

# Creating Successful Community Plan-- A Next Generation Planning Process

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Planning can be thought of as composing of two interdependent elements. The first is content. It consists of the stated community desired future and goals as presented in the comprehensive plan, land use, recreation and development maps and actual plans for enacting the community's vision and goals.

The second is process. It is composed of the methodologies deployed to develop and implement the content. It's about taking people on a journey. This journey is the trek to their desired future. The words "their desired future" are highlighted because a comprehensive plan in a democratic society ought to represent citizen hopes and dreams.

This suggest the planning process must actively involve citizens in expressing and developing their desired future. The latter suggests the importance of developing action plans and an implementation structure: a charting of who is responsible for what and when.

Planning as journey also emphasizes the importance of not overly focusing on the technical aspect of planning. Traffic studies, annexation cost-benefit analysis and park designs are of little value when people don't support or understand. them. The best technically developed plan is worthless when citizens have no idea where the community is going; that is its direction. Technical planning must go hand and hand with planning as journey. In other words, planning needs to be technically doable, not an "impossible dream" wish list or

a list of undoable objectives, and yet, also express citizen aspirations and dreams.

Finally, planning as journey suggest a dialogue rather than a broadcast process. Broadcasting is traditional marketing and public relations. A product, or in our case, a comprehensive plan is developed. This done by consultants and/or a task force. Public relations and marketing people are to create a winning broadcast strategy and campaign . Presentations, media commercials and advertising are developed. The campaign is launched.

A campaign is military thinking. A strategy is formed. Troops are assembled. Allies and enemies identified. The assault is launched. The result is a war. Rather than devoting talents, energy and time to improving the community, citizens may devote between 25 to 50 percent of their capability to turf protection, interpersonal conflicts, playing political games and hidden agendas.

Dialogue seeks to actively involve all stakeholders. In other words, citizens participate in rather than being sold too. The advantages are: (1) reduced acceptance time, (2) a diminished likelihood of a "bloody battlefield," (3) enhanced community spirit, (4) a greater likelihood a plan acceptance and implementation, (5) faster implementation, and (6) citizens will possess a better understanding of how moneys will be deployed to create a better community life.

Three methodologies are proposed as the process to achieve required content and process outcomes. They are: (1) Open Space conference, (2) Search conferencing and (3) Participatory Work Design conferencing.

## **I. High Citizen Involvement Fact Finding And Dialogue: Open Space Fact Finding Conferences**

First, Open Space Conferences would be deployed to conduct citizen fact finding and dialogue. An Open Space conference is large group self-organizing conference. This conference represents a rapid and yet, quality fact finding methodology.

### **Open Space Conference Stages**

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- \* Preconference Work with
  - \* Open Space Design and Conference Implementation Team
  - \* Conference Performance
  - \* Editing of Conference Proceeding
  - \* Dissemination of Conference Proceeding
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The conference is open to whomever wishes to participate. It is guided by a single theme. The conference is guided by four principles: (1) whomever attends are the right people, (2) whatever happens is the only thing that could happen, (3) whenever it starts is the right time, and (4) when it's over, it's over. Participants self-organize into groups to explore issues relevant to them. Data is collected by them. Each would produce a verbal presentation for the full conference and a written text. In fact, lap top computers and video recorders might be provided for participants to write their text and to document their fact finding interviews. This text would be the conference product and outcome.

## Open Space Conference Outline

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- \* Introduction by the sponsor
  - \* Conference Management Team Introduction
    - \* Statement of Conference Team
    - \* Statement of Expected Outcomes
  - \* Conference Constraints and Commitment Statement
    - \* Introduction to How the Conference Works
      - \* Housekeeping Statement
    - \* Introduction to Open Space Principles
      - \* The Actual Conference Begins
    - \* Presentation of Conference Outcomes
      - \* Conference Closure
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Second, Open Space conference proceedings would be feed into a Search conference(s). Search conference participants would also engage, if necessary, in additional fact finding. This might take the form of structured interviews and/or participant environs scans as presented in the Search methodology.

## II. Search Conferences: Discovering Common Ground

Development success depends on creating "common ground" amongst competing groups' mind sets, viewpoints and economic interests. A Search conference would be used to assist in "common ground" creating shared community development vision or desired future. Search conferences have been design for this purpose and possess a track record for creating common ground. Search conference is based on the following assumptions.

## Search Conference Assumptions

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- \* Ordinary people have real world knowledge and can organized it.
    - \* Ordinary people can self-organize and perform tasks without experts.
      - \* People can create their own futures.
  - \* People want opportunities to use their bodies, minds and hearts.
    - \* People prefer cooperation to competition.
  - \* Developing shared perceptions is critical to create a new context for shaping the future and action plan formulation.
  - \* Egalitarian participation supports more productive and effective conferences, visioning and action planning.
    - \* Diversity must be respected, appreciated and valued.
  - \* Developing shared reality perceptions is critical to understanding the environment.
    - \* Effective and successful change arises from involving all stakeholders in the design, development and implementation process.
    - \* Designing the conference and change process is as critical as conducting the session and implementing plans.
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Search conference involve participants performing the following selected tasks.

## Search Conference Tasks

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- \* Changes in the world important into the future
- \* Trends and forces directly affecting our system
  - \* Common history of our system
- \* Our current system: what to keep, throw-out and create
  - \* Desirable future of our system
  - \* Engaging in Action Planning

**\* End of the search conference: community diffusion and plan implementing**

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The Search outcomes and products would be a community vision and action plans for enacting it. It ought to also support community social structure development: a social network which provides for focus actions amongst diverse groups.

Search conferences might also be conducted for transportation, land use, recreation, public safety, development and annexation. These conferences would build upon the first, its vision and action plans.

### **III. Coordinate and Implementation of Development Activities**

Not uncommon is the development and/or updating of a comprehensive plan which is not implemented. Mayors and council persons assume that existing departments and community groups will implement. They assume that a "plan implementation architecture" existing where it does not. Most communities and local governments don't possess a social architecture for coordinating existing resources to implement. The result is that the plan is never enacted and citizen's dollars have been wasted on plan which only gathers dusty on shelves.

Coordination and implementation would result from the establishment of democratic self-managing teams arising from the Search conference(s). These teams would coordinate and implement development activities. A modified Participatory Work Design conference would be used to establish the teams and their coordination processes and structures. This conference ought to also create liaison connections between the business community, other community groups and the city.

### **Concluding Idea**

When asked what was the most difficult challenge and biggest fear experienced, Baldrige Quality Award winning company leaders stated, "giving up control." City executives, mayors and council members may face the same when considering this process. Control

will have to be given up. But as Baldrige leaders found, people can rise to challenges, have much to contribute when presented with responsibility, and can make quality and community improving contributions. So can parents, educators and taxpayers. The question is: Isn't your community's future worth facing this challenge and fear?

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