

# Building Great Neighborhoods

A Citizens' Guide for  
Neighborhood Planning



Michigan State University

# ***BUILDING GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS***

## ***A Citizens' Guide for Neighborhood Planning***

by

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**MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY**  
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# *DEDICATION PAGE*

This manual is dedicated to the Leadership Team at South West Area Neighbors (SWAN), in Grand Rapids, Michigan, who tested this neighborhood planning process and gave so much of their time and talent to plan for their neighborhood's future:

- ❖ Joan Cunningham
- ❖ Henrietta Edwards
- ❖ Barb Harn
- ❖ Julie Hood
- ❖ Debbie Smith
- ❖ Lori Stanton
- ❖ John Sutherlin

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Our best wishes to the SWAN neighborhood for their continued success as they carry out their plans to revitalize their “little corner of the world”.

An additional dedication is made to all of the neighborhoods in Michigan wishing to revitalize their residential and commercial areas through an economic and social justice approach. Michigan State University, through its Urban Collaborators and Land Policy Program, believe this manual will provide you with an important tool for your neighborhood redevelopment efforts.



*BUILDING GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS*



# ***PAGE OF APPRECIATION***

## ***BUILDING GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS ADVISORY COMMITTEE***

A small but mighty Advisory Committee struggled with us at the very beginning to define what shape this neighborhood planning process would take. Their assistance and input were invaluable. Thank you.

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# INTRODUCTION

During the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, core cities in Michigan experienced the twin trends associated with urban sprawl - abandonment and disinvestment. As middle and upper income people fled to the suburbs, primarily low-income households were left in the central city. Neighborhood and business associations were organized to fight the deterioration, reduction in city services, and the crime that followed. The 1990's brought new prosperity to some of our cities as young people and former suburbanites discovered the amenities of city living.

Cities in the process of revitalization are now faced with a new set of challenges: gentrification, a lack of tools to maintain housing that is affordable to a range of household incomes, and valued neighborhood businesses squeezed by increasing property values. Cities still suffering from economic decline struggle to build a feeling of community. Residents and business owners in both of these kinds of neighborhood share a feeling of uncertainty about their own future and that of their neighborhood.

## *The Manual*

“Building Great Neighborhoods” outlines a neighborhood planning process that can assist residents, businesses, and other neighborhood stakeholders in taking control of their future. It provides *one* potential approach to neighborhood revitalization. This manual explains how a neighborhood can develop a Vision for its redevelopment and construct an Action Plan to implement that Vision. Together, they form the basis of a Neighborhood Plan. The process described here is *empowering* because it requires current neighborhood stakeholders to take the lead in deciding how their area will be improved (shared vision). It is a *consensus building* model since it builds upon common ground rather than defining and accentuating differences. This process also has a *capacity-building* component since the planning activities are coordinated through the neighborhood association or other community-based organization, expanding their ability to handle increasingly complex projects.

### **Basic Components of a Neighborhood Plan:**

1. Leadership Team – guides the planning process
2. Neighborhood Profile and SWOT Analysis - where we are now
3. Worst Case Scenario – where we do not want to go
4. Visioning and Preferred Scenario - where we do want to go
5. Neighborhood Survey and Neighborhood Summit - tools to build the plan
6. Action Teams and Action Plan - how we can achieve the Vision



*BUILDING GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS*



Any community-based organization interested in planning for its neighborhood's future can use the manual. Each chapter explains a different step in the process of developing a neighborhood improvement plan. This manual explains a process that has been proven effective in organizing a neighborhood to manage change. ***This process can be adapted to meet the specific conditions of your neighborhood.***

A Neighborhood Plan sets the course for the neighborhood's future. It provides the context from which to evaluate concepts and make policy decisions. For example, when downtown or a private developer proposes a project for a neighborhood, it will be measured against the Neighborhood Plan to see if it helps achieve the Vision or not. It also assists community-based organizations in planning their activities to complement and help achieve neighborhood goals. The plan should also function as a unifying mechanism bringing residents, businesses, and other neighborhood stakeholders together to work collaboratively on agreed upon goals and dreams. ***By focusing the attention of all sectors on the goals and strategies encompassed in the Neighborhood Plan, the opportunities for significant neighborhood improvement are increased.***

The planning process described in this manual is generally based on an actual planning project undertaken in Grand Rapids, Michigan, by the South West Area Neighbors (SWAN) in cooperation with Michigan State University. (Appendix M is an overview of the SWAN experience). However, each neighborhood will have to adapt the process to the unique character of their neighborhood and to the unique circumstances of their neighborhood association. ***This manual should be used as a guide and not as an end in itself.***

Neighborhood planning involves hard work, long hours, frustration, stress, but also passion, the art of compromise, and a valuable opportunity to learn about your neighbors, yourself, and the community. Make the investment in building the future of your neighborhood – the dividends are tremendous. Just make sure that you take the time to enjoy the process. You must be able to look at your Neighborhood Plan when it is finished and feel good about the work that was done on this worthwhile project. So, two important words to remember: HAVE FUN! ! !

***“The strategic visioning process allows the community to stretch beyond what exists now to reach new potential for the future. Through collaboration and consensus building, diverse sectors are brought together to determine what they want the community to be in the future...People become empowered through their active participation in creating the community's future and thereby become more adept in dealing with change.”***

**Dr. Janet Ayres  
Purdue University**



***BUILDING GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS***



# What is Neighborhood Planning?

For purposes of this manual, neighborhood planning is defined as a process initiated by a neighborhood association or other community-based organization that involves residents, business owners, and other neighborhood stakeholders (churches, schools, etc.) in deciding what improvements they would like to see happen in their neighborhood. A Neighborhood Plan builds on the assets already in place so that the unique character and vitality of the area are preserved and enhanced.

*In neighborhood planning, the process is just as important as the plan itself!* Done in the format described, it empowers residents and other neighborhood stakeholders to both gain some control over their future and develop leadership skills. It is also a capacity-building process in that it increases the neighborhood association's ability to handle more complex issues and activities.

Neighborhood planning differs from the kind of planning done by professional planners in several ways. Most importantly, the physical design of place does not drive this planning process. **Finding out what residents and business owners want in the neighborhood and how the area should feel is what drives neighborhood planning.** How those things are accomplished through design and physical improvements largely becomes the role of the professional planner (form follows function).

Neighborhood-based planning should be resident-led, but it should involve all current stakeholders: businesses, faith-based organizations, schools, landlords, etc. To the extent possible, all people within a neighborhood should be involved in the planning process. Neighborhood planning must be an open process where everyone's perspective is heard and respected. It is important that a consensus be gained among those currently in the neighborhood as to how the area should be redeveloped. This widespread agreement on how the area should look in the future becomes the neighborhood's "shared vision". Consensus on the Vision is reached at a "neighborhood summit" – the culmination of the planning process. An "Action Plan" is then developed to achieve the shared vision.

**Change is going to happen – of this we are certain. Will you just react to it?**

**Or will you decide to manage it?**

# *Frequently Asked Questions*

## **Why Neighborhood Planning?**

Traditional planning has generally meant that City Hall or other outside parties impose their ideas of redevelopment onto the very people who know the neighborhood best – the people who live and work there. Neighborhood-based planning is an alternative. It is a natural outgrowth of citizen-based initiatives, a hallmark of democratic governments. It takes citizen participation to the next level: citizen decision-making. A Neighborhood Plan is a self-improvement plan.

Neighborhood associations have very limited resources but are bombarded with requests to get involved in myriad activities. How does a neighborhood group decide which of these activities to pursue? *A Neighborhood Plan becomes an effective measurement stick.* Does activity “X” help us achieve our Plan or not? Activity “X” could involve a very noble cause, but if it does not help achieve the neighborhood goals specified in the Neighborhood Plan, then it should not be pursued. It is extremely difficult for neighborhoods to say “no” to the many noble causes that pass their way. To be most effective, however, the resources of the neighborhood association must be focused on accomplishing the Neighborhood Plan.



Neighborhood associations also receive many requests to endorse or support various projects, zoning variances, etc. Again, the Neighborhood Plan becomes a yardstick to measure the appropriateness of these requests. Is the request compatible with the long-range Vision for the redevelopment of the neighborhood? Does the request help achieve the goals and strategies outlined in the Neighborhood Plan? If the request is not compatible or does not advance the plan, the answer is “no” (even if the request is being made by a really nice person!). *A Neighborhood Plan functions as a guide when making decisions and policies about the neighborhood.* A Neighborhood Plan consists of quality of life issues such as safety, good schools, a sense of community, as well as land uses.

## **Where’s The Action?**

A plan does not mean much unless it is implemented. That is why an Action Plan is an integral part of the Neighborhood Plan. After the shared Vision is agreed upon, specific strategies and activities that will achieve the Vision are developed. This becomes the Action Plan. It is the neighborhood’s responsibility to make sure its Plan is implemented. The neighborhood must initiate action to realize its goals.

## **What About City Hall?**

The city is an important partner in neighborhood planning. Although they do not drive the process, your association needs a close working relationship that takes advantage of significant technical expertise along with funding resources that may be available through the city.

It is also important to make sure your Neighborhood Plan is compatible with the City's Master Plan. Be aware of the guidelines and standards the Master Plan has for your neighborhood. (See Chapter 9 for more information on this.) If you do not already have a good relationship with the Planning Department, now is a good time to develop one. Call them and ask about any planned activities for your neighborhood: street improvements, traffic calming measures, etc. Effective communication with the Planning Department can help alleviate potential problems and provide coordination for physical improvements in your area. Additionally, a partnership with the Planning Department can provide an opportunity for citizens to learn more about planning concepts so that more informed decisions are made.

### **How Much Will This Planning Cost?**

Costs involved in this planning process range from minimal to expensive. It depends on how you want to do this. Minimally, copying and postage expenditures will be incurred. Other expenses can include: staff time, consultant, refreshments at meetings, and research related activities. Additional costs will be incurred at the Neighborhood Summit (food, facilitator, packet materials, flip chart, supplies, etc.).

The following chapters explain the specific steps involved in the neighborhood planning process. In the Appendices, you will find some tools that may be used throughout the planning process. Please take a moment now to review the Appendices so that you will know what is available.



**LAND MINE:** Although citizens are not professional planners, they know what they want and what they do not want in their neighborhood. Professional planners can assist citizens in making their dreams become a reality. The difference in respective roles must be understood and respected, and it must be reciprocal. It is imperative that neighborhood associations understand this distinction and then help professional planners understand it. Some professional planners are not used to working with citizen planners. Professional planners deal primarily with the land use parts of your Neighborhood Plan.

### **Resources/References**

- 
- Green, "Asset Building and Community Development".  
Jones, "Neighborhood Planning: A Guide for Citizens and Planners".  
Martz, "Neighborhood-Based Planning: Five Case Studies".

# Getting Started

Before beginning the planning process for your neighborhood, first assess whether your neighborhood is ready for such a large undertaking. A significant amount of time from many people is required for the planning to be successful. Answers to these 5 questions will help the Board of Directors of your neighborhood association decide whether or not your organization will be able to successfully complete this.

## *Is Your Neighborhood Ready?*

- 1) Is there enough **interest** neighborhood-wide to undertake neighborhood planning, or do just a couple of people want to do it?
- 2) Is your neighborhood being bombarded with so many pressing issues/problems that there is not enough **energy** left to do planning?
- 3) Does your neighborhood association have the **capacity** to bring a representative group of neighborhood stakeholders together to do neighborhood planning?
- 4) Does your neighborhood have the **resources** needed to do neighborhood planning – from organizing a Leadership Team to holding a Neighborhood Summit to implementing an Action Plan?
- 5) Are there **additional factors/circumstances** that should be considered?

Your association needs to have a frank discussion on the above questions. Neighborhood planning requires a huge time commitment from staff, Board, and other neighborhood volunteers. It will cost money. Your planning effort will be undermined from the start if you do not take the time to make sure your association is ready for this huge undertaking.

Once the Board determines that your neighborhood is ready to do a planning project, we recommend that you proceed by organizing a Leadership/Planning Team. This group of volunteers (with staff assistance, hopefully) will have the responsibility of leading the planning process. The success of your neighborhood planning will be directly related to how well the Leadership Team does its job.

**Your neighborhood must have enough of four basic ingredients to begin a neighborhood planning process: capacity, energy, interest, and resources. Also consider other factors that could interfere. Don't undermine the process by not addressing these issues!**

# *Organizing the Leadership Team*

## **Identify Residents And Other Neighborhood Stakeholders For The Team**

The Leadership Team should consist of 10-12 people who are as representative of the neighborhood as possible. Remember that several members will naturally drop off during the planning process. Residents should be geographically, ethnically, and economically diverse, while also representing both men and women from different age groups. Include business, church, and school representatives from the neighborhood as appropriate. Recruit people who have a sincere desire to see the neighborhood improve and have the time to commit to making it happen. It will help communication if at least two of the Team members are Board members of the neighborhood association.



## **Decide On The Role Of Staff**

If your neighborhood association has staff, the Board should decide what role staff will take in the planning process. If this is added to a staff member's job description, remember that some of their other duties should then be reassigned. Staff can play an important role in the planning process by providing technical and other assistance to the Leadership Team. The assistance of an outside consultant may also be considered. It will be difficult for Team members to facilitate the planning steps while also participating in them, so consider such arrangements carefully.

## **Call The First Meeting Of The Leadership Team**

Finding a time when all members of the Team can make a meeting will be a challenge. Try to meet at a convenient location within the neighborhood. Decide beforehand who will chair the meeting. The agenda should include: welcome, introductions, explanation of the neighborhood planning process to be undertaken, a meeting schedule, and initial discussion on a timeline for the project. Whether the planning process should culminate in a Neighborhood Summit should also be considered. Make sure Team members know what will be required of them.

## **Develop A Project Timeline**

Your neighborhood planning process should last no longer than a year (excluding the implementation of the Action Plan). The Leadership Team should go through the planning steps outlined in the following Chapters as quickly as possible in order to keep momentum going and interest focused, using a project timeline to keep on track. A draft timeline should be presented at the Leadership Team's second meeting and adopted. A regular item on each month's agenda should be checking to make sure the timelines are being met. (Appendix C is a sample timeline.)

### **Hold Productive Meetings**

The Leadership Team should meet at least monthly. Develop and follow an agenda for each meeting. Take minutes, and distribute to Team members. Members will feel the meetings are productive if decisions are made, action follows, and progress is measured.

Sub-committees can handle some of the Leadership Team's work outside of monthly meetings. Sub-committees should consist of Team members as well as others so that additional people can be involved in the process, although on a more limited basis. (Appendix D gives sample sub-committees and their duties.)

### **Outcomes And Benchmarks**

At its second or third meeting, the Leadership Team should develop a list of benchmarks or outcomes by which the success of this project will be measured. These criteria will help the Leadership Team evaluate the planning process after the Neighborhood Summit.

When brainstorming benchmarks or evaluation criteria, focus on the question, "When you look back at this planning process, what will make you say it has been successful – and it was worth my time?" Possible benchmarks/evaluation criteria may include:

- 100 people attended the Neighborhood Summit
- a core group of 6-8 remained active on the Leadership Team throughout the planning process
- input was received from all segments of the neighborhood during the planning process
- consensus was reached on a Vision for the redevelopment of the neighborhood
- an Action Plan with concrete steps was developed to begin achieving the Vision
- each Action Team has at least 10 people who have committed to working on the Team to implement the Action Plan
- new volunteers have been recruited during the planning process
- residents feel empowered
- the neighborhood association has gained credibility in the community by successfully undertaking this planning project
- I learned a lot

The list you develop can become a guide as you proceed through the planning process since it should clearly state what the Leadership Team is intending to accomplish. As ideas for new activities that could be pursued by the Leadership Team arise, they can be judged against this list. Does the proposed activity help you accomplish one or more of these benchmarks? If not, the activity probably should not be pursued. The Leadership Team should re-focus on its agreed upon purposes.

### Develop Leadership Skills

A good neighborhood planning project will give everyone involved an opportunity to try and learn new things. This is an important aspect of the capacity-building that will be occurring. It is important to allow Leadership Team members the chance to learn new skills and improve current skills (public speaking, chairing a committee, decision making, etc.). If neighborhood association staff are involved in the planning, this also holds true for them.

Leadership Team members will probably develop close friendships as the planning process unfolds – a dynamic common in small group processes. Much learning will occur and leadership skills will be developed. Team members will be exposed to new experiences. All of this is to be savored as the rich experience of neighborhood planning unfolds for the participants.

All of the background preparation has been done. Your Leadership Team has been recruited and held its first meeting. Now you are ready to actually begin the neighborhood planning process. Don't forget the advice to have fun!



**LAND MINE:** If there is great difficulty in recruiting members for the Leadership Team, more time must be spent communicating to the neighborhood about why planning is needed and what the benefits will be. Re-examine the section on “Is Your Neighborhood Ready?” to see if you have missed something. Don't proceed until you have a solid Team in place.

### Resources/References

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“A Guide to Community Visioning”.

Jones, “Neighborhood Planning: A Guide for Citizens and Planners”.

# Conducting a SWOT Analysis

To effectively conduct neighborhood planning, you must have an accurate “picture” of your neighborhood. If Leadership Team members are not familiar with the demographics, zoning, and other relevant factual information regarding your neighborhood, it is important that you spend time researching and then understanding this information. This is the first step in developing a neighborhood profile or “picture”.

After you have a factual profile of your neighborhood, you will want to list the perceptions of your area. This is best done through an analysis of your neighborhood’s **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, and **T**hreats – a SWOT Analysis.

## Neighborhood Profile

- **Data**
- **SWOT Analysis**
  - Strengths
  - Weaknesses
  - Opportunities
  - Threats

The SWOT Analysis, originally developed by the Harvard Business School, is an **environmental scan** of your neighborhood. [Picture yourself on a bluff overlooking your neighborhood, your hand shielding your eyes from the sun as you observe the goings-on in this little settlement.] *Your SWOT Analysis will form the basis for other parts of the planning process, so this is a critical piece that must be given due attention.*



The SWOT Analysis can be done with just the Leadership Team, or it can involve many people from the neighborhood. The following steps would be used in either case. They are written as if just the Leadership Team is doing the analysis.

## *Planning for the SWOT*

A SWOT Analysis is a process of brainstorming that will list both positive and negative perceptions of your neighborhood. It can be conducted during a regular monthly meeting of the Leadership Team. Allot 3 to 4 hours for this important planning step.

A facilitator is needed to conduct the brainstorming session. You will need a flip chart and markers to write the ideas that are brainstormed. Dots or some other self-adhering objects for voting are also needed. Copies of ‘Rules for Brainstorming’ (Appendix E) should be distributed to Team members and reviewed.

## Conducting the SWOT Analysis

The facilitator should first review with the Leadership Team what a SWOT Analysis is and why it is needed. The facilitator should then review the rules of brainstorming, emphasizing that this is the time to generate ideas and not to critically discuss those ideas.

The facilitator should begin the brainstorming by asking people to name the **strengths** that they feel are present within the neighborhood. Go around the table with each person naming one strength, making sure that everyone has an equal chance to participate. **Strengths** are defined as assets or positive aspects currently present within the neighborhood, or what people may like about the neighborhood. There are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers since each Team members are giving their own opinions.

**Make sure that everyone’s ideas and comments are recorded on the flip chart.** Continue going around the table until all ideas have been exhausted. Be aware of the time, however, since roughly the same amount of time should be spent on each of the 4 categories.



Being able to identify many neighborhood strengths can be very encouraging and powerful to the Leadership Team. It can help set the tone for a positive planning perspective. It can create “buy-in” from Team members since it describes many of the good things that should be preserved in the neighborhood. Can you take time to celebrate what a great neighborhood you have?

Once the group is finished with the strengths, repeat this process with the weaknesses. **Weaknesses** are identified as characteristics within the neighborhood that negatively impact the area or are what people don’t like about the neighborhood. Weaknesses can also be defined as deficits. One person may view something as a positive, while another person identifies that as a negative – so *the same item may be both a strength and a weakness.* **Make sure to write down everyone’s ideas on the flip chart.**



Strengths and weaknesses have focused on the internal and present conditions of your neighborhood. Now a shift in thinking is required as we look at trends and conditions from outside that may impact the neighborhood in the future. This is more difficult.

Repeat the brainstorming process with opportunities. **Opportunities** are defined as influences or characteristics that may positively impact the neighborhood in the future, or may benefit the neighborhood. Again, **make sure to write down everyone’s ideas.**

Finally, the last category to brainstorm is threats. **Threats** are defined as influences or characteristics that may negatively impact the neighborhood in the future, or can harm the neighborhood. (These can also be described as fears.) **Everyone’s ideas should be written down.**

## *Consolidating Ideas*

You should now have a good list for each of the four SWOT categories. Since the SWOT session will usually take an entire meeting's time, you may want to appoint a sub-committee to cluster the brainstormed ideas within each category to consolidate similar items. Try to match like ideas - for example, under Strengths, close to downtown and easy access to freeways can be combined into 'good location'. Do not change the meaning of any ideas. Do not try to put all ideas into just a few general themes just for the sake of consolidation. What is trying to be accomplished here is reducing the list of like ideas within a specific category. **This is still not the time to evaluate these ideas.**

## *Gaining Consensus – Dot Voting*

At the next Leadership Team meeting, the sub-committee should report. Team members should be given the chance to disagree with the proposed clustering. Then it is time for the group to evaluate the ideas that have been brainstormed through an individual process of voting.

Each Leadership Team member is given a number of dots (usually 3 to 5 dots per category). Each member is to put their allotted dots on the ideas with which they most agree. Dots can be voted in any combination within a category (e.g. all 3 dots on one idea, or 1 dot per idea, etc.) Appendix F further explains dot voting.

The goal is to reach consensus on three or four strong ideas in each of the categories. Dot voting helps to obtain agreement on major issues within the neighborhood by identifying what Team members believe to be the most important – *building common ground*. The process of dot voting eliminates the destructive and unproductive arguing that sometimes occurs over differences neighbors have, and instead focuses on what they have in common.



Once everyone has voted, tally up the dots, and note the top 3 to 5 ideas under each category. Those ideas with few or no votes/dots are eliminated from discussion. This list of the major strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats is your SWOT Analysis. This is the foundation of your Neighborhood Plan and you will be building upon it.

The brainstorming process allowed everyone to express their ideas, and now the dot voting has eliminated all but the ones most widely agreed upon. This process also prevented any one person from dominating the process.

## *Follow Up*

Once you have completed your SWOT Analysis, check to see if other groups within your area have also done a SWOT Analysis (business associations, master plan teams, etc.). Compare your SWOT Analysis to these others. If there are major differences, this may signal the need for further analysis. There should be great similarities – which further confirms the common ground that you are building.

**Tip:** If the SWOT Analysis will only be done with the Leadership Team, ask them to collect ideas from their neighbors on the area's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. These ideas can be presented during the brainstorming process. This will help increase the diversity of input into the SWOT Analysis and allow Team members to practice their leadership skills.

 **LAND MINE:** A SWOT Analysis that has few strengths and many weaknesses may be indicative of a bigger problem. Groups that are not able to see positive aspects within their own neighborhood may not be ready to carry out a redevelopment plan at this point in time.

### **Resources/References**

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Green, "Asset Building and Community Development".

Jones, "Neighborhood Planning: A Guide for Citizens and Planners".

Michigan State University, "Charrette Handbook".

# Describing the Worst Case Scenario

Scenario-building is a technique that can provide a common understanding of the roles neighborhood planning and action can play. It is a tool that can be used to paint a picture of what your neighborhood could actually look like. The picture could be pretty, or it could be pretty ugly. Let's start with the ugly.

This next step in the neighborhood planning process involves taking a very negative look at things. The “worst case scenario” will describe what is likely to happen if current negative trends continue in your neighborhood. The worst case scenario builds from the weaknesses and threats you have identified in your SWOT Analysis. It assumes that no positive action will be taken in the next 10 to 20 years to change/improve the course of events.

Developing a worst case scenario is helpful in getting the Leadership Team members to see what will happen in their neighborhood if no planning and no positive actions occur. It provides a probable scenario for what your neighborhood will look like if nothing is done. Most Leadership Team members probably know intuitively what the worst case scenario is – this is most likely what motivated them to become involved in neighborhood planning! This planning step involves putting these thoughts and fears down on paper.

You will need to decide whether you will have an outside facilitator for this planning step or someone from the Leadership Team. You will also have to decide how elaborate the group wants to get in depicting the worst case scenario.

## *Studying Your Weaknesses & Threats*

Obtain any demographic or other data to help you identify current trends and conditions within your neighborhood, if you have not already done this. The worst case scenario should be based on actual data as well as perceptions and feelings.

**Developing a worst case scenario is helpful in getting the Leadership Team members to see what will happen in their neighborhood if no planning and no positive actions occur.**

At a Leadership Team meeting, review the neighborhood's weaknesses and threats that were identified in your SWOT Analysis and other relevant data. If these trends and conditions continue for the next 10-20 years without any applied strengths and opportunities to balance them out, what will your neighborhood look like? What will be the condition of the housing? What kind of businesses will be here? How safe and how attractive will the neighborhood be?

**If this discussion (answering the above questions) did not occur previously, now is the time to talk about these issues in depth. It will not be unusual for participants to express many fears about the future. If most of this discussion has already taken place at another meeting, the ideas previously expressed should be summarized and then added.**

A consensus should be reached on what negative trends are the most likely to continue and then how this will affect the neighborhood. It will be difficult for some Team members to be so negative, but it is worth the time to lay it out for everyone to see. The process will become more positive in the next step!

## *Depicting the Worst Case Scenario*

At a minimum, the Leadership Team should describe in a paragraph what the worst case scenario is for the neighborhood. If time and interest allow, you could draw a picture and/or map of what your neighborhood would look like if the negative trends continue. It is up to the Leadership Team as to what they would like to do to fully understand the consequences of not taking any positive action. Thought should also be given to how this will be communicated to the broader neighborhood if the Leadership Team feels there is a lack of understanding among neighbors on some of the negative forces affecting the neighborhood.



Now that you've anticipated and reached some agreement on the negative consequences of what will happen to your neighborhood if no planning is done, it is time to begin planning for a positive future.

 **LAND MINE:** The probable scenario can be a difficult concept for some members to handle since they do not like to state solely negative conditions. The only thing you can do is bite the bullet and be glad we are now moving to a more positive planning step.

### **Resources/References**

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Jones, "Neighborhood Planning: A Guide for Citizens and Planners."

# Developing a Vision or Preferred Scenario

In Chapter 4, you developed a worst case scenario that described what your neighborhood would be like if negative trends continued and no actions were taken to improve them. The preferred scenario or Vision will describe how you wish your neighborhood to be in the future. This is a time for you to dream about the kind of place in which you would like to live – your “Camelot”!

The first step in developing a preferred scenario is “visioning” or “dreaming” about what you would like your neighborhood to become. Just as the ‘worst case scenario’ built off of the weaknesses and threats from your SWOT Analysis, the ‘preferred scenario’ will build from the strengths and opportunities you identified. The preferred scenario becomes the Vision for the redevelopment of your neighborhood.

This step is one of the most difficult parts of the planning process. It requires that the Leadership Team look 10 to 20 years into the future, which is a stretch for everyone. If Leadership Team members have not had significant experience beyond their own neighborhood or city, it is even more difficult for them to imagine how things can be done differently. In preparation for the visioning exercise then, Team members should spend some time studying web sites (Appendix G) and other materials that show various street designs, in-fill housing designs, brownfield redevelopment potential, etc. If resources allow, actual tours of other cities, or even of other neighborhoods within your city that have successful revitalization projects, would be very worthwhile.



*What we want to accomplish with this planning step is to gain a consensus on how the Leadership Team would like the neighborhood to look, feel, and be in the future. This will then be a framework or guide to where you are going and what the neighborhood should become. This is done first through an exercise that helps you envision what you would like to see.*

The Leadership Team will need at least a 2-3 hour meeting to do the visioning process. Pens and paper for each Team member and a flip chart are needed materials. The meeting should be held where there are few distractions because the Team members will need to concentrate. Someone will need to function as a facilitator to take the Team through the following suggested steps in a timely manner.

# Visioning Process

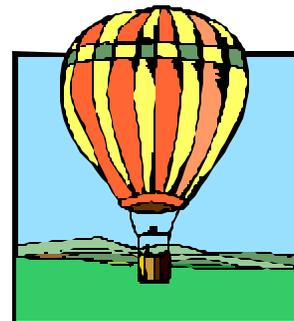
Visioning is a process by which a neighborhood envisions or dreams about the future it wants. It creates a shared image of what they want their neighborhood to become – the preferred scenario.

## Review

The facilitator reviews with the Leadership Team what the visioning process is and how it is a critical step in the neighborhood planning process.

## Setting the Stage

The facilitator then sets the stage by asking the Leadership Team to imagine they are flying over the neighborhood in a hot air balloon 10 to 20 years from now. What do they want to see as they look down? What will the neighborhood look like? What will people be doing and how will they be interacting with each other? Don't be shackled; now is the time to dream!



## Vision of Housing

To help Team members envision the future for their neighborhood, first ask them what the housing looks like from their hot air balloon. Have several pictures available of different kinds of housing types to get them thinking. Ask each Team member to write down as many characteristics as they can to describe the housing they see (want to see).



These characteristics should be both physical (two-story, restored, etc.) as well as intangible (safe, affordable, etc.).

## Vision of Commercial District

After everyone is finished writing about housing, then ask them to imagine what the business district will look like from the hot air balloon 10 to 20 years from now. Again, to help get them started, have pictures of several different kinds of commercial buildings, street landscaping, and examples of business activities. Ask them to write as many characteristics as they can think of that would describe the commercial area in the future – again, both physical and non-physical characteristics.

## Vision of Quality of Life

The third category of visioning involves the neighborhood's quality of life. The Leadership Team will really have to stretch their brains on this one. In addition to the houses and businesses, what else would they like to see from their hot air balloon? Are children playing? Are neighbors talking to one another? What about the neighborhood park, school, or other gathering place? This category can include physical structures as well as social and cultural factors. This can be a "feeling" part also. Again they should write as many characteristics as they can to describe what they want to see.

### **Other Vision**

If the Leadership Team has identified another important component of the neighborhood (in addition to the above three), ask them to describe what they see about it from the hot air balloon in 10 to 20 years, following the same process.

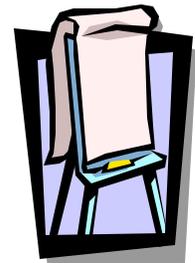
## ***Recording the Visions***

### **Record Housing Visions**

After everyone has finished writing, ask each Team member to identify (prioritize) his/her top 3 characteristics within each category. What 3 things are most important of all the characteristics you dreamed? Starting with housing, go around the table and ask each person to give his/her top characteristic for housing. Each characteristic should be written on a flip chart. Continue around the table 3 times so that people give their three most important characteristics. There is no problem if two or more people report the same basic characteristic.

### **Record Commercial District Visions**

Ask each person for a business district characteristic. Go around the table 3 times, having people state the characteristics most important to them. Write each idea on the flip chart.



### **Record Quality of Life and Other Visions**

Continue the same process with the third and any other categories your group envisioned.

## ***Creating the Vision/Preferred Scenario***

Since your visioning process will have taken a lot of time, a sub-committee should be appointed to take the lists of characteristics the Team just brainstormed and create the preferred scenario, or Vision. This will require some good thinking. The Vision will have 3 or 4 components (housing, business district, quality of life, etc.), and it should capture the essence of what the Leadership Team envisioned. We suggest the following process for developing the Vision, which will be presented at the next Leadership Team meeting.

### **Develop Summary Phrase**

A sub-committee should develop a short phrase for each of the components that briefly summarizes the majority of characteristics listed by the Leadership Team. For example, under Housing – “a variety of housing types” might best describe the characteristics envisioned by the Leadership Team. A short summary phrase is all that is needed – nothing fancy, but the phrase should capture the essence of what the Leadership Team generally described in their visioning.

### Include Pictures Or Drawings

Pictures or drawings that illustrate the summary phrases can be used if desired.



### Record Summary Phrase And Pictures/Drawings

On one flip chart sheet, list a category (Housing, for example), the summary phrase (a variety of housing types, for example), any pictures or drawings, and then list the priority characteristics\* brainstormed by the Leadership Team. Do the same for each category. The categories taken together become your Vision (preferred scenario). These categories are now called the components of your Vision.

\*Some of the characteristics listed by Leadership Team members may be contradictory, or some members may not agree with the “dreams” of others. No problem! The only thing you need consensus on right now is the main components of the Vision (housing, business district, quality of life, or whatever you’ve chosen) and the summary phrases. You will want others from the neighborhood to have input into specific ideas under each component as the neighborhood planning process proceeds. Discussion and prioritization of the ideas (characteristics) will not occur until the Action Plan is developed. This is why it is important that your **summary phrase for each component** (for example, a variety of housing types) **encompasses most of the characteristics expressed** – whether everyone agrees with all the specific characteristics or not. This is again a process that focuses on the common ground among Team members rather than their differences.

### Report On Vision

At the meeting after the visioning process, the Leadership Team will hear the report of the sub-committee and review the summary phrases for each component of the Vision. Does the Leadership Team feel comfortable with the vision/preferred scenario? Does this basically seem like the direction your neighborhood should be headed? If there are any major concerns with the Vision, they should be addressed now.

### The Neighborhood Survey

You will test out the most important ideas in the Vision through the Neighborhood Survey (next chapter) to make sure the broader neighborhood concurs with the group’s dreams for the neighborhood’s future. If the survey results do not support the Leadership Team’s Vision for the redevelopment of the neighborhood, corrections must be made.

The major point of the Vision is to have a future focus that is agreed upon in the neighborhood so that your planning efforts will be aimed at the same target. You do not

have to be specific at this point – just an overall direction needs to be articulated for now. This now becomes your neighborhood’s Vision for its future redevelopment. It is the star to which you will hitch your neighborhood wagon.

 **LAND MINE:** If the Leadership Team cannot agree on the major components for the Vision and some general characteristics for each component, stop where you are and look for shared beliefs. Although there is no need to agree on everything, you must identify some common ground upon which you can build a Vision. Do not go any further in the neighborhood planning process until this common ground is developed.

 **LAND MINE:** Although *general* agreement is always needed among the Leadership Team before you can progress to the next neighborhood planning step, it is not unusual to have someone who does not agree with the rest of the group. Consider carefully whether or not that person represents an important perspective within the neighborhood that needs to be incorporated. If a compromise cannot be reached, the majority rules (this is a democracy). The planning process cannot be held up for one contrary person. However, ignoring a valid perspective can jeopardize the entire planning process. As a group, the Leadership Team must decide if an individual’s disagreement is representative or not. If it is not, do not let one person hold up this important neighborhood work.

 **LAND MINE:** It is **not** recommended that you spend time developing a vision statement – one sentence that tries to capture the essence of your Vision. This can be a long and tedious process – time is better spent undertaking activities that will achieve the Vision. Much disagreement can also be generated when wordsmithing a vision statement. There appears to be no good reason to put your Vision into a single statement.

## Resources/References

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“A Guide to Community Visioning”.

Jones, “Neighborhood Planning: Guide for Citizens and Planners”.

Vandenberg, “Strategic Futuring Resources for Working with Communities and Organizations”.

# Developing/Conducting a Neighborhood Survey

The Neighborhood Survey can be a very positive and a very important part of the planning process. Although the survey cannot be finalized until the Vision is completed, initial work and discussion on the survey should be held at the second or third Leadership Team meeting.

A neighborhood survey can accomplish several purposes, so the Leadership Team must be clear on what they want the survey to do. After the Vision has been successfully developed by the Leadership Team, the following purposes for doing a survey are listed in order of importance.

## *Reasons for Conducting a Neighborhood Survey*

### Gaining Consensus On The Vision

Survey questions should be crafted so that they explore the level of agreement or disagreement on the major characteristics described by the Leadership Team under each component of the Vision. The survey should “test” whether the ideas expressed by the Leadership Team are supported by the larger neighborhood. Answers to the questions will provide valuable feedback on whether the Leadership Team is on the right track.

### Neighbors Included In Process

The thinking of more neighbors can be included in the planning process by surveying them for their opinions. This is especially true if certain segments of the neighborhood are not represented on the Leadership Team. Maybe you were not able to obtain representation from certain geographical areas in your neighborhood, racial or cultural groups, or specific stakeholder groups like businesses. Extra efforts should be made to survey those segments.

**Early in the planning process, the Leadership Team should begin work on developing a neighborhood survey. A neighborhood survey can accomplish several purposes - from gaining consensus to creating a sense of ownership.**

### **A Communication Tool**

The survey can function as a communication tool. It will inform people that a neighborhood planning process is underway. This will also be a good opportunity to inform people about the date of the Neighborhood Summit and encourage their attendance so that they can hear the results of the survey and have additional opportunity for input into the future of their neighborhood.

### **Create Sense Of Ownership**

The survey can begin to give residents a sense of ownership of the Neighborhood Plan by their participation in this step of the planning process. People like to be asked their opinion on things. Then interest is created in wanting to see the survey results (how does my opinion compare to others in the neighborhood?). This necessitates the Leadership Team building integrity into the surveying process. Respondents' answers must be incorporated into the Neighborhood Plan as much as possible so that it is an accurate reflection of what the neighborhood wants to accomplish.

### **Obtain Important Neighborhood Data**

Survey data can be used by the neighborhood association for years to come. Decide what you would like to learn about the people in the neighborhood, and then craft questions that will elicit that information. For example, asking for opinions on a major issue facing the neighborhood, or measuring interest in a new program, etc. Survey results can be included in proposals, Board and staff work plans, and other materials.

### **Leadership Development Of Team Members**

It provides a concrete activity for the Leadership Team. The survey instrument must be carefully designed and then consistently administered. The more involvement by Team members, the more successful the survey. Team members will learn interview skills and demonstrate to the neighborhood that something positive is happening.

Since a significant amount of time will be taken to survey the neighborhood, the Leadership Team must decide if outside assistance is needed to help develop the survey instrument. Area colleges may be a resource. The Team must make a commitment to allocating a sizeable portion of their time to this endeavor whether outside assistance is used or not.



## ***Developing the Survey***

Since one of the main purposes of the survey is to see if the Leadership Team's ideas are representative of the neighborhood, survey questions will be written around the main ideas expressed in the SWOT Analysis and the themes developed in the Vision. Questions should be written so that they elicit the information needed to make the

Leadership Team feel confident that their perceptions are shared generally throughout the neighborhood, or that it is clear that they are not shared. (See Appendix H for a sample survey.)

It is helpful to have simple demographic questions within your survey. Questions asking whether the survey participant is a homeowner or a renter, male or female, etc. will help to determine whether or not your survey is representative of the neighborhood.

When writing the questions, begin to think about how the answers will be compiled into usable information. Qualitative questions and open-ended questions (for example, what do you like most about living in this neighborhood?) will result in a list of responses, while quantitative answers can be compiled into a simple spreadsheet (for example, do you own or rent?).

A consultant, neighborhood association staff person, or a sub-committee of the Leadership Team should draft the survey. This should be presented to the full Leadership Team for corrections and additions. How the questions are worded must be appropriate for your neighborhood. Adequate time at a Team meeting should be scheduled to review the draft and make revisions. A re-draft of the survey should be presented at another Team meeting for final approval.

Before final approval is given, the Leadership Team should ask the following questions concerning the survey:

- 1) Will the answers to these survey questions clearly indicate that we are in general agreement with most of the neighborhood, or will they clearly indicate what issues that we do not agree upon?
- 2) Will residents have any trouble understanding what we are asking in each of these questions?
- 3) Have we asked for information on an important issue currently facing the neighborhood?
- 4) Will the results from this survey give us an accurate picture of what our neighbors are thinking and feeling about the neighborhood and its future?

## *Conducting the Survey*

Now comes the fun part – talking to your neighbors about this planning effort and the survey. Much thought must be given to how the surveys will be distributed and collected to attain the greatest number of completed surveys. This will largely depend upon the resources of the group. More than one method should probably be employed. The technique we recommend for doing most of the surveys is **personal interviews**. This technique involves interviewing your friends and neighbors as well as going door-to-door within your neighborhood.



Leadership Team members should first start by interviewing each other. This will be a good “test run” for the survey and a training for Team members. This should be done at a Leadership Team meeting. The Team should agree on an “intro” that is given when explaining what the survey is and trying to convince someone to take the time to do the survey. Team members should pair up. First one will ask the other all the questions on the survey and write the responses on a survey form. On the open-ended questions, make sure you have accurately captured the response, using quotes as necessary. Then it is the other person’s turn to ask the questions.

This practice session will help to make sure that all Team members will be asking the questions in the same manner for everyone they interview. Although this is not a “scientific” survey, you should make sure as much uniformity in administering the survey is attained as possible. (You are putting a lot of time into this survey, so remember to strive to make the results as representative and reliable as possible.) Note any ambiguous or confusing questions. It is not too late to make final edits to the survey.

**Tip:** It is important for the Leadership Team to write down the point of what the respondent said, using quotes as necessary when using the personal interview style.

When the Leadership Team has completed surveying each other, any glitches or awkward wording of questions that you discovered should be discussed and appropriate changes made. These completed surveys will be tabulated with the others you will do – they count! Now you are ready to interview others.

**Surveying can include: personal interviews, distribution through block clubs and neighborhood events, and dropping surveys off at homes with directions on how to complete. A goal should be set as to how many completed surveys you would like. (It will probably be difficult to collect more than 100 due to limited resources.) Each Team member should pledge to interview and complete a certain number of surveys. A timeline should be set for when all surveys must be completed.**

If you are having difficulty collecting the number of surveys you want, consider some other methods. Have surveys available at neighborhood events for people to pick up and mail in later. You can **mail** out the surveys to all the residents within your neighborhood if you have the resources. Another technique for gathering survey results is to do **telephone** surveys. The population you can reach this way is reduced, however, because some people may not have telephones, or may have unlisted numbers.

Don't forget to include with each survey a flyer announcing the date and time of the Neighborhood Summit.

**CONFIDENTIAL**

**Special Note:** It is extremely important that the survey respondents' answers be kept confidential. This will allow people to feel free to express their true opinions. You must strictly adhere to this policy of confidentiality. It would be permissible for a Team member who conducted a personal interview to say, a respondent in the northern part of our neighborhood expressed concern about recent acts of vandalism. It would never be permissible to say, Jane Smith said she is really upset about the crime on the 1200 block of Elm Street. Establish a culture that takes the issue of confidentiality seriously.

 **Land Mine:** Although this is not a scientific survey, it is still important that a representative sample of people from the neighborhood be surveyed. If a significant segment of the population within your neighborhood has been uninvolved in the process thus far, it is of utmost importance to ensure that their voices are heard with this survey. The validity of your survey results and the credibility of your planning process will be questioned if care is not taken to be inclusive.

## *Tabulating The Survey Results*

A 'number cruncher' should be identified who will volunteer to tabulate the responses to each question within the survey. As your surveys begin to come back, compile the answers. The easiest way is to use a spreadsheet program (such as Excel) to compile the answers into one file. Simple math will provide a number of answers in this format.

**Example:**

Do you Own or Rent?				
	Own	Rent		
Survey #1	1	0		
Survey #2	0	1		
Etc.	...	...	...	...
Total	43	61		
Percentage	41.3%	58.7%		

“Total” represents all the responses in one column. A grand total equals all of the responses to that question. Divide the Total in a column by the grand total to get the percentage of how many people answered that question with each response. E.g., 41.3% of survey respondents own their home.

Although no survey will be tracked to an individual, it is important to have one person who is tracking what geographical areas are returning completed surveys. If an area is not participating, a special interview team might want to go door-to-door in that area to personally interview neighbors.

**Tip:** If you need help in developing the survey, or compiling the answers, consult your local college or Extension office. See if they will offer assistance with these types of activities.

## *Analyzing The Results*

Once all of the surveys have been returned, and the responses compiled, the analysis begins. Take some time at a Leadership Team meeting to go through the final results of the survey. Are you surprised at any of the responses? Where is there major consensus? Are there issues where neighbors are evenly divided? Do the results support the direction you are taking with the Vision you developed? As a result of the survey responses, do you need to make any changes to the Vision?

The results that surprise you will be the results that will most interest the public. It may be beneficial to compile the survey results into a 2-3 page document for distribution at the Neighborhood Summit, and maybe to the media. A summary could also be included in your neighborhood newsletter.



The survey results should confirm that the Leadership Team is on track with how it wants to see the neighborhood redeveloped. If this is not true, stop and figure out why. Make needed adjustments. How will you ensure that future decisions will be more representative of the neighborhood?

Don't forget to refer to these survey results whenever a topic/issue emerges in the neighborhood. If done properly, this survey can be a great resource for years to come.

**Note:** If your neighborhood association is not sure it wants to undertake neighborhood planning at this time, a survey such as the one described in this chapter may be a *first step*. It could help gauge resident interest in planning. A Neighborhood Survey could begin to assess priority issues that a planning process could address and measure the neighborhood's ability to carry out such an involved project.

### **Resources/References**

Jones, "Neighborhood Planning: A Guide for Citizens and Planners".  
Patton, "Basic Methods of Policy Analysis and Planning".

# Neighborhood Summit

The Leadership Team must decide early in the planning process how they will have neighborhood residents authenticate their work. The Neighborhood Survey provided broader input into the planning process. Now the neighborhood needs to come together to give their approval of the Vision/Preferred Scenario that has been developed. This will make the Vision created by the Leadership Team a “shared” vision – one accepted and adopted by the rest of the neighborhood.

We recommend that a specific event be organized to accomplish this – a Neighborhood Summit (or whatever name you would like to call it). Invite the whole neighborhood; everyone is welcome! Setting a date for the Summit early in the planning process provides a goal to which your planning efforts are aimed. It also sets a clear deadline for your planning process.

**Tip:** Planning for the Summit may take 3 months or more. The earlier the Leadership Team starts its planning for the Summit, the more successful it will be.

In addition to the neighborhood agreeing on a shared Vision for its future redevelopment, the Neighborhood Summit is also used as the opportunity to create an Action Plan that will implement the Vision. It is the hope that those attending the Summit will also agree to volunteer for one of the Action Teams that will be organized that day.

## Summit Check List

- |                               |                       |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| ✓ Set a time and date         | ✓ Set the agenda      |
| ✓ Select a location           | ✓ Folders             |
| ✓ Advertise                   | ✓ Door prizes         |
| ✓ Hire a facilitator (or not) | ✓ Supplies            |
| ✓ Daycare                     | - large pads of paper |
| ✓ Signs                       | - dots for voting     |
| ✓ Food                        | - markers             |

This chapter will cover many suggestions for planning an all-day event. You must adapt these ideas to meet the particulars of your neighborhood. The chapter is divided into five segments: Preparing for the Summit, Setting the Summit Agenda, Summit Set Up, Summit Day, and Summit Follow Up.

# *Preparing for the Summit*

## **Setting A Time And Date**

Since the work you have to do at the Summit will take about 5 hours, a Saturday is probably the best day. What time you begin and end depends on your neighborhood, but generally 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. works best. Time of year will also affect the number of people who will attend your event (hope that you pick a date somewhere between a beautiful summer day and a freezing, snowy winter day – both keep people away!).

- Is the date just prior to a holiday?
- Will many people be able to attend?
- Are other neighborhood events planned for that day?
- Will people be on vacation?
- Is there enough time between now and then to complete all planning steps?

## **Choosing A Location**

When deciding where to host the Neighborhood Summit, give priority to a location that is within your neighborhood. However, make sure it has the facilities you need. Cost is another consideration. The other aspect of a location that the Leadership Team

Does the location have enough space for what you want to do?

- Large room for main group
- Smaller rooms for break out groups
- Lunch & Refreshment areas
- Registration area
- Accessible bathrooms
- Area for daycare if needed

must consider is whether everyone in the neighborhood will feel comfortable there. Churches, organizations with negative reputations, etc. can prevent some people from attending events there. The Leadership Team must be sensitive to these feelings and factor this into their decision on a location.

## **Hiring A Facilitator**

The Leadership Team will need to determine early on whether to hire a consultant to facilitate the Summit or to lead the Summit themselves. A good facilitator will listen respectfully to people's opinions but will keep the group focused on the purpose of the Summit and move the agenda along. The facilitator must be viewed as impartial with no personal stake in decisions that are made at the Summit. Factors to be considered when deciding whether or not to hire a facilitator are: cost, if someone in your group has facilitation skills, and whether the Team feels confident in being able to handle any circumstances that arise at the Summit.

## **Translator Needed?**

Serious thought should be given as to whether or not you need to do the Summit in two languages. Don't exclude part of your neighborhood due to a language barrier and make sure advertising conveys this.

## **Budget**

All costs that may be incurred during the planning process should be considered and a budget developed. Funding grants from local foundations or the City should be explored. Don't forget neighborhood sources such as the business association, neighborhood association, churches, etc. The budget should be approved by the Leadership Team.



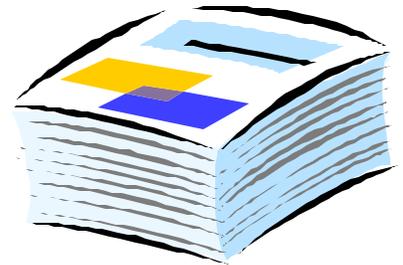
## **Sub-Committees**

Sub-committees should be formed to handle the many tasks that are required in planning this event. Sub-committees might include: Budget, Food and Snacks, Publicity, and Set Up/Registration. (See Appendix D for more information on sub-committees.) Each sub-committee should be chaired by a Leadership Team member. Special training may be sought on how to chair committees – this is a great learning opportunity! Other residents should be recruited to help share the work and thereby increase involvement. (Recruitment may be difficult but it is worth the effort.) Reports should be given each month at Leadership Team meetings on the sub-committee's progress.

### **Publicity Sub-Committee**

Once you have the place, date and time set, begin to advertise. The sooner that people know about an event, the more time they will have to plan around it. Good publicity can help build excitement and anticipation for the Summit. Realize that once you begin advertising the date, this will be a deadline for the Leadership Team that is now cast in concrete.

Advertising can take many forms. Flyer distribution can be done through block clubs and generally throughout the neighborhood. Placing an article in your neighborhood newsletter should be done about a month before the Summit, and a follow-up article on the Summit's success should be done afterwards. Contact should be made with the *Grand Rapids Press* and the *Advance*. Try to obtain both a pre-Summit announcement in the paper as well as having a reporter come out the day of the Summit. If it is a slow news day, a TV station might provide some coverage the day of the Summit also. This will help to build good public relations for your neighborhood and inform those who were not able to attend the Summit.



Ideally, a sub-committee of the Leadership Team should be formed to brainstorm ways the Summit can be advertised in the neighborhood to make sure as many residents as possible attend. A simple, tri-fold brochure that explains the planning process can also be produced fairly cheaply and helps to explain to others what this is all about. A comprehensive publicity plan with timelines should be developed and approved by the Leadership Team.

### **Set Up/Registration Sub-Committee**

The first job of this sub-committee is to create registration packets, which will be given to each Summit participant. It may include: an agenda, evaluation form,

#### **Registration Packet**

- \* Folder/bag
- \* Agenda
- \* Neighborhood Survey results
- \* Info on your organization
- \* Info on future events
- \* Evaluation form

Neighborhood Survey results (a condensed version), information on your organization, and anything else that you think may be useful. Other items to include in the packet if available: pen, writing tablet, raffle ticket, trinkets (key chain or other donated items)

from businesses), and a directory of city departments.

The packet itself can be a folder, plastic bag, or whatever will hold your Summit materials. It is never too early to start planning for the packets and soliciting donations. It will be worth all the thought that is put into preparing an attractive and useful packet since it will be taken home by all of the participants.

### **Food & Snacks Sub-Committee**

The Food & Snacks sub-committee will plan what will be served at registration (coffee, donuts, etc.), the lunch – either hiring a caterer or preparing it yourselves, and an afternoon snack. What to serve will in large part be decided by what foods you can get donated and how much money you can raise to subsidize the food costs. If you are able to hire a caterer, this should be done early on. If you plan to make the food yourselves, remember that you will have many things to do that day. People like a good, free lunch, so it wouldn't hurt to splurge on this item!

- Food:** (this is a big draw in itself)
- \* What kind?
  - \* Will it appeal to many people?
  - \* Cost?
  - \* Hire a caterer?
  - \* Buffet?

## *Setting the Summit Agenda*

The Neighborhood Summit is the time to present the planning work that has been done by the Leadership Team and offer the participants a chance to become involved by adding their opinions. They should have a chance to give input on the components of the Vision and its implementation, and they should feel welcome to join an Action Team. This section covers items you may want to include at your Summit and items to include on the Agenda. (See Appendix I for a sample agenda.)

### **Agenda**

- I. Welcome & Announcements
- II. Purpose of Summit
- III. Leadership Team Reports
- IV. Discussion/Building Consensus
- V. Meeting with City Reps.
- VI. Lunch
- VII. Action Teams
- VIII. Door Prize Drawing
- IX. Adjournment

**Tip:** Developing the agenda for the Summit is an important Leadership Team responsibility. This will be their opportunity to showcase their work while motivating others in the neighborhood.

## Leadership Team Report

The first part of the Summit should be spent reporting on the work of the Leadership Team. Each of the major neighborhood planning steps (SWOT Analysis, Survey, Vision, etc.) should be explained to Summit participants. This is an important part since all of the Leadership Team's work will be showcased and explained.

The opportunity to present these reports should first be given to members of the Leadership Team. This can be an important leadership development opportunity if Team members have not had much public speaking experience. For this reason, each Leadership Team member should be encouraged to present at least a part of a report at the Summit. However, if an individual does not feel prepared to handle this, another task should be identified.



Once the Team has decided who will present what parts of the planning process at the Summit, make sure the order of the presentations flows so that people who attend the Summit will be able to understand what they are hearing in a coherent fashion. Consider the use of visual aids – a PowerPoint presentation, graphs, posters, pictures, etc. They can both help the Leadership Team speakers remember their speeches and be informative as well as entertaining for the audience.

## Discussion – Building Consensus

Now it will be the Summit participants' opportunity to talk. Since the last presentation report by the Leadership Team will be on the Vision/Preferred Scenario, the next agenda item will be to build consensus on this Vision through group discussion. Each of the Vision components (Housing, Business, etc.) with the priority characteristics brainstormed by the Leadership Team should be written on a flip chart. The facilitator should take one component at a time and encourage discussion.

Take the Housing Vision first. What has been forgotten? Do you agree with what is listed? As participants come up with additional ideas, add them to the list of characteristics. Do the same with the other components of the vision.

This discussion is important because it gives Summit participants the opportunity to develop ownership of the Vision by contributing their ideas and giving their approval. Create an atmosphere that makes participants feel comfortable offering their ideas and suggestions without fear of confrontation. Everyone has something important to contribute, and everyone's perspective needs to be heard and respected.

**Don't Forget:** There is not discussion on the components that were chosen – just the *characteristics* of each component. The components are the framework chosen by the Leadership Team and should be built upon at the Summit.

Once discussion has taken place on all of the components and additional characteristics added (and keeping within the timeline), the group should then cluster any like ideas if needed. After that is complete, the rules for dot voting should be explained.

The participants should have each received 3 to 5 dots multiplied by the number of components in the Vision (in their packets or handed out now). They will vote for what they think are the most important characteristics under each component. Do not allow putting all dots in just one component. Each Action Team will want to know what everyone thinks is important in each component. (However, all dots for a component can be placed on just one characteristic.) Tally up the votes in each component, and the characteristics with the most votes will become the strategies addressed by the break out groups in the afternoon. (See Appendix F for a refresher on dot voting.)

**Note:** There is still no discussion occurring at this point about which idea is more important or better.

### **City Representatives**

While the goal of the Summit is to focus on neighborhood-wide issues, many neighbors may have specific problems that they would like to have solved. Sometimes it is difficult for people to focus on the whole neighborhood when there is a major problem on their block or right next door. These concerns can be handled more appropriately through city departments. If this is likely in your neighborhood, it may be beneficial for you to invite city staff to the Summit to listen to individual problems at a specified time. In this way, people can discuss the whole neighborhood as a group, but know that their individual concern will be addressed later. Another option might be to suggest that the participants leave cards with their name, phone number, and a short description of the problem at the Summit and have the city offices respond to these issues after the event.

A good time to have residents meet with city representatives is after the morning session and just before lunch. This way little Summit time is spent on individual problems but yet their importance is recognized.

### **Lunch**

Allow 30 to 45 minutes for lunch. It is a time for Summit participants to network. Make sure not too much time is allotted for lunch, otherwise people will eat and leave.



### **Afternoon Break Out Groups**

After lunch, Summit participants will divide into small groups according to which component of the Vision that most interests them. There should be at least one break out group for each component of the Vision (Housing,

Business, etc.). This is the “meat” of the Summit since this is the beginning of the Action Teams and the Action Plan. The groups will discuss what programs or activities should be pursued in order to begin work on accomplishing the Vision.

Thought needs to be given as to who will facilitate the break out groups. We recommend co-facilitators: one Leadership Team member and one person who has experience facilitating small groups. These co-facilitators should receive instruction on what needs to be accomplished at the breakout meetings at the Summit. (See Appendix J for information for facilitators.) If you have a consultant facilitating the Summit, you might designate that person to co-facilitate an Action Team that you feel may be controversial.

### **Wrap Up & Door Prizes**

So that participants get an understanding of the “big” picture, each break out group should report back to the full group at the end of the day. These reports should be short and outline priority activities the neighborhood should undertake in the next year. The persons who give this little report can be appointed by the facilitators or elected. It is another opportunity for people to gain public speaking experience.

To keep people until the end, we have found that a drawing for door prizes as the last item on the agenda is effective – you must be present to win. If raffle tickets are distributed with the packets during registration in the morning, it prevents someone from coming just before the drawing and walking away with a prize. Information about the drawing and the rules should be included in your pre-Summit publicity.

**Door Prizes:** (this is another big attraction)

- \*Cost?
- \*Can you get some prizes donated?
- \*When will you draw the prizes?
- \*How and when will you distribute tickets fairly?
- \*Do people have to be present to win?
- \*Do you have to be at the conference all day to participate?

## ***Summit Set-Up***

The day before the Summit will be very busy. It is best to visit the facility the day before to check the following:

- Decide the location for the registration table, refreshments, lunch, etc.
- Set up the rooms for the break out groups, if possible.



- If it is going to be hot, make sure you know how to turn on fans or open windows, and if it will be cold, make sure you know where the temperature control is.
- If you are offering childcare, make sure the room is adequate and call your volunteers to ensure that they will be available.
- The packets should be put together and brought to the Summit location.
- Make signs that direct people to parking, front door, rest rooms, daycare, etc.
- Double check with the caterer on delivery time and the number of people you will be feeding, and contact your facilitator to ensure that everything is set.

**Staffing: How many people will you need throughout the day?**

- |                                |                                      |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| • Greeters?                    | • Facilitators for break out groups? |
| • Set-up?                      | • Troubleshooters?                   |
| • Clean up?                    | • Introductions?                     |
| • Registration Table?          | • Food servers?                      |
| • Scribe for break out groups? | • Babysitters?                       |

We also recommend that a “dress rehearsal” with the Leadership Team members who will be presenting be done the day before the Summit. Practicing their presentations in front of the other Team members at the Summit location will build their level of confidence. There will still be time to smooth out any rough spots. Some speakers may need extra assistance in polishing their presentation. We found this to be a very worthwhile practice since so many of the presenters were first-time public speakers. It also gives everyone a chance to check out the microphone (if needed) and other logistics.

## *Summit Day ! ! !*

Leadership Team members will want to arrive early to make sure that everything is in place and in order. On the day of the Neighborhood Summit, an important role for Team members to play is host. All Summit participants should be greeted and welcomed as they arrive in the morning. Team members should also staff the registration table, act as troubleshooters, and generally set a tone of hospitality and participation. TAKE PICTURES!!!!

**Goal:** The goal is to have a well-attended neighborhood-wide meeting to review the work the Leadership Team has done, gain consensus on a Vision for the neighborhood’s redevelopment, and begin implementing the Vision through the formation of Action Teams.

## **Registration & Coffee**

Having people sign-in at the Summit is a good way to track how many people attended, where they live in the neighborhood, and how you can get them additional information. As people begin to arrive, they can pick up their packets, name tags, etc. at the registration table. A sign-up sheet should include name, address, phone number, and email, if applicable. Tickets for the door prizes can also be distributed now. Any breakfast refreshments should also be available.



## **The Summit Officially Begins**

Try to start the Summit no more than 10 minutes late. If you have a “critical mass” present, it is best to begin and hope that more people will join you later. People who are on time get angry if they have to wait too long.

The president of the neighborhood association, or other such person, should give the welcome and call the Summit to order. The day’s agenda should be briefly reviewed, the importance of neighborhood planning stressed, any announcements made, location of bathrooms, etc. explained. It should also be explained that today we will be focusing on neighborhood-wide issues. If you have City representatives present to hear individual complaints later, introduce them and explain that procedure. The person presenting all of this information needs to have been prepared so that these messages are clearly delivered.

If you have a professional facilitator, s/he should be introduced. Someone then needs to explain how the morning session is to proceed so that the audience is clear about what it is going to be reported and then what the expectations are of them later. It must be made clear to everyone attending what this neighborhood planning is all about and how it will affect them. The first Leadership Team member to give a report should be introduced. At the end of the first presentation, the presenter should introduce the next speaker, and so on.

## **Discussion – Building Consensus**

As explained under “Setting the Summit Agenda”, the facilitator will now lead the group in a discussion to see if they agree with the direction taken by the Leadership Team and to seek their input. After clustering like ideas if needed, the participants will do their dot voting for what they feel are the most important characteristics under each component.

The planning work of the Leadership Team has now been transformed into a Vision that has been adopted by the neighborhood to guide all future redevelopment! A framework for neighborhood activity and decision-making for years to come has just been created. Congratulations on developing this Shared Vision – a very important part of your Neighborhood Plan! Onward!

**Tip:** Be sure to put up signs and announce all businesses or people who donated food, supplies, or money to the Summit.

### **Lunch & Individual Problems**

Summit participants should be reminded about the City representatives if they are present. Directions to lunch should be announced. A preview of the afternoon's activities should be given and participants asked to think about which Vision component or break out group they would like to attend. (These messages can be done by the facilitator or a Leadership Team member – just make sure this decision was made earlier so that a smooth transition is made to lunch.)



### **Break Out Groups**

Now begins the critical second part of your Neighborhood Plan – developing the Action Plan that will help achieve the Vision. As many neighborhood stakeholders as possible should provide input into what activities should be pursued. You will start with the Summit participants and get their ideas first.

After lunch, ask the participants to select the break out group that interests them the most (Housing, Business, etc.). The facilitators for each group should take the top two or three strategies that were voted on in the morning and focus discussion on them. The group should then brainstorm ideas for specific actions that need to be taken to realize these strategies. For example, the Housing component may have a strategy defined as “Promote housing that is available to persons at all income levels.” In order to do this, home purchase programs may be looked into, relationships with banks may be explored, and partnering with landlords who own property within the area may be suggested. These ideas can be discussed. When there is general agreement, the activity should be written on the form provided. (See Appendix K for sample form.) This is the information that should be reported to the full group when it re-convenes.

The co-facilitators will want to wrap up their group session by encouraging each participant to sign up for an Action Team. It will be these Teams that begin to implement the activities discussed today.

### Wrap Up & Door Prize Drawing

Each break out group should have a representative give a brief report on their discussion and what activities they recommend be pursued. The participants should then be thanked for their hard work. Another plug should be made to sign up for Action Teams so that the Vision they created can be realized. Remind everyone to fill in and return their evaluation form. (See Appendix L for sample evaluation form.)

Tickets should be drawn until all door prizes are given away.

### Clean Up

Everyone should pitch in and help clean up the facility. This would also be the time the Leadership Team could shout and dance a little to *celebrate* a successful neighborhood planning event. We don't take enough time to properly recognize and celebrate our good work!!!

## *Summit Follow Up*

After everyone has had a chance to recuperate from the Summit (but not too long!), the Leadership Team should have a meeting to evaluate the Summit and lay out an implementation plan. If a professional facilitator were used, this would be a good time to de-brief with him/her.

### Evaluation

At the meeting, the Leadership Team should carefully read through the evaluation forms from the Summit. The Team should discuss what went well and what needs to be improved in the future. Team members should feel good about their accomplishments and take the time to pat each other on the back.

This would also be a good time to review the "Outcomes and Benchmarks" that were developed in Chapter 2. How many of these were you able to achieve? This will help to give you a good overview of the entire planning process.

### Loose Ends

Identify what needs to be done to wrap up the final details with the Neighborhood Summit. Checks may need to be written, thank you notes sent, a summary of the evaluations written, etc. Don't let these things drag on. Get busy and finalize things as quickly as possible. There's still more work to be done!

**Don't forget:** Send thank-you notes to supporters who donated supplies and/or money.

## **Next Steps**

It is the responsibility of this Leadership Team to plan for its succession. You must tie up all loose ends from the Summit and then make sure that the Action Teams get organized. The decision must be made as to whether the neighborhood association assumes responsibility for neighborhood planning after that or if a Leadership Team should continue. We recommend the latter – mainly to keep up the momentum.

First look at how to *re-organize* the Leadership Team. Some members might want to drop off. For sure you will want to involve new people and add them to the Team. The role of the Leadership Team for the next year may include:

- 1) Get the Action Teams active and monitor their progress
- 2) Seek funding for Action Team activities
- 3) Decide on any leadership development trainings for Leadership Team members
- 4) Research how the land use parts of your Neighborhood Plan can be incorporated into the City's Master Plan
- 5) Develop public relations/informational materials, e.g. a document called the Neighborhood Plan that specifies your Vision and Action Plan
- 6) Have at least one contact with every Summit participant – send a final report on the Summit, call to recruit for an Action Team, etc.
- 7) Coordinate with the neighborhood association and business association so that proposed development, zoning variances, etc. that come to your neighborhood are in accord with your Vision
- 8) Plan next year's Neighborhood Summit

## **Action Teams**

The next chapter deals with organizing your Action Teams and developing an Action Plan. This is where the “rubber meets the road”. Your neighborhood planning process and Summit could be perfect up to this point. However, if it is not implemented, it will never have much impact. This is why the Action Plan now becomes so important, and the emphasis shifts from the Leadership Team to the Action Teams.

The Leadership Team needs to decide who will be responsible for convening the Action Teams. We recommend that co-chairs for each Action Team be designated (ideally, one Leadership Team member and a new recruit). If possible, staff assistance for each Action Team should be provided.

## **Resources/References**

Medema, “Project Based Planning for Nonprofits”.



# Organizing Action Teams & an Action Plan

At the Summit, break out groups were formed around each of the components described in the Vision/Preferred Scenario, and they discussed activities that could be undertaken to achieve the strategies. An Action Team for each of the Vision components now needs to be organized (Housing Action Team, Business Action Team, etc.). Each Team would ideally consist of 15-20 members. These Teams have to take the lead in translating the Vision into action.

***The purpose of an Action Team is to develop a specific Action Plan that they will implement in order to achieve their part (component) of the Vision.***

***The Action Teams will determine whether your neighborhood planning efforts remain “on the shelf” or are actualized.***

Action Team co-chairs and possible staff assistance should have been identified and recruited by the Leadership Team. Now it is up to the co-chairs and staff to prepare for the first meeting of their Action Team.

- Identify additional people who could serve on the Action Team. Make sure you have included the people from the Summit who signed up for an Action Team. Serving on an Action Team will be a good way for residents to get involved in their neighborhood. What neighbors can you recruit?
- Does each Team reflect the diversity of the neighborhood? Are important segments of the population represented: renters, business owners, etc.? Who has expertise in the issues to be tackled? Recruiting Action Team members may be difficult, but it will be well worth the effort.
- Set the meeting date and send notices to all Action Team members of the date, time, and location. A brief agenda could also be included.
- If funds allow, creating a notebook for each Action Team member is a nice touch. They will be able to keep minutes of the Action Team meetings, roster of Team members, etc. You can put background information in the binder, summary of Neighborhood Survey results, history of neighborhood planning

effort, relevant news articles, etc. The notebooks also convey a “sense of importance” for the members and the task at hand.

### **First Meeting**

It is important that the Action Teams hold their first meeting soon after the Summit so that neighbors and residents will realize that action is going to take place, and that their participation at the Summit was not time wasted.

At its first meeting, Action Team members may be reluctant to commit to doing much. They might want to take a “wait and see” attitude. The meeting agenda may consist of the following items:



- Welcome and thanks for their participation.
- Introductions.
- Review briefly the neighborhood planning process so that everyone has the same background and understanding of what has happened.
- Review the strategies for your component that were decided upon at the Summit. This would be a good time for discussion on the strategies. Action Team members should add new strategies if appropriate.
- The Team should also review the Action Steps that were brainstormed at the Summit, and any new ideas should be added to that list by Team members.
- At some point, the Team must decide what Action Steps they will take. This decision can be made through discussion and consensus or through the more formal process of dot voting.
- Complete the form found in Appendix K - or something similar. This becomes your Action Plan.
- Do Team members know of others who might be interested in joining? This would be a good way to expand Team membership.
- Set the date, time, and location of next meeting.

**TIP:** It may take an Action Team a meeting or two to be ready to vote on Action Steps to take. Some teams may require background information on the Action Steps that can be taken (such as traffic-calming) while other Teams may be ready to vote and take action immediately. Work with your Team at the pace they are most comfortable with, as long as progress is being made. Team members must “buy-in” to the Action Plan before they will put energy into accomplishing it.

### **Implementing the Action Plan**

For the next year, a lot of work needs to be done. The agreed upon activities in the Action Plan must be undertaken. It is important to make as much progress as possible in achieving each Action Plan. Your neighborhood association must be willing to expend extra energy to make sure something is being accomplished.

### **Accountability**

Each of the Action Teams must feel accountable for the completion of their Action Plan. Holding a Summit approximately one year after the first summit can reinforce this. At this Summit, the Action Teams would each present the activities they undertook over the past year, and what steps they plan to take in the near future. The power of accountability should not be underestimated. It is essential for achieving neighborhood empowerment and for trust building between the residents and other stakeholders and the neighborhood association.

### **Continuous Planning**

Planning for the future is never finished. You will always want your neighborhood's activities to be guided by the Vision. It is imperative to keep your neighbors involved in the planning for their future.

The last major phase of the neighborhood planning process is to incorporate the land use parts of your neighborhood plan into the City's Master Plan. It is the responsibility of the Board of Directors of your neighborhood association to make sure this happens. This important step gives you the most assurance possible that your neighborhood will be redeveloped in accordance with the dreams of its neighborhood stakeholders and not by outside influences. The next chapter explains a process for achieving this.

 **Land Mine:** It is important to have many perspectives represented within your Action Team. However, everyone should generally agree with the Vision and want to take action to achieve it. Do not recruit people who will be obstructionists. They will sabotage this implementation phase of your planning process.

# Coordinating with the Master Plan

It is important to try and coordinate your neighborhood planning efforts with City Hall. Your planning efforts provide an opportunity for your organization to develop a good working relationship with your City Planning Department, your City Council representative, and other governmental units. Good cooperation from City Hall can facilitate the development and implementation of your Neighborhood Plan.

If your city has an updated Master Plan, it should provide a framework for neighborhood redevelopment. It is important for the Leadership Team to know what the Master Plan says about your neighborhood (and the surrounding neighborhoods) so that you can coordinate your plan with the City Master Plan. You will also want to make sure that the plans pursued by your Action Teams are done in accordance with the principles and direction given by the Master Plan.

In some cities with Master Plans, they can have a process whereby the parts of your neighborhood plan that deal with land use and the physical infrastructure can be incorporated into the City Master Plan. This is usually done through an amendment process. It will then be very difficult for anyone to come into your neighborhood and try to do a redevelopment project that is contrary to your plan. Once your neighborhood plan is in place, it can become the City's plan for your neighborhood. This broader base of support and recognition for your neighborhood plan gives more assurance that everyone will have to pay attention to it.

It is also important to obtain a basic sense of other official city documents that affect your neighborhood. At the top of this list would be the zoning ordinance, which is a legally binding document that is, in many situations, stronger than the city's Master Plan. The zoning ordinance determines what private owners and developers are legally able to build or do in your neighborhood, and issues covered could range from governing the size of newly built family housing to regulating whether or not "adult entertainment" or "junk yard" businesses are allowed. If you determine that current zoning laws could be harmful to your neighborhood, legal process is in place to ask for amendments, or to require approval of potentially harmful land uses.

Other official documents that could affect your neighborhood that you would want to know about include any parks and recreation plans, redevelopment or enterprise zone plans, or consolidated housing and community development plans that have been formally adopted. As noted below, setting up a good communications system is an excellent way to find out about such documents.

If your city does not have an updated Master Plan, that should not stop your organization from doing neighborhood planning. In fact, your Neighborhood Plan could be a first step in a city-wide Master Planning process. It is still important, however, to communicate your planning intentions to City Hall and seek their cooperation.

### **Communicating with City Hall**

So, whether your city has a Master Plan or not, keeping them informed of your efforts is very important. If you have not already contacted your City Planning Department, do so now.

Explain your neighborhood planning process to them and ask what steps your neighborhood association should take to coordinate with the City and their Master Plan. And don't forget your City Council members. Be sure to keep them informed of your planning efforts also.

Neighborhood planning can help to forge a new relationship between neighborhood associations and City Hall. Both entities have expertise in areas that the other needs. A partnership relationship that respects each other can result in a win-win situation for your neighborhood and the city as a whole. However, whatever the quality of the relationship between your organization and City Hall should not affect neighborhoods vigorously pursuing the development and implementation of their own neighborhood revitalization plans.

“Neighborhood organizations act as a stabilizing force in a neighborhood by bringing people together to address problems. Once they are recognized and seen as legitimate, such organizations tend to act even more reasonably. The point being made here is that when neighborhood organizations are looked on as a full partner in the planning process, they do act as responsibly as any other entity in the city.” [p. 5]

### **Resources/References**

Jones. “N-hood Planning: A guide for Citizens and Planners.”



# Conclusions

There is no doubt that neighborhood planning is an important activity to undertake. How you do it depends on your particular neighborhood's needs and resources. We have explained one approach and hope it may serve as a guide in your neighborhood planning efforts. It is a way to involve neighbors and focus their efforts on positive future change.

- 1) Neighborhood planning is a capacity-building activity for your neighborhood association. At the conclusion of your planning process, your association should be stronger and able to handle more complex issues and projects.
- 2) The planning process should have helped to identify and engage new leaders and increased the leadership skills of current volunteers. [This is a major contributor to the increased capacity of your neighborhood association, as explained above.]
- 3) All neighborhood stakeholders should have been brought together to identify their common ground and how they can work together to make an impact. This process will not solve all disagreements, but it will focus everyone on the positive and how each one can contribute to the improvement of the neighborhood in a constructive manner. *This partnership with all stakeholder groups within a neighborhood is a powerful strategy.*
- 4) A successful neighborhood planning process should have helped develop a better working relationship with the City. By working with your City Planning Department, it may be possible institutionalize your Neighborhood Plan by having it become an amendment to your City's Master Plan. This would then illustrate how the City and neighborhoods can work in partnership toward the same, mutually beneficial goals.

Just as the future of any individual is uncertain, your neighborhood's future may be uncertain. This uncertainty does not prevent us as individuals from preparing for our future. The same should be true for our neighborhoods. **We need to proactively plan for our neighborhood's future and thereby take some control over an important part of our lives.**

“...There are basic tenets that might be of value in framing both individual and collective responses to our turbulent times. They amount to two maxims: acknowledge reality and accept our interdependence...In turbulent times, only communities that manage to ‘pull together’ will not be pulled apart.”\*

When you have pulled your neighborhood together by completing this planning process, you will have thought of many ways it could have been done differently – and better. This is natural! Remember that planning is like any skill. For example, the first time you played tennis or the violin, you weren't very good. But if you kept practicing, you got better. Planning is a continual process. We expect that you will keep getting better and better at it all the time.

### **Feedback**

We would be interested in any feedback you can give us on this manual. We intend to periodically update the information in the manual, so any ideas on how we can change and clarify information would be very helpful. Any suggestions for improvements, or any other recommendations or comments, can be sent to:

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### **Resources/References**

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\*Faron Supanich-Goldner, "Turbulence Rising?", Community News & Views.





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# *APPENDIX A*

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# APPENDIX B

## *Glossary of Neighborhood Terms*

[The following terms used in *Building Great Neighborhoods* are defined below. Other definitions in other publications are also possible.]

**Action Plan:** The specific activities that the Action Teams have decided to undertake in order to achieve the Vision for their neighborhood's redevelopment.

**Affordable Housing:** Decent and safe housing that requires no more than 30% of a household's income for rent.

**Business District:** An area within a neighborhood that contains structures built for commercial entities, which originally offered goods and services needed by area residents.

**Capacity Building:** Increasing an individual's or organization's ability to effectively handle increasingly difficult neighborhood issues and operational tasks.

**Community Economic Development:** Programs or activities that increase the economic viability of a neighborhood through resident implementation.

**Consensus:** General agreement within the neighborhood on how to proceed.

**Demographic Data:** Specific information and statistics about your neighborhood, such as median household income, racial composition, number of homeowners, etc. Much of this information can be obtained through the U.S. census that is taken every 10 years.

**Easement:** The right of a person, government agency, or public utility company to use public or private land owned by another for a specific purpose. A grant of one or more of the property rights by the owner to, or for the use by, the public, a corporation, or another person or entity. (Telephone lines, sidewalks, shared driveways, etc)

**Empowerment:** When an individual or groups feels that they can exercise some control over the circumstances in their lives. It cannot be given; it must be developed from within.

**Form follows Function:** Know what you want to accomplish or what your purpose is (function) and then decide on what organizational structure or program (form) would be best to achieve this. Too often people come up with a "good" activity or a "nice" committee first and then try to make it fit an issue or neighborhood concern. A more



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effective approach is to clearly identify what needs to be done and then figuring out how to do it.

**Historic Preservation:** The protection of structures and places from demolition because they are deemed to be important parts of our past.

**Infill Housing:** Housing that is built in an established residential area (usually on a vacant lot where a house has been demolished).

**Infrastructure:** This generally refers to the physical parts of a community provided by government, such as streets, sewer lines, etc. Sometimes the definition is expanded to include telephone, cable, and electric lines.

**Land Use:** Usually a designation of how certain property can be used. In a neighborhood, some land is used for residential purposes, other land is used for commercial purposes, etc. It is important that property within an area have compatible uses.

**Land Use Planning:** Deciding how property should be used: residential, commercial, industrial, farmland, etc. and what the density should be (single family, multifamily, etc.). Citizens have become more involved recently in helping to make these decisions.

**Master Plan:** A document that outlines the land uses within an area or governmental jurisdiction and includes a framework for new development and/or redevelopment. It generally requires the authorization of a governmental unit.

**Mixed-Income Neighborhood:** An area that has a variety of housing types so that households with various incomes can afford to live there. This is usually defined as a neighborhood with a mix of middle-income households and lower-income households.

**Mixed-Use:** An area or building that offers two or more different kinds of activity or use: commercial, industrial, residential, etc. This is a land use designation increasingly seen in urban neighborhoods as they are redeveloped.

**Neighborhood Plan:** A framework of agreed upon goals, strategies, and activities that leads to the implementation of the Vision of how the neighborhood should look after it has been revitalized. Supplemental information in the Neighborhood Plan can include: a SWOT Analysis, Neighborhood Survey, etc. The land use parts of the Plan should be incorporated into the City's Master Plan. It generally is initiated by a community-based organization.

**New Urbanism:** A design movement that burst onto the scene in the late 1980's and early 1990's. New Urbanists aim to reform all aspects of real estate development. New Urbanist neighborhoods are walkable and contain a diverse range of housing and jobs. New Urbanists support regional planning for open space, appropriate architecture and planning, and the balanced development of jobs and housing. They believe these

strategies are the best way to reduce how long people spend in traffic, to increase the supply of affordable housing, and to reign in urban sprawl.

**Setback:** The required minimum horizontal distance between the lot or property line and the nearest front, side, or rear line of a building.

**Stakeholder:** Any individual or group with a direct tie to a neighborhood. This generally includes: residents, business owners, faith-based and nonprofit organizations located within the neighborhood, local school, etc.

**Strategic Plan:** A set of goals, objectives, activities, and/or strategies of what the neighborhood association wants to accomplish in the next 5 to 10 years. It usually does not focus on land use, but instead includes specific neighborhood programs and actions as well as what the organization wants to accomplish administratively. It also usually does not require broad neighborhood approval like the Neighborhood Plan.

**Traditional Business District:** A description of a type of design for a neighborhood business area that resembles business districts from the 1950's and earlier. This includes having stores close to the streets, wide sidewalks, parking in the back, slowed traffic through the area, commercial/retail space on the ground floors, and offering office or living space on the second or third floors. (This should not be confused with the Grand Rapids zoning designation.)

**Traffic Calming:** A technique that seeks to slow traffic through the design of a street while making walking a safer alternative. This can include bulb out, parking on both sides of the street, traffic circles, etc. Traffic calming measures have proven to not reduce the volume of traffic.

**Transitional Use:** A permitted use or structure that by nature or level and scale of activity acts as a transition or buffer between two or more incompatible uses.

**Vision:** The desired state stakeholders would like to see their neighborhood develop into. This shared idea guides neighborhood redevelopment activities.

**Zero-lot Line:** The location of a building on a lot in such a manner that one or more of the building's sides rests directly on a lot line.

**Zoning:** The designation of how land can be used, e.g. R-1 designates an area as residential and for single family houses.

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# *APPENDIX C*

## *Sample Project Timeline*

To insure that the neighborhood planning process progresses in a timely and efficient manner, it must be decided when needed activities should be completed. The Leadership Team should decide on a timeline for the planning project and then check it at least monthly to make sure they are on schedule.

November – Neighborhood Association Board of Directors approves initiative to undertake a neighborhood planning process

December – hold first meeting of the Leadership Team

- demographic and other data are compiled for the neighborhood

January – Leadership Team conducts a SWOT Analysis

- research is done to see if other SWOT analyses for the neighborhood have been done before
- research what the Master Plan outlines for your neighborhood

February – a Worst Case Scenario is developed and discussed

- a date for the Neighborhood Summit is set

March – decision is made as to whether to hire a professional facilitator for the Summit

- sub-committees for the Summit are formed and members recruited
- a neighborhood survey is drafted
- Leadership Team does visioning exercise

April – surveys are conducted throughout the neighborhood

- a Preferred Scenario is developed based on the visioning exercise
- an agenda for the Neighborhood Summit is approved

May – survey results are tabulated

- materials to be included in Summit participants' folders are collected
- strategies that will make up the Action Plan are identified
- all planning for the Summit is completed

June – Neighborhood Summit is held!!!!!!

- A vision for the neighborhood's redevelopment is agreed upon
- Action Teams are organized
- Leadership Team holds an evaluation meeting and celebrates!

July – Action Teams begin meeting



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# ***APPENDIX D***

## ***Leadership Team Sub-Committees***

Some work of the Leadership Team can best be handled through sub-committees. The sub-committees should be chaired or co-chaired by Leadership Team members but additional members can be recruited from the neighborhood at large (this is one way to obtain broader participation). Sub-committee reports should be made at each monthly Leadership Team meeting. Suggested sub-committees and their duties are:

### **Publicity/Public Relations Subcommittee**

- publicizes Neighborhood Summit throughout the neighborhood (flyers, posters, etc.)
- publicizes the Summit through external media (newspaper, TV, etc.)
- communicates planning progress with neighborhood stakeholders (writes newsletter articles, gives updates to Business Association, etc.)
- assist in raising funds to cover Summit expenses

### **Summit Food & Beverage Sub-Committee**

- plan menu for lunch at Summit
- decide on caterer or to do lunch internally
- decide if breakfast and morning and afternoon breaks should be served with food/beverages
- seek food donations from local merchants

### **Summit Set Up & Registration Sub-committee**

- obtain a place to hold the Summit
- decide if day care will be provided; if yes, make appropriate arrangements
- put together packets for each Summit participant
- solicit folders, pens, and other items for the packets from local businesses
- set up room(s) the day before the Summit
- staff the registration table

### **Clean Up Sub-committee**

This consists of all Leadership Team members and anyone else you can talk into helping!

The sub-committee structure should work for you and your particular set of circumstances. This structure can be as simple or as complex as you want.



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# *APPENDIX E*

## *Rules for Brainstorming*

There are several rules that should be understood and stated before beginning any brainstorming session. These rules lay the groundwork for a productive session that includes a high level of participation from the group members.

1. **Everyone participates:** No one is allowed to merely observe, although you can pass if you do not have an idea to contribute at the moment.
2. **No criticism/debate is allowed:** Every idea is a valuable idea. Discussion may take place at a later time, but not right now. Lots of ideas are generated during this brainstorming process – not debated or commented upon.
3. **Build and “piggy-back”:** Hearing another person’s idea might ignite a new idea for you. In turn, your idea will allow others to add or expand on it. The group process allows participants to build upon each other’s ideas so that the final product is usually a real mixture of many different ideas combined.
4. **Dream the impossible:** What may seem as a far-fetched idea may turn out to be the most constructive. Do not hesitate to offer an idea, even though you think it may be silly or unachievable.
5. **Take turns :** It is best to go around the table and ask each person for one idea at a time. This allows everyone to participate and no one to dominate. Keep going around the table until everyone has run out of ideas or time runs out.

Above all **Respect** everyone and their ideas - this process is a time to hear from everyone, and to gather new and different ideas on a topic.

(Note: adapted from MSU Center for Urban Affairs-Grand Rapids, January 1998 and MSU Practicum Students’ report “Planning Charrette” February 26, 2000)



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# APPENDIX F

## *Dot Voting*

Dot voting is a good way of beginning to build consensus on an issue. It can be used with a small number of people, or with a large group, and quickly defines the important issues without creating needless debate. It is a process that helps to identify what people have in common instead of focusing on the differences within a group.

In order to do dot voting, the strategies or issues that the group is considering should be written on newsprint, large enough to accommodate all the dots that will be voted. Usually the items to be voted on have been generated through a brainstorming session.

Each person should receive a set number of dots. (Dots of various colors can be purchased at any office supply store. Generally, the different colors carry no significance.) Instructions should be clearly given as to how the dots can be voted. The general rule for dot voting is that group members can place their dots (usually 3 to 5 dots) on whatever ideas they feel best represent their opinions or priorities. This means that all dots can be placed on 1 idea, 2 on one issue, 1 on another, or in whatever combination the participant desires. (An alternative is for everyone to place only one dot per idea.)

Once everyone is done voting, the dots are tallied. Those ideas receiving the most dots (votes) become the group's priorities. You have now established what issues/concerns the majority of group members share. This is the common ground from which you build.

*Brainstorming* is a process that allows everyone an opportunity to get their opinions considered by the entire group without unnecessary conflict and debate. *Dot voting* eliminates those ideas/opinions not shared by the majority since they will not receive the needed votes to be included in any further discussion. This is also an effective process that prevents a few people from dominating a whole group.

**Giving people the opportunity to express how strongly they feel about specific issues is very empowering.**

# APPENDIX G

## Web Sites

[www.brookings.edu](http://www.brookings.edu)

[www.cedam.info](http://www.cedam.info) (Community Economic Development Association of Michigan)

\*[www.cnu.org](http://www.cnu.org) (Congress for New Urbanism – click on Image Bank)

[www.communitychange.org](http://www.communitychange.org)

[www.communityplanning.net](http://www.communityplanning.net)

[www.nccd.org](http://www.nccd.org) (National Congress for Community Economic Development)

[www.plannersweb.com](http://www.plannersweb.com)

[www.policylink.org](http://www.policylink.org)

\*[www.pps.org](http://www.pps.org) (Project for Public Spaces)

\*[www.urban-adv.com](http://www.urban-adv.com)

\*[www.walkablecommunities.org](http://www.walkablecommunities.org)

\*good pictures of revitalized neighborhoods



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# APPENDIX H

## SWAN Resident Survey

### Housing

To start, I would like to ask your opinions about the housing in the neighborhood.

1. How would you rate the housing in SWAN? (Circle one)
  - a. very adequate
  - b. adequate
  - c. inadequate
  - d. very inadequate

2. How could the housing be improved?
- 
- 

3. Do you own or rent? (Circle one)

- a. own
- b. rent

4. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about future housing improvements in this neighborhood? (Circle one)

- a. Most of the housing is well built and should be preserved.
- b. Most of the housing is run down and should be bull dozed.
- c. Some new housing would be nice in addition to fixing up current houses.

5. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about the kind of housing that should be available in the neighborhood? (Circle one)

- a. There should be more apartments for people to rent.
- b. There should be more single family homes.
- c. There should be both single family homes and apartments so that lower income as well as higher income people can live here.

### The Neighborhood

Now I would like to ask you some questions about the neighborhood in general.

1. What are the 2 things that you like best about living in this neighborhood?

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

2. What are the 2 things that you like the least about living in this neighborhood?

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_



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### ***West Fulton Business District***

Here are a few questions about the West Fulton Business District.

1. Do you shop at neighborhood stores? (Circle one)
    - a. Yes
    - b. No
  
  2. What would encourage you to do more of your shopping in the neighborhood?
- 
3. Would you use a bank if one moved to Fulton Street? (Circle one)
    - a. Yes
    - b. No
  
  4. Do you support slowing down the traffic on Fulton Street? (Circle one)
    - a. Yes
    - b. No
  
  5. Which one of the following statements best describes how you would like to see future business improvements on Fulton Street:
    - a. Tear down all the old business buildings and start over with new ones.
    - b. Rehab as many of the current buildings as possible so that the business district will look like it did in the 1950's.

### ***Neighborhood Facilities and Services***

Now some general questions about the neighborhood.

1. What one major improvement would you like to see made at Sibley School next year?
- 

2. How important are each of the following neighborhood concerns to you?

	<u>very important</u>	<u>somewhat important</u>	<u>not important</u>
a. downzoning the neighborhood from multi-family (R2 & R3) to single family (R1-A)	1	2	3
b. keeping the zoo from expanding into the green area of John Ball Park	1	2	3
c. making Butterworth dump into a park	1	2	3
d. stopping GVSU from expanding further into the neighborhood	1	2	3
e. stopping downtown from expanding further into the neighborhood	1	2	3

## ***Neighborhood Planning***

Lastly, your opinion on the following questions will help SWAN in their planning.

1. Ten years from now, how would you *most* like to hear neighbors describe the SWAN neighborhood? (Circle one)
  - a. the neighborhood hasn't changed a bit in the last 10 years
  - b. the neighborhood is totally changed since downtown and GVSU have expanded
  - c. the neighborhood has a nice mix between the old and the new
  
2. Do you know that the City of Grand Rapids is in the process of updating its Master Plan? (Circle one)
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Not Sure

If you answered "yes", have you attended any Master Plan meetings?

- a. Yes
- b. No

3. What one recreation program or facility would you like to see in the neighborhood?

---

4. Are you in favor of building a new YMCA where the Adobe Restaurant used to be?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

5. What do you think should be done with the old Lexington School?

---

6. Which of the following best describes your feelings? (Circle one)
  - a. Drinking outside and youth access to alcohol should not be tolerated.
  - b. Alcohol use only concerns the individual and no one else.
  
7. Would you like to help work on a neighborhood issue or volunteer at SWAN on neighborhood activities? (Circle one)
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

If yes, please write your name, address, and phone number on a sheet of paper.

# *APPENDIX I*

## *Neighborhood Summit Agenda*

*June 1, 2002*

Neighborhood Church

- I. Welcome – Neighborhood Association President
  - thank everyone for coming
  - a few words about Association and its activities
  - introduce next speaker
- II. Announcements – Leadership Team Member
  - logistics: bathrooms, refreshments, packets, etc.
  - introduce facilitator
- III. Purpose of Neighborhood Summit – Facilitator
  - explain Summit purposes
  - review agenda – stress individual concerns handled at 11:45 a.m.
  - explain role of Leadership Team and role of participants today
  - introduce next speaker
- IV. Summit Planning Background
  - A. SWOT Analysis – Leadership Team member
  - B. Probable Scenario – Leadership Team member
  - C. Neighborhood Survey – Leadership Team member
  - D. Preferred Scenario/Vision
    1. a variety of housing types – Leadership Team member
    2. traditional business district – Neighborhood Association staff
    3. quality of life – Leadership Team member
- V. Discussion and Building Consensus on the Neighborhood's Future
  - A. Discussion
  - B. Vote on goals for the Action Teams
- VI. Meeting with City Representatives on Individual Issues
- VII. Lunch
- VIII. Action Teams
  - A. Meet and develop a One Year Plan of Action
  - B. Action Teams report back to full group
- IX. Door Prize Drawing and Adjournment

*TO INFLUENCE, RATHER THAN BE INFLUENCED*



# *APPENDIX J*

## *Instructions for Facilitators*

Facilitators are those people who work at guiding a group in a given direction. There are many important tasks that facilitators perform, and they must be prepared in order to be successful in achieving the purpose for the group.

1. Be clear on what is expected of you as a facilitator. Prepare by becoming familiar with the information to be discussed. Know what format will be followed during your small group (Action Team) discussion.
2. To begin your small group, first introduce yourself. Then ask everyone in the group to introduce themselves.
3. Review what your group is expected to accomplish in what time period. Review any ground rules. Appoint a recorder or any other assistance that is needed.
4. Keep the group focused on the discussion at hand. It can become very difficult to focus a group once they have lost their direction. It is up to you to keep the group on-task.
5. Ensure that all members are participating and that no one is monopolizing the group's time. If a member has not contributed, specifically ask her for her opinions (in a non-threatening manner).
6. Keep the group on time. If the group has a time limit, then make sure your group will be finished by that time. Otherwise, your group's input might not be considered if it is not complete.
7. Develop personal relationships. You will be the person other people will remember. Ensure that you will be worth remembering by being courteous and helpful.
8. Facilitators should not express their opinions on the issues at hand. If you feel a need to have your voice heard, then the facilitator role right now is not for you. Respect the process and ask for someone else to do this job.

# APPENDIX K

GOAL: \_\_\_\_\_

Objectives	Tasks/Activities	Team Members/ Stakeholders	Resources	Completed by:

N. Radtke, 1998



# *APPENDIX L*

## *Sample Evaluation Form*

It is important to receive feedback from participants at an event so that you know what was well received and what needs improvement for the next time. An evaluation can be as simple or as complex as you desire. The following is a very simple example.

### EVALUATION OF NEIGHBORHOOD SUMMIT

1. The thing I liked best about the Summit is \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

2. The thing I liked least about the Summit is \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

3. I wish \_\_\_\_\_

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# APPENDIX M

## Case Study

### SWAN Neighborhood Planning Process

The neighborhood planning manual, *Building Great Neighborhoods*, is based on the planning effort undertaken by the South West Area Neighbors (SWAN), a neighborhood association representing a central city neighborhood in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Facilitation and technical assistance were provided by Carol L. Townsend, Michigan State University. The following summary of SWAN's planning process from December 2001 through June 2003 is meant to serve as a real life example of how this planning process can work. However, we know that every neighborhood is different and each situation is unique. Things that worked well in SWAN may not work at all in your neighborhood, and vice versa. So this case study of SWAN is provided as an illustration of one way to do neighborhood planning.

#### **1. Getting Started**

The Crime Prevention Organizer at SWAN, Lori Stanton, played a key role throughout the planning process. She initiated discussion among SWAN volunteers about the neighborhood's need for planning. Several SWAN Board members had been participating in Master Plan meetings held by the City, so their interest in planning had already been tweaked. The neighborhood, located along West Fulton in Grand Rapids, Michigan, was also feeling the pressure of new development from Grand Valley State University and downtown, and they were unsure of how to deal with it. This interest in planning coupled with the new development that was occurring provided the impetus for SWAN to undertake a neighborhood planning process.

SWAN asked Carol Townsend, director of MSU's Center for Urban Affairs and in Grand Rapids and an Extension community development agent, for assistance in conducting a neighborhood planning process. Carol served on the Citizens Advisory Committee, which oversaw the development of the City's Master Plan, and has been interested in connecting neighborhoods to planning. Through funding from the Steelcase Foundation, MSU was in the process of developing a neighborhood planning model under the auspices of its United Growth for Kent County project. It was decided that the planning model would be developed as SWAN went through the planning process.

#### **2. Organizing the Leadership Team**

Through a special grant from the Dyer-Ives Foundation, Lori had been working on leadership development with SWAN residents. The Leadership Team was a natural outgrowth of this work. Lori identified several neighbors for the Leadership Team. Over



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a dozen people attended at least one Leadership Team meeting, but a core group of six carried the process. (We knew that people would drop off as time went on.)

One of the most important things considered in the recruitment of Leadership Team members was how well they were connected to the neighborhood. Many Team members were block captains and a couple were SWAN Board members. All of the Team members were involved in the neighborhood and knew the area well.

Another important criterion in recruiting Leadership Team members was diversity. Team members represented different geographic areas of the neighborhood. There was a good range of ages. Different lifestyles were represented. However, our efforts to involve people of color were not successful, nor were efforts to involve business owners from the neighborhood. It was not until later that we realized that we had no renters on the Team either. Despite these shortcomings, Leadership Team members were able to adequately reflect the hopes and the fears of a majority of the residents.

Leadership development continued to be an important aspect throughout this planning process. Matching interests and talents of Team members to tasks to be done is a unique skill that Lori possesses. Leadership Team members were always encouraged to “stretch” and learn new skills.

The first meeting of the Leadership Team was spent getting acquainted with one another, discussing the responsibilities of the Team, and reviewing materials on neighborhood planning.

## *SWAN Case Study*

The Leadership Team identified 4 “core values” at the beginning of the planning process. These basic values would guide them throughout the planning process. These values are:

***Neighborhood Empowerment:*** The future of the SWAN neighborhood must be decided by SWAN neighborhood stakeholders and not outsiders. To do this, a clear vision on how the neighborhood should be redeveloped must be agreed upon and then implemented. A neighborhood becomes increasingly empowered as it practices using its own voice. The history of disenfranchisement in the neighborhood must be reversed.

***Trust Building:*** An important consideration for successful visioning and implementation in the SWAN neighborhood was developing trust between SWAN neighbors, the City, and other institutions. The neighborhood planning process allowed SWAN to maximize trust-building opportunities.

***Respect and Inclusion:*** Specific efforts should be made to effectively communicate with and involve all people in the neighborhood. Everyone’s opinion should be given due consideration.

***Capacity Building and Leadership Development:*** The Leadership Team itself is the first step in laying a good foundation for grassroots leadership to develop in the neighborhood.

## ***SWOT Analysis***

The second Leadership Team meeting was spent doing a SWOT Analysis. The rules of brainstorming were distributed and discussed. Although only one or two people had done brainstorming before, the Team caught on very quickly to this process. They were soon “piggybacking” on others’ ideas.

The Team members listed so many strengths of the neighborhood that we had to finally stop them and go on to weaknesses. Team members also came up with quite a few weaknesses, which demonstrated a good grasp of the current state of the neighborhood.

Team members had a little more difficulty identifying the ‘opportunities’ and the ‘threats’. It had been easier for them to describe current conditions rather than perceive trends and less tangible effects. The meeting was running late and insufficient time was spent on this section. So, this part of the SWOT needed improvement.

A sub-committee was formed to consolidate similar ideas that had been brainstormed by other groups. They met before the next Team meeting and then reported on their work at the third Leadership Team meeting. This sub-committee also looked at the SWOT Analysis that had been done by the West Fulton Business District and compared ideas to make sure the two were not too far apart. A comparison was also done with the SWOT Analysis conducted as part of the Master Plan.

At the third meeting, Team members reviewed how the brainstormed ideas were categorized by the sub-committee. They then used dots to vote for those ideas that they felt to be most important. The items with the most dots became our priorities and what we focused on during the planning process. The dot voting method eliminates arguing and quickly identifies the priority concerns of the group as a whole.

**NOTE:** Conducting the SWOT Analysis was an important part of the neighborhood planning process. It was a good way to get everyone participating right away. Almost all concerns about the neighborhood’s future surfaced at this time. The SWOT Analysis provided a solid basis for the rest of the planning process.

## *Other Decisions*

The Leadership Team decided early on to have a Neighborhood Summit to culminate their planning efforts. The date of the Summit was chosen – June 1, 2002. A timeline was then developed, working back from the Summit date. The Team felt that the Summit could not be held any later in the summer – too many conflicts. So that left only a 6-month planning period. The Team was committed to meeting weekly if necessary (and it was!). The Team also felt that too much momentum would be lost over the summer if we tried to have the Summit in the fall. They made their decision and then stuck with it.

The commitment of the Leadership Team members was awesome. They attended Team and sub-committee meetings as well as doing extra work between meetings. Having the deadline of the Summit helped to keep commitment high. We also tried to make the meetings productive by SWAN and MSU staff being prepared and having a well thought out agenda each time. [The pizza and other snacks served at the meetings did not hurt!]

Much thought was given by the Leadership Team on whether to hire a professional facilitator for the Neighborhood Summit. Hiring a consultant would significantly increase the costs of the Summit. This negative was outweighed by the following positives:

- None of us felt comfortable facilitating the whole Summit
- An “outsider” would be better able to handle any controversy if it occurred at the Summit
- We wanted to do the Summit correctly, and a professional would help assure that
- Since none of us had ever done a Summit before, a professional would provide additional advice, technical assistance, etc.

A sub-committee structure was also decided upon early in the planning process. The Leadership Team divided into 3 sub-committees in preparation for the Summit: Public Relations/Publicity, Food & Beverage, and Set Up/Clean Up. We were not very successful in recruiting additional members for the sub-committees, which would have been a good strategic move. The sub-committees carried out their work while the planning process continued. There were sub-committee updates at each Team meeting.

For no particular reason, the Leadership Team adopted a motto that captured the reason for their doing neighborhood planning. “To influence rather than be influenced.” This motto was used on flyers and throughout the Neighborhood Summit.

## *Developing a Worst Case Scenario*

The weaknesses and threats identified in the SWOT Analysis formed the basis of the worst case scenario. The purpose of this exercise was to articulate what probably would happen to the neighborhood if no planning or positive action were taken. We did not spend much time on this since all Team members shared the same concern about new development destroying their neighborhood.

Although some Leadership Team members did not really like this part of the planning, it was a useful exercise. It provided a good contrast to the preferred scenario that was developed later.

## *Developing a Preferred Scenario/Vision*

This scenario was based on the strengths and opportunities the Leadership Team identified in the SWOT Analysis. This was a much more positive exercise since it involved “dreaming” of what Team members would like to see in the future.

The first part was for Team members to develop a Vision of how they would like to see their neighborhood redeveloped. We first focused on housing – what should the housing look like in 20 years? Then they envisioned the business district and then quality of life. Everyone wrote their “dreams/visions” down and then we went around the table with each one giving their top three ideas for each of the categories. This then became the Preferred Scenario or Vision for the neighborhood.

The actual visioning process was difficult for most of the Leadership Team members. It would have been helpful to have pictures or slides of options that could be available for their neighborhood. This way they could have chosen what they wanted or at least have a better idea of what is possible.

## *Developing a Neighborhood Survey*

This was a very successful planning activity also (as was the SWOT). We spent several meetings developing the actual survey. Staff presented draft questions and the Leadership Team reacted. Team members were extremely helpful in choosing the specific wording to be used. The Team knew what words would not be understood in the area and how different situations should be phrased. It was well worth the time we spent in developing the survey instrument.

The survey was used as a test to see if a broad sampling of residents agreed with the Vision that the Leadership Team had developed. As we developed the survey, we kept

asking ourselves what information did we need to obtain from neighbors, what kind of feedback did we need from them to feel comfortable that we were on the right track, and what did the neighborhood association need input on from the neighborhood. What did we really want to know? This provided the needed direction in formulating the survey questions.

Of 160 surveys distributed, 77 were completed. This excellent return rate was due to the Leadership Team who handed them out on their blocks and to others they knew in the neighborhood. SWAN and MSU staff conducted door-to-door surveys in parts of the neighborhood underrepresented on the Team. The percentage of people who completed the survey and rent (43%) is approximately the same ratio as the percentage who rent in the neighborhood, so the Leadership Team did a good job of getting the survey out to a representative group.

Since the survey respondents were quite representative of the neighborhood, it was important to compare their responses to the Leadership Team. Fortunately, there were no major discrepancies between the two. Again, the Leadership Team proved themselves to be very knowledgeable about and representative of the neighborhood.

## *Day of Reckoning – The Neighborhood Summit*

Early on the Leadership Team decided to have the Summit professionally facilitated. SWAN had never had a meeting of this type before, and no one knew what to expect. Additionally, there was much work to be done in the short period of time covered by the Summit. Dave Medema from Medema Consulting had worked with SWAN previously, and had been well received. Dave had also done a fair amount of work with neighborhood associations in Grand Rapids and had developed a project planning model. He was the unanimous selection.

Each of the Leadership Team core volunteered to take a part at the Summit in explaining the neighborhood planning process. This was a continuation of the leadership development that was stressed throughout this process. Since several of the members had never spoken before an audience, extra assistance was given to those who wanted it in preparing their speeches. A dress rehearsal was held the day before the Summit, and it proved to be very beneficial by getting everyone to feel more comfortable and working out last minute “bugs”.

A PowerPoint presentation was developed that contained major points to cover for each of the speakers. It added a touch of professionalism and seemed to help the presenters stay focused.

After the presentations that explained the planning process, the facilitator reviewed the three components of the Vision and asked for comments, additions, etc. There was good general agreement with what was presented, but this provided an opportunity for “buy-in” from the larger group.

The afternoon break-out groups around the 3 components of the Vision provided some good ideas of what should be in the Action Plans. It was also important to obtain the input from Summit participants on what they would like to see accomplished in their neighborhood.

Overall, the Leadership viewed the Summit as a success. Over 50 people attended. It was a positive event for the SWAN neighborhood. Most importantly, a shared Vision for the redevelopment of the neighborhood was agreed upon and ways the Vision could be achieved were brainstormed.

## *Organizing Action Teams*

From the beginning of the planning process, we knew we wanted to develop an Action Plan that would start to achieve the Vision and that this would be accomplished through organizing Action Teams. The Neighborhood Summit was the starting point for developing the Action Plans, and Summit participants were encouraged to sign up for an Action Team. The real impact of the neighborhood planning process would be felt in the accomplishments of the Action Teams in the years to come.

SWAN organized 3 Action Teams: Housing Action Team, Business Action Team, and Quality of Life Action Team. Leadership Team members co-chaired each Team, and additional stakeholders were recruited for each Team so that up to 20 people were on one of the Teams. Staff assistance to the Teams was essential in guiding them through the activities that they undertook.

## **Postscript**

SWAN held their second Neighborhood Summit on April 26, 2003. Over 75 people attended – a 50% increase over the first one. The Action Teams reported on their activities (a way to add accountability to this process). Many of the activities listed in their Action Plans had been achieved. The Grand Rapids Planning Department has agreed to look at the land use parts of SWAN's Neighborhood Plan to see if they can be incorporated into the City's Master Plan. There is still much more to do to achieve SWAN's Vision – and this is the continuing challenge SWAN faces.

**Remember that it is the neighborhood's responsibility to make sure its plan is implemented. The neighborhood must initiate action. Do not wait for City Hall or anyone else to realize your neighborhood goals.**