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Shaping Washington's Growth Management Future

Citizen Participation and Community Visioning Guide

The 1990 Growth Management Act (GMA) requires “early and continual citizen participation” in the development and updates of local comprehensive plans.

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The 1990 Growth Management Act (GMA) requires “early and continual citizen participation” in the development and updates of local comprehensive plans. In addition, one specific goal of GMA is to “Encourage the involvement of citizens in the planning process.”

photos courtesy of the City of Seattle

“I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crises. The great point is to bring them the real facts.”

**—Abraham Lincoln
16th president of US (1809 – 1865)**

Part A

Introduction

There is a fundamental belief in the United States that people have a right to take part in decisions that affect them.

Washington State growth management decisions are no exception. Citizens need to be informed about land development plans and projects, and prepared with the facts they need to fully participate.

The 1990 Growth Management Act (GMA) requires “early and continual citizen participation” in the development and updates of local comprehensive plans. In addition, one specific goal of GMA is to “Encourage the involvement of citizens in the planning process.”

The language isn’t thrown into the law as lip service. Citizen participation in local government and land use decisions must involve the people – whether testifying at a public hearing, serving on a planning board or taking part in an opinion survey on the phone or Internet.

There is also concrete evidence and nearly 20 years of courtroom and growth management hearing board decisions to back up that core right. Go wrong with public participation, and even the best plan will be suspect.

“A failure in the public participation process undermines the very core of the GMA and the legitimacy of adopted or amended comprehensive plan provisions and development regulations. The City must err on the side of involving the public in its GMA decisions.”

—Eastern Washington Growth Management Hearings Board (Dec. 5, 2002)

Good citizen participation helps:

- ✓ Reduce public mistrust in government
- ✓ Engage citizens in the ownership of local growth management challenges and solutions
- ✓ Educate and empower citizens
- ✓ Encourage good planning and citizen support
- ✓ Remove hearings board challenges to public participation rules.

We hope you use this visioning and public participation guidebook as a tool to get meaningful public involvement in your community’s planning process. It is also designed to give local governments freedom to create a public participation process that makes good sense for their communities.

If you have an ongoing citizen participation or community visioning process, this may serve as a handy reference guide. It can also be instructional. We include examples of how Washington State communities are successfully taking public participation and community visioning to heart.

“Just what is it that America stands for? If she stands for one thing more than another it is for the sovereignty of self-governing people.”

—Woodrow Wilson
28th president of US (1856 - 1924)

I. What is Citizen Participation?

Ask two different people in the United States to define “Citizen Participation,” and chances are you are going to get two very different answers. For one person, participation in a Democratic society is expressed through the mail-in or voting booth ballot. For another, it is about the freedom to debate a neighbor or an elected official at a town hall meeting in the hope of influencing political decisions.

Citizen participation in growth management decisions is not only required, it starts a good communication link among officials, community members and planning staff. The end result is a better and more acceptable plan.

The basic legal requirement for public participation the GMA is spelled out in [RCW 36.70A.140](#), which says that every jurisdiction “shall establish and broadly disseminate to the public a public

participation program identifying procedures providing for **early and continuous public participation (emphasis added) in the development and amendment of comprehensive land use plans and development regulations implementing such plans.”**

The players

Land use planning laws involve elected and appointed officials, a broad range of citizen groups and individuals (usually called “citizens” or “the public”).

These participants include:

- City councils and boards of county commissioners:** They set the rules, make final decisions on plans and land development permits, adopt ordinances, approve planning budgets and appoint planning commissioners.
- Planning commissioners:** They are non-partisan appointed volunteers who review plans and projects. They don’t make final decisions, but weigh in with recommendations before elected officials adopt plans. They also hear new ideas and often provide leadership in formal citizen participation programs.
- Planning staff:** They bring technical expertise and knowledge to land use planning. They conduct studies, manage planning regulations like zoning and subdivision ordinances and serve as a public resource on planning. Some smaller communities that don’t have planners on staff hire outside consultants to provide technical assistance.
- Citizens or public:** They are the backbone of land use planning issues, but not a single entity. “Citizens” include: an individual citizen; a citizen’s advisory committee; a neighborhood association; the local real estate association; the chamber of commerce; and members of the local backpacking or Sierra club.

How and when do they work together?

Citizen participation at the beginning of land use planning is going to save time, money and headaches for everyone in the long run. The longer you wait to involve the public the more time rumors and misinformation can spread. If this happens, officials will have to spend more time trying to dispel rumors than actually talking about the pros and cons of updates and proposals.

Early participation also identifies problems or conflicts – and an airing of concerns encourages people to solve the problems – so delaying citizen participation doesn't reduce or ease conflicts.

One of the hallmarks of the good public participation is simply making sure deciding officials are defining clear expectations and responsibilities at the beginning of the process.

Elected officials should:

- ✓ Make a strong public commitment to citizen participation;
- ✓ Clearly define decision makers' expectations, responsibilities and accountability;
- ✓ Document and clearly tell people how officials will invite, review and process citizen information;

Interaction and public information are keys to successful citizen participation. These methods help define what needs to be done, foster communication between citizens, elected and appointed officials and professional planners.

REMEMBER: people need to see that their participation is welcome and accessible to anyone who wants to be involved; they should be able to understand what is happening without knowing technical jargon; and they should know city leaders are responsible and accountable.

Working with committees

Many jurisdictions form a Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) to help update or developing a comprehensive plan. Here are a couple tips how you might add to an existing group or start from the beginning:

- Selection Process:** Pick members from a broad array of the community's civic, business, neighborhood and individual groups. Make sure the committee reflects the demographics (age, race, income and education) and geographic distribution for residents.
- Explain the Commitment, Set a Schedule and Be Sure the Public is Invited:** Be specific and realistic about the time commitment and tell potential committee members people exactly how often they will meet and that these meetings are open to anyone who wants to participate.
- Establish Ground Rules:** Agree on how make decisions, keep records and stress equity among members.
- Set Clear Objectives and Select a Leader:** Choose someone to chair or select staff to lead meetings; make sure they are clear about their task, set a realistic time table for recommendations and pay for the resources to do it.

Tailor messages to audience

A good process reaches out to a wide range of audiences. It must include a consistent message, but will need different approaches to reach all kinds of people from the broad general public to the most affected groups and individuals.

Audiences include: local officials, special interest groups, businesses, and civic organizations. Depending on the issue, other audiences most likely will people affected by the proposed change such as land owners, surrounding neighborhoods, or nearby communities.

As with most issues, the audiences will have differing perspectives. Developers who want to build multifamily housing may clash with adjacent single-family residents. Officials who want to limit

heights and maintain “small town character” may have to reason with residents and commercial property owners. What one views as open, wooded green space, another sees as undeveloped vacant land.

With each identified audience, your message must be tailored to meet certain needs. Some audiences need basic education about the purpose and principles of comprehensive planning; others need to know how and when to influence decision makers on specific issues.

No matter what the level of interest or involvement, information for audiences must be accessible and easy to understand. Your objectives and messages targeted to accomplish them must be clear.

AT THE RIGHT, is a quick overview guide of getting effective citizen participation, courtesy of “A Short Course on Local Planning,” created by the Planning Association of Washington and the state Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED).

A Quick Guide To Creating An Effective Citizen Participation Program

- Get your objectives and put a plan down on paper**
Plan specific objectives of the participation program: What exactly do you want from this? How will people benefit from it? Write them down, in plain language, so people can understand what the purpose of the program.
- Identify the players**
Figure out who should be involved by identifying who will be impacted by the plan, ordinance or project. These are the citizens that need to participate.
- Decide on the timing**
When are you going to invite and/or recruit involvement? People need to be there at the beginning if you are talking about an update of a city or county's comprehensive plan. If the job is to review and comment, then make sure you have draft proposals ready and available for public involvement.
- Work out your methods**
What is appropriate for your community when it comes to public participation? How much will it cost? Can staff (volunteer and professional) do the work and make sure it gets done? Is there enough time to do it right?
- Do it**
If you say you are going to do it and you've set out a plan, then make sure you do what you say and say what you do. Credibility and accountability is key to acceptance of a plan.
- Evaluate**
Go back after the process is finished and take a hard look at what was done and if your goals were met in the public participation process. What went well? What could be changed next time? What didn't work? How can you improve that?

II. Traditional Tools of the Citizen Participation

“Many cities and counties have used a variety of low-cost ways to include the public in the planning process. Examples include presentations of proposals in ‘town hall’ style meetings throughout the County or at service club meetings, establishing a mailing list and mailing newsletters to interested parties, placing copies of proposals in public libraries or other public places, display advertisements or inserts in newspapers in the County, and encouraging media coverage of proposals.”

—Eastern Washington Growth Management Hearings Board (Aug. 12, 2003)

Brochures: Brochures can be used as flyers, self-mailers, hand-outs, downloaded documents or e-mailed messages. If you have proper computer graphic software, you can prepare them and print them yourself. If your information is current for a year or longer, you could likely justify the cost of professionally printing a brochure.

Cable Access: **Community television stations** are non-profit organizations that provide public, educational, and government access television in many counties across the state. Several counties and

cities across Washington State use this television cable-based opportunity to present planning meetings, forums and hearings. It is an opportunity to reach out to people who wouldn't normally be involved in the process.

Citizen (Steering) Advisory Committees: Citizen advisory committees can be especially effective when their goals are clear and members clearly understand what they are being asked to do. **Please see page (11) for more information.**

Citizen Surveys: A citizen survey is a kind of opinion poll which typically asks area residents their views local issues, which includes planning preferences and thoughts as well as satisfaction levels. These kinds of surveys can be done in person or by mail, telephone or the Internet.

Community Workshops: Workshops are a popular citizen participation method that encourages interaction and talk within small work groups of six to nine people. The ideas are shared in a written report discussed by the entire group at the end of the workshop. The information used in plans can show how peoples' goals, priorities and ideas help shape land use decisions.

County/Community/Mall Fairs: A booth at a local mall or annual county fair can be a way to reach out to people who might not normally participate in community meetings or even know about a certain planning issue. Set up a booth or information table and have knowledgeable staff or volunteers there at regular hours.

Display/Reader Boards: Write a meeting notice (who, what, why, where and how) and submit it to your local or municipally-owned cable access station; Ask to use display boards at libraries, schools, shopping centers, public health centers and other public buildings.

Flyer/Insert: A flyer/insert is a simple and inexpensive way to get the word out fast about your plans. You can use them as meeting notices or handouts, and they can be sent on-line through a list and hard copy. A flyer/insert can be sent through a paid mailing, but can also be included in

regular mailings like city utility bills and/or property tax statements. You can also use them to insert into a local newspaper or shopper to help conduct public education or distribute a questionnaire, meeting notice or report.

Meeting in a Box: The “Meeting in Box” concept started in Spokane in the mid-1990s as a way to take planning information to Spokane County residents. It was a self-guided and individually hosted workshop that contained an Instruction Manual, a short video, brochures and maps. [Here](#) is more detail of the concept and how it reached thousands of residents in an informal meeting environment.

Neighborhood Walks: Please see page (44).

Newsletters: The long-standing method of [newsletters](#) are becoming easier to produce and distribute with the age of new information methods (wireless Internet, Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) cell phones). It is a great chance to tell your story to a broad section of people. The newsletter can be produced and sent out electronically and printed as well as a Portable Document Format (PDF). The articles in the newsletter can also be submitted to business, church and civic organization newsletters as well as weekly bulletins.

Opinion Article: Ask your local newspaper or online editor to let you write an “op/ed” piece for their publication. This is a way to introduce or update people on your plan and make an appeal for an issue or meeting.

Public Meetings: Public meetings are a hallmark of public participation and a legitimate first step in any citizen participation process. This is a time when technical information can be shared, directions for citizen participation opportunities and descriptions of plans and projects.

Remember: Tell citizens exactly what the purpose of the meeting so they don't become upset if



photos courtesy of the City of Seattle

A public hearing is a special meeting that allows the public to comment on proposed plans and projects before officials make a final decision.

Public Hearing: Review of your comprehensive plan requires one or more public hearings. A public hearing is a special meeting that allows the public to comment on proposed plans and projects before officials make a final decision. It is an open public meeting and ALL citizens must be allowed to present their views for the official record, both verbally and in writing, before the hearing body makes its decision.

Penny weighting Polls: The non-scientific survey provides participants with pennies (usually 10 each) and asks them to put them in labeled jars according to priority of importance. The jars can be associated with civic issues, from sewer issues to traffic problems to public transportation. People can put as many pennies they want in each of the jars provided. It is an informal, easy to understand and fun opportunity to help people prioritize a community's needs.

Public Information/Media relations: Select someone to work with the media. It could be a staff member, a hired consultant, a committee, council or planning board member. Develop a media plan and discuss what you hope to do with the media.

Learn the standard rules for working with both traditional (print, television) and non-traditional (bloggers, electronic magazines and bulletins) media.

Remember: Reporters and writers are not in the public relations business so they aren't worried whether they show you in a positive light. They can help you...

- Provide accurate information;
- Establish a relationship based on trust and accountability;
- Return calls, and when you don't know something, say so;
- And consistently submit news releases to the media (papers, online publications, television, radio, public access) about meetings and issues.

Public Notice: Posting a public notice is a legal requirement for advertising public hearings. Different agencies have required "notice periods."

Task Force: Appoint an **ad hoc** task force to work on a single issue or special topic in a limited amount of time, the group is often made up of people with expertise or a special interest in the topic.

III. New Citizen Participation Tools

Blogging: A “blog” or “weblog” is a fancy word for an online journal. It is a place to enter words, photos and to tell people the work you are doing. It is also open for people to add comments to, which makes them interactive and a good way to get feedback. It usually contains more personal information than a website dedicated to an issue.

Collaborative online documents: These kinds of collaborations (“Wikipedia” is one type) are documents that can be written by several authors together in simple language and using links. People often use them as a database that provides information, and includes them in the process.

Dedicated website: Use your city or county website to create a specific page or your own special site for the planning process. It could include everything from links to meetings and forums, proposed plans and public comments as well as media coverage and general status reports.

E-mail: E-mail might be considered “conventional” by today’s standards, but many people are still coming to grips with using computers and email. Email is a well-known communication tool that can provide a direct link into planning activities and updates.

eSurveys: An e-Survey is a way to engage people online. It could be a short series of “check the box” questions from commercial products like [Survey Monkey](#).

Internet: The Internet and modern technological innovations are expanding public access to decisions, including growth and planning issues. The Internet is a relatively new but extremely important way for decision makers to include citizens. Websites dedicated to updates are becoming more popular.

Geographical Information System (GIS) and Mapping Tools: Maps show up-to-date geographical information that allows web-users to point out areas they want to see housing changes in, stay the same or developed.

Webcasting, podcasting: Audio and video tools on the Internet are increasingly becoming mainstream-in radio shows through podcasts and TV shows, through webcasts, especially as a way to share information online. They can also be used by communities updating plans. When tied together with other more traditional participation exercises, these kinds of methods can give real depth and background to a planning update.



photos courtesy of the City of Seattle

IV. Some Success Stories

“A recent guide to citizen engagement indicates that there has been an emerging shift in citizen participation methods. . . . participation is moving from public hearings to more active citizen engagement.”

—The Growth Management Act of Washington State: Successes and Challenges
The League of Women Voters of Washington Report (2006)

The League of Women Voters of Washington Report includes an early example of planning -- and then the change in updating citywide comprehensive plans.

In 1994 – shortly after the GMA was adopted -- planning work done in Seattle neighborhoods took the form of a 600-page plan completed by planners that many citizens considered a threat to Seattle neighborhoods, according to the report.

In response, the city set up another planning process to be done at the neighborhood level.

“The City set up a fund so that neighborhoods could hire their own planners and consultants and cover other planning expenses,” according to the report.

It took four years, but all eligible neighborhoods in the city took part and all those plans were completed and approved.

Only you can decide whether a four-year time frame is realistic in your community, but the idea of a bottom up process is nothing new or radical.

Below are brief descriptions of successful public participation methods across Washington State

with links on some to go to more detailed descriptions of what these communities did to satisfy the public participation requirements of the GMA.

City of Ellensburg

Ellensburg planners engaged in a state-of-the-art comprehensive plan update that was enacted in March of 2007. The city hired a company to engage as many people as possible in the process. The methods included informal “pennyweighting” polls, topic-table workshops, a full-on project web-site featuring live commenting and complete project documentation that connected people with the process. A City-commissioned phone survey showed 57 percent of residents said they were either “mostly” or “very familiar” with the comp plan process, and that 14 percent of Ellensburg’s citizens had attended one or more of the project meetings. The city won a Washington Chapter of the American Planning Association merit award in 2007 for its efforts

[Here are more details of the plan.](#)

Clallam County

Clallam County used several of methods to inform the public about upcoming public meetings, availability of relevant planning documents and reports, and important milestones related to the GMA Evaluation and Update Project including, but not limited to:

Internet: Clallam County established a web site for the project where interested community members may go to for status updates, reports, meeting notices and agendas, and other project information. The web site also included links to the Clallam County comprehensive plan and development regulations.

Mailing List: Maintain a list of interested persons and organizations to receive notices of scheduled public meetings. Notice will be provided either by mail or email.

News Releases: Clallam County will issue news releases announcing public meetings, hearings, and comment periods to local media including, but not limited to: Peninsula Daily News, Sequim Gazette, Forks Forum, KONP Radio, and Peninsula News Network.

Hearings-Decisions: Public notice of all public hearings and any decisions regarding the review and update of the comprehensive plan development regulations will be published under “Legals” in the Peninsula Daily News classified section. Public notification of all hearings will be provided at least 10 days before the date of the hearing. The notice shall include the date, time, location and purpose of the hearing. Clallam County may pay for other public notices in addition to this legal notification.

Here is the complete [public participation plan](#)

City of Bremerton

The City of Bremerton’s latest [comprehensive plan](#) update and recently completed [downtown sub-area](#) plan relied on heavy public involvement from start to finish.

City of Brewster (Okanogan County)

The City of Brewster held a bilingual planning event in April of 2008 to help community residents develop an understanding of the planning process. They solicited ideas for industrial and commercial development and shared information about new shoreline development regulations. The city wanted to ensure that the substantial non-English speaking population was included in the discussion. More than 130 people attended the event in a town of about 2,000. Here is an overview of the process, how non-English speakers were encouraged and materials used:

[Questionnaire in English and Spanish](#)

[Press Release](#)

[Outreach Plan](#)

[Flyer and Questionnaire](#)

Stevens County

Stevens County citizen involvement for the comprehensive plan process between November of 2004 and July 2006 when Stevens County adopted its plan:

Every property owner in unincorporated Stevens County received notice of the Comprehensive Plan process (over 18,000 notices sent).

County held more than 35 public workshops, meetings, and hearings in 11 different communities. Thousands attended and participated in the process.

Used Planning Councils made up of volunteers from each Commissioner district to hold public workshops. Informal meetings with community groups and special interest groups held throughout the County during the process.

During each comment period, multiple press releases sent to each media outlet. Posted notices, updated FAQ's, handouts, and copies of the plan on County website. Maintained strong mailing list with more than 1,200 people on GMA mailing list.

Over 18,000 pages in administrative record.
Over 1,100 individual comments received.

All substantive written comments received were responded to in writing.
Used public surveys to gather information on EIS alternatives and important local questions.
Stevens County's efforts garnered a special Judges' Award for the **Governor's 2007 Smart Communities Awards**.

[Here is the plan for public participation for Stevens County.](#)

[More information here.](#)

City of Spokane

City of Spokane created a citizen participation group at the beginning of the GMA planning process before putting anything on paper. The group, "Spokane Horizons: Shared Directions for Tomorrow", worked throughout the update to shape a citizen participation plan that ultimately helped citizens be more accepting of the result. The city's approach garnered several awards, including a nod from the American Planning Association/Planning Association of Washington.

Here is a **primer** on Spokane's public participation.

City of Vancouver

The City of Vancouver has used several innovative public participation programs during its comprehensive plan update. One of the most successful is called "First Tuesday" series.

The "First Tuesday" series is sponsored by the Vancouver Planning Commission, is open to the public and is widely advertised. It is broadcast live on Clark Vancouver Television (CVTV) and taped to be re-broadcast later.

The program has been running for six years on the first Tuesday of the month, excluding holidays. This series has become a significant part of the public outreach and citizen involvement in planning-related issues in the community.

Topics are wide ranging and include transportation, parks, environmental protection, sustainability, economic development, historic preservation, as well as topics more directly related to land use planning.

Typically, attendees include planning commissioners from Vancouver and other local jurisdictions, staff from a variety of agencies and jurisdictions, neighborhood leaders, interest group representatives and citizens from a range of neighborhoods.

Between 2003 and 2006 there were 29 First Tuesday events, with a total of 1,468 attendees, averaging 51 people per event.

The First Tuesday program has proved to be an effective, low cost, way of reaching out, educating, interacting, and learning from the public.

In 2007 the First Tuesday program won an award for the American Planning Association for excellence in public outreach and education.

V. What Does the Law Say About Citizen Participation?

What exactly does the Growth Management Act (GMA) say about “citizen participation”?

The basic legal requirement for public participation is spelled out in RCW 36.70A.140, which says that every jurisdiction “shall establish and broadly disseminate to the public a public participation program identifying procedures providing for **early and continuous public participation (emphasis added) in the development and amendment of comprehensive land use plans and development regulations implementing such plans.**”

Just how do we ensure “early and continuous public participation?”

There is no specific language. But, also in RCW 36.70A.140, it mentions “broad dissemination of proposals and alternatives, opportunity for written comments, public meetings after effective notice, provision for open discussion, communication programs, information services, and consideration of and response to public comments.”

How do we meet these requirements?

To meet these requirements -- and the requirements of the Open Public Meetings Act -- jurisdictions publish meeting dates for their council or commission and advisory boards. Citizens can be informed about plans and hearings through notices in newspapers, newsletters, web sites, mailings and emails.

In addition, local governments identify a timeline and process for amending comprehensive plans and zoning. Cities and counties should schedule the amendment process to include time to provide

notice and gather comments from nearby jurisdictions and other affected agencies such as special districts and private utilities.

Is it a cookie cutter, “one size fits all” process?

No. Local governments can create additional strategies in their public participation program. Many innovative and successful programs have been developed and carried out at the local level since the GMA was passed in 1990. They include outreach to people who do not often attend public meetings, such as senior citizens and youth. There are also new ways to reach people through the Internet and email distribution lists, newsletters, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and direct mailings.

What does the law say about local public meetings?

The Open Public Meetings Act states that: “All meetings of the governing body of a public agency shall be open and public and all persons shall be permitted to attend any meeting of the governing body of a public agency, except as otherwise provided in this chapter.” (RCW 42.30.030)

A “meeting” includes any gathering of the governing body at which action is taken. “Action” means the transaction of the official business of the governing body, including, but not limited to, receipt of public testimony, deliberations, discussions, considerations, reviews, evaluations, and formal actions.” A “governing body” means the multimember board, commission, committee, council, or other policy or rule-making body of a public agency, or any committee thereof when the committee acts on behalf of the governing body, conducts hearings, or takes testimony or public comment. This definition covers city and county councils, county commissions, planning commissions, and advisory boards such as library and park boards.

What are the basic requirements for meetings?

The date, time, and place of regular meetings need to be established by ordinance or resolution (RCW 42.30.070). Either the presiding officer or a majority of the council, board, or commission’s members may call for a special meeting, as long as a 24-hour written notice is given to each member. Members of the media who filed a request for notice with the council, board, or commission must also

be notified. At a special meeting, no final action may be taken on any item not on the agenda (RCW 42.30.080). A meeting may be adjourned or continued, as long as a note is posted on the door of the meeting room with the time and date of the continuation (RCW 42.30.090 and .100).

When can a council, commission, or board go into executive session?

Very rarely. RCW 42.30.110 lists those situations for which an executive session is permissible. For municipal purposes, they are generally limited to personnel matters, real estate acquisition, the selling or leasing of property, and consultations with the agency’s legal counsel. While in executive session, only “discussion” or “consideration” are permitted; all final action must be taken afterward in open session. Before the executive session begins, the presiding officer announces that the board is going into executive session, states the purpose of the session and the reason it is exempt from the Open Public Meetings Act, and declares the length of time the executive session will last. If there’s any question about how long it will take to hold the executive session, it’s important to underestimate the time required, since the board can’t return to its regular agenda until the stated time declared for the executive session has expired. However, it’s perfectly legitimate for the presiding officer to return to the public meeting from the executive session to extend the executive session as needed, until all discussion is completed.

After a hearing on a proposed plan update or ordinance has been held, is it O.K. to make “minor changes” prior to adoption (but after the hearing is closed), without giving the public the opportunity to comment on those “minor changes”?

Very rarely. The Eastern Washington Growth Management Hearings Board provided guidance when it ruled “Each amendment or change made during this process, not exempted under RCW 36.70A.035(2)(b), requires at least one additional opportunity for public comment with appropriate notice and time to review the amendments prior to adoption. No other interpretation makes sense given the importance the GMA places on public participation...” (EWGMHB Case No. 01-1-0018, 1000 Friends of Washington and Neighborhood Alliance of Spokane v. Spokane County)

The exemptions are when the proposed change (1) has had an environmental impact statement (EIS) prepared on it and it is within the EIS range of alternatives; (2) is within the scope of the

alternatives available for public comment; (3) corrects typographical errors, changes names or addresses, or clarifies language without changing its effect; (4) makes a capital budget decision as provided for in RCW 36.70A.120; or (5) enacts a moratorium or interim control under RCW 36.70A.390.

But what if we have a real emergency and just don't have time for an extended public participation process?

You have to make time for public participation. The Central Puget Sound Growth Management Hearings Board in *McVittie v. Snohomish County* concluded that a jurisdiction must provide notice and opportunity for the public to participate prior to adopting any GMA plan or amendment to that plan, regardless of urgency. Although the board noted that a local jurisdiction has some degree of discretion to determine what constitutes appropriate public participation, it also stated that providing “zero” opportunity for public participation prior to adoption is not appropriate (CPSGMHB Case No. 00-3-0016).

The municipal or county code should identify specific criteria for determining when an “emergency” exists. These criteria will be important when determining if an amendment to the comprehensive plan or zoning is an appropriate action or should be docketed for the next amendment process.



If there's any question about how long it will take to hold the executive session, it's important to underestimate the time required, since the board can't return to its regular agenda until the stated time declared for the executive session has expired.

photos courtesy of the City of Seattle

VI. What Do Growth Management Hearings Boards Say About Public Participation?

The Washington State Legislature passed the **Growth Management Act (GMA)** in 1990 to encourage wise land use and planning. In 1991, it created growth management hearings boards to resolve land use disputes quickly - rather than a single state-wide board, three independent boards were established in order to reflect regional diversity.

Eastern Washington Growth Management Hearings Board (EWGMHB): includes all counties and cities east of the crest of the Cascade Mountains which are required to plan or choose to plan under the Act.

Western Washington Growth Management Hearings Board (WWGMHB): includes all counties and cities west of the crest of the Cascade Mountains which are required to plan or choose to plan under the Act, but are not within the Central Puget Sound Board's jurisdictional boundaries.

Central Puget Sound Growth Management Hearings Board (CPSGMHB): includes King, Snohomish, Pierce and Kitsap Counties and the cities within those counties.

Each board has issued several decisions that involve public participation as part of the GMA.

Here are some examples:

Eastern Washington Growth Management Hearings Board

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On importance of public participation:

“This Board has always held that public participation was the very core of the Growth Management Act.” [Wilma et al. v. Stevens County, EWGMHB Case No. 99-1-0001c FDO at. 6]

“A failure in the public participation process undermines the very core of the GMA and the legitimacy of adopted or amended comprehensive plan provisions and development regulations. The City must err on the side of involving the public in its GMA decisions.” [Wilma v. City of Colville, EWGMHB Case No. 02-1-0007, Amended FDO, (Dec. 5, 2002).]

“A plan that is unknown to the public is not an adequate plan.” [Wilma, et. al v. Stevens County; EWGMHB Case No. 99-1-0001c, 2nd Compliance Order (March 14, 2001.)]

“The Act’s purposes are served when public participation is an interactive dialogue between local government and the public. Those purposes are not served by a soliloquy.” [Wilma v. City of Colville, EWGMHB Case No. 02-1-0007, Order on Compliance, (Aug. 12, 2003).]

On specific methods of communicating:

The City has a duty to reach out to all of the public that are interested. The City must actively involve people in addition by giving notice in the newspaper, posting on the website and using other techniques available to the City to encourage the public to be involved.” [Playfair v. City of Chewelah, EWGMHB Case No. 04-1-0009, FDO, (Dec. 27, 2004).]

“The Board finds the City, by posting the notice of meetings and hearings at City Hall, American West Bank, the Chewelah Post Office and on the Chewelah Website, has met the goals of the Act..”[Playfair v. City of Chewelah, EWGMHB Case No. 04-1-0009, FDO, (Dec. 27, 2004).]

“The City’s Public Participation Program requires the City follow the City Municipal Code by pub-

lishing a notice of application in the official City newspaper, mailing a notice to all property owners within 300 feet of application, and posting a sign on the property for site-specific proposals. The Board finds this is proper notice and meets the goals of the Act.” [Playfair v. City of Chewelah, EWGMHB Case No. 04-1-0009, FDO, (Dec. 27, 2004).]

The GMA relies on disseminating accurate public information. Cities and Counties, usually through their City Clerk or Clerk of the Board, provide notices and publication of ordinances adopting comprehensive plans, development regulations, or amendments thereto. This is what the GMA requires and it ensures proper and accurate notice of their actions. Newspaper articles are not substitutes for the requirement that the City publish the actions taken...”[Playfair v. City of Chewelah, EWGMHB Case No. 04-1-0009, FDO, (Dec. 27, 2004).]

“Many cities and counties have used a variety of low-cost ways to include the public in the planning process. Examples include presentations of proposals in ‘town hall’ style meetings throughout the County or at service club meetings, establishing a mailing list and mailing newsletters to interested parties, placing copies of proposals in public libraries or other public places, display advertisements or inserts in newspapers in the County, and encouraging media coverage of proposals.”[Wilma v. City of Colville, EWGMHB Case No. 02-1-0007, Order on Compliance, (Aug. 12, 2003).]

On proper process for citizen comments:

“The County’s contention that this requirement would cause the County to have unending hearings unless they have one, knowing full well that the suggestions will be ignored, is disingenuous. All counties under the GMA have these hearings. If the hearing raises credible problems or beneficial suggestions and the County believes the changes are appropriate, they could adopt them as their proposed language.” [Larson Beach Neighbors/Wagenman v. Stevens County, EWGMHGB Case No. 04-1-0010, FDO, (Feb. 2, 2005.)]

The GMA requires the City to have a process for receiving the public’s suggested amendments to the Comprehensive Plan or its regulations. The GMA requires the City to entertain both general or specific plan and regulation changes. The City’s requirement that limits the public’s sugges-

tions to general goals and policies is too restrictive.”[Wilma v. City of Colville, EWGMHB Case No. 02-1-0007, Order on Compliance, (Aug. 12, 2003).]

On adopting a public participation plan:

“Public participation issues may first be challenged when and if the county adopts a public participation program (PPP). Spokane County’s PPP was reviewed in previous cases and found compliant. The only issue that could be now reviewed by this Board is whether the County is following their public participation program. The program itself cannot be challenged, only whether it should be followed. The Petitioner did not challenge whether the public participation was being followed.” [Harvard View Estates v. Spokane County, EWGMHB Case No. 01-1-0018, FDO, (June 4, 2002).]

“The GMA requires a fair opportunity for public comment before a final legislative decision is made. The County did not allow for the proper public participation required by the GMA. The public as well as the City of Spokane must have a reasonable opportunity to comment on the amendments to be considered by the County. [City of Spokane v. Spokane County and City of Airway Heights, EWGMHB Case No. 02-1-0001, FDO, (July 3, 2002).]

On flexibility in how public participation happens:

The Act does not prescribe how public participation shall occur, it provides only that there be extensive public participation. The County’s division of the plan adoption process into the six geographical areas is a creative way to encourage comment from those affected and allows the plan to better coordinate the planning of such a diverse county. A single meeting or several meetings on a single plan might not have provided the same level of public comment. Such a complex and massive meetings might very well diminish the public input. We must look at the process and judge whether the spirit of the Act is carried out.” [Wenatchee Valley Mall Partnership, et al. v. Douglas County, EWGMHB Case No. 96-1-0009, FDO (Dec. 10, 1996).]

Western Washington Growth Management Hearings Board

On proper notice to citizens:

“The evidence in the record indicates the City’s good faith in extending the public hearing... However, we have to agree with the petitioner that there was insufficient notice that the comment period remained open; and changes to the draft ordinance were not readily available to read and review. Since there was an express comment period closure date set out in writing, the City had an obligation to provide express notice of the extension of the comment period.” (Dunlap v. Nooksack, WWGMHB Case No. 06-2-0001 (Final decision and order, July 7, 2006)

On the final decision makers:

“It is true that the GMA’s public participation requirements are founded in the belief that the best decisions are made with full public knowledge and participation. However, the GMA does not direct the local jurisdiction in how to act upon the comments it receives. However laudable consensus may be as an aim, the GMA does not require it.” (Better Brinnon Coalition v. Jefferson County, 03-2-0007, Amended Final Decision and Order, Nov. 3, 2003)

On proactive communication to citizens:

“Under the GMA, a County has an affirmative duty to dispense as much accurate information to as many people as it possibly can. Simply providing access does not satisfy that duty.” (Mudge v. Lewis County, 01-2-0010c, Final Decision and Order, July 10, 2001)

“Where a local government makes substantial and significant changes to maps after the closing of the public hearings that is not resubmitted for public review, compliance with the Act ... is not achieved.” (Paneko v. Lewis County 00-2-0031c, Final Decision and Order, March 5, 2001)

On specific methods of communicating:

“The GMA requires early and continuous public participation but does not require a specific methodology. The failure to directly mail notices to affected property owners during the latter

part
of the CP (comprehensive plan) adoption process did not violate the GMA.” (Abernroth v. Skagit County, 97-2-0060, Final Decision and Order, Jan. 23, 1998)

“The GMA requires that a local government provide an opportunity for early and continuous public participation but does not force citizens to attend nor require that they discuss any particular issue.” (TRG v. Oak Harbor 96-2-0002, Final Decision and Order, July 16, 1996)

“In light of the record and the number of hearings that were held, a three-minute limitation for each speaker and other restrictions on oral presentation did not violate the GMA, where unlimited written submissions were allowed.” (Achen v. Clark County, 95-2-0063, Final Decision and Order, Sept. 20, 1995)

Central Puget Sound Growth Management Hearings Board

On the final decision makers:

“The ‘public participation’ that is one of the hallmarks of the GMA, does not equate to ‘citizens decide.’ The ultimate decision-makers in land use matters under the GMA are the elected officials of cities and counties, not neighborhood activists or neighborhood organizations.” (Poulsbo, 2309c, FDO, at 36)

“...As a business association, S/K Realtors clearly are representatives from the private sector. However, in the GMA public process at issue here, Petitioners have no different status than neighborhood groups or citizen organizations or any other member of the general public. Consequently, not having a decision ‘go your way’ does not equate to a failure of the GMA’s public participation process. [S/K Realtors, 04328, FDO, at 10-11]

“Cities and counties are required to undertake “early and continuous” public participation in the development and amendment of comprehensive plans and development regulations, and that while the requirement to consider public comment does not require elected officials to agree with or obey such comment, local government does have a duty to be clear and consistent in informing the public about the authority, scope and purpose of proposed planning enactments.” (WSDF I, 4316, FDO, at 71)

On how to act in a public setting:

“... the Act envisions a ‘response’ to public comments and ‘open discussion’ to occur within a variety of forums including vision workshops, open houses, focus groups, opinion surveys, charettes, committee meetings and public hearings. It does not entitle citizens to a face-to-face confrontation and verbal exchange with elected officials about the plan.” (Robison, 4325c, FDO, at 30)

On proper notice of comments:

“To have meaningful public participation and avoid ‘blind-siding’ local governments, members of the public must explain their land use planning concerns to local government in sufficient detail to give the government the opportunity to consider these concerns as it weighs and balances its priorities and options under the GMA.” (Bremerton/Alpine 5339c/8332c, Oct. 7, 1998 Order, at 8)

On proactive communication to citizens:

“Cities and counties are required to undertake “early and continuous” public participation in the development and amendment of comprehensive plans and development regulations, and that while the requirement to consider public comment does not require elected officials to agree with or obey such comment, local government does have a duty to be clear and consistent in informing the public about the authority, scope and purpose of proposed planning enactments.” (WSDF I, 4316, FDO, at 71)

“Citizen disappointment with a local government’s choice does not equate to a violation of the process by the government if citizens have had a reasonable opportunity to comment.” (Sky

Valley, 5368c, FDO, at 36)

“The ultimate decision-makers in land use matters are the local elected legislative officials. As part of the decision-making process, an opportunity for public comment must be provided; however, the decision-makers are not required to agree with or obey public comments. Nonetheless, they have a responsibility to educate and inform the public [including surrounding jurisdictions] about their pending actions, [including] ILAs and their implication for amendments to plans and development regulations.” (Burien, 8310, FDO, at 10)

“Some cities have delegated to a Planning Commission (or planning agency) the responsibility for conducting public hearings on amendments to plans and regulatory codes. Others have chosen to have the legislative bodies themselves conduct such hearings, either in addition to or in place of those held by the planning commission. While neither might constitute a clear error of law under the GMA, taking either approach to extremes could have serious negative consequences. For example, consistently refusing to ever have a public hearing on plan amendments could undermine the public’s faith in the accessibility and accountability of its elected officials. Conversely, always conducting duplicative hearings by the legislative body on actions already heard by the planning commission could erode the credibility and effectiveness of an important advisory body.” (WRECO, 8335, FDO, footnote 7, at 13)

On informal conversations about plans:

“Off-the-record and informal conversations [and telephone conversations] with advisory board members and staff do not constitute ‘meaningful’ public participation with the local government decision-makers since these concerns [raised in conversations] are not part of the decision record.” (Ramey Remand, 9302, Dec. 15, 2000.)

On specific methods of communicating:

“The County simply did not provide any notice or opportunity for public comment on its consider-

ation of the proposed Plan and development regulation amendments contained in the two emergency ordinances ... A jurisdiction may not bar GMA participation standing by providing no notice of or opportunity for, public participation at any time either prior to, or after, the adoption or amendment of a GMA plan or development regulation or other related GMA measure.” [McVittie V, 0316, Nov. 6, 2000, Order, at 4-5.]

“[A jurisdiction] has discretion to define ‘appropriate’ but deciding to provide ‘zero’ opportunity for public participation is not ‘appropriate’ and an abuse of that discretion and contrary to the Act, [Providing no notice or opportunity for publication before the adoption of the emergency plan amendment emasculates the GMA. [It is irreconcilable with the public participation requirements and renders the GMA’s public participation provisions absolutely meaningless.” [McVittie V, 0316, FDO, at 24.]

“The City advertised that it intended to do one thing, then, at the eleventh hour, it did something else entirely...The City’s actions related to these Ordinances were clearly erroneous and utterly failed to comply with the notice and public participation requirements of the GMA.” [WHIP/Moyer, 03306c, FDO, at 28-29.]

“...As a business association, S/K Realtors clearly are representatives from the private sector. However, in the GMA public process at issue here, Petitioners have no different status than neighborhood groups or citizen organizations or any other member of the general public. Consequently, not having a decision ‘go your way’ does not equate to a failure of the GMA’s public participation process. [S/K Realtors, 04328, FDO, at 10-11]

VII. Conclusion

“If you don’t have a plan for yourself, you’ll be part of someone elses.”

—American Proverb (Author unknown)

Creating and updating comprehensive plans is tough. It brings the best and the worst in us. The planning process asks people to talk about what is real to them, asks them to give things up, accept change and to tolerate differences.

Working with people via citizen participation brings its own reward and paves the way for predictability and equity. A good plan looks at the whole and responds to the public welfare. A good planning process invites all who are willing to participation in a plan’s formation, adoption and implementation.

Use whatever makes sense for you to produce the best process and plan for your community – instead of having someone else do it to you.

Part B

I. What is Community Visioning?

The Growth Management Act (GMA) views early and continual participation as key to a community's comprehensive planning process. Community visioning is a term to describe community ideals and dreams that get turned into manageable and realistic community goal statements.

Community visioning starts the actual planning process as a way for officials and staff to find out what the community values are and place planning emphasis on them. The concept of visioning is so important that visioning language is embedded in the GMA itself:

(ii) Visioning. The public should be involved at the earliest possible time in the process of comprehensive planning under the act. This should begin with a visioning process in which the public is invited to participate in a broad definition of the kind of future to be sought for the community. The results of this process should then be incorporated into the plan features, including, but not limited to, locally adopted levels of service and densities selected for commercial, industrial, and residential development.

II. Basic Components of Visioning

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The need for citizen participation ranges from providing people with useful information to giving them an opportunity to take action for or against a proposal.

Your message will become a lot clearer once you spell out your objectives and decide if you need to inform, educate, involve, or empower your community.

Early involvement includes “community visioning” at the beginning of the planning process. Continual participation means creating meaningful opportunities along the way for people to influence the outcome of the plan. The objective of citizen participation in the planning process is to produce a better plan. You want one that reflects community values and support for implementation.

photos courtesy of the City of Seattle



Your message will become a lot clearer once you spell out your objectives and decide if you need to inform, educate, involve, or empower your community.

III. Different Approaches to Visioning

Assess Your Resources

In the beginning, make an assessment of the community's level of interest and willingness to get involved. A neighborhood or citizen response to community visioning in Kirkland might be different than Kalama.

Find out what kinds of resources are available – for instance, does someone know how to create, chart and analyze a questionnaire? Are there experienced group facilitators in the community who would be willing to help out? Is there someone with the technical skills to help with an online survey or design an invitation or brochure?

A quick assessment will help you decide when to use one-way techniques (like mailing a survey) and when to plan interactive or two-way communication techniques (like small groups or large meetings).

Evaluate Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)

A systematic identification of these four attributes will become important to building future goals and objectives that are realistic. The SWOT analysis allows you to objectively summarize strengths and weaknesses as well as the opportunities and threats that lie in the external environment. These worksheets provide space for the committee to brainstorm and more objectively articulate your community's position in the regional economy.

Take a look back

Ask someone to write a narrative report recalling past events that help tell the community's story. Include the accomplishments and challenges – what does this story help tell you about community values? How will it influence the future?

Examine the present.

It is important to get a handle on the current state of your community. Try to find someone to review and analyze the most recent census data, current plans and reports as well as publications that track changes in the community's demographics. Reflect on the pace of growth, the rate, or absence of significant change. What does the present tell you about future needs.

Conducting these exercises can help you decide on a time frame (10, 20 or even 30 years) for your vision statement. The results can help you answer these questions:

- Are community values well defined or do they need to be clarified?
- Should the community focus on specific needs with a detailed questionnaire or survey or will a well-planned meeting be enough to reach agreement on a vision?

Design the Process

There are a few well-known and imaginative activities to get people in a visioning mood. Each requires some preparation in advance. If interest is high, you can schedule these kinds of activities

more than once:

Going to the “Balcony” – Ask participants to imagine themselves viewing the community while standing on the tallest building or bluff overlooking town. The overview helps you talk about future land uses, urban growth boundaries and transportation issues. People can use it also to imagine an ideal future based on the possibilities they see from above.

Walking Tours – Invite the public on a walking tour. Give them a map and ask them to tell you about the unique features and special places that make their community attractive – and what they think should change. They can also make notes on the map about cleanliness, signs, street conditions and safety as a way to imagine the future. Ask them to talk and map out what would happen if the town did nothing? What would they change?

Pennyweighting Polls – The non-scientific survey provides participants with pennies (usually 10 each) and asks them to put them in labeled jars according to priority of importance. The jars can be associated with civic issues, from sewer issues to traffic problems to public transportation. People can put as many pennies they want in each of the jars provided. It is an informal, easy to understand and fun opportunity to help people prioritize a community’s needs.

Photo Gallery – Schedule a time for people to take photographs of town. Create an online or bulletin board display and discuss the ideal future. The success of camera visioning comes from having different eyes look at your community. One person’s eyesore is another’s favorite place to hang out.

Combine one or more of these standard participation tools with the previous public participation examples (some of these are also explained in the public participation section)

Polls – Polls are systematic, scientific and impartial ways to collect information. Polls measure attitudes, behaviors and attributes. Polling instruments can include open-ended or in-depth surveys, telephone or person-to-person interviews, focus groups and observations.

Attitudinal Surveys – An attitudinal survey usually is made up of statements for which people are asked to express their agreement or disagreement by using a scale. (Strongly agree, disagree, etc.). It can be a good tool to assess perceptions and attitudes and get a gauge for community values.

Open-ended Surveys – Design a short public opinion survey (three to five questions) to find out people’s dreams and visions for the future. Responses are recorded and can be time consuming to tally and analyze. Open-ended surveys often reveal common themes (keep small town character) and chronic issues (traffic is a mess). These ideas can be used as the basis for a longer, detailed survey.

Person-to-Person Interviews – This is a good technique to involve volunteers. Design the questions beforehand and ask volunteers to do the interviews with selected and/or random community members.

Town Meeting Visioning – Circulate flyers and announcements around to invite everybody to come to a large meeting at the beginning and/or end of the visioning process. Combine short, formal presentations with an informal reception format. Use the meetings as a way to put reports, survey results, mapping and other information on display. Ask the participants to respond to the information on display.

Small Group Visioning Process – Small groups can be fun, informative and encourage casual but meaningful discussions. Limit groups to eight or 10 people and make sure what gets said is put on a flip chart. Establish ground rules for the group process, which can include everything from the length of the exercise to a consent that everyone gets equal time to participate.

Before the group starts, decide what you want them to accomplish: Put it on a flip chart or overhead: For instance, you may ask group members to finish this statement using the components of the vision (image, time, ideal, unique). For example, “In 2020 our city will look like....”

Give each group member a pencil and paper and allow them to write images for a couple of minutes. Then ask if everyone would be comfortable sharing that with the group. Go around one-by-one and put a couple of images from each member on the flip chart. Review them to see if anything is missing and that everything is clear.

After a brief discussion, ask the group to write a composite vision statement. Repeat this process for each question and statement. Be sure to let the group know how this work will contribute to the community's vision process.

Follow-up – Once you have taken the community through one visioning process, it will be easier to renew the commitment to start or revise the goals to meet issues you didn't originally envision.

If you are satisfied with the vision statement, you are ready to go on to goal setting and the comprehensive plan review. Let the statement shape the goals and influence policy direction. Publish it and refer to it as time goes by.

Follow-up is an important final step for every process. You need a sense of closure after a period of activity and a way to measure your success. A follow-up evaluation helps assess how well you have met your goal and what you might do differently next time. Invite key participants, the organizing group and officials to take part in a written evaluation.

This will help you as you periodically revise your comprehensive plan. You will want to start with a look at your vision statement and planning goals to find out how close you are to fulfillment.

XI. Real World Visioning Success Stories

Town of Skykomish

The Vision for Skykomish identifies and describes a Vision for the future of Skykomish that represents the aspirations and intentions of the community for its future condition. The Vision project was undertaken in conjunction with clean up planning efforts by BNSF Railway as overseen by the Department of Ecology. The Vision for Skykomish works to preserve the future of this historic small town. It gives the community a sense of what the town will be like in years to come. It establishes strategies – from economic planning to infrastructure development – designed to help local businesses survive and grow post-cleanup. Here is the [public participation plan](#), including the visioning portion of the plan.

City of Kalama

The City of Kalama did an exhaustive look at its future and its vision of the future. Here is the [report](#), which includes the town’s visioning process.

[Here is information on the City of Kalama visioning success story.](#)

City of Spokane

The city won several awards for its visioning process. [Here](#) is some background.

City of Longview

The City Council of Longview, Washington updated its community vision in 2006. The vision and strategic plan is supposed to guide City policy, budgeting, and activity, and is also expected to spark city-wide coalition efforts to build a preferred future for Longview. The council incorporated ideas collected through a number of information-seeking activities, including the following:
Two workshops with representatives of other government jurisdictions in the area.

Two workshops with members of Longview boards and commissions.
Two “21st Century Town Meetings” in which 125 citizens discussed the future of Longview using electronic polling technology.
An intensive month of workshops with a “Preferred Future Search Committee” of 32 citizens representing the community, selected from more than 70 applicants
Public input through a survey conducted at the Cowlitz County Fair.
A series of workshops held by City departments and department directors.

The vision is described in this [document](#).

City of Mountlake Terrace

“A Vision for the Mountlake Terrace Town Center” includes a significant visioning process you can read about [here](#).



In the beginning, make an assessment of the community's level of interest and willingness to get involved. A neighborhood or citizen response to community visioning in Kirkland might be different than Kalama.

photos courtesy of the City of Seattle

XII. Conclusion

“What could be worse than being born without sight? Being born with sight and no vision.”

—Helen Keller

American author, activist and lecturer (1880-1968)

Once you have successfully taken your community through one visioning process, it becomes much easier to renew the commitment to implement the vision or revise goals as needed.

As long as you keep your objectives in mind and work toward satisfying the GMA goals, your visioning process will be successful. Just remember, you want an ideal and unique written image of your community’s preferred future set in a reasonable time. You want it based on reality. It should be a statement or series of statements that express what the community views as possibilities for the future.

No matter what kind of techniques you use, in the end you will want some kind of consensus on the community’s vision of its present and future. The ability to reach a consensus is a measure of success and shows that you have met your obligations in the process.

Consensus shows a community’s willingness to support the comprehensive planning process and seeing the vision into a reality. If your community is satisfied with the vision statement, you are ready to go on to goal setting and reviewing and updating your comprehensive plan.

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