

***Public Involvement: How Active Participation in
Environmental Issues and Decisions Makes Economic Sense
and Broadens the Knowledge Base***

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Introduction

Many public organizations, both federal and state, as well as nonprofits, have some obligations with respect to involving the public and encouraging community participation. This may be part of their agency mission statement or part of their mandate as a public agency. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which became law on January 1, 1970, is generally regarded as initiating and mandating citizen involvement in environmental issues and decisions. A wide variety of “buzz words” may be used to label this type of involvement, such as *involvement of stakeholders* or *public awareness* or *community buy-in*.

The U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which started including active participation of residents and community members in the 1970’s, offers four key principles: collaboration, inclusion, communication and participation. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) developed its current Public Involvement Policy in 2003 after three years soliciting input from diverse avenues (internet, forums, etc.). This policy was the most recent update of its public participation policy, which dates to 1981.

Citizen, public, and community involvement has established its place within most planning documents, whether these come from federal, state, or regional agencies or from the private sector. Increasingly, citizens are demanding a voice in planning issues, especially environmental ones. In many instances, this involvement is seen as a burden by private developers working on government-supported projects and by public officials as well. The reality is that citizen participation can offer benefits to project planners, increase efficiencies, and generally serve as an asset. Because the way in which officials involve the public can either stimulate or reduce the potential for conflict and confrontation, it is important that the process, its rationales and impacts, be well understood in advance. The risks associated with trying to minimize or avoid broad community participation, however, include not only conflicts, but also the loss of information obtainable only from those who have in-depth local experience.

This Guide is intended to respond to local officials’ need to improve citizen participation processes. It provides a brief summary of the benefits and costs of public involvement for environmental programs or plans and agencies involved. Key points to consider when initiating public involvement are listed and illustrated with several case studies. A list of useful resources, including books and websites, is given at the end. Most government agencies, such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) or HUD have their approach to public involvement detailed on their websites.

Brief History of NEPA and Public Involvement in the Environmental Economics Mix

In 1969 President Richard Nixon signed the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA); it became law on January 1, 1970. NEPA is written in very broad terms. The law states that “all agencies of the Federal government” shall follow NEPA guidelines whenever possible. It goes further to add that “presently unquantified **environmental** [original emphasis] amenities and values may be given appropriate consideration in decision-making along with economic and technical considerations” (NEPA, Section 102). With this statement we have the first official

policy recognition that other factors may be just as important, or more important, than economic or technical ones. Examples might be local cultural or historic sites, factors affecting quality of life for citizens, and aesthetic considerations of land use for communities. These “presently unquantified” factors continue to be re-examined in order to establish and quantify their economic value, for example, the economic value of scenic views for tourism in a region. NEPA does not specifically require that the public must be involved; however, the act states clearly at several points that statements, proposals, and information about environmental impacts of decisions must be made available to the public, as well as to other agencies. Through this far-reaching law, the public, groups, as well as individuals, have a right to information about environmental issues.

The Citizen’s Advisory Committee on Environmental Quality was established in 1969. NEPA mandated that agencies work with this Committee as well as “representatives of science, industry, agriculture, labor, conservation organizations, State and local governments and other groups” (NEPA, Section 205). The information flow was not to be one-way (from the top). Information was also to flow from the bottom-up, from individuals and groups to agencies, “in order that duplication of effort and expense may be avoided.” Over 30 years ago our government recognized that information flow works best and is most cost-effective when it flows from bottom-up, as well as from top-down.

Following the passage of NEPA, federal agencies began looking for ways to effectively involve the public and to document their efforts. HUD and FEMA led the way, and their websites provide a rich resource from their efforts over the past three decades, as does the EPA’s website. Since 2000, there have been increasing numbers of agencies and state and local governments calling for increased participation by the public, by communities, and by people with local knowledge in environmental issues and decisions. A variety of terms are used to describe this vision: civic environmentalism, “strong democracy” or “deep democracy,” and participatory democracy. The core meaning of these terms revolves around inclusion and involvement of all stakeholders in decisions, using conflict resolution, consensus building, and problem-solving techniques to address environmental issues.

Public involvement often begins with educating people about issues, but perhaps more importantly, with education about how to participate. The burden of beginning this process mainly lies with agencies and governments, as community members may feel they do not have access or that they “don’t know enough” or are “not important enough” to have a voice. All of these are messages of powerlessness. When people, communities, or organizations feel powerless in an ongoing administrative process such as planning, they are inclined to look for other means of exercising power. Demonstrations and litigation are common responses that can be extremely costly to projects. Public involvement is a process of empowerment and engagement that can, at a minimum, reduce the potential for those costs. At best, it generates a collaborative process that better informs the project decision-makers, both public and private.

What Do We Mean by Citizen Participation?

Many agencies and groups refer to Arnstein’s “A ladder of citizen participation” in examining the public involvement process. The ladder analogy portrays participation as a series

of rungs; as one climbed the ladder, one had more power. The lower rungs were termed “therapy” and “manipulation.” These methods were paternalistic, with the agency stance being one of “knowing best” and informing the public of what is best for them. The information flow is one-way: top-down. The traditional urban planning system often uses this approach. When agencies attempt to behave in this manner in addressing environmental issues today, the response is likely to be negative. Increasingly antagonistic responses have led to this paternalistic approach being labeled “DAD” or *Decide, Announce, Defend* (Depoe, Delicath, Elsenbeer, 2004). With this approach concerned citizens feel their opinions don’t matter and get angry when they have no opportunity to voice them. Someone else decides what would be good and then tell the public. When members of the public, understandably, get angry that they are not involved, the agency must then defend its plan of action. Public hearings or internet websites with opportunity to comment often serve as a strategy for defending agency plans but these usually offer little in the way of meaningful dialogue since they are mostly structured as one-way lines of communication.

The next three rungs on the ladder are “informing,” “placation,” and “consultation.” In these approaches to participation, citizens are given token outlets for increased communication. Examples include the Citizen Advisory Committee or CAC. CACs are sometimes convened to serve as places where a factory, for instance, can explain its operating procedures to citizens and citizens can voice their concerns. Arnstein terms this “placation” (and a rung above this is “consultation”) as citizens still have no power to affect decisions or operations. In other cases, a factory or industry may give donations of money to the CAC for “community betterment,” such as funding youth sports, as part of a public relations effort that could be seen as the lowest rung on the ladder – “manipulation.”

The top three rungs on this ladder are “partnerships,” “delegated power,” and “citizen control.” These all contain the possibility of the public actually having some input and say in actual decisions. Public-private partnerships are an increasingly common form of regeneration or development organization at the local level, but the degree of actual public participation varies tremendously. True community partnerships offer the potential for establishing relationships of trust and respect between citizens, public officials, universities/scientists, and private enterprise. Later this guide explores some other models for citizen participation in environmental decisions and offers basic guidelines to follow.

Why Do It?

There are a variety of benefits and costs of public involvement for public sector agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). One primary reason many groups have public involvement is that they are required to do so. Most EPA grants, for instance, specify that the community must be involved and must be an active participant. Behind the mandate, there are several extremely valid reasons for including members of the public in planning and decision-making and making sure that the participation goes beyond merely meeting the requirement in a superficial or token manner.

There are four main reasons for taking the time and trouble to ensure meaningful levels of public participation in environmental decisions:

- access to local information and knowledge
- acceptance by affected parties of decisions once they are made
- direct economic returns to private and public investors, and
- relationship-building

Local Information and Local Knowledge

There are several sound reasons for having the information flow be more than one-way.

- ✓ *Prevention of Costly Errors:* Residents of an area may have local information and knowledge that can prevent costly errors. Local knowledge is a term that is being used more and more in many venues. Residents know which areas are wetlands or marshy at times, which ones have poor drainage, what businesses used to operate at a particular location (“twenty years ago it was a gas station, then a ...”), burial locations, problems that arose with past plans, etc. This knowledge can augment, and in some cases correct, public records on land uses, old Sanborne maps and the other materials on which planners and project developers rely in doing “due diligence” before making investments. Even when no errors in records are corrected, there is a benefit from either more rapid access to information or corroboration that reduces the uncertainty that accompanies reliance on past records. This benefit may exceed the costs of the public involvement.
- ✓ *Knowledge of History and Value of Place:* Local knowledge means that the people who live in an area have an understanding that is more complete (and more complex) than can be shown by facts and figures. They know the history of a place, what it means to the community, and what its value is beyond its market price as real estate. Because they are the keepers of this knowledge, the citizens or residents are important as informants. They know what their community needs and wants, and this knowledge is valuable for planning for the longer term. Often such information can help avoid the construction of facilities for which demand, while currently high, is waning due to trends not evident in market prices. (The many shopping centers abandoned within a decade of their construction are examples of the failure to recognize such local trends, as are the recurrent cases of new construction demolished to provide needed infrastructure that a better understanding of the area might have avoided.)

Acceptance of Decisions

Community involvement and negotiation over controversial issues, while time consuming and expensive, is less so than litigation and resultant penalties. When citizens are included in the planning stages and they feel that their voices have been heard and respected, they are more likely to accept and support ultimate plans and decisions, even when they have not had actual decision-making power. There are countless instances of public protest and litigation occurring when communities hear about plans and decisions as an announcement without any prior discussion. This goes back to the antiquated, but still in use, tactic of *Decide, Announce, Defend* (DAD).

Most governments and companies have found that defending is an extremely costly strategy, with lawsuits stretching into several years or even decades. The DAD approach may include heavy costs at both the time and financial levels. Furthermore, there is often accompanying bad publicity, which also has financial repercussions for governments, agencies, and industries.

Aggressive action to prevent public participation can also be extremely costly and incur bad publicity. SLAPP is an acronym for Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation. These lawsuits are designed to prevent citizens from speaking up or to hinder other avenues of participation in decision-making. SLAPPs began about 20 years ago and the number has been increasing over that time. Oregon has an easy-to-read chapter online about SLAPPs at www.oregon.gov/LCD/citizeninvolvement.shtml. Oregon's chapter relies extensively on research done by Pring and Canan (see resources). According to this research most SLAPP suits are filed by developers about land development issues. The aim is usually to punish or silence environmental activists within a community, and the suits most often occur in situations where the developers feel they would not be successful carrying their view in the public arena. Another way to look at SLAPPs is that the plaintiff (usually a developer) believes their economic interests will be negatively impacted by public participation. However, research also shows that "almost all SLAPP suits are eventually dismissed or decided in favor of the defendants" (Oregon chapter online). Pring and Canan state that "SLAPPs, as lawsuits go, are losers" (quoted in the Oregon chapter online).

Several states have instituted legislation addressing the problem of SLAPPs and protecting the right of citizens to participate in public decisions as the foundation of our democratic process. SLAPPs can be time-consuming and expensive, especially for citizens and community groups with few resources. Public groups and even individuals have often responded to SLAPPs by filing "SLAPPback" suits, countersuits against the plaintiffs of the original SLAPP. And they have frequently won large monetary settlements. SLAPPs and SLAPPbacks are further examples of the economic costs of an adversarial approach to public participation. Spending initial time and effort on the process of community participation is the best way to avoid the far greater expenses involved in SLAPPs and SLAPPbacks and also provides the valuable economic benefits of local knowledge and acceptance of decisions.

Examples of the Economic Costs of the DAD Approach

The DAD or *Decide, Announce, Defend* approach often has high economic costs. One example occurred in the small rural town of Winona, Texas, where a wealthy white socialite took on the cause of helping a poor, mostly African-American community fight the dumping of industrial toxic waste into wells. Phyllis Glazer, the woman who spearheaded this fight, put a lot of her own money into legal battles but also developed a website, including a beautifully done photo essay called "Fruit of the Orchard," for her group MOSES (Mothers Organized to Stop Environmental Sins).

In 1981, American Ecology Environmental Services Corporation decided to move into the small Texas community, purchased land, and announced to the community that a well would be drilled. Residents heard that the well would be used to contain salt water from nearby oil

field operations and that fruit trees would be planted on the rest of the land. In reality residents later found that hazardous waste from numerous facilities in both the United States and Mexico was being transported to the site by truck and rail, then dumped. Waste was being stored in aboveground storage tanks, and there was a facility built to process waste, including solvent recovery. In this case, residents felt that they were not told the truth or were given inadequate information, in addition to having no say in this decision. The community found itself living with a hazardous waste disposal facility, which released air pollutants and odors. They felt they had no say in the decisions made in 1981 and that their health and their children's health were compromised. Led by Glazer, residents formed MOSES and began legal action. MOSES also mounted an extensive public campaign against the facility.

The facility spent money and time attempting to defend their practices. But in 1997, five years after MOSES began, the offending facility, American Ecology Environmental Services Corporation, officially shut down. The opposition from MOSES was cited as the reason. Other examples have been made into popular movies, such as "Erin Brockovich" with Julia Roberts and "A Civil Action" with John Travolta, which have highlighted these types of adversarial relationships between citizens and companies or governments. In both of the cinematic examples there was no "announcement" made, but the involved companies had taken action without citizen participation and later had to spend large amounts of time and money defending their actions.

Louisville, Kentucky, was the site of another case where citizen outcry and lawsuits added time and financial costs to the expansion of the local airport. In 1989 the city used urban renewal powers to acquire neighborhoods near Standiford airport. The government termed these neighborhoods "blighted," as the legal rationale for the taking. The residents took umbrage at that term, considering themselves to have been insulted, and filed suit. The Kentucky Supreme Court heard the case and found that the neighborhoods were, indeed, not "blighted." Louisville had to settle the case for \$6.2 million, an agreement which then allowed the expansion to occur. Here is a clear case of enormous costs in money and time due to lack of public participation and "buy in" to a plan. There was further litigation involving appeals and re-hearings into the early 1990's and the original cost estimates for the relocation of the residents were based on the assumption of a seamless process and community acceptance. The conflict helped drive the actual costs from about \$60 million to close to \$130 million.

The United States Supreme Court recently ruled on a case in Connecticut which involved the issue of an eminent domain taking of homes the occupants valued to be turned over to a private developer. The proposed new upscale mixed-use development received the support of the city of New London, Connecticut, which acted to take residential land in the working class Fort Trumbell neighborhood. They defended their action as part of their economic development plan. The original redevelopment plan was filed in 1998, but homeowners fought back and filed a law suit, which went to the Connecticut Supreme Court, where they lost, then to the United States Supreme Court, where they lost again. All of this took time and money due to litigation costs, as well as the rise in land prices over the seven-year time span that the project was delayed. So even as the city of New London and the future developers won their case, not involving the public at the outset cost them significantly.

Opponents of a parkway in Utah used litigation to try to stop construction. Rounds of litigation could last for years. The parkway has been opposed by citizens and citizen environmental groups (The Sierra Club and Utahns for Better Transportation) that strongly felt other options were not carefully considered before being rejected. “Opponents are ‘in control of what happens from here on out,’ parkway project manager Thomas admitted. ‘It is their choice to find a way to move forward or stall the project, which they can easily do.’” The Director of Utah’s Department of Transportation said that opponents are a “small minority” and should “move on.” The citizen groups have developed an alternate option to the parkway, as part of a “Citizens’ Smart Growth Alternative” plan. Their plan is designed to save wetlands and ease congestion. But once an adversarial situation develops and litigation is initiated, years can be involved and each year costs money. In this case, both sides appear invested in their positions and continued litigation appears probable; litigation could last until 2007 or 2008 (reported in the Salt Lake Tribune, March 22, 2005).

Other Direct Economic Benefits of Public Involvement

This guide has already looked at some of the economic benefits from using local knowledge, as well as the monetary value of taking the time to create an atmosphere of participation and acceptance, rather than an adversarial one with the possibility of expensive lawsuits. There are other economic benefits to public involvement. One of the most important ones relates to the potential for “smart growth.” The label was initially attacked by the development community as a diversionary term for opposition to any growth at all. However, the economic benefits to both local government budgets and developer profits have moved the idea of smart growth into the mainstream, as evidenced by narratives from a number of different development-promoting organizations.

Within already developed areas, many planners are promoting the idea of “greening” cities to create stronger property markets. Creating sustainable, livable urban areas, will help decrease the flight to the suburbs, as well as saving resources and improving quality of life for the urban residents. Moreover, higher real estate values will more readily attract private capital to brownfields and other abandoned properties, permitting the density and intensity of use of urban lands to rise, and reducing the pressure for conversion of rural lands to more intensive uses.

When a *Wall Street Journal* headline in June, 2005, reads, “Developers see green in ‘brownfield’ sites,” it appears that such revitalization can yield private profits. Any conversion of such sites to new uses, however, is likely to require both environmental due diligence and public hearings related to rezoning or permitting. Delay is the enemy of developers, so lengthy hearings could pose problems – but the potential litigation associated with not involving the close neighbors that any redevelopment project will have is far more problematic. Planning to involve the community can thus have direct private returns. This connection is clearly recognized by the Urban Land Institute (ULI), the nation’s largest umbrella organization of developers, development consultants, and public economic regeneration agencies. The organization is promoting community involvement as an essential component of planning and development initiatives that contributes to project feasibility and profitability, and offers a number of case studies of successful efforts involving their neighborhoods on their website.

On the public sector side, beginning “Green City” initiatives have been undertaken by several cities, such as Louisville, Kentucky, with clear understanding of their economic as well as environmental benefits. Money is saved by using coordinated buying practices directed at recycled and other “green” products and services, by recycling on a city-wide scale, and by businesses that “go green,” especially with respect to their pollution prevention efforts. Vehicle emissions testing programs improve air quality and thus reduce acute asthma cases and hospital emergency room visits. They may also reduce the need to require additional emissions controls on companies, even though those controls might cost local jobs. The opposition to such testing dwells only on the costs of the inspections, so public education and buy-in – and therefore community involvement – is a key component to the maintenance of such control systems. Community involvement and participation usually includes educational components – measures to make sure there is understanding and comprehension at all levels. Public involvement and participation in Green City initiatives is crucial to their success or failure.

All of these measures indirectly or directly affect land use planning. Recycling decreases the need for additional landfills, as does green buying (coordination avoids duplication and waste, which then decreases need for landfill capacity). New businesses may be located on brownfields or other infill type properties within a city, while their pollution prevention efforts decrease the likelihood that they will add to land and water pollution, and the increased density permitted by land re-use can reduce vehicle miles driven and contribute to the air quality improvements pursued by the emissions testing programs. The key elements of a green city program, however, rely on community participation and buy-in: recycling by households requires community education and support for the effort, as does business involvement in recycling, buying green or pollution prevention, and participation in emissions testing.

The foundation for either smart growth or green city efforts thus rests on public involvement and public participation. Citizens’ organizations and firms need to understand the planning activities and be part of the ongoing process, whether to facilitate redevelopment of brownfields, decrease the flow of wastes to landfills, or reduce the generation of new pollution.

Relationship-Building

Although the public involvement process is, indeed, time-consuming and messy, once begun it builds its own momentum. As the process gets easier, the costs to developers and to the agencies that oversee and approve new activities with environmental consequences will tend to decline. When citizens find their own voices and know someone is listening, they are motivated to keep on participating and use the skills developed during the process. Each time the process is put in place, it builds upon the foundation laid by previous experiences. People become more adept at knowing where to gain access to government and other agencies. They also become increasingly skillful at navigating through bureaucracy and about how to voice their feelings and opinions for maximum impact. In turn, this fosters a community in which those skills are transferred from one set of citizens to the next: building a legacy of appropriate community involvement. This develops a culture of cooperation, mutual respect, and inclusion which has a synergistic effect.

While the participation process may be costly to initiate, as it continues over time, the interactions involved have two very positive outcomes. First, the transaction and other direct costs of the processes – for the citizens as well as the consulting decision-makers – will tend to decline. That is simply a matter of people learning about the institutions and the institutions learning how to accommodate citizen participation more readily. Second, and far more importantly, the ongoing processes, if successful, will enable the members of the public involved to climb the ladder of citizen participation as the institutions and organizations to which they offer input come to accept the legitimacy – and value – of their involvement. As citizens climb that ladder, moreover, the quality and economic value of the specialized local knowledge they can offer decision-makers improves. This beneficial result arises in part because they may learn more about plans on which they could comment, but even more because they have more access and voice, and therefore are more likely to be heard and heeded.

The key to empowerment is respect for the other person or group, as well as respect for the **process** of empowerment or public involvement itself. When the process itself is viewed as ongoing and valuable, an important outcome is a tendency, over time, for all stakeholders to climb up the participation ladder. Participants from the general public and government officials must both be viewed as important collaborators within the process framework. Collaboration has a very different meaning than cooperation.

Seymour Sarason, who has studied change within large systems, explains, “By collaboration I do not mean cooperation, which far more often than not in practice conveys a one-way street message: ‘Let me tell you what you can do for me.’ There is nothing wrong with that message except when the conveyor implicitly conveys the additional message: ‘This is my turf so please do not intrude’” (Sarason, 1993, p. 199). This covert message puts people in a position of lesser power. The message ‘Let me tell you what you can do for me’ implies a power differential, with the speaker being superior. Many disciplines, practitioners, scientists, public officials, etc. sometimes fall unaware into the trap of ‘this is my turf so please do not intrude.’ This covert message with its implied power differential promotes feelings of resentment and powerlessness. Feelings of resentment and powerlessness increase the likelihood of lawsuits, as in the previous examples from Louisville, Kentucky and New London, Connecticut.

Long Term Benefits of Relationship-Building

Examples of successes with environmental concerns, such as brownfields redevelopment or planning and development issues, appear to be community-based and share common features with democratic processes. The process becomes more important than specific outcomes, and the process may be called participatory or public involvement. McCool and Guthrie (2001) did a study of participants in two planning projects in western Montana, where the projects were perceived as “messy” due to disagreement over goals and there was no clear cause and effect relationship established through science. Conflict is inherent in “messy” projects such as these. The conclusion reached by the authors was that the processes were successful due to an emphasis on public learning and consensus building. Learning was viewed as the primary positive outcome, involving understanding of multiple perspectives, including differences in values and beliefs among stakeholders, legal and political processes, as well as local knowledge about the

workings of the particular ecosystems involved. Public participation builds relationships through informal, face-to-face meetings which establish increased understanding and trust.

A study of five cities, including Birmingham, Alabama, and Dayton, Ohio (Prugh, et al, 2000), which had initiated the public participation process in environmental decision-making, showed that while there still was not broad-based citizen participation in the decision-making process, participation increased tolerance and a sense of belonging to the community, while decreasing conflict over environmental issues. City officials found public participation and involvement time consuming but felt the benefits (including economic ones) were substantial enough to offset this negative. True public involvement does not mandate consensus among stakeholders but is based upon cooperation.

The “returns” or benefits from public participation which this guide has explored are couched in terms of relationship and building positive communication and decision-making patterns for communities. Success is measured case by case in terms of outcomes for projects with community participation. As of now, there is little to no information detailing specific economic returns for public involvement. Negative examples, or ones illustrating the costs in time and money, often due to litigation, abound. Orr (2003) presents field evidence of the cost-effectiveness of conflict resolution and mediation when compared to litigation. Litigation is, on average, six times more expensive than mediation. Successful public participation may prevent the need for even the lower costs of mediation, as well as the significantly higher costs of litigation.

One study demonstrates that consumer pressure pushes industries/firms to be “environmentally proactive” and self-regulate through the adoption of an Environmental Management System. This decreases pollution but costs/benefits for the community and the industries are not specifically addressed (Anton, Deltas, and Khanna, 2003). Studies of concrete positive returns (for both public and private sectors) that are directly attributable to public participation (again often in terms of time and money saved) appear almost non-existent at this time. As yet, this is a relatively untapped area for extensive research.

In the following examples, though not in this country, community participation was shown to directly save money due to local knowledge and input. The first case concerns the construction of rural health centers in Mexico. Researchers studied 102 units constructed over a five-year period, comparing three building processes: national public bidding, restricted invitation (to developers), and community participation. In the community participation process, community committees acquired the land, got cost estimates and purchased materials, carried out construction, and monitored progress (Tapia-Cruz, et al, 2003). The study found that the community participation process resulted in “considerably lower expenditure” than the other processes. The authors state that the results for construction and cost-saving were “outstanding” and attribute this to getting materials at lower prices, as well as more efficient management of resources.

In the second example, using community participation to prioritize road improvement in East Africa, the authors state that use of community process stretched limited financial resources further and in a manner that was perceived positively by both district authorities and local

communities. Public participation was effective in determining which roads are used more and which ones were most crucial to poverty reduction/economic development. Community members used collectively defined criteria, based on social and economic indicators. Following the prioritization process, agreements were made, cost estimates obtained, and work was completed using local contractors and “village paid labourers, one third of whom were women” (Leyland, 2003, p. 5). Resources were stretched farther with this process, as well as the community receiving direct economic benefit from the use of local contractors and laborers. Here, as in the first example, community participation was effective in obtaining direct economic benefits for all concerned.

Case Examples of Successful Public Participation: Smart Growth

One project, called “Reality Check on Growth,” involved a wide variety of stakeholders in developing a regional vision for Los Angeles, California. It demonstrated that agreement and even consensus can be reached among “highly disparate” participants. It was so successful that the Southern California Association of Governments decided to fund a multiyear, multimillion dollar follow-up project for the region. For these agencies and governments to put so much time and money into this effort demonstrates clearly that they saw the economic benefits inherent in the process.

The Real Estate Center at the University of South Carolina’s Moore School of Business partnered with the Urban Land Institute for a similar growth planning process. Again, there was a wide variety of stakeholders, including developers and community members. One of the growth principles that resulted was to “make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost-effective.” Another was to foster community participation. The overall aim was that all recommendations should be “economically viable.” Again, state agencies found that community participation is part of cost-effective and economically beneficial decisions, and funded a process that included all parties.

Chattanooga, Tennessee, is hailed as an example of successful community involvement in planning its riverfront development and downtown renewal, both of which have translated into economic growth for the city. The city began this process in the mid-1980’s and currently sees public participation in planning as the “norm” due to its success in promoting economic development for all sectors.

Public participation was the key to the successful redevelopment of a quarry into a shopping center in Minneapolis. Plans were discussed openly in monthly meetings of a community task force and the meetings were televised for wider public access. Citizens expressed concerns about traffic, noise, and safety and the city addressed these **before** plans were finalized (Pepper, 1997). Envision Utah is a public/private partnership formed in 1997 to develop a broad-based grass-roots process for growth planning, as well as preservation of “critical lands” ([http://www.envisionutah.org/index.php?id=NDY\\$](http://www.envisionutah.org/index.php?id=NDY$)). The partnership’s success is attributed to resident involvement in workshops that identified values held and then analyzed a variety of alternate scenarios. This process resulted in a phased growth strategy which was initiated in 2000.

Six hundred citizens participated in a community design charette to address multiple village issues, such as parking and safety, in Huntington Village, Long Island. This ambitious workshop was a pilot project with Vision Long Island, Sustainable Long Island, and the Town of Huntington. The workshop was very successful. Using smart growth principles, residents were able to reach a compromise on a parking problem that had existed for decades, as well as develop engineering and construction plans which would meet other community needs (http://www.visionhuntington.org/projects/proj_gerard.htm and www.co.suffolk.ny.us/Planning/03CommPart.pdf). This was truly a broad-based approach with children participating in designing their vision for the community.

Communities throughout Georgia have participated in a public/private partnership program called *Blueprints for Successful Communities*. Beginning in 1997 this program has held community design workshops to explore choices for combining quality of life with economic growth and integrated land use. The foundation for the success of the program is “extensive community participation” (http://www.georgiaconservancy.org/SmartGrowth/SG_communitygrowth.asp) and its regional emphasis. Habersham County’s Smart Growth Coalition, in northeast Georgia, for instance, has raised public awareness, made recommendations to the county commission, and is participating in the development of the county comprehensive plan.

North of Santa Fe, New Mexico, tribal members of San Juan Pueblo initiated a community planning and design process in 2000. This award-winning, ground-breaking effort was the first smart growth model for Native American tribes and included mixed-use public spaces and strategies to preserve and support significant cultural patterns. Their first completed project was the Tsigo Bugeh Village, completed in 2003, which has mixed-use housing, a community center, and traditional plazas with communal “hornos” or ovens (www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/sg_awards_publications_2004.htm).

Key “How To” Points for Public Participation

- ❖ Identify and include a broad range of interested parties (stakeholders) as early in the process as possible. Both the websites of the EPA and the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC), which is part of EPA, give good ideas for the types of groups and organizations to include in the process. (The website addresses are listed in the Resources section of this Practice Guide.) If important stakeholders are left out, this increases the likelihood of costly controversy and litigation.
- ❖ Co-sponsor meetings with community organizations, including the planning stages of the process. Leadership is a shared responsibility and participants define the way in which they choose to participate. Co-sponsoring is a mark of respect, which increases positive outcomes, such as public “buy-in” to plans.
- ❖ Make sure all meetings are accessible (transportation, time of day, type of facility, etc.). Community participants feel disrespected and disenfranchised if meetings are held at inconvenient times or locations. This again increases the possibility of anger and controversy.
- ❖ Build in an atmosphere of equality and respect. For instance, avoid the use of “panels” or tables of “experts.” Respect and value local knowledge. Listen! Panels can give the

- message that planners, developers, and government officials know more and are more important than community members.
- ❖ Be clear and honest about the amount of influence the public or community has on any decisions made and on how decisions will be made and communicated. If community members feel misled about the amount of their influence, an adversarial relationship could develop. They are likely to believe they were lied to. If, on the other hand, they are clearly told how decisions will be made, even if they do not participate in the actual decision, they do not believe a trust has been violated. This decreases the chance of law suits.
 - ❖ Give whatever information is needed to facilitate meaningful participation. This is an unfamiliar process for community members, planners, developers, academics, and government officials. All need guidance in negotiating their role within this complex process.

Online Resources for “How To” Points

1. The Environmental Justice Resource Center has a checklist for public participation and a list of environmental justice resources for Region IV at <http://www.ejrc.cau.edu/finalappx.html>.
2. The City of Vancouver’s 14 chapter guide on *How to Participate in City Processes: A Guide for the Public* is an excellent model for city governments. The guide goes over the why’s and how’s for participation, then details how to access and influence various city agencies, including the City Council, boards, committees, and task forces:
<http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/planning/pubinvolveguide/>
3. The EPA’s Guide to Public Involvement is found at <http://www.epa.gov/pubinvol/pdf/sipp.pdf> which also has links to several associated websites. Their 31-page paper, “Stakeholder Involvement & Public Participation at the U. S. EPA: Lessons Learned, Barriers, & Innovative Approaches” (January 2001) is a valuable resource for planning public participation. One of the first “lessons learned” is that “establishing trust is integral.” The report also emphasizes the need for early involvement in the planning stages, rather than tacking public awareness or “education” on during the final stages. There are references to case studies in EPA’s Green Toolkit at <http://www.epa.gov/greenkit/casedex.htm> which may be helpful.
4. Also on the EPA website is the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council’s (NEJAC) Model Plan for Public Participation, which has great resources including the model plan, a checklist for government agencies, and core values which guide public participation efforts:
<http://www.epa.gov/projctxl/nejac.htm>.
5. Many cities have focused public participation efforts in their transportation agencies, since issues involving roads and public transportation often are hot issues in communities. One example is found at http://www.sarasota-manateempo.org/text/Adopted_PIP/PIP.PDF which offers Sarasota’s approach to public participation in transportation issues, mainly through a Citizen Advisory Council. Another similar example is Kentucky’s Transportation Center’s protocol for Structured

Public Involvement or SPI, which is defined as “a paradigm designed to improve stakeholder satisfaction with the public planning process.” SPI is part of their Bluegrass Region Transportation and Community and Systems Preservation (TCSP) Corridor Visualization Project. The project's title is "An Integrated Model for Transportation Planning and Context Sensitive Design for the Central Bluegrass Region of Kentucky." SPI is detailed on their website at <http://cvoz.uky.edu/psa/tcsp/spi.htm>.

6. The National Association for Regulatory Administration has posted a great short (4 pages!) list of the *Do's and Don'ts of Community Participation* by Karen E. Kroh (1999). This list is brief yet covers all the major points:
<http://www.nara-licensing.org/dosanddentscommunityparticipation.htm>.

7. J. Norman Reid of the USDA Rural Development, Office of Community Development has written a 13-page guide: *Community Participation: How People Power Brings Sustainable Benefits to Communities* (June, 2000). This guide is easy to read and focuses on creating what the author terms “participating communities.” There are several great examples of how this works in actual communities around the United States, including the Kentucky Highlands, Jackson County, and Breathitt County, Kentucky. Other examples are from Tennessee, Pennsylvania, Oregon, and Florida. Community participation is a key foundation for USDA’s empowerment zones and enterprise community programs:
www.ezec.gov?Pubs/commparticrept.pdf.

8. The U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Homes and Communities web site includes “General Guidance on Community and Resident Involvement” at <http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/programs/ph/hope6/css/guidance.cfm>. While this information is targeted toward their Hope VI program, the four key principles outlined would apply to any program or project for which public involvement and participation was important (these principles are *collaboration, inclusion, communication* and *participation*).

9. MIT’s Technology and Law Program has an excellent guide called “Public Participation in Contaminated Communities” (1999), online at <http://web.mit.edu/ctpid/www/tl/TL-pub-PPCC.html>. This research study examined seven cases of successful public participation in contaminated communities. The seven cases were chosen because they were considered successful by both the communities and the government agencies involved. There is a section which explores previous research on successful public participation processes.

10. The National Center for Environmental Decision-Making Research’s website <http://www.ncedr.org/> is no longer active but material will remain posted on the site. On the site there is a case study section. Their information is also available as hard copy and there are useful links on the site – a number to EPA guides on community participation in a variety of environmental issues.

11. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania’s website for their official rules and regulations has a chapter detailing the state policy on “meaningful public participation.” Within this chapter the second section establishes “Responsibilities of the developer,” such as full disclosure, soliciting a

wide representation of stakeholders, etc.

<http://www.pacode.com/secure/data/025/chapter24/s24.2.html>

Online Resources for Examples in this Practice Guide

1. Smart Growth Online has Smart Growth news. The article on the Wisconsin legislation and lack of support for community involvement in growth planning and development is at <http://www.smartgrowth.org/news/article.asp?art=4737>. The site also includes news about Chattanooga's success in public participation for its waterfront and downtown development at <http://www.smartgrowth.org/news/article.asp?art=2666>. The article about the litigation over the Parkway in Utah is at <http://www.smartgrowth.org/news/article.asp?art=4645>.
2. Urban Land Institute's case studies for community participation are on their website at <http://www.uli.org>. The Community Action Grants are at <http://www.uli.org/Content/NavigationMenu/MyCommunity/CommunityActionGrants/Co>.
3. For information on the eminent domain case in Connecticut, see http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/law/jan-june05/domain_2-22.html. Also, see <http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/living/home/12035872.htm> and <http://www.dailysouthtown.com/southtown/dsnews/241and2.htm>.
4. Louisville, Kentucky's problematic airport expansion can be found online at <http://www.louisville.com/leo/nak1014.shtml> and in a *Business First* article at <http://www.bizjournals.com/louisville/stories/1997/11/17/story1.html?t=printable>. One example of the lawsuits is at <http://home.netvista.net/~hpb/cases/busey-1.html>.
5. The State of Oregon has a number of resources online, including "An Introduction to SLAPPs Suits (Statement of problem)" at www.oregon.gov/LCD/citizeninvolvement.shtml.

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