



Synopsis

Planning is a highly collaborative effort. Planners work with politicians, residents, and interest groups to help improve the health, equity, and efficiency of communities. This collaborative demand is extremely essential in land use planning. This case-in-point examines the collaborative relationship between planners, the public, and politicians in land use planning practice. The growing demand on land leads to increasing environmental, economic and social issues, and interweaved conflicts between them. In response to these challenges, land use planners have to build a more collaborative relationship with politicians, local residents, and other interest associations in order to integrate diverse values and balance various interests. This initiative uses the Brandon Assiniboine River Corridor Master Plan as a vehicle for the investigation of a collaboration process in land use planning. It explores how planning practitioners deliberately deal with land use conflicts among the needs of economic development, social development and environmental protection, and what strategies were developed in order to involve the public into planning effort.

Background and Context

The theory and practice of planning is constantly evolving and developing, due to changes in political, economic, and social environment, and evolving needs of the citizens. Modern society is characterized as multicultural, multiethnic, multiracial, therefore, land use conflicts include not only resources like land and money, but also involve the relationships between people, politics, race, ethnicity and culture as well (Forester, 2000). This diversity should be addressed in the planning process. Public participation has proved its significance in accommodating various needs of different interested parties in planning and decision making.

Public participation is a process led by planning authority, where people other than professionals and decision-makers are invited to give opinions

The effectiveness with which this triad -- public, politician, and planner -- can work together will largely determine the success of the planning process in a community... the citizenry and the municipal planners and councilors are dependent upon one another in the process to attain a plan that embodies an acceptable direction for the future of the community.

Hodge, 2003: 330

Table of Contents

Synopsis

Background and Context

The case of the Brandon Assiniboine River Corridor Master Plan

Interrelationship among the Public, Planners and Politicians

Probing in Depth

Conclusion

in the decision process. The ultimate success of public participation is largely dependent upon a good cooperation between public, politicians, and planners. The intricate and complex relationships among diverse affected parties or stakeholders make public participation often fail to address its early objective to meet the needs of vulnerable groups. To some extent, it has been a routine and limits the citizen's role just to consultation. Such a public participation wastes time and money, and it is even worse than no participation at all (Randolph 2004, P61). Making participation process a practical reality rather than an empty idea has been a substantial challenge for planners, especially those in private sectors.

In response to these challenges, the nature of participatory planning has been undergoing constant changes. Evolving from planning for the public to planning with the public, modern planning practice has increasingly focused on planning by the public. In the land use planning arena, it is embodied as collaborative participation. Collaborative participatory planning can be defined as a set of processes through which

involved stakeholders work together to create innovative solutions to conflicts and to reach for a consensus on a plan and its implementation. Characterized by Randolph, as "tell us what you want and we'll all figure out what to do together", collaborative planning aims to provide a forum for involved stakeholders to learn from one another, resolve conflicts, and create solutions to problems. It implies a two-way information flow among the politicians, the public, and the planners.

The case of the Brandon Assiniboine River Corridor Master Plan

The planning process of the Brandon Assiniboine River Corridor Master Plan was a practice of collaboration between planners, the public, politicians and community organizations. The purpose of the project is to balance the challenge of conserving the natural river environment with community needs and desires to access and enjoy the natural habitat.

It is a community initiated plan. The public expresses their desire to apply a broader approach to revitalizing the Assiniboine River



The Brandon Assiniboine River Corridor Master Plan

Corridor's long-term health and preserving the River's natural eco-system. Recognizing the public need, the City Council created a Technical Advisory Committee involving senior representatives from the City's Engineering, Planning and Parks Departments. The committee invited Lombard North Group Planners and Landscape Architects Consultant Company to provide guidance and technical expertise to the Master Planning Process. The concerted effort of these three partners shaped the foundation of the final success of the plan.

Interrelationships among the Public, Planners and Politicians

The interrelationships among the public, planners and politicians have direct impacts on the efficiency of the planning process. However, to achieve a good relationship among them is dependent on mutual trust, expectations, and communication skills of the three participants. Politicians' responsibility is to represent the interests of the people in the neighborhoods and make the decision directing the community's future. During this process, they consult planners and other technical advisors for advice. The involvement of the public also redistributed the power of planning and formed an interdependent and interactional triangle relationship.

In this case, the citizens of Brandon had the desire to participate in the planning process of the Assiniboine River Corridor Master Plan. A planning process was then developed to help diverse interest groups undertake the plan. A forum was created to enable representatives from a broad spectrum of community interests to participate and direct the preparation of the plan. The planning group includes the City Council, departmental representatives of federal and provincial governments, businesses, educators, heritage, cultural, aboriginal, environmental and naturalist societies. It consisted of 70 registered

participants with a further 124 people and organizations in correspondence on the mailing and news bulletin list. The final steps in the adoption of the plan involve public review and refinement of the River Enhancement Strategies.

Employing multi-step participation of citizens and stakeholders during the planning process, this project successfully reconciled the diverse interests of public, politicians and developers and engaged a diversity of groups and interests in the process of preparing and implementing the master plan. The plan identified a vision which strengthened the inter-relationship between people and the environment. A strategy was created to reflect on the aspirations of community dedicated residents to prepare Brandon for the next century by establishing a more sustainable relationship among people, the city and nature. In addition, the success cooperation of three groups further helps attract funding from senior governments and private sector.

The city realized the support and desire of the community to become involved in the project, and provided co-ordination of community and business investment in the strategy. The community in turn provided labor, material and



Representatives from a broad spectrum of community interests to participate and direct the preparation of the plan.

funding for various components of the River Corridor Enhancement Plan. The engagement of the politicians in different levels of government further enhanced the community's ability to turn its vision of Brandon's River Corridor into results. It also helped this project to successfully obtain the significant financial contribution from federal government and provincial government.

Probing in Depth

One lesson Mr. Palubeski addressed for the Brandon Assiniboine River Corridor project is that there is never too much participation. Community planning is ultimately a political process, through which local people and interest groups have opportunities to be involved in the decision making process. Public participation presents a grounding base for the decision-making and the directions for the future. Without it, problems might not be really solved. One problem might largely be transformed to another problem. Further, when more people involved in the planning process, more innovative alternatives can be created. On the other hand, the more creative ideas produced, the people will more likely to be involved in the process. The involvement of diverse communities in this project brought a positive impact on the politician's decision. This interactive relationship between politicians and the public, which is built upon process created by planners, finally lead to the success of the project.

Effective participatory approaches imply a consensus built between politicians, developers, and the public before the decision making. Planners usually have less influence on the existing political situation; however, they can improve the quality of the analyses and empower vulnerable groups and community actions through carefully designing the participatory programs. The experience of this project shows that successful planning process depends on the degree of integration of various views of

different interest groups. Through the continuing participation program, different interest groups exchanged ideas and negotiated solutions to the conflicts before the decision making. Decisions generated through this process had the potential



Planners could provide more feasible accesses for the public to be involved in the decision-making process

to meet local needs and desires, and achieve a broad acceptance in the subsequent plans. In addition, this collaborative and consensus-building procedure not only provided public and community support for the project, but also built trustful relationship between each group.

Another lesson that emerged in the Brandon Assiniboine River Corridor project is to always involve politicians in the planning process. The planning process is not just participation of the public. The engagement of politicians also plays an essential role because their decision directly influences the availability of necessary funding for the project and the crucial support for the organization of priorities. Their support for the project can provide planners adequate flexibility to organize the participation programs, and enhance the communication between the local community and other levels of governments. A development plan often has a long-term guidance. However, Councilors of various terms have different interests. One way to maintain the interests of councilors in the projects is to build

some connections between the project and those councilors. Attracting councilor's attention on a project is not an easy task for planners. It depends on the scale of the plans and the influence of the projects. It is also dependent on the degree of the public attention, as politicians should present the interests of the community. In order to maintain a dialogue between politicians and the public within the project, it is very important to retain public's aspiration. Mr. Palubeski mentioned that the traditional ways, such as media, newspapers, and brochures, are still the main techniques to inform the public. Creatively using these traditional methods will generate unanticipated consequences and achieve more public attention, for example, encouraging people to tell their own stories relating to the changes brought by the project, and promoting the dialogues between the

conflicting interest groups through TV programs.

Conclusion

An effective planning process can bring together the diverse experience and perspectives of residents, local interest groups, and governments at different levels, and create a vision that is uniquely reflective of local values and characters. This case in point examines the significance of a working interrelationship of planners, politicians, and the public in the planning process. Incompatible interrelationship will have a detrimental impact on participation approaches. Planners should not just focus on designing participatory programs. Planning deliberatively, planning collaboratively, a good relationship with politicians, residents, and interest groups will lead to the success of those programs.

References:

- Forester, John. (1999). The Deliberative Practitioner: Encouraging Participatory Planning Processes. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.*
- Healey, Patsy. (1997). Collaborative Planning: Making Frameworks in Fragmented Societies. London: Macmillan.*
- Hodge, Gerald. (2003). Planning Canadian communities: an introduction to the principles, practice, and participants. 4th Ed. Thomson Nelson.*
- Randolph, John. (2003). Environmental Land Use Planning and Management. Island Press.*
- Sandercock, L. (1998) Towards Cosmopolis: Planning for Multicultural Cities. Chichester, John Wiley & Sons.*

Other Resources

Interview with David Palubeski, President of Lombard North Group, Wednesday, March 2, 2005.

David Palubeski, MCIP, is the principal partner and General Manager of Lombard North Group. Mr. Palubeski has great abilities to develop and implement effective public consultation processes, where all "stakeholders", including public administration, elected representatives, private interests and community interests were considered.

Haijing Gao holds an Bachelor of Engineer (ARCH) degree and is currently finishing her Major Degree Project in the Masters of City Planning program at the University of Manitoba. Her interests include land use planning and participatory planning.