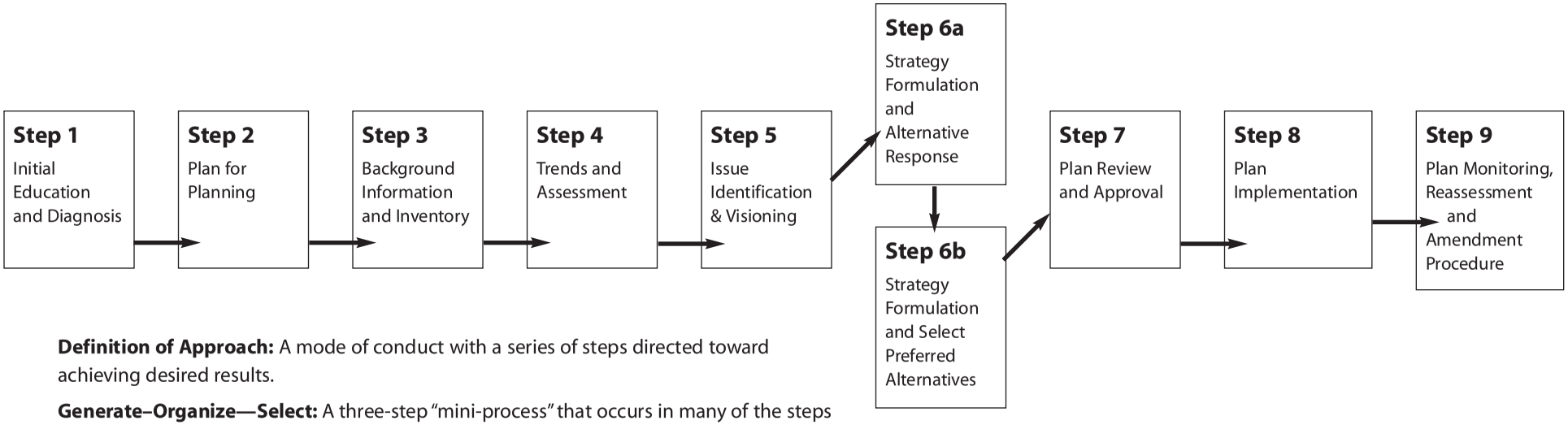
A third example for integrating the content elements is shown by staggering or overlapping the elements. To illustrate, Example 3 would have a subset of steps (Steps 3–6 in this concept) that are overlapping. Draft plans would be developed for each element and then brought together for full comprehensive plan review and approval.

There are likely many variations of the examples presented here, and there are other ways to integrate the elements. This section is intended to introduce you to the overall notion of integrating the various elements.

# Figure A

# General approach to comprehensive planning: a proposed road map

## The Approach




**Definition of Approach:** A mode of conduct with a series of steps directed toward achieving desired results.

**Generate–Organize—Select:** A three-step "mini-process" that occurs in many of the steps in the comprehensive planning approach.

**Determine how the Smart Growth Law and elements relate to the approach**
(See figure B for each step.)

**Examples of Plan Product for Each Step** See figure B for each step



**Source:** University of Wisconsin–Extension
Citizen Participation Team/Comprehensive Planning Committee
Facilitated and compiled by Steve Grabow, professor, May 2000

# Figure B—An approach to comprehensive planning:

## In context with the Smart Growth Law and plan products—Steps 1, 2 and 3

| The Approach | Step 1<br>Initial Education & Diagnosis | Step 2<br>Plan for planning | Step 3<br>Background information inventory |
|---|---|---|---|
| | ■ Confirm that planning is the needed purpose<br>■ Profile existing plan(s) and assess effectiveness (Mandates)<br>■ Analyze change dynamics (Growth and Change Assessments)<br>■ Review fundamental and principles of planning<br>■ Review possible plan approach and output<br>■ Determine initial concerns, preliminary issues and community values<br>■ Assess capacity and readiness to plan | ■ Determine the purpose for the effort<br>■ Determine plan sponsors champions<br>■ Determine planning team and manager<br>■ Determine other people's involvement (stakeholders—who, when, how)<br>■ Determine process steps/scope<br>■ Determine plan output<br>■ Determine plan timeline<br>■ Determine resources<br>■ Determine initial start-up requirements<br>■ Determine assoicated educational, evaluation and citizen involvement approaches | ■ Document demographic profile<br>■ Document existing land use and development patterns<br>■ Document physical and environmental features<br>■ Document economic base |
| **Smart Growth Law and Elements (Ohm, 2001)** | | ■ A jurisdiction is encouraged to design its plan with a "balance" between its purpose and 14 planning goals<br>■ These 14 "goals" are representative of a menu of sound planning principles advocated by the American Planning Association<br>■ Develop a procedure for fostering public participation at each stage of plan preparation | ■ Issues and opportunities element: Background information on population, demographics<br>■ Housing element: background<br>■ Transportation element: Background<br>■ Utilities and Community Facilities Element: Background<br>■ Agricultural, Natural Resources and Cultural Resources element: Background not required, but see land use element for "Agriculture and Environmentally Sensitive Lands"<br>■ Economic Development element: Background<br>■ Intergovernmental Cooperation element: Background<br>■ Land Use element: Background—current land use map |
| **Plan product examples** | ■ Educational programs/workshops<br>■ Workshops on community "hopes and concerns"<br>■ Mini-strategic planning workshops<br>■ Background for planning report and newsletter<br>■ General planning capability assessment | ■ Plan program design workshops<br>■ Plan design report<br>■ Scope of work and deliverables document<br>■ Profile the planning effort report<br>■ A "Request for Proposal" document | ■ Research reports by topic<br>■ Overall background report<br>■ Background tables and charts<br>■ Background/Inventory maps<br>■ Map and chart display |

## In context with the Smart Growth Law and plan products—Steps 4, 5 and 6

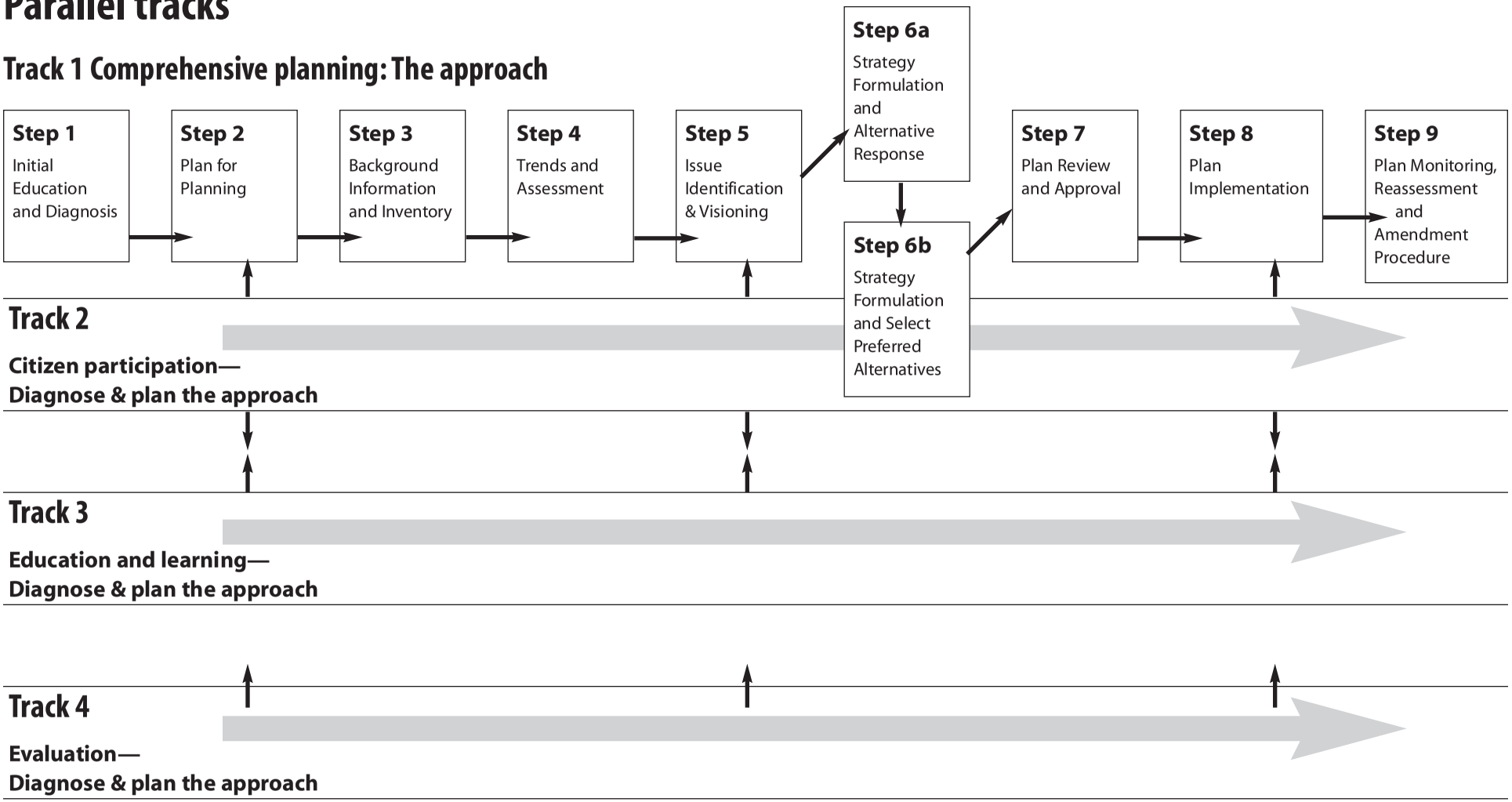
| The Approach | Step 4<br>Trends and Assessment | Step 5<br>Issue Identification and Visioning | Step 6a<br>Strategy Formulation and Alternative Responses (Generate and Organize) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | ■ Document and assess demographic, economic and growth trends<br>■ Project and assess population<br>■ Project and assess land use and development demands<br>■ Determine community values<br>■ Assess the environment (Community Hopes and Concerns Assessment) | ■ Determine fundamental questions or key challenges<br>■ Determine descriptive end-states or visions of what the community wants for its future<br>■ Enable opportunities for graphic illustrations of land use visions | ■ Determine the possible patterns of major initiatives, programs and actions to address key issues and respond to visions<br>—Develop graphic alternatives with land implication drawings for land use alternatives<br>—Develop narrative strategies in response to policy-oriented issues<br>**Step 6b<br>Strategy formulation and select preferred alternatives (Select)**<br>■ Determine preferred strategies and land use alternatives |
| **Smart Growth Law and Elements (Ohm, 2001)** | ■ Issues and Opportunities element: Forecasts and trends of population/demographics<br>■ Economic Development Element: Strengths and Weaknesses assessment<br>Land use Element: Trends and projections | ■ Issues and Opportunities Element: overall objectives, policies, goals and programs | ■ Housing Element: Objectives, etc.<br>■ Transportation Element: Objectives, etc.<br>■ Utilities and Community Facilities Element: Objectives, etc.<br>■ Agricultural, Natural Resources and Cultural Resources Element: objectives, etc.<br>■ Economic Development Element: Objectives, etc.<br>■ Intergovernmental Cooperation Element: Objectives, etc.<br>■ Land Use Element: Objectives, etc.<br>—Future land use map<br>—Urban Service Area map |
| **Plan product examples** | ■ Trends and Projections report:<br>—Population trends and projections<br>—Economic trends and projections<br>—Land demand and use projections<br>■ Community Values Assessment and Workshop<br>■ Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats assessment and workshops (SWOT analysis or Hopes and Concerns analysis) | ■ Household Survey<br>■ Town Hall type workshops<br>■ Focus group workshops<br>■ Community-wide public meeting<br>■ Issue identification meetings<br>■ Visioning packets<br>■ Community visioning workshops<br>■ Vision statements<br>■ Issue and Community Preferences report | ■ Alternative scenarios (narrative and graphic)<br>—Ag preservation<br>—Rural hamlet<br>—Environmental corridor<br>—Urban service area<br>■ Narrative strategies<br>—Transportation<br>—Community facilities<br>—Economic development<br>—Design guidelines<br>■ Plan preparation: Detail the plan |

## In context with the Smart Growth Law and plan products—Steps 7, 8 and 9

| The Approach | Step 7<br>Plan Review and Approval | Step 8<br>Plan Implementation | Step 9<br>Plan Monitoring, Reassessment and Amendment Procedure |
|---|---|---|---|
| | ■ Gain formal commitment to approve and proceed with the plan<br>■ Determine process for measuring plan effectiveness | ■ Approved strategies and plan alternatives are incorporated through the relevant system<br>■ The detailed follow-up activities are identified to put the plan recommendations into practice, including:<br>—Responsibilities of implementation bodies<br>—Specific action steps<br>—Schedules and milestones<br>—Resource requirements<br>■ Developing or amending zoning and land division ordinances are typical implementation elements of the land use plan component of a comprehensive plan | ■ Review implemented strategies and plan alternatives<br>■ This is an ongoing process to evaluate the effectiveness of the implemented strategies<br>■ This assessment looks at what is working and nor working with the implemented plan<br>■ This step provides a plan for suggesting plan amendment procedures and is a prelude to a new round of planning. |
| **Smart Growth Law and Elements (Ohm, 2001)** | | ■ Implementation Element:<br>—Describe how plan elements are integrated<br>—Include a mechanism to measure progress in achieving plan | ■ Implementation Element:<br>—Include a process for plan update (suggests an update in less than 10 years) |
| **Plan product examples** | ■ May be a separate plan section<br>■ Identified plan review and approval procedure (refined from plan for planning setp)<br>■ Includes a summary of opportunities for plan review by key stakeholders<br>■ Include considerations for both formal and informal mandates review or approval<br>■ Plan for measuring effectiveness of the plan | ■ May be a separate plan section<br>■ Summary of linkages between the "Plan" and follow-up implementation mechanisms<br>■ Listing of follow-up action steps, roles, responsibilities, timelines, etc. | ■ Identification of the assessment and evaluation process (including reference to possible plan evaluation tools that might be used)<br>■ Identification of the routine plan review and amendment procedure<br>■ Identification of a suggested plan update target (for example: 5 years, 10 years) |

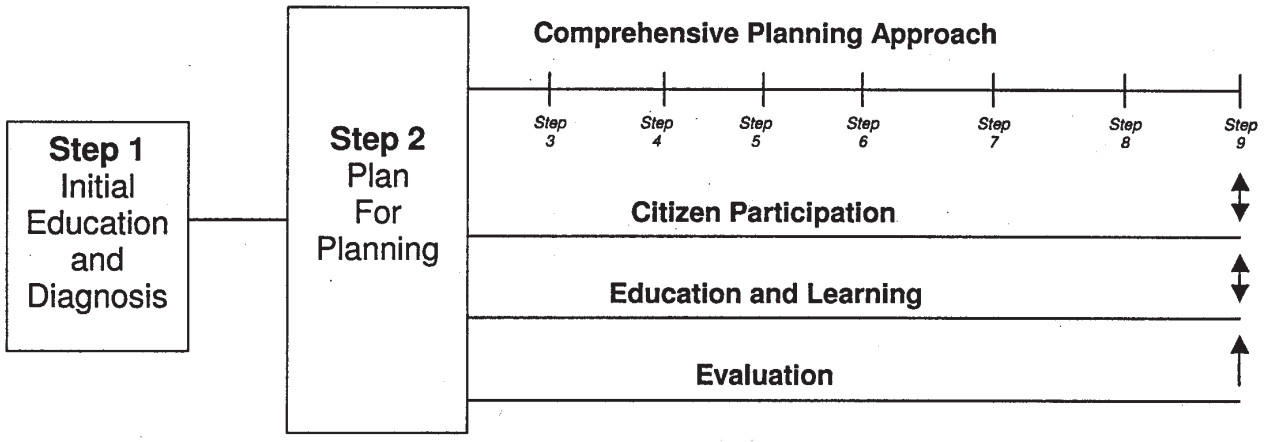
# Figure C—Parallel or concurrent processes that occur during the comprehensive plan

The illustration below shows that there are parallel tracks of purposeful activities that occur during the comprehensive planning process. For example, learning and education should take place throughout the process. Similarly, there needs to be routine evaluation and assessment about how well the process is going. The approach for "Education and Learning" and for "Evaluation" should be determined early and planned in advance. And throughout these approaches, citizens must be involved at appropriate times. They should be given an opportunity to continually contribute to the comprehensive plan. The graphic below illustrates how planning, citizen participation, education of the citizens/planners, and evaluation of the approaches occurs concurrently.




Source: University of Wisconsin-Extension, Citizen Participation Team/Comprehensive Planning Committee

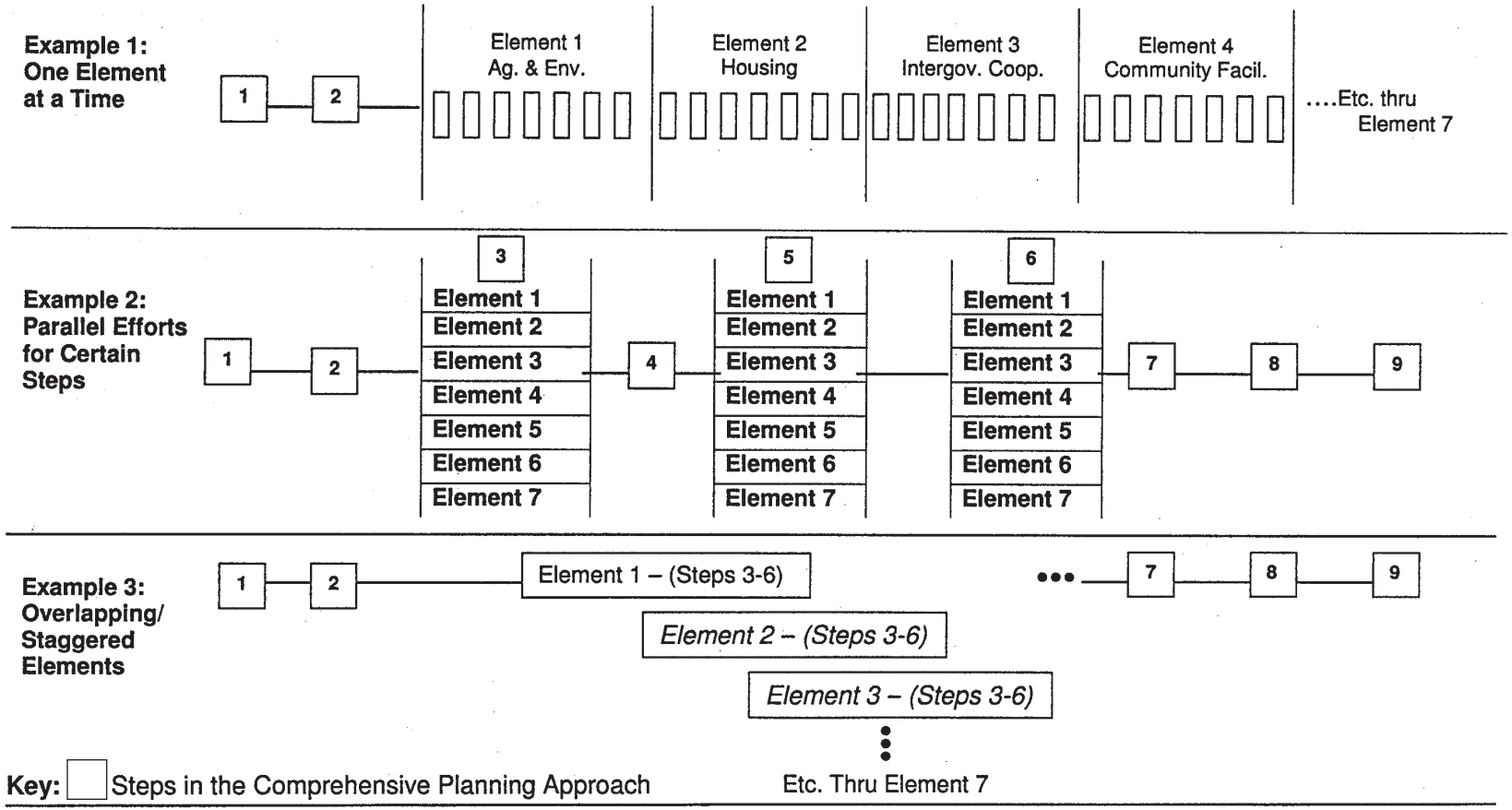
# Figure D—Simplified schematic of the concurrent processes




Source: University of Wisconsin–Extension, Citizen Participation Team/Comprehensive Planning Committee

# Figure E—Integrating the content elements into the comprehensive planning approach

The illustration below shows examples, in general schematic form, for integrating the required "content elements" (agriculture, housing, transportation, etc.). These examples are not intended to be prescriptive, but instead, are conceptual ways that the individual elements can be integrated in practice. The examples are derived from case examples of existing and pending comprehensive planning efforts throughout Wisconsin. Note: In Example 1, a follow-up mechanism to integrate the elements would need to be introduced.




**Source:** University of Wisconsin-Extension Citizen Participation Team/Comprehensive Planning Committee

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Section 3

# Rationale and benefits of citizen participation and the links to comprehensive planning

This section looks at the rationale for involving citizens in decision-making and planning. The benefits of citizen participation in comprehensive planning are identified, and some distinctions are made between the importance of technical skills in planning and the roles and skills of citizen planners. This section also documents the requirements for citizen participation, which are mandated in Wisconsin's Smart Growth Law.

The purpose of this section is to provide information on ways to involve the public in creating a comprehensive plan. This is a requirement of the Wisconsin Smart Growth Law. Any municipality/county that is officially involved with land use decision-making (and wants to remain so) must comply with this mandate. **How** this gets done is a matter to be determined locally. **What** gets done primarily depends on a few factors. These are:

- Determining the real value of citizen participation. (How important is this for you?)
- Determining what you hope to accomplish by involving citizens in the planning process.
- Making effective use of specific citizen participation methods appropriate for accomplishing your purpose.

## Theory and foundations

Generally speaking, people participate in government by voting, and often times local officials are not well informed about the many other ways citizens may be involved in government. Developing a personal belief system about citizen participation is important. It is very useful to consider some theory and definitions to develop your own framework for understanding and practicing citizen participation in response to the Wisconsin Smart Growth Law.

Democratic theory offers two basic rationales for citizen participation in decision-making:

1. **Citizen participation is likely to produce better decisions (Pateman, 1970).**
   - More complete knowledge or expertise from citizens results in informed decisions.
   - Citizen interests will be better articulated and presumably better accommodated.
   - Legitimization and implementation of strategies are likely to be easier to the extent that citizens are satisfied, and their various interests are adequately addressed.
2. **Citizen participation is likely to produce better citizens.**
   - Citizenship is enhanced when citizens shoulder part of the responsibility for the formulation or implementation of decisions.
   - Active participation educates and empowers citizens at the same time it commits and makes them responsible for civic action.

**"With few exceptions, wherever citizens have been given the opportunity to participate in their communities, the results have been dramatically encouraging…"**

*—Saul Alinsky, 1974*

**Deliberation of a citizens planning committee.**

**Democratic decision-making, in contrast to the technocratic approach, is based on the assumption that all who are affected by a given decision have the right to participate in making it.**

This citizen participation framework is optimistic and has been proven true many times over; the outcomes noted by Pateman can lead to community betterment. **"How"** this work gets done will be the key determining factor in producing better decisions and citizens. Communities will have to think and act strategically to foster desirable citizen participation. It is not likely to happen by itself.

In discussing the theory of citizen participation, it is useful to review other broad theories of decision-making structures. DeSario and Langton, in their book, *Citizen Participation in Public Decision Making*, explore public policy making. Two broad decision-making structures are defined and analyzed: the **technocratic approach** and the **democratic approach.**

The **technocratic approach** is defined as the application of the technical knowledge, expertise, techniques and methods to problem solving. A key belief is that trained staff "experts" are best suited to make complex technical decisions.

This approach has been popular with planners who deal with subjects like land use, transportation, agriculture and natural resources (elements in Wisconsin's "Smart Growth" Law). Techniques and methods can be effective when considering technical decisions, which rely on science to determine the potential of "what is." Application of fertilizer serves as one example; road maintenance is another.

Professionals in planning are often technicians with academic perspectives. They focus on techniques rather than on people, which can lead to a "we-will-take-care-of-you" and "we-know-what-is-best-for-you" attitude (Hibino and Nadler, 1990).

However, the technocratic approach to decision-making is difficult to apply to social problems because social goals are often complex, conflicting and unclear. Value judgments are concerned with determining "what should be." In this regard, citizens are their own experts on what they value and believe in—it is personal, not scientific. Professional experts, who don't take people's values into account, are likely to find citizens who become skeptical, resistant, angry or indifferent. People don't like being manipulated or patronized.

**Democratic decision-making**, in contrast to the technocratic approach, is based on the assumption that all who are affected by a given decision have the right to participate in making it. Democracy refers to citizen involvement activities in relation to government planning and decision-making.

Theory can help to ground you when thinking about citizen participation—it is very practical when applied to real situations. Local officials may be much more effective in helping to foster citizen participation by taking time to understand a few definitions. Noted here are some to consider:

- Citizen participation is a purposeful activity of citizens taking part in governmental decision-making outside the electoral process. Through citizen participation, citizens can advise elected officials and in turn, elected officials can advise citizens. (Such, 1989)
- Public (citizen) participation is any process that involves the public in problem-solving, planning, policy setting or decision-making and that uses public input to make decisions. It is a process through which people who will be affected by or interested in a decision—those with a stake in the outcome—get a chance to influence the content. Through public participation, stakeholders influence and share responsibilities for decisions (Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources).
- Citizen participation is the process that can meaningfully tie programs to people (Spiegel, 1969).
- Citizen participation is a "categorical term for citizen power," and highlights the importance of distinguishing between merely engaging in a superficial act of participation, and having the actual power one needs to impact outcomes. True citizen participation allows citizens to bring about social reform and share society's benefits. (Arnstein, 1969)

Section 3

# Mandates from the legislature

## The law

The Wisconsin Smart Growth Law requires citizen participation during the process of creating a comprehensive plan. Enactment of the 1999 Wisconsin Act 9 made changes to various Wisconsin statutes that enable local governments to develop and implement comprehensive plans for their jurisdictions. Aside from providing a framework for developing comprehensive plans, the legislation prescribes measures to ensure public participation throughout the comprehensive planning process. A local governmental unit must comply with Section 66.1001 (4) (a) before its comprehensive plan may take effect (see page 24).

This is the mandate to local government officials. With it comes a major challenge that few local officials, especially those who are elected, are prepared to deal with effectively. Their knowledge and skill levels regarding citizen participation are generally low. They haven't been given enough opportunity to learn basic concepts and skills needed to involve people in the process of comprehensive planning.

Another challenge will be the belief of some officials that citizens should become involved through their own initiative. "After all, it's their responsibility to get involved with local issues. They simply should be interested in dealing with our problems." This view often leads to minimal opportunities for ordinary citizens to participate in their communities.

Many innovative problem-solvers view problems as reflections of the prevailing state of mind, a perception by one or more people that something is wrong and needs to be changed. How they look at any problem shapes the way they deal with it (process). Therefore, the process used to deal with a problem significantly will determine the effectiveness of solution finding and implementation. Citizen participation can be thought of as a "problem." A poorly developed process for dealing with a problem rarely brings about impressive results. More typical are results that are insignificant or that compound the problem.

**Citizen participation is a process through which people who will be affected by or interested in a decision—those with a stake in the outcome—get a chance to influence its content.**

# The Law

## Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning and Smart Growth Law—Ensuring Citizen Participation: 1999 Wisconsin Act 9

Enactment of 1999 Wisconsin Act 9, also known as Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning and Smart Growth Law, made changes to various Wisconsin Statutes that enable local governments to develop and implement comprehensive plans for their jurisdictions. Aside from providing a framework for developing comprehensive plans, the legislation prescribes measures to ensure public participation throughout the comprehensive planning process. A local governmental unit shall comply with the following before its comprehensive plan may take effect:

**Wisconsin Statutes, Section 66.1001 (4)(a)**

> **The governing body of a local governmental unit shall adopt written procedures that are designed to foster public participation, including open discussion, communication programs, information services and public meetings for which advance notice has been provided, in every stage of the preparation of a comprehensive plan. The written procedures shall provide for wide distribution of proposed, alternative or amended elements of a comprehensive plan and shall provide an opportunity for written comments on the plan to be submitted by members of the public to the governing body and for the governing body to respond to such written comments.**

**Analysis of Section 66.1001 (4)(a)**

- "The governing body of a local government **shall adopt** written procedures that are designed to foster public participation…"

  The statute does not specify how the written procedures have to be adopted. The procedures could be adopted by simple motion, resolution or ordinance by the governing body of the local government. The important aspect here is the requirement for **written procedures**—a call to develop a public participation plan.

- "…including **open discussion, communication programs, information services and public meetings** for which advance notice has been provided…"

  The statute spells out some specific public participation methods that, at a minimum, must be used throughout the comprehensive planning process. As we have described in this publication, there are a large number of potential public participation methods and tools. Make sure to match the method or tool to the specific purpose of public participation throughout the comprehensive planning effort—and make sure to provide adequate advance notice to provide for participation in **every stage** of the preparation of a comprehensive plan."

- The statute makes clear in this passage that public participation is required throughout every step or stage of comprehensive plan development. It is not a step of its own in the comprehensive planning approach. Rather, as we have suggested in this publication, it is an approach of its own that runs parallel and complementary to the comprehensive planning approach. Appropriate public participation methods and tools are utilized within each step of the comprehensive planning approach to accomplish specific public participation purposes.

- "The written procedures **shall provide** for wide distribution of proposed, alternative or amended elements of a comprehensive plan…"

  As work is completed in the comprehensive planning process, distribution of this information should be made as broadly as is possible. The Public Participation Plan should define how and to whom updates, information, proposals, reports, etc. will be distributed. Keeping as many people informed and engaged in the comprehensive planning process as possible will help lead to better decision making and ultimately to buy-in and commitment to the plan that is developed.

- "…and **shall provide** an opportunity for written comments on the plan to be submitted by members of the public to the governing body **and** for the governing body to respond to such comments."

  The statute requires that the community set up ways for people to provide written comments on various aspects of the comprehensive plan. Beyond that, it requires that the local unit of government respond to the comments. So, it's not good enough just to create a mechanism to collect written comments—the local unit of government must also develop responses to the comments received. This is a good practice for all written correspondence received at the local level. A written response back to the citizen will let the citizen know that you are reading their comments. Your acknowledgement of their comments also serves to let people know that you value their input and take their input seriously. Further, by providing a written response to the comments, you are telling the citizen how you intend to use their comments, or how their comments have affected the comprehensive planning process.

The Comprehensive Planning and Smart Growth Law also prescribes a methodology for adopting an ordinance that ratifies the comprehensive plan.

**Wisconsin Statutes, Section 66.1001 (4)(d))**

**No local governmental unit may enact an ordinance under par. (c) unless the local governmental unit holds at least one public hearing at which the proposed ordinance is discussed. That hearing must be preceded by a class 1 notice under ch. 985 that is published at least 30 days before the hearing is held. The local governmental unit may also provide notice of the hearing by any other means it considers appropriate. The class 1 notice shall contain at least the following information:**

1. The time, date, and place of the hearing.
2. A summary, which may include a map, the proposed comprehensive plan or amendment to such a plan.
3. The name of an individual employed by the local governmental unit who may provide additional information regarding the proposed ordinance.
4. Information relating to where and when the proposed comprehensive plan or amendment to such a plan may be inspected before the hearing, and how a copy of the plan or amendment may be obtained.

**Analysis of Section 66.1001 (4)(d)**

- "No local governmental unit may enact an ordinance under par. (c) **unless** the local government **holds at least one public hearing** at which the proposed ordinance is discussed."

  In order to adopt a comprehensive plan at the local level, the local unit of government must adopt the comprehensive plan as an ordinance. To ensure public participation in the adoption process, the local unit of government is required to hold at least one public hearing to discuss components of the comprehensive plan and to receive input from the public on the plan.

- "That hearing **must be preceded** by a class 1 notice under Ch. 985 that is published **at least 30 days** before the hearing is held."

  The local unit of government must publish the public hearing using a class 1 notice, which requires at least 30 days notice prior to the session. This level of notice is required to allow the public adequate time to review components of the comprehensive plan and to formulate any comments they would like to make at the Public Hearing.

- "The local government unit **may** also provide notice of the hearing by any other means it considers to be appropriate."

  In addition to formal posting requirements, the local unit of government may use any other method of providing notice of the Public Hearing. We would recommend that you provide the broadest notice possible for the Public Hearing. Give your residents every opportunity to participate.

# Public policy education

Public policy education provides knowledge about public issues with the goal of helping people make better-informed policy choices (Barrows, 1993). The need for public policy education will be very large relative to the Smart Growth Law; local officials need new information and a better understanding of their community to design a comprehensive plan.

Many policies will be created during this process. The American Planning Association (1998) defined "policy" as a general rule for action focused on a specific issue, derived from more general goals. The purpose of involving the public in decisions is to help planners and managers make better decisions, which should save both time and money by creating inclusive actions and decisions that are less likely to be reversed (Heberlein, 1976).

Simply put, a policy is a commitment to action. For example, let's say a village board adopts a policy to keep its park system clean and operational. Funding for a part-time parks manager may be the outcome from policy being put in place.

Public policy education is also based on a "pluralist" view of the democratic political process in which there are numerous individual interests and interest groups, and many decision-makers with potentially conflicting interests in the various branches of government. Public policy decisions are viewed as compromises among these divergent interests. *This is an extremely important concept because it implies that there is no single public interest and no optimal policy choice.* The fact that there is debate means that the perceived interests of different groups conflict, giving rise to policy issues.

It is often the case that a solution or resolution of a debate will favor some groups and hurt (or not help) others. Scientific knowledge, the wisdom of the university, cannot be used to determine the "correct" policy choice for society, because science cannot supply the value judgment that ranks the interests of one group as more important than the interests of others.

Public policy education is based on a philosophical concept of the value of public participation in government decisions. It is assumed that if the democratic process is to function effectively, citizens must be well-informed on the major issues of the day, and have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process.

Plato argued that education was the key to developing good policy and social conditions in his ideal Greek city-state. Thomas Jefferson placed great faith in education and the importance of a well-educated and informed citizenry as the basis for representative democracy.

These viewpoints are well-suited to comprehensive planning. Local officials, who are aware of the various facets of citizen participation, are more likely to develop effective systems for involving the public in planning. There are many ways for people to be involved in comprehensive planning, ranging from a passive news release to an active binding referendum.

However, some local officials are not good communicators, and they don't realize it. Thus, their ability to communicate effectively with their local stakeholders gets compromised. This common situation hinders public policy education efforts.

**You can enhance communication by concentrating on:**

- Determining the purpose of the interaction with the public.
- Identifying the audience(s) to be reached.
- Determining the self-interest of the audience(s).
- Creating a few, succinct message points focused on your purpose, and fitted to audience self-interests.

This simple framework will pinpoint what to consider to help the audience understand your message.

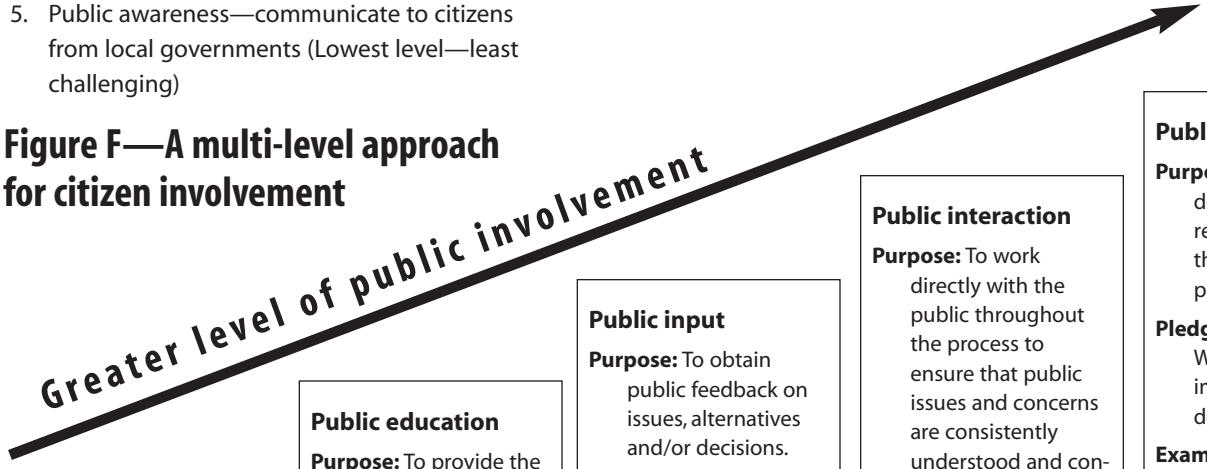
Local officials set public policy when they select alternatives for citizen participation. This work will be much easier if the purposes of citizen involvement are agreed upon before methods are chosen to implement it.

**There are five different levels of involving citizens in the comprehensive planning process.**

1. Public partnership—formal involvement in meaningful decision-making process. (Highest level—most challenging
2. Public interaction—enabling effective dialogue between citizens and government.
3. Public input—communicate to local governments from citizens
4. Public education—provide information and education to the public.
5. Public awareness—communicate to citizens from local governments (Lowest level—least challenging)

Please note that the higher levels selected for citizen involvement aim to increase actual participation of people in the planning process compared to lower levels. And the higher levels require more effort and resources. Each level is important, but not mutually exclusive. You are not limited to choosing just one. You may need to work in several levels over time (see figure F).

## Figure F—A multi-level approach for citizen involvement




**Public awareness**

**Purpose:** To make the public aware of the comprehensive planning project.

**Pledge to the public:** We will keep you informed.

**Example methods:** Direct mail, news releases and mass media, displays and exhibits.

**Public education**

**Purpose:** To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in better understanding the various steps in the planning process

**Pledge to the public:** We will try to help you understand.

**Example methods:** Public education meetings, websites, newsletters.

**Public input**

**Purpose:** To obtain public feedback on issues, alternatives and/or decisions.

**Pledge to the public:** We will provide a variety of opportunities for your input, and will provide feedback on how the public input was used in the planning process.

**Example methods:** Open houses, public hearings, visual preference surveys, opinion surveys, focus groups.

**Public interaction**

**Purpose:** To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.

**Pledge to the public:** We will work with you to ensure that your concerns are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced decisions.

**Example methods:** Visioning

**Public partnership**

**Purpose:** To place decision-making responsibilities in the hands of the public.

**Pledge to the public:** We will work to implement what you decide.

**Example methods:** Citizen planning committees

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**Purpose is what gives meaning to activity.** Without purpose, local officials won't be able to think or act in a strategic manner. Understanding purpose will greatly increase the ability to focus the public policy development.

Local officials will benefit also from understanding the "Smart Growth" law; the likely outcomes to be obtained from involved citizens, alternative ways for citizens to participate and strategies for involving citizens in planning. Citizen participation supports comprehensive planning. Unfortunately, in many communities, not enough attention is given to the process of planning and designing citizen participation systems. Keep in mind that most people find it difficult to support what they don't like or don't understand.

# Citizen participation and democracy

Citizen participation is a process that gives private individuals an opportunity to influence public decisions. It has long been a component of the democratic decision process. Our roots in citizen participation can be traced to ancient Greece and colonial New England. Citizen participation was institutionalized in government in the mid-1960s with President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society program (Cogan, 1986).

Nearly 50 years earlier, a powerful grassroots social movement changed political activism in the U.S. with the advent of "community organizing." This work was pioneered by sociologist Saul Alinsky in Chicago. He believed that widespread poverty left America open to the influence of demagogues who cared more about power than people. Alinsky's solution was to organize active, widespread participation in the political process that involved all sectors of the community (Close, 1940).

The concept of citizens participating in government decision-making is fundamental to the functioning of a democratic system of governance. While it is true that the United States is a "democratic republic," where government officials are elected to represent citizens, it is also true that elected officials need to inform, be informed by, and interact with citizens on an ongoing basis if their representation is to be meaningful.

Citizens' involvement in government through electing representatives every two or four years is clearly not enough to enable true representation of the public will. Regular and continuing involvement in government decision-making is the very basis for the idea of citizenship. Without the opportunity to participate in government on a regular basis, citizens are reduced to being merely "taxpayers," a term analogous with "consumers." Without citizen participation governments become less "governments for the people and by the people," and more "service providers" for the "taxpayers" (Hinds, 2001).



It is not uncommon for local officials to misunderstand people's involvement. Noted below are a few thoughts on this subject.

- Citizens must be given the opportunity and encouraged to participate.
- Most citizens are not skilled enough to act effectively on their own; they need training.
- Citizens need to be educated about the issues to know the likely impact/consequences of planning. Their initial perceptions often are not tied to reality.
- Citizens will get involved when their interest level becomes greater than the comfort of non-involvement.
- Citizens usually need organization to help them focus and act in their true self-interest.
- Most people will be skeptical initially.
- Citizens need to be accepted "where they are at" if you hope to move forward with them.

Local officials deserve opportunities to learn and develop the skills to integrate citizen participation within all the elements of comprehensive planning—especially if they hope to make a real difference in giving ordinary people a voice in shaping the future of their communities. Few things are as important as this, and much is at stake in Wisconsin. The late Saul Alinsky (a professional community organizer) got right to the point when he wrote: "It is highly undemocratic to plan, govern, arrange and impose programs without communication with the people for whom they are designed; it is also disastrously impractical."

In their book, *Breakthrough Thinking,* Shozo Hibino and Gerald Nadler write about the "people design principle"—defined as giving people related to or affected by change the ongoing opportunity to take part in preventing or solving problems.

The people design principle is based on the premise that life means nothing apart from individuals. Their concerns and ideas should be treated as the basic fabric of problem solving. **Anyone** has the potential to become a valuable contributor.

The object is to create an atmosphere that fosters each person's optimal contribution. The principle holds that the prospects of a solution's success are enhanced in direct proportion to the involvement of those who stand to gain or lose by it. Even if all the affected people cannot be involved due to logistics or sheer numbers, identifying them gives local officials the opportunity to do something through subgroups, newsletters, audiotapes, talks and so on. Keep in mind that each person has a preferred way of receiving information. If you want people to understand your message, you have to deliver it in a way that makes sense to them.

Although not everyone can or will participate at every step of the project, the key is to provide a never-ending occasion for response and contribution. How participation is carried out is as crucial as the actual involvement. Initial actions or statements cast the die. Groups can lose hope and may even stop trying if they don't attain some success almost immediately.

The people design principle is critical in the process of working with, not putting aside, whatever beliefs exist. It allows group members to express their own values and to push forward within their own contextual frameworks. The number of people who ought to be involved by role and position is usually large, even if they don't all formally belong to the group. Some should be involved throughout the project; others only during certain activities.

*Remember, everyone does not need to be involved in the same way, at the same time or for the same purpose in comprehensive planning. Nor would they want to be. It's important to think carefully about the business of people involvement. Real community-making won't occur very successfully without it.*

**It is highly undemocratic to plan, govern, arrange and impose programs without communication with the people for whom they are designed; it is also disastrously impractical.**

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# Commonly used methods for involving citizens

In Sections 2 and 3 of this publication you have learned about the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of comprehensive planning and citizen participation. In this section we move toward the practical application of that knowledge by introducing you to 14 commonly used methods for engaging citizens, as well as a worksheet that will assist in developing a citizen participation plan.

Before we detail these commonly used methods, there are a couple of important considerations to keep in mind. First, citizens must be given the opportunity and encouragement to participate. If one or the other is missing, the participatory effort will not be as effective as it could have been. For example, if a community plans for a citizen participation event, say a public educational session, but fails to encourage participation, the event will not likely draw a large crowd. Likewise, encouraging people to participate without developing opportunities for their involvement will likely increase public confusion and lead to less participation than might have otherwise been expected.

Second, many citizens do not possess the skills necessary to act effectively on their own—they need training. A series of educational sessions prior to the start of the comprehensive planning effort can provide orientation, build trust and develop a common level of understanding among the broader public related to planning and public involvement topics. This capacity building will help prepare citizens for the more rigorous public involvement methods described in the following pages.

In an effort to provide you with a detailed set of resources that describe a number of citizen involvement methods, we have highlighted 14 commonly used tools or techniques for involving citizens. The information that follows highlights various aspects of the 14 methods we have chosen to describe in detail.

*In Portage County, a series of educational sessions was held prior to the start of the comprehensive planning process to help the public better understand Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning Law, the definition of comprehensive planning, the county's approach to comprehensive planning, and opportunities for citizen involvement throughout the process. In addition, information was presented that documented how the community had grown and changed over the past 30 years, and projected growth for the next 20 years. This information helped develop a common level of understanding among citizens in the county, and set the stage for successful participation throughout the* **comprehensive** *planning process.*

**Citizens work on developing a local vision.**

**Table 1: Purposes of citizen involvement ordered by purpose of involvement**

Table 1 shows the 14 methods along the left. Across the top of the table, the various purposes for citizen involvement are listed. For each method listed an "X" appears in a corresponding purpose box. For example, Direct Mail has an "X" in the "Communicate to Citizens from Local Governments (Public Awareness)" purpose box. This indicates that Direct Mail has a primary purpose of local government communicating to citizens—or more simply, to increase public awareness.

**Table 1: Methods and purposes of citizen participation**

| **Method** | **Public awareness** Local government communicates to citizens | **Public education** Provide information and education to the public | **Public input** Citizens communicate to local government | **Public interaction** Enable effective dialogue between citizens & government | **Public partnership** Formal involvement in meaningful decision making process |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Direct mail | X | | | | |
| News releases and mass media | X | | | | |
| Displays and exhibits | X | | | | |
| Public educational meetings | | X | | | |
| Websites | | X | | | |
| Open houses | | | X | | |
| Public hearings | | | X | | |
| Visual preference Survey | | | X | | |
| Focus groups | | | X | | |
| Opinion surveys | | | X | | |
| Citizens' advisory committee | | | X | | |
| Visioning | | | | X | |
| Citizens' planning committee | | | | | X |
| Referenda | | | | | X |

**Table 2: Purposes of citizen involvement—usefulness of methods by purpose**

Table 2 further refines the information contained in table 1 by showing the relative usefulness for each of the 14 methods. The usefulness of each tool for a particular purpose is indicated in the table by "high," "moderate," "low" or "possible." Using Direct Mail as an example again, you can see that for promoting public awareness, this method has a "high" usefulness. For public education it has a "moderate" usefulness.

**Table 2: Purposes of citizen involvement—usefulness of methods by purpose**

| **Method** | **Public awareness** Local government communicates to citizens | **Public education** Provide information and education to the public | **Public input** Citizens communicate to local government | **Public interaction** Enable effective dialogue between citizens & government | **Public partnership** Formal involvement in meaningful decision making process |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Direct mail | High | Moderate | | | |
| News releases and mass media | High | Moderate | | | |
| Displays and exhibits | High | High | | | |
| Public educational meetings | Moderate | High | | | |
| Web sites | Moderate | High | Possible | | |
| Open houses | Low | Moderate | High | | |
| Public hearings | | Moderate | High | | |
| Visual preference Survey | | Moderate | High | | |
| Focus groups | | | High | | |
| Opinion surveys | | | High | | |
| Citizens' advisory committee | | | High | Low-Moderate | |
| Visioning | | | High | High | |
| Citizens' planning committee | | | High | High | High |
| Referenda | | | High (advisory) | | High (binding) |

**Table 3: Characteristics of select citizen participation methods**

Table 3 examines a number of characteristics of the select group of 14 citizen participation methods detailed here. In this table, each citizen participation method is assessed using the following criteria: citizen time commitment, number of citizens engaged and resource commitment by local government. Continuing with our use of Direct Mail as an example, you will note that this method requires "low" citizen time commitment, has the potential to engage a "high" number of citizens, and requires a "moderate" resource commitment from the local government.

**Table 3: Characteristics of select citizen participation methods**

| Method | Citizen time commitment | Number of citizens engaged | Resource commitment by local government |
|---|---|---|---|
| Direct mail | low | high | moderate |
| News releases and mass media | low | high | low |
| Displays and exhibits | low | moderate | moderate |
| Public educational meetings | moderate | moderate | low |
| Websites | moderate | moderate | moderate/high |
| Open houses | moderate | moderate | moderate |
| Public hearings | moderate | low/moderate | low |
| Visual preference Survey | moderate | low | moderate/high |
| Focus groups | moderate | low | low |
| Opinion surveys | moderate | moderate | moderate |
| Visioning | moderate | moderate | moderate |
| Citizens' advisory committee | high | low | moderate |
| Citizens' planning committee | high | low | moderate/high |
| Referenda | low | low/high | moderate |

# One-page narrative summaries

A series of one-page narrative summaries of the 14 citizen participation methods is included to provide you with some important details about each methodology. We describe the method, outline its purpose, highlight details of the method, and suggest appropriate uses in the comprehensive planning process.

# Direct mail

## Description of the method

A method of building awareness in which a mass mailing of letters, brochures or other promotional pieces is delivered to a large number of individuals to increase their awareness of an event or project.

Direct mail is used to get a specific message to a targeted audience.

A direct mail program has two basic components—an audience and a message. First, the audience. Who are you trying to reach? What common traits and characteristics does the audience share? Next, the message. What is the message you want to send to your target audience?

When crafting your message, be direct. Get to the point and don't waste the reader's time. Do your homework and know your audience. Create a message that people will read. Be respectful in tone and content. Be informative and communicate value. Be creative in delivering your message—make it interesting and easy to look at. Think ahead. Anticipate questions that readers may have and answer them in the piece.

## Purpose

The primary purpose of this method is to create public awareness. A secondary purpose is to provide education.

## Characteristics

- Direct mail works best when you have a simple message and an easily identifiable target audience. It doesn't work well with complicated messages and diverse target audiences.
- Direct mail requires little time commitment by citizens.
- Direct mail can reach or engage a large number of people.
- Direct mail requires a moderate to high resource commitment by local governments, depending on the number of people targeted and the material delivered.

## Use in the planning process

Direct mail can be used throughout the planning process, but will be most effective early in the process when a large number of people can be reached. An effective early message is key to improving awareness of the planning project.

Efforts should be made to ensure that the direct mailing reaches as broad an audience as possible, including diverse and traditionally underserved audiences. These could include school age children, teenagers, older adults and minorities.

# News releases and mass media

## Description

News releases and mass media promote public awareness and education via media outlets in an effort to keep the public informed without relying entirely on the initiative of reporters to get the word out. Communicating with the public is one of the local government's key responsibilities. Because this method has the potential to reach a large number of people, it can be very effective.

Carefully craft the message that you wish to communicate and determine the best media to convey the message. Always put the information in its proper context—make the meaning of the message clear by giving adequate background information. Be concise. Send a few short messages, rather than a big, complex message. Clearly distinguish fact from opinion. Avoid any and all jargon. Get your message to the media—a good working relationship with the media will help ensure that your message is delivered as you wish.

## Purpose

The primary purpose of this method is to create public awareness. A secondary purpose is to provide education.

## Characteristics

- News releases and use of mass media works best to announce developments and decisions. If well-timed and designed, they can help keep the planning project in the public eye. They don't work well when your actions aren't consistent with message.
- News releases and use of mass media require little time commitment by citizens.
- News releases and use of mass media can reach or engage a large number of people.
- News releases and use of mass media require a low resource commitment by local governments.

## Use in the planning process

News releases and use of mass media is appropriate throughout the planning process. In fact, it may be one of the most effective ways to keep the project in the public eye.

**Source:** Adapted from *Citizen Participation Handbook for Public Officials and Professionals Working in the Public Sector.* Institute for Participatory Management and Planning, P.O. Box 1937, Monterey CA 93942-1237

# Displays and exhibits



## Description

Displays and exhibits are created to share information with the public. A fixed display or exhibit uses pictures, maps and text to convey a message to the public. These types of displays and exhibits should be set up in public places with high visibility and high traffic volume to maximize exposure. Shopping centers, vacant storefronts, fairs, libraries and municipal centers are all good places for displays and exhibits.

Another effective way to convey a message to the public is by setting up a booth staffed by individuals knowledgeable about the topic or issue. Staffed displays and exhibits give the public an opportunity to ask specific questions and share their concerns or reactions regarding the information presented.

Displays and exhibits most commonly provide one-way communication to the public. However, it is possible to incorporate a method for the public to provide feedback on the topic or issue. Response forms and a drop-box for completed forms can be incorporated into the display or exhibit.

## Purpose

The main purpose of displays and exhibits is to make the public aware of planning issues and processes. Secondary purposes could include educating the public about planning issues and alternatives and creating an opportunity for the public to provide feedback, if the display or exhibit is set up to accommodate this function.

## Characteristics

Displays and exhibits are most effective when used in coordination with other citizen participation techniques, such as open houses, visioning processes, or charettes.

Displays and exhibits require little time commitment from the public. They are often set up in a place that the public is at for other purposes so that people don't have to go out of their way to participate.

Displays and exhibits are effective in getting information to segments of the public that might not otherwise participate in the planning process.

The financial resource needs of displays and exhibits vary depending on the size and complexity of the display or exhibit.

Staffed displays or exhibits require considerable staff or volunteer time, with or without compensation.

## Use in the planning process

Displays and exhibits can be used effectively throughout the planning process, whenever there is a need to inform and/or educate the public about planning issues or processes. They can be used early in the process to let people know that the community is undertaking planning and what process steps will be used. They can used to let the public know what has already happened in the planning process and about upcoming opportunities to participate. They can be useful during the strategy formulation step to let the public know about alternative strategies under consideration. And they can be used in the plan review stage to provide information to citizens regarding opportunities to participate in that process.

Source: Adapted from *Citizen Participation Handbook for Public Officials and Professionals Working in the Public Sector.* Institute for Participatory Management and Planning, P.O. Box 1937, Monterey CA 93942-1237.

# Public education meetings

## Description of the method

Education programs are usually conducted to improve citizens' understanding of an issue, to inform them of technical information necessary to understand the issue, or to improve communication between citizens and decision-makers. Some of the education programs for citizens used within the context of the comprehensive planning process are:

- Education about the planning and decision making process
- Education on substantive content such as planning, environmental assessment, visioning, etc.
- Education on land use issues affecting a community

This education might be accomplished formally through seminars, workshops and lectures. Or, it may be conducted more informally through simulation games, roundtable discussions and brown-bag lunches or through publications and audiovisuals.

## Purpose

The purpose of public education meetings is to ensure that citizens have sufficient subject matter background to participate fully and effectively in the comprehensive planning process.

## Characteristics

Public education meetings may increase the public's impact on an issue.

When fully informed, citizens may feel less intimidated by professionals and more likely to express differing viewpoints.

When educated, citizens can make a valuable contribution to decision makers as they work on creating solutions to an issue. However, some citizens may resent the suggestion that they need education or may question the "objectivity" of an education program conducted by a planning agency or local government.

Education programs can be developed to accommodate a relatively large number of participants at a low to moderate cost to local governments. At the same time, if education programs are needed on a large number of topics, they can add time and expense to the planning process.

## Use in the planning process

The education must be integral to the planning or decision-making process or citizens may view the education as wasted time and effort.

Educational efforts will likely be necessary throughout the planning process, but more so early on. They should be conducted and promoted in different ways to reach and educate as many citizens as possible.

**Source:** *Adapted from the Involving Citizens, A Guide to Conducting Citizen Participation* by Wilbur A. Wiedman, Jr. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Bureau of Information and Education, 1992.

# Websites

## Description

Websites (your own or the use of others') provide an opportunity to offer information and education to stakeholders in the planning process. Meeting minutes, preliminary plans, maps, fact sheets, studies, links to other websites, and a host of other resources can be placed on a website for public review. The website can also be used interactively—for the public to ask questions of the local government and the local government to respond—or for the collection of data or input from the public on planning related issues.

Websites can range from simple to complex. When developing one it is important to keep it simple and easy to use. If it is complex, or if the information is difficult to find, the website will not be effective. Linking other sites to yours is also valuable, and can help reach a broader number of citizens.

## Purpose

The primary purpose of this method is to provide public education. Secondary purposes include public education and public input.

## Characteristics

- Websites work best to provide resources to members of the public for review at their own pace and on their own time. If well-designed, they can help keep the public well-informed and educated about the planning process and key community issues. Websites don't work well when they are too complex and finding resource materials is too complicated.
- Websites require a moderate time commitment by citizens.
- Websites can reach or engage a moderate number of people, depending on the area and the availability and use of computers.
- Websites require a moderate to high resource commitment by local governments.

## Use in the planning process

The use of websites is appropriate throughout the planning process. In fact, it can be one of the most effective ways to provide information to the public. This is an area in which more people are becoming comfortable. It shouldn't be underestimated as a way of reaching people.

Public access to web information is an important concept to consider. For those that don't have internet access at home or at work, it may be possible to arrange for public access at public libraries or other public offices.

**Source:** *Adapted from Citizen Participation Handbook for Public Officials and Professionals Working in the Public Sector.* Institute for Participatory Management and Planning, P.O. Box 1937, Monterey CA 93942-1237

# Open houses

## Description of the method

An open house creates an informal setting for citizens to interact with local government officials and the people in the community who are involved in planning.

There are two main objectives of an open house:

- To expose citizens to information and ideas that support the planning effort
- To provide citizens with an opportunity to ask questions, express concerns, and react to information (text, graphics, photos, etc.) and ideas, and to provide both written and oral feedback about the information being presented.

Citizens are greeted by a member of the group hosting the open house and given a brief explanation of the process and room layout.

Stations are set up around the room for citizens to visit. Each station should focus on one particular proposal or idea. A member of the host group should be available at each station to answer questions and engage in dialog with citizens.

## Purpose

The main purpose of an open house is to obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives or proposals. Open houses also have an educational component that provides the public with an opportunity to learn more about specific issues.

## Characteristics

Displays, handouts and other visual and audio materials are used to inform citizens about the issues, ideas and proposals presented at the open house event.

- Open houses provide citizens an opportunity to ask questions and voice their hopes and concerns directly to elected officials and/or people in the community responsible for planning.
- Open houses do not typically involve a formal presentation to the entire audience. Similarly, they do not provide citizens with a forum to voice their hopes, concerns, or opinions to the entire audience.
- Open houses require a moderate time commitment from citizens. They must leave their homes to attend and spend time interacting at the different stations during the open house event.

  There is a moderate amount of financial and other resource commitment from the local government necessary to support an open house. Handout materials, displays, and refreshments are needed to make the event a success.
- Open houses have the potential to reach a moderate number of people in the community. Care should be taken in selecting a date, time and location to increase the likelihood of broad participation.
- Open houses can occur on one day or evening, or over a number of days and times.

## Use in the planning process

Open houses are typically held during the issue identification and visioning step, the strategy formulation step, and the plan review step of the comprehensive planning process.

Source: *Adapted from Citizen Participation Handbook for Public Officials and Professionals Working in the Public Sector. Institute for Participatory Management and Planning*, P.O. Box 1937, Monterey CA 93942-1237.

# Public hearings

## Description

A public hearing consists of at least four major parts:

1. A summary of why the hearing is being held
2. Presentation of the range of alternative solutions, including any recommended or preferred solutions to an issue or issues
3. An inventory and evaluation of the consequences or impacts of each of the solutions being considered
4. Public comments that react to, support, or oppose the solutions being considered. These comments become part of the official record of the hearing.

## Purpose

The public hearing has two main purposes:

1. To present the public with alternate and recommended courses of action to address an issue or issues
2. to provide an opportunity for public comment on proposals that react to, support, or oppose the alternatives being considered.

A local government that holds a public hearing as a method of citizen participation makes the promise to listen to and acknowledge citizen input given within the framework of the hearing, and to provide feedback to citizens on how their input influenced decision making.

## Characteristics

Public hearings can be a very poor technique for obtaining citizen input for a variety of reasons:

Public hearings are the perfect setting for confrontation and conflict, not the thoughtful discussion of possible concerns.

Many citizens are overwhelmed by the presentation of sophisticated and official looking information; they feel inadequate to respond on the spot.

Many citizens prefer not to provide comments in a public setting; especially one that requires standing in front of the room and speaking into a microphone. The public hearing format can be intimidating.

Many people believe that by the time a public hearing is scheduled, a decision has already been made. They don't feel their input is really being seriously considered.

Often, people will either not speak up at all during the public hearing, or they will speak up, become emotional and take a very uncompromising stand. This kind of input tends to polarize interests.

Public hearings provide an opportunity for citizens to speak and react to a proposal in a public setting, but without rebuttal or additional dialogue with local government officials.

The success of the public hearing can be greatly enhanced by involving citizens in the development of the proposals, solutions or recommendations that will ultimately be discussed at the public hearing.

Additionally, it is often beneficial to hold an informational meeting prior to the public hearing so that citizens have the opportunity to learn about the alternatives, ask clarifying questions, and formulate their responses prior to the public hearing.

## Use in the planning process

A public hearing is part of the minimum legal requirement for comprehensive planning and citizen participation. While they are usually held toward the end of the planning process, public hearings can be held in other steps of the planning process as well. For example, a public hearing might be held to gather public input prior to the adoption of a community vision statement, or to get reaction to proposed plan recommendations. Ultimately, any public hearing is greatly improved with proper planning, education, and ample citizen participation well in advance of the hearing.

Source: *Adapted from Citizen Participation Handbook for Public Officials and Professionals Working in the Public Sector. Institute for Participatory Management and Planning*, P.O. Box 1937, Monterey CA 93942-1237.

# Visual preference survey

## Description

In community settings, this technique generally asks citizens to take photographs of what they deem to be appropriate and inappropriate community design features or land uses. The resulting photos are then paired with participant descriptions of why they like or do not like specific scenes. Categories of positive and negative design or land use features are generated beforehand to guide note taking.

This method is used to build consensus around community norms that can guide long-term land use planning and decision making. The norms are thus tied to visual images, which may be displayed in documents and/or displays and exhibits.

## Purpose

A visual preference survey serves to obtain public input on planning analysis of alternatives, and, secondarily, to provide a vehicle for public education.

Care should be given to include a diverse representation of the community's populations and interests.

## Characteristics

A visual preference survey is an excellent way to ground planning in reality—both constraints and opportunities—of the community's physical environment. It recognizes the tendency of citizens to readily grasp the visual concepts that are difficult to describe in words.

A potential limitation is that few citizens can participate in the process at any given time. Also, the method requires a moderate to high resource commitment by the local government. Someone needs to compile and "interpret" the results from a design perspective, which takes both effort and expertise.

This method works best when ample time exists for shooting, organizing and interpreting photos. A moderate level of citizen time commitment is required, but most participants find picture-taking an enjoyable respite from meetings and discussions.

This method also works well when public officials cannot describe physical characteristics of the community, particularly those valued by its citizens.

## Use in the planning process

Visual preference surveys have been used very effectively in the background information and inventory, issue identification and visioning steps of the comprehensive planning process.

They may also be recommended for use in the plan implementation step, particularly for developing signage, design review, and aesthetic codes.

# Focus groups

## Description

Focus groups are a form of qualitative data collection in which a moderator facilitates a group discussion based on a set of predetermined questions. Most focus groups include between six and twelve people. A separate individual may record participant responses, or electronic taping devices may also be used. The focus group moderator uses a variety of questioning techniques to uncover and explore participants' attitudes, feelings, and beliefs about an issue or issues relating to one or more topics.

Focus groups are commonly used to identify issues for subsequent inclusion in community surveys. They may also be used to validate the significance of issues previously identified through a community survey, or to better understand issues.

Participation in focus groups is usually by invitation, often to get input from a variety of interests. This may be done by including several perspectives in a single focus group, or through the use of multiple focus groups where each focus group represents a particular interest.

## Purpose

Focus groups are a means of providing citizen input to local governments and planning groups.

## Characteristics

Focus groups are very useful in uncovering issues and concerns as well as the values, beliefs and attitudes that underlie the positions people take on issues.

Focus group questions, because they need to be relatively simple, are not difficult to generate. Consequently, focus groups require little preparation time and fewer resources than many other citizen participation methods; particularly given the rich data they are capable of producing.

Focus groups are only as effective as the group's moderator. A skilled moderator will know how to use probing and follow-up questions to get beneath the surface of participants' responses to the underlying attitudes, beliefs and values.

Because of the small number of participants used and their selection, focus groups cannot be considered truly representative of a community. In addition, less vocal participants often don't get as much input into the discussion, unless the moderator makes a point to include them throughout the process.

## Use in the planning process

Focus groups work well when there is a need to conduct a preliminary identification of community issues and concerns. While often used to identify or validate issues, focus groups may also be used to provide feedback on alternative recommendations during the strategy formulation and selection step and during the plan implementation step to assess the public's satisfaction with the plan. Focus groups can also be used during the plan monitoring and reassessment step to assess public satisfaction with plan outcomes, impacts, and even the planning process itself.

# Opinion surveys

## Description

Opinion surveys are a means for collecting primary quantitative and qualitative data from or about citizens. They are "reactive" in nature, requiring citizens to respond to verbal or written statements and questions. Opinion surveys are used to measure the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, opinions, behavior and other attributes of citizens. Surveys can be conducted orally (face-to-face or via telephone) or in writing (mail-back or drop-off returns). Questions asked may be those for which respondents give answers in their own words (open-ended) or those for which respondents must choose from among a set list of answers (close-ended).

## Purpose

The purpose of opinion surveys is to provide one-way public input from citizens to local governments. Effective surveys also include some background on the planning process, and, therefore, may have some aspect of public education.

A survey of each household in a municipality provides an opportunity for every household to be involved in the planning effort.

## Characteristics

Opinion surveys have the advantage of systematically describing the views of a large number of citizens. A drawback to opinion surveys is the absence of the interaction and synergism of group participation strategies. There are also many potential errors in designing and implementing the survey process, enough so that basing momentous decisions on the survey may require the services of a survey research consultant.

Citizen opinion surveys work best when potential courses of action can be weighed against some tradeoff or cost. Opinion surveys work poorly when questions are phrased in generalities so vague or non-controversial as to render the answers meaningless.

The citizen time commitment associated with opinion surveys is moderate; mainly requiring people to think reflectively.

Governments using this strategy can glean tremendous amounts of information while spending modest amounts of money and staff time (unless survey consultants are employed).

## Use in the planning process

Opinion surveys can be used very effectively during the issue identification and visioning step of comprehensive planning. They can also be used during the plan monitoring, reassessment and amendment step, as a check on the plan's progress.

# Citizen advisory committee



## Description

Citizen advisory committees are established by the governing body of a local governmental unit, usually at the beginning of the comprehensive planning process. They are created for the purpose of advising a local government, plan commission, or planning body on issues relevant to the comprehensive planning process.

There are no set criteria for selecting members of a citizen advisory committee. Citizens are often selected based on their interest or skill sets. Committee members can be selected to represent a cross-section of the community or based on single issues or interests.

It is important for the local government to keep two things in mind when establishing a citizen advisory committee: 1) precisely what, they want the body to accomplish (purpose); and 2) how the citizen advisory committee will accomplish its purpose.

Clearly established purposes and expectations will help the committee succeed.

## Purpose

The purpose of the citizen advisory committee is to work directly with the public throughout the planning process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently identified, understood and considered.

## Characteristics

Creating a citizen advisory committee results in a considerable commitment, both by the local government and those citizens agreeing to serve on the committee. While the committee's recommendations are advisory, the local government cannot solicit input and then consistently ignore it. Decision-makers who do that, or are perceived to be doing that, are subject to suspicion, and their relations with their committees and the public will likely be strained.

Successful advisory committees require a lot of time and effort on everybody's part.

How the members of the committee are selected can affect whether or not the committee achieves consensus and how well the general public embraces the committee's recommendations.

When advisory committees work well they provide for detailed analysis of an issue or issues, and allow participants to gain understanding of other perspectives, which helps lead toward compromise and, ultimately, consensus.

Although advisory committees are among the most popular citizen participation methods, it is a simple but sobering fact of life that many experiences with advisory committees can be bad for both sides.

Local governments often misuse citizen advisory committees by not listening to or implementing recommendations, by using the committee as a scapegoat for unpopular actions, and by abdicating their decision-making responsibility to the committee.

## Use in the planning process

Citizen advisory committees can serve throughout the entire comprehensive planning process, or during specific steps, whenever the local governing body, plan commission, or planning body needs advice from the public

Source: *Adapted from Citizen Participation Handbook for Public Officials and Professionals Working in the Public Sector. Institute for Participatory Management and Planning,* P.O. Box 1937, Monterey CA 93942-1237.

# Visioning

## Description

Visioning involves describing a preferred future state or set of conditions for a community. The vision may depict this future through text, images or a combination.

The Oregon Visioning Model, an example of a community visioning approach, asks participants to answer four basic questions about their community:

- Where are we now?
- Where are we going?
- Where do we want to be?
- How do we get there?

A number of visioning models exist. Each asks participants to develop a vision that reflects shared community values, and describes how citizens want their community to look in the future.

## Purpose

The purpose of visioning is to provide a means for public interaction during the planning process. The objective of visioning is to ensure that local government and planners understand public issues, concerns and preferences.

## Characteristics

Visioning provides an opportunity for citizens to work independently, and/or in groups, to address public interests, values or issues.

Visioning permits a variety of ways to express a preferred future for a community. Participants may express themselves in ways that are most comfortable to them; for example, writing, speaking,, drawing, photography and computer-based imagery.

Visioning provides an inspirational context with which to guide the larger planning process because it asks citizens to describe their future community in terms of shared community values. Once a community vision is established it helps guide the development of strategies to reach that identified future.

Visioning requires considerable time and effort from participants, facilitators and local government alike. It is not unusual for visioning efforts to last for several months to a year or more.

The financial and material resources required for a visioning program vary greatly depending on the approach used by the planning group.

## Use in the planning process

Visioning may be used early in the comprehensive planning process as a means of inspiring planning group members. It is most commonly used in the issue identification and visioning step, and during the strategy formulation step as alternative and preferred end states are developed in response to community issues.

# Citizen planning committees

## Description

Citizen planning committees are formal groups comprised of local government officials and citizens. Each committee member has full voting privileges within the context of the comprehensive planning process. The citizen planning committee is charged with designing, implementing, and evaluating the comprehensive planning process within a community.

Citizen planning committees are formed in advance of any planning activity. Since legal responsibility for formal community planning belongs to local government through their planning commissions, the formation of citizen planning committees usually begins with, and requires formal sanction by, local government.

## Purpose

Citizen planning committees represent a formal planning partnership between citizens and local government. As such, their purpose is to place final decision-making authority in the hands of the public. Consequently, this citizen participation approach generates the highest level of community impact upon the community planning process.

## Characteristics

Citizen planning committees lend credibility to the planning process and increase the chances that the public will support both the planning process and the final plan because citizens share decision-making authority.

Citizen planning committees require the sanction of local government and work best when government is genuinely interested in partnering with citizens in the planning process.

Citizen planning committees require considerable investments of time and energy by members, as well as moderate to high levels of resource commitment by local government.

The ability of citizen planning committees to engage other citizens will vary from low to high depending on the roles and opportunities created for other citizen involvement during the planning process.

## Use in the planning process

Citizen planning committees are formed at the very beginning of the planning process and continue through all steps of the planning approach.

# Referenda

## Description

Referenda are a form of "direct democracy," as opposed to "participatory" democratic methods, which comprise the core of citizen participation methods.

There are two forms of referenda: binding and non-binding (advisory). With binding referenda, citizens make policy decisions by a simple majority vote, without the advice and consent of the local government. With non-binding or advisory referenda, citizens advise the local government on a policy decision, but the governing board may choose to set aside the outcome of the vote and make its own decision.

Referenda can be initiated by citizen petition, or can be initiated at the discretion of the local government. Wisconsin statutes govern the following referenda procedures: municipal advisory referenda [§8.06 and §8.55]; direct legislation [§9.20]; counties [§59.52(25)]; charter ordinances [§66.0101]; municipal incorporation [§66.0211 and §66.0215]; annexation [§66.0217(7) and §66.0219]; boundary fixing by judgment [§66.0225]; boundary agreements [§66.0307]; and other special cases.

## Purpose

The general purpose of a binding referendum is to create formal citizen involvement in a meaningful decision. Its explicit promise is that the policy chosen by the electorate will be faithfully implemented.

The purpose of a non-binding or advisory referendum is to have citizens provide input on policy alternatives. It implies that the governing body will listen to citizen views on an issue, and then give feedback to the electorate on how the referendum influenced the local government's decision.

## Characteristics

Both binding and non-binding referenda work best when the local government faces an "either-or" decision, one upon which the electorate may truly reflect their views by a "yes" or "no' vote.

Referenda work poorly with highly complex issues, due to the need for public understanding of a large amount of technical information.

An advantage of referenda is the potential for engaging high numbers of citizens, with low citizen time commitment and moderate resource commitment by the local government.

A drawback is the difficulty of phrasing an issue simply enough to be understood on the ballot.

Also, the failure to use complementary citizen participation methods leading up to the referenda will result in lower voter participation.

## Use in the planning process

Referenda may be used effectively during the strategy formulation step of comprehensive planning, as a means of selecting preferred alternatives.

Referenda may also be used during the plan monitoring, reassessment and amendment step, given that conditions and community preferences may change over time.

# The citizen participation worksheet

The worksheet that follows contains a number of questions and considerations that will help guide you through the development of a citizen participation plan for your comprehensive planning effort.

The worksheet will help to ensure that you have developed a citizen participation plan that complements your comprehensive planning process—one that will engage citizens in a number of appropriate ways throughout every step of your planning process

# Worksheet



When the community diagnosis is complete and it is determined that the community has the willingness and capacity to begin a comprehensive planning process, a plan for citizen participation should be developed. The following questions are useful in profiling the citizen participation effort.

1. Whose citizen participation plan is it? The Citizen Participation Plan is for:
   - □ The local unit of government
   - □ The county
   - □ The county and local units of government
   - □ Affected citizens and community organizations
   - □ Others
2. What period of time will the Citizen Participation Plan cover?
   - □ 1 year
   - □ 2 years
   - □ 3 years
   - □ 5 years
   - □ other (specify) _____
3. What is/are the purpose(s) of the Citizen Participation Plan?

   _____

   _____

   _____

4. What are some initial suggestions or promising methods to pursue for assuring a blend of participation (from passive to active involvement)?
   a. Public Awareness

   _____

   _____

   b. Public Education

   _____

   _____

   c. Public Input

   _____

   _____

   d. Public Interaction

   _____

   _____

   e. Public Partnership

   _____

   _____

**Worksheet,** *continued*

5. Who needs to be involved in the citizen participation effort? When will they be involved? How will they be involved? What is the purpose of their involvement?

| Who | When | How | Purpose |
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6. What products/outcomes are expected from the citizen participation effort?

7. What is the timeline for the citizen participation effort?
   a. Starting date _____
   b. Methods used in the citizen participation effort (link to each step in the comprehensive planning approach)

| Method | Relates to comprehensive planning step # | Start date | Duration | Responsible party |
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8. How will the citizen participation plan be adopted?
   a. Who needs to be involved in reviewing and adopting the citizen participation plan?

   _____

   _____

**Worksheet,** *continued*

9. Identify resources necessary for implementation of the citizen participation plan, where you plan to get them, and whether or not they are assured.

| Resource need | Where will you get this resource? | Assured? Yes or no |
|---|---|---|
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10. How will the citizen participation plan be:
    a. Evaluated?
    b. Monitored and assessed?
    c. Amended?

## References

Bryson, John M. and Farnum K. Alston. *Creating and Implementing Your Strategic Plan: A Workbook for Public and Nonprofit Organizations* (pp. 31-35, 89). Jossey-Bass Publishers. 1996.

University of Wisconsin-Extension, Citizen Participation Team (2001). *Citizen Participation Training Manual*.

Section 5

**This section provides a more detailed "How-to guide" for getting started in the creation of a comprehensive plan.**

# Getting started with a comprehensive plan

This section provides a more detailed "how-to" guide for getting started in the creation of a comprehensive plan. For illustration purposes, the comprehensive planning approach from Section 2 will be used. Steps 1 (Preliminary Education and Diagnosis) and 2 (Plan for Planning) represent the initial stage of planning, sometimes referred to as a "preplanning" phase. This early, start-up phase may take considerable time—it is not uncommon for preplanning to last a year or two. This is the time when community leaders and citizens figure out the fundamentals of planning, including learning about why a plan may be needed, who should be involved in the process, and what the specific planning process could be.

Steps 1 and 2 lay the foundation for actually "building or creating" the plan itself. While the approach to planning is described as a nine-step process and appears linear, in reality, a typical planning process overlaps between steps, may loop back from one step to another, and may repeat and reinforce portions of steps in an interactive fashion. In other words, a planning process may appear very precise in theory, but in practical application, plan development is a very dynamic process that requires flexibility in the operation of the plan process.

These are important notions when getting started in planning. In all types of planning, there is a strong desire to get on with the actual planning, and then, with implementing the plan. Many local officials and citizen planners are action-oriented and impatient about taking what is perceived as too much time getting ready for actual plan development. However, the early education, community diagnosis, and plan for planning activities (Steps 1 and 2) are critical in assuring that the completed plan will be both useful and effective.

This section will provide suggestions for moving your community toward development of a plan. Special emphasis will be given to the importance of involving citizens in a meaningful way during all stages. Again, this section will focus on the initial steps, or preplanning phase, of comprehensive plan development.

**Steps 1 and 2 lay the foundation for actually "building or creating" the plan itself. Many local officials and citizen planners are action-oriented and impatient about taking what is perceived as too much time getting ready for actual plan development. However, the early education, community diagnosis and plan for planning activities are critical in assuring that the completed plan will be both useful and effective.**

# Step 1: Preliminary education and diagnosis

## Overview of preliminary education and diagnosis

The purpose of this step is to provide basic education and opportunities for community diagnosis. Education is a critical first step in any decision-making process. Early education arouses people's interest and makes them aware that a planning process is about to begin. Step 1 can present factual information on the status of the community and awaken residents to the possibilities of the future.

Early education can also provide important background about the current operations of government in matters of physical, social and economic development (Kent, 1964). It has been pointed out that any or all of the steps in the process are appropriate for providing educational programs. In fact, as the community proceeds with planning, education is interwoven into the entire comprehensive planning process and goes on continuously (Kent, 1964). However, extra effort to immerse the community and prospective planning process participants is warranted early on to help prepare them for making good decisions later.

Community diagnosis is a process of asking questions that provide insights about the nature of the community. Obviously there is a lot of education and learning during the diagnosis activities.

The community diagnosis helps unveil, at a very early point in the process, initial community concerns, potential issues and values of its citizens. It is important to understand, in a preliminary way, what appear to be important factors to emphasize in the plan. This initial development of issues can help customize the "plan for planning" to assure that key issues are given prominence and thoroughly addressed in the planning process.

The community diagnosis step also provides an early opportunity to find out about "power and influence networks" that can either support and champion the planning process or that can work against the planning process. It is important to know whom the individuals and groups are that will likely get behind the development of a plan. It is also useful to know who might resist a new plan.

The preliminary education and diagnosis step lays the essential foundation for the ultimate creation of the plan. Many of the ideas that first get raised in this step may find their way into the approved plan. Other ideas will be cast aside as the process proceeds with more input from key people, more knowledge, greater appreciation for technical considerations, more opportunities for sharing perspectives, and a better understanding of the consequences of alternative futures. This step also can initiate and instill the importance of representative and meaningful citizen involvement.

It is not necessary to provide an overwhelming amount of education or an exhaustive community diagnosis. One always has to be careful not to intimidate the community with too much information or by asking too many questions. A community is less likely to use data in a meaningful way if there are large volumes of it (Nadler and Hibino, 1998). Planning processes have been known to bog down when the community gets frustrated from a data overload or too many challenging questions. Therefore, this section will provide suggestions on the type of educational support and methods for diagnosing the community's current situation.

And finally, the diagnosis step is useful in assessing whether or not the community is ready and capable of undertaking a planning process. At the conclusion of this step, the plan coordinating team should be in a position to gauge the extent to which community leadership, resources and enthusiasm are sufficiently in place to proceed with the planning process.

**Early education arouses the interest of people and makes them aware that a planning process is about to proceed. It can present factual information on the community's status and awaken residents to the possibilities of the future.**

**The preliminary education and diagnosis step lays the essential foundation for the creation of the plan. Many of the ideas that first get raised in this step may find their way into the approved plan. Other ideas will be cast aside as the process proceeds. And finally, the diagnosis step is useful in assessing whether or not the community is ready and capable of undertaking a planning process.**

## Who will lead this step?

There are several different approaches for building a comprehensive plan, many methods of citizen participation, and numerous combinations of ways to launch the initial education and diagnosis phase. Leadership is a critical element in the success in beginning the planning effort as well as throughout the planning process (Kelly, 2000).

In jurisdictions with established planning staff, the planner(s) may lead the preplanning stage. Other key players may include representatives from the planning body, if one exists, and support from the governing body. Regardless of community size, the top elected official should be either directly linked or indirectly associated with this early step. While jurisdictional size does affect the possible leadership of the preplanning phase, technical and professional support is valuable. University assistance can be especially useful during the earlier phases of planning, and the University of Wisconsin-Extension has a major initiative for directing its

resources to comprehensive planning. Some nucleus of leadership should be assembled to coordinate the preplanning activities.

For example, in the development of the Jefferson County Comprehensive Plan, a "Core Group" or plan coordinating team met regularly for nearly a year to lead the early education and community diagnosis. This group consisted of the county board chair, county board vice chair, the Planning and Zoning Committee chair, Strategic Planning Committee chair, and the county administrator. Professional support included the planning and zoning director, zoning technician, land information director and community development educator from UW-Extension.

This plan coordinating team or committee should not be confused with the primary planning body or "planning team." The coordinating committee will set the overall planning process policy and direction (Bryson, 1995). Part of the plan coordinating team's responsibilities may include diagnosing what kind of planning body (planning commission, citizens' advisory committee, steering committee, or task force) may be appropriate during the development of the plan. The plan coordinating team should help establish or affirm the designated committee or "planning team" which will be most involved and make decisions during the actual planning process. Again, there are numerous ways and combinations for including existing planning commissions, new advisory groups, and citizens in carrying out the planning process.

Existing Wisconsin statutes and the Smart Growth Law identify requirements for the composition of planning bodies for each governmental jurisdiction in Wisconsin. In addition, UW–Extension provides numerous resources to help interpret both the statutory requirements and possible options for the establishment of planning bodies or planning teams to develop the comprehensive plan. The planning team will likely not be activated until the Plan for Planning (Step 2) has been completed.

**In the development of the Jefferson County Comprehensive Plan, a "core group" or plan coordinating team met regularly for nearly a year to lead the early education and community diagnosis. Part of the plan coordinating team's responsibilities may include diagnosing what kind of planning body (planning commission, citizens' advisory committee, steering committee or task force) may be appropriate during the development of the plan.**

## Possible content details

Preliminary education and diagnosis can provide a firm foundation for development of the actual plan, and can certainly take on countless topics. The experience of the coordinating committee is invaluable in helping to design the initial educational programs. As pointed out, education must occur throughout all stages of the planning process to make good decisions. Acknowledging the opportunity to provide education throughout the process takes some of the pressure off of the temptation to "cram" too much community learning right up front. This section will outline a few suggested components that can help prepare the community decision-makers for the process, without overwhelming them with information overload. Again, the ultimate purpose of community education and community involvement is to help produce better decisions in the plan. Since a good plan builds on prior steps, Step 1 is the place for "lightly" introducing important and basic background concepts.

**This section will outline a few suggested components that can help prepare the community decision makers for the process, without overwhelming them with information. The ultimate purpose of community education and community involvement is to help produce better decisions in the plan.**

## a. Profile existing plans

It is important to understand the fundamental existing vision (or goal) statements and policies that are currently in place within the community relative to the functional elements of the comprehensive plan. At a minimum, some of the key policies controlling land use that actually influence changes on the land should be assembled. A professional staff person or seasoned official should be able to assemble a short list of pertinent and meaningful guidelines that currently exist. This exercise should go beyond just piling all the existing plans on a table. Instead, a concise summary of existing planning policies, accompanied with an assessment about how the plans are being followed, and their effectiveness, can quickly bring officials and citizen planners up to speed about the plans currently in place.

The Jefferson County Planning and Zoning Administrator was able to describe the County's old "General Development and Agricultural Preservation Plan" and its effectiveness in five pages. This was necessary and interesting information, but was not overwhelming to the citizenry.

**A concise summary of existing planning policies, accompanied with an assessment about how the plans are being followed, and their effectiveness, can quickly bring officials and citizen planners up to speed about the plans currently in place.**

## b. Growth and change assessment

Examining some of the trends in growth and physical change provide sound rationale for undertaking a new plan. Essentially, all communities are changing in many ways, albeit some more dramatically than others. Regardless, a concise demographic analysis and summary of growth projections provide many insights and implications for the future.

## c. Review fundamentals and principles of planning

Many of the participants in a community planning process are not familiar with basic terms and concepts related to community development and planning. Leaders of the process have an opportunity to review some fundamental notions to establish this baseline knowledge. In Jefferson County, this overview was referred to as a "Planning Primer."

It is always useful to establish a common language of key terms. Various definitions of "community planning" or "comprehensive planning" should be discussed. For instance, over time, planning professionals have used the terms comprehensive plan, master plan and general plan to essentially describe the same type of plan. Basic principles of growth management should also be presented. For example, the following definition of growth management was used during the education phase of the Jefferson County planning process:

> *Growth management involves deciding where growth should and should not occur, and targeting public investment to encourage and support development in areas where development is acceptable and desirable, in addition to discouraging it in other areas.*

Another useful orientation program for aspiring participants in a planning process is a review of the rationale for community planning. This can include a discussion about the common-sense reasons why good planning can benefit local governments and residents. In Jefferson County, the following benefits were discussed:

> *Planning helps preserve resources and qualities people value and appreciate in Wisconsin and Jefferson County. Planning promotes more open and democratic decision-making. It also increases consistency and fairness.*

It may be helpful to describe a variety of other types of plans commonly developed in communities. Examples of other types of plans include strategic plans, local area or district plans (such as for neighborhoods, downtowns and other specific areas), and functional or single purpose plans (such as for housing, transportation or parks). Before completing Step 1, the plan coordinating team should feel confident that there has been a good discussion about the meaning of comprehensive planning and other types of planning, and there should be agreement on what the plan will be called.

Another fundamental concept to cover in a baseline education program could include differentiating between planning and zoning. It is also useful to provide clarification about various plan implementation tools, in addition to zoning, such as capital improvement programming, subdivision regulation and overlay district identification.

**Many of the participants in a community planning process are not familiar with basic terms and concepts related to community development and planning. Leaders of the process have an opportunity to review some fundamental notions to establish this baseline knowledge. In Jefferson County, this overview was referred to as a "Planning Primer."**

## d. Review possible plan approach and plan products

The planning approach is characterized by the series of steps necessary to carry out the planning process. The approach to planning is also comprised of the variety of tools, techniques and skills used in each step. Citizen planners and local officials are frequently unclear about the components of a planning approach. It has been pointed out that there are many different planning approaches used by consultants, planning officials and other planning practitioners.

A nine-step approach to comprehensive planning has been outlined in Section 2 to illustrate one sound approach while recognizing there are many ways to carry out the planning process. Familiarizing the community about a typical planning approach can provide a useful orientation about the types of activities involved during the course of carrying out or building the plan. While there is great variety in the way that planning processes may be carried out, there are a few steps that are common in most every process and these steps should be described. In Jefferson County, the "Planning Primer" provided a three-page description of a "typical" multi-step planning process.

Section 2 also introduces the notion of "plan products." Plan products or outputs describe the tangible activities, reports and published materials associated with the planning process. The planning process tends to become more real to prospective citizen planners when examples of plan products are described for each step. For instance, existing land use maps could be an expected product from Background Information and Inventory (Step 3); population trends and projections might be a part of Trends and Assessments (Step 4); and a household opinion survey may be a plan product from Issue Identification and Visioning (Step 5). Citizen planners may not fully understand the complexities of planning from this orientation, but it represents a building block for more fully designing the planning system in Step 2 Plan for Planning.

**Familiarizing the community about a typical planning approach can provide a useful orientation about the types of activities involved during the course of carrying out or building the plan. In Jefferson County, the "Planning Primer" provided a three-page description of a "typical" multi-step planning process. Plan products or plan outputs describe the tangible activities, reports and published materials associated with the planning process. The planning process tends to become more real to prospective citizen planners when examples of plan products are described for each step.**

## e. Determine initial concerns, preliminary issues and community values

Early in any planning process, it is important to gain a sense of the initial community concerns, potential issues and values that the plan could potentially address. It is also valuable to inquire about what local officials and the citizenry view as the purposes for a plan. Participants in this preplanning phase are generally eager to vent about concerns that they have about current or future situations that affect the community.

Those involved in these early processes are also generally willing to share their deeply held values and beliefs about community development and issues of importance to them. Community involvement techniques can be informal in relaxed settings. Relatively simple questions can prompt wide-ranging responses. For example, the following questions are likely to elicit meaningful value statements and even conceptual notions of a preferred vision that program participants have for the community: "What are concerns about our community and what are your hopes for the future of our community?"

In Jefferson County, preplanning workshops were held in four quadrants of the county. The meetings were targeted for local elected officials, planning and zoning commissioners, economic development officials and citizens. Important background education was provided by the plan coordinating team members, and reasons for doing a comprehensive plan were presented by the team.

More rigorous review, assessment, analysis and issue determination, using more detailed methods, will follow in future steps of the process (Step 3—Inventory, Step 4—Assessment, Step 5—Issues and Vision). Insights from this preplanning phase will be tested, expanded upon and refined later in the process. Evolution of the process brings clarity to many of the considerations raised at the start.

**Early in any planning process, it is important to gain a sense of the initial community concerns, potential issues and community values that the plan could potentially address. The insights from this preplanning phase will be tested, expanded upon and refined later in the process. Evolution of the process brings clarity to many of the considerations raised at the start of the process.**

## f. Assess capacity and readiness to plan

The diagnosis step provides the plan coordinating team with an opportunity to assess whether or not the community is ready and capable of undertaking a planning process.

Key criteria for "readiness" to plan include: 1) having key leaders and decision makers in place to support and commit to the project; 2) having minimal barriers or obstructions that could thwart the process; 3) having identified the capability and resources to proceed; and 4) having the community recognize that there are benefits to be gained from undertaking the plan process.

**At the conclusion of this step, the plan coordinating team should be in a position to gauge the extent to which community leadership, resources and an established need are sufficiently in place to proceed with the planning process.**

Section 5

# Step 2: Plan for planning

The purpose of comprehensive planning is to develop and integrate a community's plans for housing; economic development; utilities and community facilities; transportation; agriculture, natural and cultural resources; and intergovernmental cooperation. Another primary purpose of the comprehensive planning effort is to involve citizens appropriately throughout the entire planning process. In the end, the community's comprehensive plan helps guide growth and builds a sense of place as the community moves toward achieving its vision for the future.

## Overview of the plan for planning

The purpose of this step is to develop an initial agreement among key decision makers about the overall planning effort. The agreement should produce consensus on the following issues:

- The purpose and worth of the planning effort.
- The groups or persons who should be involved, and in what ways.
- The specific steps to be followed in the planning approach.
- The format and timing of necessary studies and reports, or other projects to be completed throughout the planning effort.
- Any important limitations or boundaries on the effort.

Many of the commitments necessary to produce a good process and plan are developed in this step. In Step 1, initial educational and diagnostic needs are explored and will likely reveal the need for continued learning opportunities for community leaders and citizens in Step 2 and beyond. A general guide for these anticipated learning needs should be outlined. In addition, evaluation mechanisms to determine how the planning process is proceeding should be considered. A periodic "check-in" on the effectiveness of the planning process is desirable, and should be considered during this step as well.

The Wisconsin Comprehensive Planning and Smart Growth Law requires written procedures to foster public participation in every step of comprehensive plan preparation. These procedures should be developed during Step 2.

Many critical questions about process design are answered in Step 2. For example:

- **Whose comprehensive plan is it?** Is this a plan for a single unit of government, a multi-jurisdictional area, a whole county? Defining the scope of the project area is an important consideration in this step. In Portage County, for example, the initial planning project included all 17 towns, nine villages, one city and the county. Each unit of government would create a comprehensive plan for its jurisdiction to include in an overall county comprehensive plan document.
- **What period of time will the comprehensive plan cover?** With a comprehensive plan we are generally talking about a plan that will cover a longer period of time, say 10 to 20 years. In Jefferson and Portage Counties, the comprehensive plans were designed to cover a 20-year period.
- **What concerns, problems or issues do you hope the comprehensive plan will address?** Are there special areas of emphasis for the plan to address in your community? Can the planning process be useful in helping address a particular concern to your residents? Are there particular elements of the comprehensive plan that need emphasis? We aren't indicating here that all issues need to be identified within a community. Rather, this is an opportunity to identify key issues facing the community—issues that the community can do something about. A community that can focus this discussion on key issues is thinking strategically about its future. Several key areas of focus came out of a discussion like this in Jefferson County: 1) splitting of land in rural areas of the County; 2) how communities grow on the "fringe," outward from existing areas of development into previously undeveloped portions of the rural area; 3) preservation of environmental corridors; and 4) growth of rural hamlets (unincorporated settlements).

**"The beginning is the most important part of the work."**

*—Plato, The Republic*

- **Who should be involved in the development of the comprehensive plan?** Defining the groups or persons to be involved in the planning process, and equally important, how they will be involved in the planning process, will help to assure that there is a representative sample of the community's population and interests involved. In the end, having the right people involved at the right time and for the right purpose will lead to greater support for the plan that is developed.

As mentioned earlier in this publication, Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning and Smart Growth Law requires written procedures to enhance public involvement at every step of plan preparation. Development of a public participation plan during the plan for planning step is advised.

Public participation is not simply a step within the comprehensive planning approach—it is a process in its own right that runs parallel to the comprehensive planning approach. As such, there are specific tasks or purposes associated with each step in building citizen participation.

In Section Four of this publication we highlighted 14 commonly used citizen participation methods, how they are used, appropriate purposes for their use, and where they might best be utilized within a comprehensive planning effort. We encourage you to use this information as a resource as you develop your citizen participation plan.

The City of Evansville, a Rock County, Wisconsin community, used a table (see Figure G, page 61) to illustrate citizen involvement in the city's comprehensive planning process. The table does an excellent job of laying out who will be involved in the comprehensive planning process, the purpose of their involvement, when and how they can be involved in the process.

By developing this detailed table, the city was better able to understand the need for citizens' involvement. As a result, the city will ultimately be better able to track and manage public roles throughout the comprehensive planning process. Additionally, they will be able to monitor the effectiveness of the citizen participation methods they are using, and make adjustments as necessary.

The table on page 61 illustrates the City of Evansville's approach for involving several different planning participants. For purposes of this publication, not all groups of people that were identified for involvement are included.

# Figure G—Citizen involvement in comprehensive planning

| Who should be involved? | What is the purpose of their involvement? | How should they be involved? | When should they be involved? |
|---|---|---|---|
| **City Council** | To validate the planning process | Approve Planning Guidance<br>System and timeline milestones | Throughout the whole project |
| | To ensure the job gets done | Approve the comprehensive plan by ordinance | At end of planning process |
| | To receive input from constituents | Attend public meetings and hearings | Throughout the process |
| | To adopt the comprehensive plan and the citizen participation plan | By ordinance<br>By resolution | Upon completion of Comprehensive Planning before implementation |
| | To sponsor the planning process | Create the Smart Growth Planning Committee and provide funding. | During annual budget planning |
| **Smart Growth Planning Committee** | To keep the ball rolling | As process champions | Throughout planning process |
| | To develop process and plans | As planning team | Throughout planning process |
| | To provide updates and communications | Give reports to city council and planning commission | Quarterly or as needed |
| | To insure that funding is available to support the planning efforts | Form a sub-committee to investigate funding needs and options | After state grant review process provides notice; as resource needs are identified |
| **Citizens** | To meet requirements of the law | This will be determined as the citizen participation plan is designed | This will be determined as the citizen participation plan is designed |

Excerpt from the People Involvement Approach: City of Evansville, Wisconsin (2002)

## Determine the sponsors and champions of the planning effort

Sponsors and champions of the planning effort are important components for success.

Sponsors are people in positions to legitimize the planning process. They have enough power, authority and prestige to commit the community to the planning project and to hold people accountable. They are not necessarily involved on a day-to-day basis, but they do pay careful attention to progress. Sponsors possess a number of key attributes:

- They articulate the purpose and importance of the planning effort.
- They commit the necessary resources—time, money, energy, legitimacy—to the effort.
- They encourage and reward creative thinking, constructive discussions, and looking at issues from a variety of viewpoints.
- They are willing to exercise power and authority to keep the process on track.

In the City of Evansville's comprehensive planning project, the Evansville City Council sponsored the effort.

**Champions** are the people who have the primary responsibility for managing the planning process day-to-day. They are the ones who track progress and pay attention to the details of the planning effort. They are essentially cheerleaders for the project; they encourage, persuade and push those involved in the planning effort through difficult spots and toward their desired outcomes. Champions attend to a number of key functions:

- They keep the planning project on people's agendas.
- They attend to the process without promoting specific solutions.
- They think about what has to come together (people, tasks, reports, etc.) to make the project a success.
- They organize the resources necessary for the project to move toward its intended outcomes.
- They keep pushing the process along.

In the City of Evansville's comprehensive planning project, the Smart Growth Planning Committee was the champion of the effort. In other cases, one or more individuals take on the champion role. Regardless of the situation, champions are key to the planning project's success—and they need to be supported so they don't burn out. Advisors, those who can provide wise counsel, and people who provide support to the champion, can play valuable roles in supporting the planning project.

## Determine plan coordinating team and primary planning body members

A plan coordinating team can help assist with or oversee the planning project. While formation of such a team is not mandatory, in the case of comprehensive planning on a community level, it can serve a very valuable purpose.

The plan coordinating team's function is to provide the overall planning process policy and direction to the group actually engaged in the planning effort—the primary planning body. Having a plan coordinating team comprised of local elected officials, resource experts (municipal staff members, planners, and others who can provide knowledge about the process of planning or specific aspects of the community), and other key decision-makers in the community will help to ensure that the process moves as efficiently as possible from start to end.

**As you may recall from the discussion about the Jefferson County coordinating team, this core group consisted of the county board chair, county board vice chair, the planning and zoning committee chair, strategic planning committee chair, and the county administrator. Professional support to the coordinating team was provided by the planning and zoning director, zoning technician, land information director and the UW-Extension community development educator.**

*The Jefferson County coordinating team met regularly for nearly a year to lead the county's early education and community diagnosis efforts. Further, this group developed the broad policies and the comprehensive planning approach to be used, and they identified a preferred planning team structure along with potential members.*

The primary planning body or "planning team" is the group charged with developing the comprehensive plan. Communities have a great deal of flexibility in establishing the primary planning body. In cities, villages and towns with village powers, the Plan Commission is charged with "making" the community's plan. This doesn't mean that the plan commission must draft the comprehensive plan itself. While that is certainly an option for the plan commission to consider, it can also coordinate the planning effort by involving local planning staff, utilizing the services of a private planning consultant, working with a regional planning commission, or appointing a citizen advisory committee. Ultimately, the plan commission is charged with adopting the comprehensive plan by resolution and submitting it to the local governing board for adoption by ordinance.

**In the Portage County Town of Sharon, a community that was originally part of the county's multi-jurisdictional plan but later pulled out to plan on its own, the plan commission has taken leadership. Using resident input gathered through a town survey and public meetings, the plan commission is working systematically toward the development of a comprehensive plan for the town.**

**When the comprehensive plan has been completed and reviewed, the plan commission will adopt the plan by resolution and forward it to the Town Board for consideration. If the Town Board approves the plan, it must adopt it by ordinance for it to take effect.**

For a town to adopt a comprehensive plan under the state's Comprehensive Planning Law, it must have a plan commission in place to recommend the adoption of the plan by the town board.

For a town to have a plan commission, it must first adopt village powers. In general, village powers allow a town to act for the public health, safety and welfare of the town, using the broad powers granted to villages under State Statute Sec. 61.34(1). One of the village powers a town may exercise is village planning authority under Sec. 61.35. This statute in turn provides that villages have the authority granted cities under Sec. 62.23. This latter statute includes authority for cities to set up a plan commission and develop a comprehensive plan. The net result is that a town with village powers may establish a plan commission and develop a comprehensive plan (Schneider, 2001).

Cities and villages are authorized by statute to put seven-member plan commissions in place. Towns with village powers may use a seven-member plan commission or, in towns with populations under 2,500, the town may use a five-member plan commission.

With either option, the members are appointed by the city's mayor, village's president or town's board chair. In the case of a seven-member body, three of the members must be citizens of recognized experience and qualifications. Alternatively, the five-member board must have at least one citizen member. Governing board members and other elected and appointed officials may serve on the plan commission.

Having a governing body member as part of the plan commission can be a benefit by providing a liaison role to the governing board. This will help the plan commission keep planning politically realistic. Having citizens as members of the plan commission can help ensure that the community's interests are met.

## What steps will you use in the comprehensive planning process?

- Once there is a broad understanding of the purpose of the planning process and who needs to be involved, a decision can be made about what steps are needed in the comprehensive planning approach.
- In Section 2 of this publication, we laid out a nine-step comprehensive planning approach. You can use this approach as a model for your comprehensive planning effort by selecting which steps you need to complete. In most cases, the entire nine-step approach will be necessary to complete your comprehensive planning effort. In other cases, however, a community may have completed one or several of the steps before the current round of planning begins. The point here is to make a reasoned decision about what steps will be necessary to complete your comprehensive plan.
- Once the necessary steps are identified, decisions about what specific tasks need to take place within each step can be made and a timeline can be developed. This process answers the fundamental question, "What is the very best way to go about developing our comprehensive plan?" It describes what the planning process will look like from start to finish. Additionally, the identification of process steps will help frame the overall scope of the planning project, and will help the community begin to assess the resources necessary to complete the planning project.

### What resources are necessary to complete the effort, and where will they come from?

- Resource requirements for the planning project must be assessed. There are resources necessary for start-up, plan development, implementation, monitoring and assessment. What will these costs be? Where will the resources come from? Are the resources assured, or is there work that needs to be done to make sure they are available?

**The City of Evansville identified the following process steps that would be necessary to develop its comprehensive plan.**

1. **Initial education and diagnosis**
2. **Plan for planning**
3. **Background information and inventory**
4. **Trends and assessment**
5. **Issue identification and visioning**
6. **Strategy formulation**
   - **a). Generate strategy alternatives**
   - **b). Select preferred alternatives**
7. **Plan review and approval**
8. **Plan implementation**
9. **Plan monitoring, reassessment and amendment procedures**

- A review of comprehensive planning projects across the state reveals that most town comprehensive plans cost between $15,000 and $30,000 to complete. Multi-jurisdictional plans, complex city or urban area plans, or countywide plans can cost upwards of $200,000–$1,000,000 or more.
- Resources necessary to complete the comprehensive plan can come from a variety of sources. The State of Wisconsin, through the Office of Land Information Services at the Department of Administration, administers a planning grant program for Wisconsin communities. The program has been in existence since 2000. In the current state budget, $2 milliion of grant funding is available per year to offset the costs associated with the development of a comprehensive plan.
- Communities may want to consider working together within a multi-jurisdictional planning process. This approach has helped several communities across the state save money on comprehensive plan development through cost sharing agreements.
- Funding for the development of a comprehensive plan can also come from a community's general tax levy. Tax levy funds would be designated to offset plan development costs.

- A simple table can be used to list resources necessary to carry out the project, and then to identify where the resources will come from and whether or not they have been secured. An example table is included here to highlight some potential resource needs.

| Resource need | Where will you get this resource? | Assured? Yes or no |
|---|---|---|
| Plan coordinating team members | Town plan commission | Yes |
| Primary planning body members | Town board, plan commission, citizens | No |
| Financial resources for plan development | State planning grant, town general purpose funds | No |
| Financial resources for start-up | Town general purpose funds | Yes |
| Financial resources for citizen involvement activities and documentation | State planning grant, town general purpose funds | No |
| Existing plans and other data needs | Town clerk, county planning & zoning office, UW-Extension | Yes |

## Determine start-up requirements

As part of the assessment of resource requirements for the project, a set of start-up resource requirements will be developed. These include the financial, physical and human resources necessary to get the planning effort on track and moving forward. Without the support, attention and involvement of key decision-makers, it is difficult to move ahead.

These are but a few of the many questions that need to be asked and answered in this step of the planning process. The benefits of a good plan for planning are numerous.

- The purpose and worth of the planning effort are likely to be recognized by all affected parties, and the process will be looked upon as legitimate.
- The community can decide if the comprehensive plan is "doable."
- Development of measures of effectiveness for the comprehensive planning effort can be established (for example, the number of people who attend planning meetings; planning milestones, such as studies and reports completed or a plan document developed.)
- It ensures that the results of the planning effort will be seen as "legitimate."
- Broad sponsorship of the planning effort can provide a level of comfort or safety during discussions of issues that are highly charged.

In the following sections we will detail some other fundamental steps in the Plan for Planning step.

## Determine plan products

As a result of the planning effort, a variety of plans, reports, educational programs, research projects and other outputs are possible. Defining up front what sorts of products are desired from the planning effort, as well as their timing within the planning effort, will provide the community with a "road map" of project "deliverables." In fact, a listing or report of desired plan outputs is one example of a planning project output. Other examples might include:

- Educational programs or workshops
- Public participation plan
- Project newsletter and fact sheet series

- Plan for planning report (profile of the planning effort)
- Research reports
- Maps and charts
- Trends and projections report
- Household survey
- Community visioning sessions
- Element area strategy alternatives
- Draft comprehensive plan
- Plan implementation strategy
- Monitoring and evaluation plan

Once the set of products that will result from the planning effort have been identified, specific responsibilities can be assigned for completing these tasks along the project timeline.

## Determine plan timeline

After the questions above have been addressed, a project timeline can be developed. The key here is to match the time necessary to complete the project with the project's purpose, the proposed process steps, and the proposed people-involvement approach. This results in an estimate of the time necessary to complete your project—the timeline may very well change as the project gets started. It's perfectly okay to modify the timeline to fit the needs of the project.

Above all, make sure that the timeframes for the planning process are realistic. If they are too long, the planning process will not be relevant; if they are too short, the planning process will not be long enough to adequately evaluate and address prevailing issues, or to develop a clear vision for the community's future.

**In Portage County, the comprehensive planning process began in earnest in the summer of 2001 with an anticipated completion date of summer 2004. A three-year timeline was originally developed. However, as the project moved forward, more time was needed to adequately prepare draft plans for each of the participating municipalities and the timeline was extended six to nine months to accommodate the change.**

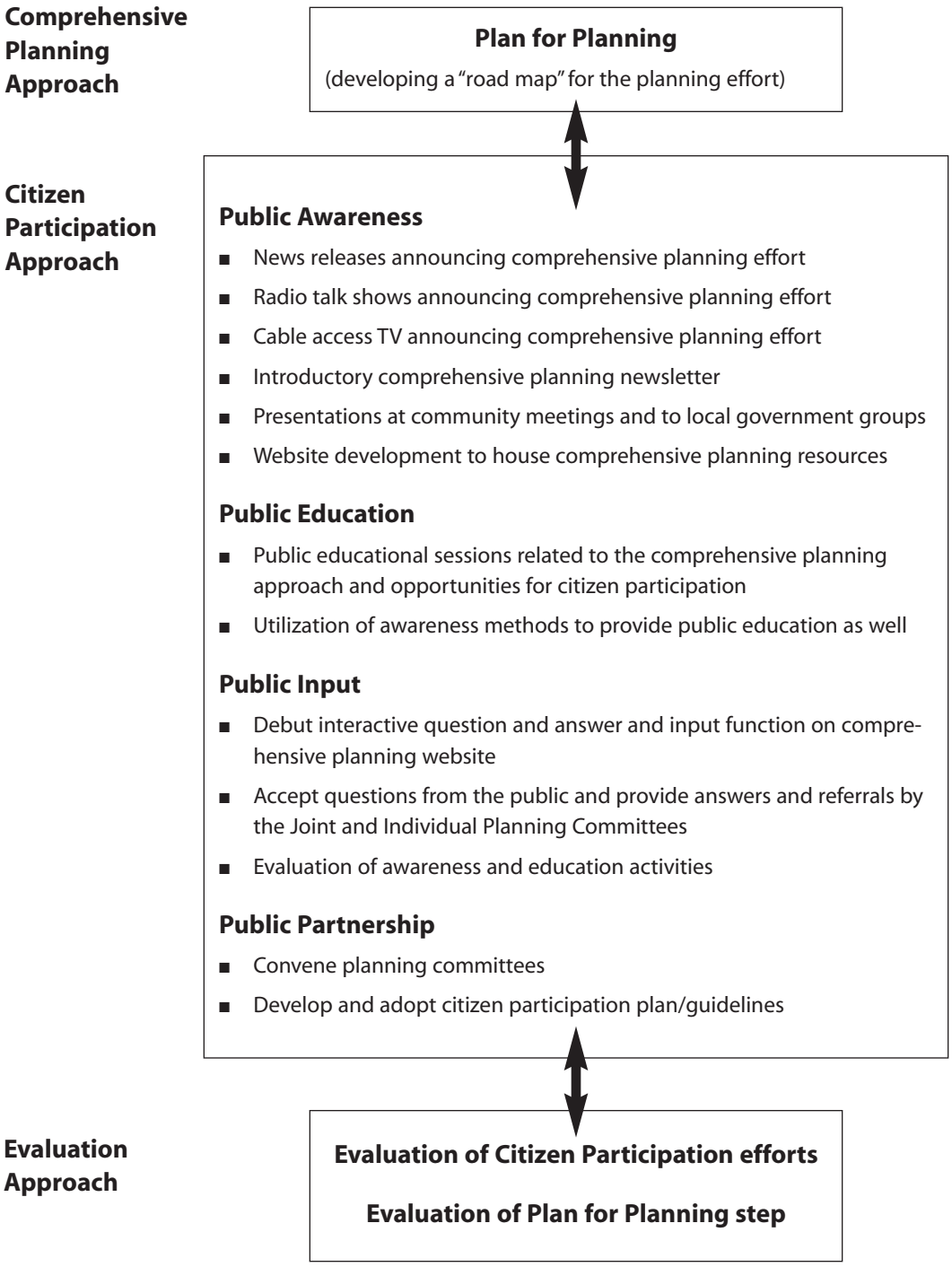
## Determine associated educational, evaluation and public involvement approaches

Educational, evaluation and public involvement approaches are parallel and complementary to the comprehensive planning approach. That is, at every step of the comprehensive planning approach, there is a complementary educational, evaluation and public involvement methodology to that planning step.

Matching purposes amongst the parallel tracks of planning, education, evaluation and citizen participation will provide a "systems" approach to the effort, and will help to provide added value to the process through the development of synergy among activities.

In Portage County, a multi-jurisdictional comprehensive planning process began in 2001. As a part of the plan for planning step, local leaders developed approaches for the comprehensive planning, citizen participation and evaluation approaches necessary for the effort. Figure H on page 67 illustrates how the comprehensive planning, citizen participation, and evaluation approaches complemented each other in the plan for planning step of the planning process.

# Figure H— Schematic of Portage County Citizen Participation Plan in Step 2: Plan for Planning



## Outcomes of Step 2: The plan for planning

At the completion of this step, a profile of the planning effort can be drafted. The profile will contain information about the proposed planning system—whose plan it is, the purpose of the plan, people involvement, steps in the process, expected outcomes, etc. The profile of the planning effort will serve as a "road map" for the project, and can be referred to on a continuous basis throughout the project. Remember, the road map may change over time as the situation changes, new needs emerge, events work to influence the original timeline, or involvement strategies need to be modified.

Once the profile of the planning effort is complete, the community will have an understanding as to whether there is capacity to complete the plan internally, or if there is need for planning support from county planning staff (if appropriate) or a planning consultant. If support is needed from outside the community to develop the plan, a Request for Proposals (RFP) document could be developed for solicitation of initial proposals that address the community's planning needs.

The Plan for Planning step serves as a "gut check" for the community to assess whether or not it is ready to proceed with the planning effort or if it needs to ramp up a bit first to prepare for the planning effort. Doing the Plan for Planning Step well will save a lot of time and money.

**When taken seriously and thoroughly prepared, the plan for planning step does an excellent job of laying out the scope of work to be completed. It can help a community identify likely approaches to the planning process, mechanisms for completing the plan, options for citizen involvement, and resulting plan products and deliverables. Based on the plan for planning, a community can assess its readiness to proceed and identify the best approach for their circumstances.**

**Following the plan for planning in Portage County, the county decided to do the planning internally through the Planning and Zoning Department. Funding for the project was secured through a state planning grant, county funds and participating municipality contributions. These funds supported project expenses, including the hiring of four additional planners needed to complete the project.**

**In Jefferson County the plan for planning served to help the county decide to solicit proposals from private consultants to complete the planning process. An RFP was released, consultant proposals reviewed and a private consultant hired to complete the project in collaboration with the county.**

# Some final thoughts

The purposes of this publication are three-fold:

- To help local elected officials better understand comprehensive planning.
- To help local elected officials ensure purposeful citizen participation throughout the comprehensive planning process.
- To provide a detailed guide on how to get started with comprehensive planning.

In Wisconsin, UW-Extension can play an important advisory role in assuring that sound citizen participation principles are identified and implemented. With well-executed citizen participation methods or techniques, you can expect improved outcomes from your planning effort.

We have provided additional details on some of the preplanning steps that UW-Extension has taken a lead role in developing here in Wisconsin. UW-Extension is well positioned to provide this education on comprehensive planning based on our varied roles and considerable experience within our specialist and county-based educator core.

Comprehensive planning is a complex topic. Many individuals and stakeholders have a role in the comprehensive planning process. This publication has provided information about who to involve, how to involve them, when to involve them, and the purpose for their involvement.

With the tools provided within this publication, we hope that you will have a set of resources that will enable you to build an effective citizen participation plan for your comprehensive planning effort—a citizen participation plan that reflects the approach you intend to use and one that is appropriate given the resources you will be allocating for the project.

We hope that this publication has provided you with a basic understanding of comprehensive planning and citizen participation approaches. We wish you well in your community's future planning efforts.

# Notes

Section



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