OPEN PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABILTY

The Eco-municipality Process Guide

By

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May, 2007; revised July, 2009

> *…We realized that unless we considered the full range of challenges to our city's physical environment, the progress we'd worked on so long and so hard for might be at risk. And it became clear that to secure a stronger, cleaner, and healthier city for our children and grandchildren, we had to start acting now. In short, we realized that New York needed not a long-term plan for land use, but a long-term plan for sustainability.*
>
> Michael Bloomberg
> Mayor, New York City
> *Urban Land*
> March, 2007

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FOREWORD

This handbook offers guidance for how to design, lead, and carry out an open, community-based, comprehensive, and systematic process for becoming a sustainable community – an *eco-municipality*. *Open* Planning for sustainability means a process that is widely inclusive, designed to involve the broad range of perspectives that exist in a community or organization, and is a 'transparent" process. The process described in this handbook is based upon the planning experiences of almost 200 local governments in Sweden and in the United States that have demonstrated high success rates in adopting and implementing plans and action proposals that "work" – in other words, plans that are effectively translated into concrete, appropriate actions. This process can also be used in agencies and organizations.

An eco-municipality is a local government that has officially adopted a particular set of sustainability principles outlined later in this handbook,[1] and has committed to a bottom-up participatory and systems approach to implement these. *The Natural Step for Communities: How Cities and Towns Can Change to Sustainable Practices* by Sarah James and Torbjörn Lahti (New Society Publishers 2004), describes eco-municipalities, with many examples, as well as outlining a change process for how to become one. This handbook – *Open Planning for Sustainability: The Eco-Municipality Process Guide* – presents a deeper, more detailed description of that change process, providing recommended techniques and tools for carrying this out.

This handbook is intended to complement a second handbook - *Grounding the Vision: the Eco-municipality Education Guide* (EE Guide), by Torbjörn Lahti. The *Eco-municipality Education Guide* provides a deeper conceptual understanding of what sustainability means in the community as well as global contexts. Together, both handbooks provide the conceptual educational material and the concrete process steps to guide a training, education, and strategic change process to become an eco-municipality. These are essential elements of the process of becoming an eco-municipality.

This handbook is also based upon *The Art of Swamp Yankee Planning*[2] by Philip Herr, 1975, revised April 2005. This participatory planning process, developed by Philip Herr in the 1960s and originating in New England, has been used in over 100 communities and local governments in the United States and beyond. Its planning process, supported by a

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[1] Either The *Natural Step(TNS)* four system conditions for a sustainable society, or the American Planning Association's four sustainability objectives based upon the TNS system conditions

[2] The term 'Swamp Yankee' is a name that native New Englanders have coined for themselves. Swamp Yankees believe strongly in "government by the people". The Town Meeting form of government, where all residents who attend Town Meeting constitute the local governing body, is still the predominant form of local government among the small towns of New England.

40+-year track record of successful implementation and adoption of change proposals, closely resembles the successful change strategies of the eco-municipalities that have been refined and streamlined into a five-year comprehensive change process that has come to be known as the Robertsfors Model for sustainable community change.[3] Sarah James and Philip Herr have worked together using the *Open* Planning approach in local comprehensive planning and change processes since 1991.

Due to the close similarity of the two processes, and the highly successful implementation track record of both, we know that the probability of successful implementation of the eco-municipality process model, including aspects of both, has a high likelihood of successful implementation in the United States and beyond.

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[3] From 2001-2006, Torbjörn Lahti led the Sustainable Robertsfors project from which the Robertsfors Model emerged. The Sustainable Robertsfors project was an internationally-funded sustainable community demonstration project to show how a municipality and its larger community can systematically transform its community and municipal processes to sustainable practices in a five-year period, including widespread community education and involvement. The Robertsfors Model is a synthesis of learning from the five generations of Swedish eco-municipalities, beginning in the early 1980s. <www.hallbara.robertsfors.se/engelsk/indexing.html>

I.INTRODUCTION

"Sustainability plans that work" are those that effectively reflect the values and interests of the community for which they are written, that move beyond that to frame an action strategy, and which result in getting actions implemented. Planning and actions, right from the onset, are intertwined. "Working" defined in that way critically depends upon the process that went into plan creation. This material focuses on those processes, rather than on the community outcomes which "should" result. Another time we can talk about whether neo-traditional design should go back to Florida, whether affordable housing belongs on top of stores, and when wind power is a more appropriate form of renewable energy than solar power. This handbook deals instead with how to design and participate in a change process, which allows communities to decide about such things in a way that is likely to result in well-informed action appropriate to that place at that time.

Much of this material is nearly universal in its applicability. However, in some respects geography is critical, and when it is we'll try to flag it. There are many prescriptions for what a sustainability plan should contain and still more for what open sustainability planning (the verb) should cover. The *open* planning for sustainability we have in mind to discuss these principles is the kind that bridges several interrelated topics, has at least a fairly long-term horizon, and has implementation as its explicit aim, rather than only creating a utopian vision of a sustainable community or simply improving community understanding, however valuable those may be in some circumstances. A plan for transforming a municipal fleet to biofuels over the coming two years can probably succeed without respecting all that follows, since it is a short-range single-topic plan. An apparently single-issue plan such as a housing plan, however, really addresses intentions not only for housing opportunities but also for land use, among other things, so it still would benefit from this approach. A stand-alone sustainability "visioning" exercise, though long-term and multi-topical, by definition will not reflect some of these principles, so testing it against them is not reasonable. On the other hand, taking note of these principles might lead to reconsideration of whether stand-alone "visioning" is in fact the best thing for the community to do.

Open Planning for Sustainability brings about a *systems approach* in its planning process. While the process of comprehensive planning in theory should accomplish that, it often has served no more than to collect and analyze data for, and develop recommendations for a series of planning topics – housing, land use, economic development, transportation, for example, that never become integrated with each other. In contrast, this planning approach applies sustainability objectives, introduced in the next section, to the broad range of planning topics with results that almost automatically create a systems approach to each topic that is interrelated with all the others. As a result, the implementing policies and actions that come out of this process are *moving in the same direction*, rather than conflicting or competing with each other. This is also accomplished through a community-based process that brings about a sustainability plan that reflects the wishes and desires of community citizens, businesspeople, property owners, all in the community _- for their

future – a future that is sustainable. Since the plan ultimately is their plan, the likelihood of successful adoption and implementation is high. The track record of the 100+ *Open* Planning communities, and the 70+ Swedish eco-municipalities, who have used a strikingly similar approach, underscore this.

II.WHAT DO WE MEAN BY SUSTAINABILITY?

"Sustainable development…meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Brundtland Commission
World Commission on
Environment & Development,
Our Common Future, 1987.

While more and more people every day are familiar with the term "sustainability", there is still much uncertainty and confusion that surrounds this concept. The most common definition of sustainability is the above description generated by the Brundtland Commission in 1987. In the face of all this confusion, many well-intentioned people, organizations, and communities spend hours if not months struggling to come up with their own definition. Sets of sustainability principles now abound. It's no wonder that many people, including some local officials, tend to dismiss the whole idea as "fuzzy." Even the Brundtland Commission description, succinct as it is, does not give us a clear idea of how to move toward sustainable development or what policies and practices are sustainable and which are not.

Deepening understanding of and clarifying what sustainability means is the essential first step toward planning for sustainability. If we, as change agents, are unclear about what we are trying to move toward or why it is important to do so, we are not going to be able to move forward effectively or engage a growing circle of officials, community residents, and sectors of the community in this journey. Hence, educating ourselves and a growing circle of others is the first step in our eco-municipality journey. And, not only is education the first step in the journey, it continues as an ongoing process throughout all phases of planning for sustainability and beyond.

The companion volume to this one – *Grounding the Vision: The Eco-municipality Education Guide* – contains the conceptual material for deepening and clarifying the understanding of sustainability, and why it is important. That volume can be, and has been, used in study circles and municipal and community education and training sessions to guide learning processes and inform users of what is happening in the world that is unsustainable, and what we need to do to change this trend. The book *The Natural Step for Communities: How Cities and Towns Can Change to Sustainable Practices* (New Society Publishers, 2004), by Sarah James and Torbjörn Lahti, is also being used as a discussion guide for study circles and sustainability education sessions. The potential change agent or process leader can and should use those resources as the basis for deepening and clarifying the understanding of sustainability and its importance in her or his local community.

The core of this educational material is built upon the *Natural Step* framework for sustainability that originated in Sweden in the early 1990s through a consensus of scientists led by cancer researcher Dr. Karl-Henrik Robèrt.[4] This framework, increasingly now used around the world to define sustainability and guide action toward it, also became the basis for the guiding sustainability objectives of the American Planning Association's *Planning for Sustainability* Policy Guide[5], adopted by that organization in 2000, to help local communities, legislators, and others to understand what sustainability means at the community and local level, and how planners and communities can move in this direction.

Why do we need to think about and plan for sustainability?

At the global level, two trends are converging. On the one hand, the natural systems of the earth are deteriorating, and this is happening at an accelerating rate. On the other, population and consumption are rising, and consumption is disproportionately higher in the developed versus the developing worlds. For example, the ecological footprint[6] of an average U.S. citizen is about 23 acres/year, while that of the average world citizen is 6.7 acres. The ecological footprint of a citizen of India is about 2.2 acres. These two trends – deteriorating living systems on the one hand, and rising population and consumption on the other – are like two sides of a funnel, which are converging upon each other. We humans and all of life are in the middle of that funnel, and we do not know at what point its sides will converge. Some say it might be as soon as in the next 15-25 years.
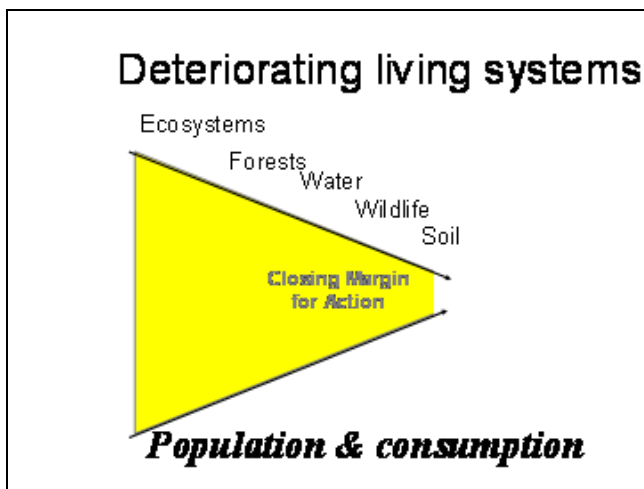
Figure 1: The funnel of converging unsustainable trends. Source: Karl-Henrik Robèrt, The Natural Step.

Tool for reorienting to sustainable practices

The following four objectives – the guiding sustainability objectives of the American Planning Association – based upon the Natural Step framework for sustainability, is one of the clearest and most useful conceptual tools we are aware of to define and guide planning

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[4] See *The Natural Step Story* by Karl-Henrik Robèrt, New Society Publishers, 2002.
[5] See <www.planning.org/policyguides/sustainability.htm>, Part III.
[6] *2006 Living Planet Report*, World Wildlife Fund, Washington, DC.

and decision-making toward sustainability. Examples of how these can translate into action and strategies are included:

1. ***Reduce dependence upon fossil fuels, underground metals and Minerals.*** Reason: These substances, extracted from below the Earth's surface, are steadily accumulating in our biosphere at concentrations far beyond their natural occurrences. Many of these concentrations are toxic.	Policy and action examples: Changing public fleets from petroleum-based fuel to biofuels or electric vehicles; compact, pedestrian-oriented development; using renewable energy for heat and power; minimizing or eliminating the use of phosphorus and petro-chemical fertilizers in agriculture.
2. ***Reduce dependence upon synthetic chemicals and other unnatural substances.*** Reason: These substances as well are steadily increasing in our biosphere faster than they can break down and be reabsorbed. Many are persistent and do not break down quickly. Many are toxic.	Policy and action examples: Green building practices that eliminate use of toxic building materials; landscape design that eliminates the need for pesticides and fertilizers; municipal purchasing that encourages purchase of low or non-chemical products.
3. ***Reduce encroachment upon life-supporting eco-systems.*** Reason: Human activity is breaking down natural systems (land, water wildlife, soils, forests) by depletion and destruction faster than they can renew themselves. Nature, through the process of photosynthesis, is the basis of all life.	Policy and action examples: redevelop existing sites before building on open land; compact development & smart growth approaches; reduced water use; graywater & storm water reuse systems; natural resource protection.
4. ***Meet human needs fairly and efficiently.*** Reason: If people cannot meet their fundamental human needs, the first three objectives will not be met. Farmers in Brazil will keep burning down the rainforest if they cannot meet their subsistence needs any other way.	Policy and action examples: Affordable housing for a diversity of residents, locally-based business and local food production; participatory community planning and decision-making, environmental justice; social justice.

Understanding and using this framework of sustainability objectives in <u>all</u> aspects of planning municipal decision-making and changing practices is central to the art of planning for sustainability. Later sections of this document will discuss how applying these four objectives, or the four Natural Step system conditions on which they are based, results in a *systems approach* to planning for sustainability, which differentiates this approach from all other sustainable development initiatives that most commonly take the form of a project-

by-project or single-issue approach. The successful results of the systems approach are well illustrated by the remarkable accomplishments of the Swedish eco-municipalities, described in detail in *The Natural Step for Communities*.

III. PROCESS PRINCIPLES

This chapter discusses important principles of the *Open* Planning for Sustainability process; the next chapter talks about how to structure such a process.

To be effective, sustainable community plan-making should center on preparing **a statement of intentions for the sustainable future of the community, making sure that it has been agreed to by all those whose actions it is meant to guide**. Plans that meet that simply stated but highly demanding standard are unlikely to gather dust on shelves or anywhere else. Instead, they commonly become an integral part of the community's way of guiding its future. That is the kind of planning and plan-making this material is about. Success with such planning depends heavily on observance of seven planning principles, organized according to whether they apply to the content of the process, participation, or approach. Although they seem to be little more than common sense, they are far from universally observed.

A. CONTENT

1. ***Open* Planning for Sustainability should be vision-based.** The planning should create and document a sustainability vision for the community that is vivid, engaging, and forthright, as well as being concrete enough to guide decisions, and meeting the four sustainability objectives described in the previous chapter.

2. ***Open* Planning for Sustainability should focus on place-centered intentions.** From the beginning, sustainability planning should build connections and reconcile conflicts across subject areas and between broad intentions and concrete actions. That makes it an intentional plan, not a utopian one, with implementation as the goal.

B. PARTICIPATION

3. **The process should be broadly inclusive.** Assure that the full range of interests, values and perspectives that shape civic affairs or other key decision processes are so engaged in the planning and have such an effective voice in it that they recognize the resulting sustainability plan as being their own.

4. **Participation should be made a solidly contributory experience.** Make the participation sound and worthwhile for both community and participants. In other words, it needs to be <u>real, not pro forma.</u>

C. APPROACH

5. **The planning should be tested with actions.** Test the sustainability plan and the process through action during, not only following, the planning process.

6. **Plan through iterative cycles.** Do sustainability planning through a number of planning cycles, not just one linear pass. In reality it is an ongoing process.

7. **Seek convergence on agreed intentions.** Planning efforts are only useful if they lead to shared conclusions.

This manual is about those principles, why they are important, and how to put them into action. In many ways, they are mutually reinforcing - following one serves each of the others - so there are special rewards for observing all of them, although often that is not possible. Each of the principles also has merit independent of the others. If only one or two of the principles can be made applicable in a given case, there will still be benefits from applying them.

A.CONTENT

1.BE VISION-BASED

The planning should create and document a sustainable vision for the community that is vivid, engaging, and forthright, as well as being concrete enough to guide decisions.

Such a plan should have a resonance for people in the community, reflecting that this is really their community being planned, and not some generic one. Such a plan should present a future sustainable vision that can really be grasped, not just intellectualized. The presentation should engage and hold attention, not losing it through intrusion of materials more suitable for appendices or separate support documents. If it is the product of a good program, the plan presentation can be completely forthright about its intentions, not masking them with deliberately fuzzy language, hidden double meanings, and other "planner talk."

Assuring that the plan focus is on visions and intentions, not descriptions and predictions, helps greatly in making it engaging. Too many so-called plans are chiefly descriptive of what exists or is predicted to exist, with little or no expression of what is wanted or intended by the community. They are technician's documents in that they do not make explicit either the value-laden choices about what kind of future the community really wants, or the almost equally

One *Open* Planning community documented its citizen-based planning effort with a concise plan simply written and hand-illustrated by the citizens that put it together. It powerfully captures the spirit and intentions of the community in a format allowing wide circulation at modest cost.

Another *Open* Planning community, in common with some other communities, chose to shape the length and format of its plan to allow it to be reproduced in full in the local newspaper prior to its final revision and adoption. As has been true for others doing the same, it was rewarded with helpful community input.

Another town's 2+" thick comprehensive plan chiefly describes the town and the technically necessary accommodations to a future that is projected, not chosen. Almost no significant policy choices are made, and no real image of the kind of place that the community would like to be is conveyed. The plan has been ignored.

value-laden choices about how best to achieve that future. Instead, the "plan" simply describes what is likely to be, then states a series of seemingly determinate public responses to how to accommodate that unalterable future.

Further, some so-called "plans" may indicate intentions, but the intentions belong only to the authors, and the authors are not all or even a majority of those who have responsibilities for the actions cited in the plan. A quick clue: if the term "recommend" is heavily used in the plan document, the chances are, it is a report drawn by one set of parties hoping to influence another set of parties, rather than drawn by a set of parties agreeing on what they themselves intend trying to achieve. You do not recommend to yourself. If intentions have been agreed upon, the term "recommend" will seldom still be appropriate in a plan. A good plan is a statement **by** a community, not a set of recommendations **to** it.

The way of planning described here puts the program emphasis on early creating and framing intentions, gaining agreements on them, expressing those clearly, and connecting all that to action, rather than on initially collecting and analyzing data about land use or traffic or viewsheds. The most critical "data" in this type of planning concerns how the parties involved feel about their community and how change should be guided. Well-expressed, that is much more engaging than descriptions of what was true in the past and is likely in the future, because it centers on public choices.

2. Focus on place-centered intentions**.**

From the beginning, the planning should build connections and reconcile conflicts across subject areas and between broad intentions and concrete actions in the context of the particular place being planned. That makes it an intentional plan, not a utopian one, with implementation as the goal.

> A planning workshop for two neighbor *Open* Planning communities broke into groups; each made up of citizens, supported with design professionals suitable to their tasks, working at far corners of a gymnasium. One team designed a visionary new town center for one of the communities. Another, at the extreme opposite side of the room, designed improvements to a major highway corridor bisecting both communities, faithfully complying with highway standards. Both were frustrated by complexities of access along a short stretch of the highway; one viewed through a site planning lens, the other through a highway design lens. When one Corridor design team member wandered across the room, saw what the Town Center folks were doing, and told them what the Corridor team was doing, there was a sudden epiphany for both. A common solution to both their problems quickly appeared, and is now a part of both the nascent idea for a Town Center and the guidelines for Corridor improvements. If the teams had worked in separate rooms, that breakthrough across topics to plan for a place might not have occurred.

- Building across subject areas. The planning we are addressing is centered on places, fitting and reconciling topics such as housing and jobs and open space to make better places. The interrelationships among topics such as economic development, transportation, and land use are so powerful that planning for any one of them without also planning for the others should be unthinkable, but it is common. Without both political legitimacy and technical capacity in all three areas, for example, it would be

near-impossible to achieve an innovative change in land use controls to promote more economic development within a business area, addressing otherwise preemptive traffic concerns through an innovative transportation demand management approach. For another example, in communities approaching land saturation, land use allocations among housing, business and open space is a zero-sum challenge among interests likely to be in competition. Reconciling intentions for housing, economic development and land use has a much better chance of success if those topics are being planned together than if planning for each is separated from the others by time or planning context.

> Land use studies during an *Open* Planning community's comprehensive plan studies revealed only about 1,000 acres of remaining developable land. Housing advocates needed all of that and more to meet needs they identified, as did economic development advocates. All the while, conservation interests felt that protecting all of the land would be beneficial. Dialog during the process resulted in complex resolutions leaving all interests satisfied with the plan outcome.

Focusing on topical interrelations and place is easier said than done. Almost unavoidably, even within a comprehensive program, the effort tends to divide along topical lines reflecting skills and participant interests. Too many planning efforts lose the opportunity of developing synergies across topics by politely accepting topical reports and stapling them together into an "anthology plan." Ways of gaining creative integration across topics include these:

- Plan with capacities and legitimacy across as many topics as feasible. Planning for a comprehensive set of topics, but doing so serially, one topic following the other, is not really comprehensive planning since that ordering precludes the vital exchange across topics as they are being developed.

- Plan using sustainability objectives. Applying the four sustainability objectives discussed in the last section to a series of planning topics to generate a vision, baseline inventory, and action plan is a systems approach, and will almost automatically generate a result that is interrelated and comprehensive.

- Encourage a process of exchange across groups starting early. Searching for fruitful interconnections, and facing and attempting to resolve differences rather than "papering them over," can lift a planning effort from mediocrity into real accomplishment.

- Connections between goals and intentions. When a plan is completed, every single goal statement or similar expression of intention should be supported with at least one significant implementing action that is within the potential reach of those for whom the plan is intended to provide a guide. Especially for planning that starts with unbridled brainstorming, that discipline may raise a number of challenges.

  - Having "health care improvement" as the goal and no health care organizations as part of the planning effort (it happens) may demand broadening the set of organizations that are co-participants in the planning, or may suggest reconsidering how the goal is to be framed. "Strengthen advocacy for health

care improvements" might be a more tenable goal, although perhaps a disappointingly modest one.

- There may be solid support for a stated goal, but none of the participants, including professional planners, may have concrete ideas about how to move it forward. The action intention then might become to simply carry out a later planning effort to develop a real plan of action towards that goal, involving different staffing and participants.

Similarly, no actions should be proposed that do not relate back to stated goals and objectives. "Classic" planning is deductive, working down from early-established goals through objectives and programs to concrete actions. Sometimes, however, there are actions for which there is wide support but for which a more abstract rationale is elusive. The inductive effort to trace back from actions to the more general purposes they serve does not just "tighten" the plan. It may well lead to new understanding of how intentions of seemingly unrelated actions really converge, possibly leading to generation of previously overlooked potential actions.

B. PARTICIPATION

3. BE BROADLY INCLUSIVE.

Assure that the full range of interests, values and perspectives that shape civic affairs are so engaged in the sustainability planning process and have such an effective voice in it that they recognize the resulting plan as being their own.

Commonly, planning and implementation are viewed as a "we/they" process: "we" who do the planning need to educate "they" who control local decision-making, or we cannot get our proposals adopted. Broad engagement implies abandoning that perceived duality, and instead making sure that the planning really does reflect the values and perceptions of all of the decision-makers, including those not commonly drawn to planning exercises. It is no secret that those who are most easily engaged in planning processes often differ in values from other people who, although unlikely to be participants in planning, may well be participants in decisions. Once past the perception of a we/they duality, "outreach" becomes less about educating others than it is about creating opportunities for the whole diversity of participants to inform each other, all educating themselves in the bargain. Achieving this is perhaps the most demanding aspect of this process, but there are well-practiced ways of succeeding. These are two equally important sub-objectives.

– ENGAGE THE FULL DIVERSITY OF THE COMMUNITY'S RESIDENTS, BUSINESSES, INSTITUTIONS, AND OTHER LEGITIMATE INTERESTS (E.G. LANDOWNERS) IN THE PLANNING.
Getting participation, which goes beyond the usual "city/town hall junkies" and which is not skewed requires pre-design and usually requires careful recruiting, rather than

reliance on publicity and self-motivation. Be careful: the whole program can founder around this point.

- Identifying what appropriately constitutes "diversity" will often be challenging, and deserves a careful design effort with substantial community participation.

> A common participant omission is large landholders, especially non-resident ones. Two *Open* Planning communities reaped real benefits from a specific outreach to bring them into the process, making them part of the planned solution.

- The participatory design must not categorically exclude anyone, and must openly allow for corrections of any appearance of "stacking". Recruiting people of all ages from neighborhood A and business people, elders, and youngsters from all parts of the community leaves out all who neither live in neighborhood A, nor are elders or youngsters, a large share of the community.

- Be sure that the process of engaging does not miss those having legitimate interests but voices so quiet that they are too often overlooked: kids, seniors, minorities, or just those who do not usually come out for public events.

- The next challenge is how to actually involve that diversity. Response to passive notices of events is seldom sufficient to gain real diversity. Well-designed telephone "contact trees" and other active recruitment efforts, though subject to question as "social engineering," really are a valuable way of reaching towards this objective. Sometimes the challenge of recruiting an appropriate diversity of participants suggests broadening the subject area in order to be attractive to a more diverse set of interests.

> One *Open* Planning community offered on-site day-care to enable participation by parents of kids too young to be left alone, let alone to participate. The caregivers wound up giving the kids exercises just like ones the "adults" were conducting in another room. At the end of the day, the process had added the little ones as another participant group. They proved to be by far the best received and perhaps the most imaginative group of all.

– ENGAGE A WIDE RANGE OF AGENCIES, ORGANIZATIONS, AND OFFICIALS SO FULLY THAT THEY VIEW THE PLAN AS THEIR OWN.

If the plan in question is a municipal one, then the elected, appointed, and employed officials across local government are a crucial part of the community that must be reflected in the plan. The support of those individuals is important to gaining plan implementation. Just as importantly, their insights into the community and its decision processes can be of enormous help in doing the planning, and the values that they individually bring to the questions being considered have a special importance because of the time and commitment to the community that they have displayed.

The duality town or city hall/citizens is another one that requires overcoming. At the same time, the mechanisms for participation might well differ between those used for town hall folks and those through which others take part. The mechanisms for town/city hall folks should reflect the special background, different hours of availability, and different kinds of legitimacy that characterize municipal employees and officials. It often is best to engage local officials with a set of activities which parallel but do not duplicate those used for the other participants, together with a process for bringing the two paths together early and often.

4. MAKE PARTICIPATION A SOLIDLY CONTRIBUTORY EXPERIENCE.

Make the participation sound and worthwhile for both community and participants.

Asking people to participate in planning for the good of the community is asking a lot in a society where people are hesitant to even join bowling leagues. Asking for participation a second time, if the first time was a disappointment, becomes an exercise in futility. For those reasons, it is important that those who participate will not only bring benefit to the community but also will gain real rewards for themselves. These are some of the ways of achieving that.

– MAKING PARTICIPATION CONSEQUENTIAL.

For some, the potential for effective advocacy, which participation provides, will provide major gratification for having taken part. That is strengthened when, for example, participants are recruited and organized by sub-area of the community, role as large landowner or business entrepreneur, or age group (kids, seniors). Participation can then be seen as helping to ensure good treatment for their particular "corner" of the community.

For such motivation to be gratified, participation has to be really consequential. First, the participant's role in shaping the planning should be a truly meaningful one. Being part of a large "yes" group is not very gratifying. Too often participation is designed for community education and constituency building, rather than giving a real voice to those taking part.

Second, being part of a process that has real promise of making an impact on action is a powerful motivation and source of reward for participation, whether by individuals or by organizations. Connecting the process to real decisions should be part of its initiation. Participating in a "visioning" exercise, which is unconnected to any concrete planning gives less promise of consequence than being part of a committed process that provides assurance of continuing through plan-making and into implementation. Some sponsoring boards or agencies will even commit in advance to bringing at least some of the proposals from the planning effort to the local governing body. Playing a real role in those circumstances can be a heady reward.

Third, the alternatives being considered should be real and consequential. Much of planning is concerned with developing, testing, and synthesizing strategies across alternatives. A test for whether alternatives are real is whether they in fact have proponents, as opposed to being the nominal "straw men" that planners and designers often create to stand on either side of the alternative intend to be selected. Participation in "straw man" choices is not consequential. Further, even if an alternative has proponents it is not "consequential" if it is an unattainable fantasy, such as moving the hated roadway into an adjacent community, which is okay for brainstorming but not for consequential planning.

In July 2002 more than 4,000 people participated in a planning exercise organized to discuss the merits of six "alternative" designs for redevelopment of the World Trade Center site, supported by state-of-the-art technology to facilitate exchange among a group of that size.

With almost a single voice participants replied "none of the above" to the choices among alternatives provided, and the process, as described by one of its organizers, "now has to start over again." Clearly the otherwise exemplary process was damaged by offering only minor variants, and not real alternatives in the sense that we are using that term.

– LEADING FROM THE SIDE.

For planning programs to succeed they need leadership that walks a fine line, doing more than passively "facilitating" but still allowing participants to develop the substantive content. Those leading should do so as co-equals with the other participants, simply having skills, insights and a role that complement those of the others. That kind of leading involves some technique, but most importantly, it requires an attitude that cannot be put on, though it can eventually be acquired. If participants are to take real proprietorship of the resulting plan, the content of the planning has to belong to them from the beginning.

These are a few things that can help in doing *open* planning for sustainability in this truly community-based way.

- Begin participation early and continue it throughout the process. The common statement "It's too early to involve the public, we are not far enough along" is seldom accurate. The most consequential decisions in most planning programs are actually made early, for example in framing the study scope, so meaningful participation should also start early.

- Share information: avoid inadvertently centralizing it. For example, surveys inherently centralize information in the hands of the surveyors, rather than sharing it in the way that discussions do. Having all materials submitted to a single integrator is very different from circulating drafts. The wonderful e-mail button "reply to all" has the right spirit.

- Build participant understanding. At minimum, participants' understanding of their community and what sustainability means should be deepened through their participation. Through participation they may also learn about some of the technical substance of the topics being planned. It is not sensible to try to make traffic engineers out of all participants, but both participants and the process outcomes will benefit if some participants learn something about the basics of traffic, or housing, or renewable energy, or whatever the topic may be. A good process neither asks participants to act on matters about which they lack competence nor accepts as "given" the areas of competency that participants bring to the undertaking.

- Have participants play creative roles, not just reactive ones. That spirit, exemplified in "visioning," is important throughout. Enabling participants to act with competent creativity as the planning proceeds beyond brainstorming or visioning requires skill in devising how citizens and various kinds of experts can best complement each other in achieving results neither could achieve without the other.

- Keep the action in the participants' realm, not "back in the office." For example, agenda-setting for future meetings and synthesizing outcomes of meetings recently held are critical steps, and whenever possible should be done out in the sunshine of public participation. If this is to be the participant's process the participants need to be part of these key steps. Materials long held back from participants because they are not ready for public review are symptomatic of a process that does not belong to the participants, and they know it.

- Match the pattern of participation and the pattern of decision-making. A process where topical or group sessions are sequential, each building on choices made at the last, is ideal if everyone is able to take part in all sessions; however, sometimes only the paid professionals can do that. If times for sessions cannot be arranged so nearly all participants can attend all sessions, then topical planning sessions should be parallel, not sequential, so that missing some sessions (other than final integrating ones) does not disenfranchise participants.

- Allow for briefing about background information, perhaps both oral and written, before asking participants to act. This means walking a fine line: one person's "briefing" is another person's "brainwashing". Sometimes participants can help by both doing part of the briefing, and by suggesting what it should contain.

- Individual exercises, such as a well-designed community "scavenger hunt" or "awareness walk", can hugely improve understanding. Again, that requires care about inadvertent (or designed) manipulation of participant perceptions.

- Make the process fun! Brainstorming is fun, especially if it is carefully designed to be so. Drawing on maps is a hoot once people get over misplaced fear of being

incapable. Sharing over food is a time-proven helpful program element. Meetings conducted with lightness, openness, clarity, dispute-avoidance, and assurance of civility all contribute to a positive experience. Tediously read materials, illegible overheads, "air-time hogging," and contentiousness can be near fatal to program enthusiasm for participants.

C.APPROACH

5. TEST PLANNING WITH ACTIONS.

Test the plans and the process through action during, not only following, the planning.

There are many benefits from designing a sustainability planning process in which implementing actions occur during the plan making and not only after it.

- The community sees the planning as truly consequential, even while it is ongoing, heightening engagement.

- Those doing the planning learn from outspoken participation by segments of the public and from officials who only become vocal participants when there are real actions involved. Many people will not participate at all in planning processes until the issues become concrete, such as rezoning the land next to their home. The quality of consideration given by most participants changes when "warm fuzzies" turn into real proposals, actually being deliberated for implementation. Action on concrete proposals is one of the most valuable pieces of learning in the entire planning process, but its educational value to the effort is small if it comes only at the end. Accordingly, planning and action need to be part of a unified process, informing and stimulating one another throughout the process.

- Artful selection of early actions – "finding the low-hanging fruits"- can help inform the planners about where there is latent agreement within the community, and where divisions are deep. Over and over again, such early actions have outcomes that greatly surprise even veteran officials and activists, and that learning is an enormous benefit to the planning effort.

In one *Open* Planning community, citizen participants in early comprehensive plan brainstorming concluded that a moratorium was vital to avoid the planning intentions being preempted by development. Dialog about that early action proposal led to an alternative set of actions, all taken to town meeting and approved. The results included land preservation, regulatory innovation, and creation of a new organization, each important in themselves. They were also critically important in demonstrating the previously doubted willingness of the town to take such actions. The experience of those early actions had transforming impact on the remainder of the planning program.

- Starting actions for which there is early agreement: Picking "low-hanging fruits" that involve initiating actions that are relatively easy to carry out is fine, and a good idea. However, if an initial Community Workshop identifies a particular action and there is general, or overwhelming community-wide agreement, even if it may take some time to implement, the sooner it can start the better.

6. PLAN THROUGH A NUMBER OF CYCLES.

Do the planning through a number of iterative planning cycles, not just one linear pass.

For the above reasons and more, going through a full planning cycle, no matter how quickly, provides an improved understanding of where scarce study resources are most strategically spent in later more detailed planning efforts. In one community, doing a land use plan may depend critically on having a highly detailed land use inventory, together with nothing more than a cursory review of the community's land use decision-making structure. In another community, it might turn out to be the opposite: the key land use questions may deal with decision-making structure more importantly than with the location matters that mapping land use helps with. A quick early planning cycle can clarify which is the case, and result in a more effective use of planning time and energy.

Building on that learning, the process itself can evolve, not being prematurely fixed on a course set at the front end, or a limited set of alternatives selected early in the process. The mid-course experience can help shape how scarce planning resources are to be allocated in next steps, what kinds of information are really needed, how communications should be designed, and what actors or new planning capacities need to be brought into the process. Commitment to such a cyclical process can also legitimize deferring planning choices that are not ripe for decision. In this approach, the decision is not being ignored, but rather (1) it will be returned to in a subsequent cycle, and (2) the uncertainties raised by leaving it an open decision are explicitly taken into account in other aspects of the plan.

> A three-cycle approach to zoning recodification in one *Open* Planning community process began with "brainstorming" that surprisingly identified review processes as the primary area of concern, resulting in a major reorientation of efforts through the following two cycles. The second cycle developed major changes for those processes, while the third cycle addressed other concerns, all adopted at town meetings climaxing the second and third cycles.

A planning cycle involves going from data to actions with goal setting and alternatives framing and testing along the way. A cycle can be completed in an hour, an evening, a month, a year, or as much as a decade in some ill-fated cases. A quick round of plan-making, light on data-gathering but long on imaginative ideas, can liberate creativity and make the subsequent making of a "real" plan a far-better informed process than would be possible without that first cycle of planning. Some call that first planning cycle "visioning" or "brainstorming" or "blue sky planning." Whatever it is called, it is a valuable part of a well-designed planning process, especially if it includes not only visioning about how the

place might ideally be but also includes explorations, no matter how preliminary, of the actions involved in getting from here to the vision. Some scorn any inclusion of actions in visioning processes as "inhibiting" to the free flow of ideas, which is not the case if the process is a thoughtful one.

Having made that quick effort, the "real" planning can then proceed with a much improved understanding of what kinds of information need to be gathered, what sort of alternatives should be considered, and even some idea of what action proposals are likely to emerge and succeed. Since the process of considering action proposals is so rich in learning for the planning itself, what might otherwise be just "second cycle" planning sometimes is designed as "second and third cycle planning." That allows the third cycle to benefit from the learning that comes from implementation efforts towards the end of the second cycle. Sometimes the third cycle even has the temerity to begin with crafting actions, and then backing into statements about the more general community purposes for which the actions are proposed. As such, it reverses the classic deductive process of plan making, making it an inductive process instead, often to great benefit.

Done well, the second (and perhaps third) cycle(s) of planning usually produce a rich array not only of goals and objectives but also of action proposals that are likely to enjoy wide support. Unfortunately, that action array is often too expansive to be fully implemented. After months or years of planning effort there is an understandable reluctance to defer or, worse, drop good action proposals from the Plan, and in the usual "second (or third) cycle" planning there is no equivalent to a "budget process" which actively forces such choices. The results commonly are unrealistically long lists of "to dos," rich material for remorse a decade later but ineffective as a guide to near-term action.

For that reason, a deeper set of choices really should be made as a part of the planning to organize action sets into strategic alternatives, and to make well-considered choices among them. One alternative might be predicated on key staff additions, while another might rely wholly on current staff levels and organizational structure. This "third (or fourth) cycle" process is just like the earlier ones, testing alternatives against goals, and making choices. The result should be a chosen strategic approach that can really be carried out within the limitations of the real world resources of funding, agency effort, and political support, specifically joining planning and implementation.

To accomplish planning in this way requires four things from those doing the planning; each of them especially difficult for people newly introduced to planning.

a. Be willing to advance proposals before all the data ever to be collected and analyzed is in hand. All the data is NEVER in hand. **Sufficient** data is what is needed. Proposals should be selected for early action in part on the basis of being ones for which early information is likely to prove sufficient for such an exploratory step.

b. Be willing to advance a proposal in one topical area before plans are complete for other topical areas. This means daring to appear to violate what comprehensive planning is all about. The overarching mind-set of comprehensive planning is that everything

depends upon everything else, and that is why we plan comprehensively. But perfect understanding of everything is never achieved - the real test is whether the understanding is **sufficient** for competent action. It is critical to complement that mindset with another: that by selecting and shaping actions thoughtfully, it is possible to move some of them forward before that full comprehensive context is in place. For planners conditioned to the concept of comprehensive interdependencies, that is a tough step. However, seeking that **separability** of some actions consistent with commitment to observing **interdependencies** among actions is a critical part of connecting planning with the real world of political decision-making, which commonly is impatient for action. At the same time, if proposals in one topical area have been developed through applying the four sustainability objectives, the outcome almost inevitably will be a comprehensive and systematic approach that will not conflict, but rather complement, proposals developed in other topical areas also using those four objectives as a guide.

c. Be willing to allocate scarce time and financial resources over a number of planning cycles, and not focused solely on one. Time and money for visioning may "trade off" against time and money for later phases of planning, but it is well spent. Time and money for designing action strategies as a third cycle of planning not only involves time and money trade-offs but is intensely political, so it may cost scarce political chips as well. All those costs for a multi-cycle approach are investments, and when allocated wisely, are powerful aids in gaining well-informed actions as the ultimate outcomes of the planning.

d. Be willing to forego the lure of "one step at a time" process decision-making. "Step-by-step" might mean doing visioning, following which support will be sought for conducting a regular planning effort, and following which support will be sought for preparation of a strategic design. That is not at all the same as a process in which all three of those steps are woven together in an integrated effort, each informing the other. The quality of participation in early stages by both citizens and agencies will be colored by whether they see it as an abstract exercise, or as an integral part of a truly coherent and consequential process.

7. SEEK CONVERGENCE ON AGREED INTENTIONS.

Planning efforts are only useful if they lead to shared conclusions.

Even processes with a linear, rather than cyclical design, often experience difficulty in reaching closure on intentions. To avoid that, explicitly seek out areas of agreement as the process goes along, document them, and build from there, rather than repeatedly returning to the same territory. Achieving that soundly can be helped in a number of ways, including these:

• Focus on agreement, not on resolving disagreement. Find where substantial concurrence exists or is easily achieved, and consolidate it. Where there is

disagreement, do not dwell, but rather simply agree on how to find agreement at some future time, and move on.

- Those managing the group process have to be careful to **accept outcomes** of that process even if not individually agreeing with some parts of it, unless the disagreement is one of fundamental principle.

- Use a **process appropriate to the style of the actors**. In small towns that seldom is formal, with structured voting on each step, but rather is informal and consensual, not majority-ruled. Sometimes, however, formality "fits", in which case use it.

- Look for how to break apparently interdependent choices into those parts which in fact can be considered independently. Yes, that is the exact opposite of the "comprehensive planning paradigm" where everything depends upon everything else so nothing can be decided until everything is decided. Focusing on interdependencies is a prescription for never deciding. Good planners do not ignore interrelations, but rather they look for solutions so robust that their elements can be acted upon separately.

- Every worthwhile meeting includes at least some agreement. Document it, preferably on shared documents liked marked-up maps and flip charts, ideally created by the participants during rather than after the meeting, and bring that agreement into the next meeting so that it can then be reconfirmed and built upon rather than being rediscovered.

- When hopelessly long lists of ideas are generated in brainstorming and other processes, do not shorten them by knocking people's suggestions down. Build new lists through positive agreement on items nominated by participants from their initial lists.

- Recognize and accept concurrence without holding out for unanimity. In this context, "consensus" on a given point may include some folks disagreeing, but being willing to stay quiet to allow progress. Do not impede that quiet agreement by needlessly polling the group individually or by voting things up or down, risking alienation of a group one vote shy of victory.

- Try "red dot voting" to set priorities. In "red dot voting" each participant might be given ten red dots to place wherever she or he wishes on wall lists of, say, thirty potential action items. Use that or any other voting scheme only after there has been enough dialogue for the voting to be well informed, and only with the caveat that it will be taken with a grain of salt, in light of less-than-perfect representation and understanding at the voting event.

- Make choices, such as choosing among alternatives, as early as competently possible. Too often planners struggle to keep all alternatives open as long as possible, but the key to success is getting well-informed closure, not never-ending debate. In doing that, sometimes it is helpful to use a classic salesman's approach, getting people on a roll of

saying "yes". To do that, organize the sequence of decisions so that the things most likely to be approved are taken first, deferring until later the ones most likely not to be approved.

IV.ROAD MAP FOR A PROCESS STRUCTURE

This section consists of an overview, or road map - of the *Open* Planning for Sustainability process structure outlined in the next chapter of this handbook. The planning process structure is organized in three phases – **I. Getting the Community's Big Picture, II. Getting the Detailed Picture, and III. Ongoing Sustainable Actions.** It is important to remember that identifying and carrying out *early actions* – picking the low-hanging fruits– are an important part of each phase. These early actions can create energy, enthusiasm, and provide visible confirmation that change is indeed happening.

While the specific steps of each phase will be described in detail in later sections, the reader can refer back to this section to get a sense of how the details and specific steps fit into the larger eco-municipality process structure. The Appendix also contains a step-by-step summary of the *Open P*lanning for Sustainability process described in detail next in Chapter V.

Phase I: Getting the Community's Big Picture:
Education, Preplanning Organization, Open Framework Planning

Finding the "fire souls" to help raise local awareness and help get the process started; initial community and local official education and awareness-raising; developing the process strategy; official adoption/endorsement of either the Natural Step system conditions or the APA sustainability objectives; early actions identification/design; creating broad-based community and municipal participation, including recruitment, holding a community-wide workshop to identify important community planning themes(topics) and to develop the overall community vision.

Results/Outcome: Community Vision, Sustainability Planning Agenda, Early Actions

Phase II: Getting the Detailed Picture:
Strategic (ABCD) Topical Planning, Ongoing Education

Organizing topic groups from the topic themes emerging from the community-wide workshop plus other topics; topic group (ABCD) strategic planning processes and analyses; developing topical sub-plans; holding a community-wide forum, consolidating the sub-plans into an overall community sustainability plan; official full plan endorsement; more early actions.

Results/Outcome: Municipal/Community Sustainability Plan: Actions
Phase III: Ongoing Sustainable Actions

Revising municipal tools such as master plans, zoning codes, building codes, capital budgeting, etc.; establishing ongoing monitoring (indicators) and evaluation mechanisms; ongoing education measures for existing and incoming municipal staff and citizens;

developing a local or regional public/private community capacity center for ongoing education and support; starting the next cycle of *open* planning for sustainability.
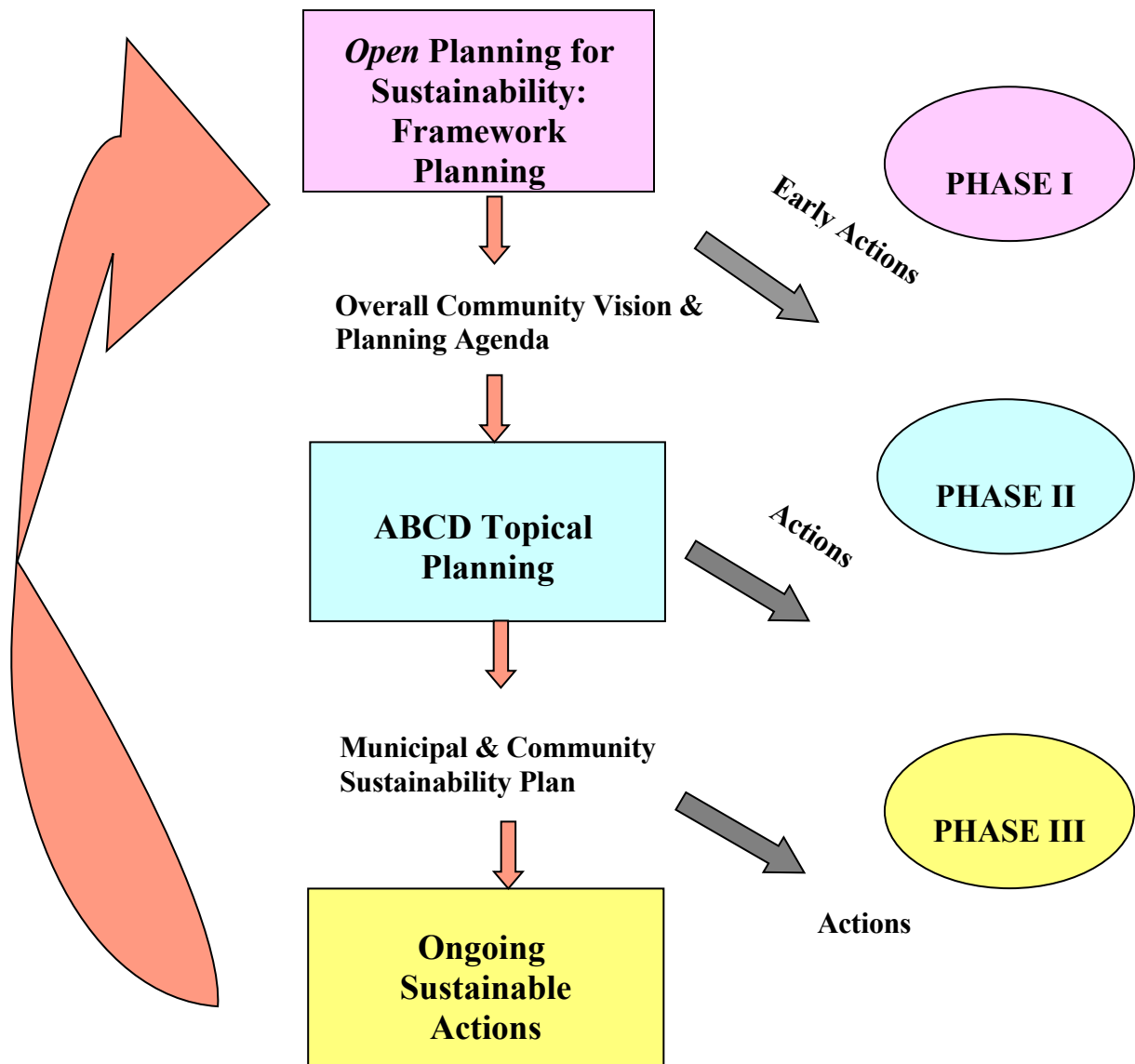
V. PROCESS STRUCTURE: MAKING IT HAPPEN

This Chapter describes the *Open* Planning for Sustainability process, outlined in the preceding Section IV that is guided by the principles of the previous chapters. This process could be used for any of a number of local community sustainability initiatives, whether preparing a comprehensive plan, designing a sustainable community strategic plan, preparing an eco-economic development program, or developing new zoning bylaws that incorporate sustainability objectives. There are lots of other ways those principles could be applied, but this particular process is one that has been widely used with substantial success in a variety of contexts by over 100 communities throughout the U.S. and beyond.

A. HOW DO I START?

Finding the Fire Souls and Raising Local Awareness

The first place to start is to seek out kindred spirits - other people in your community who realize that we need to change our unsustainable practices to sustainable ones. In *The Natural Step for Communities*, we describe the first step as "finding the fire souls". Fire souls are people with a burning interest in sustainable development and who are willing to work hard to make that happen in their community. It may be only one or two people, but in the case of almost every existing or emerging eco-municipality to date, the transformation process to become a sustainable community began with a small group of people, sometimes just one or two. It may be you!

> ***The Chequamegon Bay Eco-Region Initiative of Northern Wisconsin***
> In May of 2004, two individuals from Chequamegon Bay in northern Wisconsin, a region of about 16,000 people, traveled to Minneapolis to take part in a workshop about how to become an eco-municipality. Inspired by what they heard, these two people – one an Ashland, WI city councilor, the other a University of Wisconsin County Extension community educator, went back to their region and started spreading the word about the remarkable examples of the eco-municipalities of Sweden, and why these examples were good ones for their region to emulate. Over the next several months, they gave numerous presentations about this approach throughout the Chequamegon Bay region and talked to many local officials, local institutions, and community citizens. As a next step, they, working with a coalition of fellow fire souls and organizations, organized a two-day workshop for the region, introducing this approach, where over 200 citizens, local officials from three neighboring municipalities, businesspeople, representatives of institutions, and members of two adjacent tribal nations came together to learn and work together. Out of this workshop emerged an initial plan of action which, over the next two years, culminated in all three municipalities becoming the first official eco-municipalities in the United States, when their respective city councils voted to adopt either the Natural Step system conditions or the APA sustainability objectives as their official guide for municipal policies and practices. Now, these three municipalities – Ashland, Washburn,

and Bayfield, WI – are working with their neighbors, the Bad River and Red Cliff tribal nations, in an eco-region initiative. Inspired and spurred by their example, six other Wisconsin municipalities have followed suit to pass official resolutions and begin their own eco-municipality journeys.[7]

Figure 2: Mary Rehwald and Jane Silberstein – fire souls of Chequamegon Bay, WI

The more you and your fellow fire souls can do to raise awareness in your community about why we need to change our ways, and that there are good examples out there to follow – the better. Almost always, there are good examples in your own community and region that can be used to illustrate what is meant by sustainable development. See if you can find examples of local sustainable development that meet at least one of the four sustainability objectives; take photos of these, and use these to develop a presentation that you can use to explain sustainability, the four sustainability objectives, and give concrete examples of each. As did the original two fire souls of the Chequamegon Bay region, speak to as many groups and organizations in your community or region as you can. Have a sign-up list available always for people who may want to learn more or be notified of future events (or be involved in a community initiative!).

As soon as possible, try to find ways to enlist the participation of your local officials in first, learning about why we need to change our ways, and in sharing examples where businesses, municipalities, and individuals have done so. Informal conversations at first are best. If you do not know any of your local officials personally, try to find other individuals who have their ear and see if they would be willing to approach one or more of those officials; this may take several months. See if they can be persuaded to hear a presentation or participate in a workshop about what sustainability is important, the four sustainability objectives as a guide for change, examples of places that have used them, and local examples of sustainable development already moving in this direction. Municipal cost savings from changing to sustainable practices also is a good motivator for local officials to pay attention. There are growing numbers of examples of cost savings that can be found through some research on the Web.[8]

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[7] For more about the Chequmegon Bay eco-region initiative, see www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/ashland/cnred/documents/FinalDocumentSCIStrategicPlan4-11-06.pdf. For municipal eco-municipality resolutions, see the 1000 Friends of Wisconsin Web site at www. 1kfriends.org/Eco-Municipalities.htm.

[8] For example, the U.S. Green Building Council has amassed much documentation and studies on the cost savings of building 'green'. Go to www.usgbc.org, click on 'Research', and cost savings studies listed under 'Broad Scope".

Portsmouth, NH: Involves its Local Officials, Boards, and Department Heads

The City of Portsmouth, NH (pop. 20,674) completed work on a comprehensive plan in March, 2005. Prominent in this plan were considerations of sustainability. A community-based organization called Portsmouth Listens was instrumental in bringing this about. Portsmouth Listens had organized focus groups during the comprehensive planning process to obtain citizen input on key planning issues.

A local fire soul who was a member of Portsmouth Listens was familiar with the Natural Step framework and thought this framework would serve well to clarify the concept of sustainability and serve as a vehicle for bringing a systems approach to municipal policies and planning. This individual and other fire souls in Portsmouth Listens persuaded the Portsmouth City Manager and Deputy City Manager that city officials and staff could greatly benefit by taking part in sustainability education, using the Natural Step framework and eco-municipality approach, and went on to secure funding to make this possible. During 2005 and 2006, a series of workshops took place in Portsmouth that involved all city department heads, the City Manager and Deputy City Manager, City Councilors, and members of Portsmouth's Planning Board, Zoning Board, School Board, Conservation Commission, and Historic Commission. Some months after, a community-wide workshop introduced the Natural Step framework to community citizens, businesspeople and others. City departments are now informally using the sustainability objectives as a guide for decision-making.

Another approach to raising local awareness that both Swedish and emerging U.S. eco-municipalities have used is the organization of study circles to learn about and discuss sustainability. Study circles are groups of several individuals who agree to meet periodically over a period of several weeks to discuss a particular subject with common reading material. It works best when a designated facilitator can help start study circle, and provide the needed discussion material, and help keep the discussion on track. Study circles have been used in Chequamegon Bay and in Dane County, WI, where several hundred citizens have participated. Both places used T*he Natural Step for Communities* book as a discussion guide.

Figure 3: Bert Cohen- fire soul of Portsmouth, NH
Photo credit: Amy Donle

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Sustain Dane, Inc. Organizes Study Circles in Dane County, WI

Sustain Dane, Inc., a non-profit organization in Dane County, WI in which the City of Madison is located, has brought a deeper awareness and understanding of ecology and the need to live lightly on the earth to more than a thousand Dane County residents through organizing study circles on topics ranging from voluntary simplicity to global warming to discovering a sense of place.[9] Sustain Dane has helped to raise awareness about the eco-municipality approach that includes the Natural Step framework organizing study circles using *The Natural Step for Communities* book as a discussion guide Sustain Dane was also instrumental in persuading the City of Madison to commission sustainability training in the Natural Step framework for a group of municipal employees from a range of city departments.

Figure 4: A happy Swede jumps for joy upon hearing about Madison's sustainable development accomplishments.

Something to keep in mind if using study circles: study circles are most effective when part of an overall, larger community education and involvement strategy. When study circles come to an end after a few weeks, it will help to give people options for what they can do next, if they choose. It is also more effective if and when people know that their work – for example, recommendations and ideas for action - are going to be seriously considered for inclusion in a larger plan. Of course, study circles are also a great way of creating additional volunteer support within the community; it helps to have a ready list of opportunities for people to step into if they choose.

B. GETTING LOCAL OFFICIALS ON BOARD & GETTING THEIR ENDORSEMENT

At some point – and probably the earlier the better, local elected officials such as city councilors, Boards of Selectmen, Boards of Aldermen, County Executives, etc – need to be brought on board. In the case of some communities, such as Ashland, WI, a city councilor

was one of the original fire souls who brought the eco-municipality concept to her community and fellow councilors. This will not always be the case, however. Ultimately, it is the local officials who vote to formally adopt a resolution to become an

[9] Northwest Earth Institute, Oregon.

eco-municipality, guided by the four sustainability objectives of the American Planning Association, the Natural Step system conditions, or both.[10] This is important because it is this official action that signals to all departments and agencies of the local government, as well as to citizens, businesses, and institutions of the larger community, that the highest officials in the municipality or county are serious about this course of action. Empty resolutions that are never carried out are not the objective here, of course. Although, it will take several years, at the least, to truly bring systematic sustainable change to a municipality, local government, and its larger community – in other words, to implement the official eco-municipality resolution.

The timing of when this should happen will vary according to the particular community and local government. Some emerging eco-municipalities in the U.S. such as Ashland, WI, Washburn, WI, Madison, WI, and Duluth MN passed official city council eco-municipality resolutions relatively early in their processes and have used these to spur departments, citizens, and businesses to

Figure 5: Planning Board meeting in a Massachusetts town.

take action as well – not to mention other neighboring communities. Others, such as Portsmouth, NH and Lawrence Township, NJ, have chosen not to immediately bring formal proposals for eco-municipality resolutions to their city councils and mayors, even though these officials have taken part in educational workshops and express enthusiasm and support. Their objective is to focus attention and energy on spreading the eco-municipality concept and sustainability education more widely throughout their communities, in order to, among other objectives, create groundswell of community support behind a formal resolution proposal. The choice of when to ask for a formal resolution will depend largely on the local political situation. Experience in both Sweden and the U.S. suggests that it is best to wait until a consensus of support exists among the local elected officials who will be voting on the measure. At the same time, it is important to continually work to achieve that official support, as well as the education and buy-in of municipal departments, agencies and staff, so the eco-municipality initiative does not become one that is taking place largely outside of local government. An eco-municipality initiative that does not involve the local government may succeed in educating parts of its community about the importance of sustainability and creating some sustainable development projects, but it will not succeed in creating an eco-municipality.

C. TO FORM OR NOT TO FORM AN ORGANIZATION? AND WHAT SHOULD IT DO?

It is important that some organized group be in charge of overseeing the eco-municipality change process. Otherwise, chaos and fragmented efforts can occur; discouraging people from joining in or causing a loss of confidence that systematic change toward sustainability in their community and local government is really possible. An organized group can oversee the community and department educational processes, oversee the community-based and municipal department strategic planning processes, including education,

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[10] For examples of resolutions, see City of Ashland and City of Washburn, WI in the Appendix.

inventorying, visioning, development of action plans, and implementation of those actions. Ideally, they may be able to garner funding to enable paid staff to work on this.

The question then becomes, who, or what, should be in charge? Whose initiative or process is it, really? The specific answers to these questions will, once again, be particular to the specific local community and local government's situation, politics, and circumstances. Here are some options, and the benefits and challenges inherent in each.

    a) An Interagency/Department Committee or Task Force
    b) A single public agency or department
    c) A private, non-profit community-based organization
    d) Public/private partnership

a) An Interagency/Department Committee

Having an overseeing Committee made up of Department and Agency directors or their designates may be the most effective way to really assure that the departments and agencies of the local government are integrally involved in an ongoing eco-municipality change process. Organizing a committee of departments can help assure that cross-communication, cross-fertilization, and mutual support among local departments can occur. This Committee should be answerable to, and presumably set up by, the highest elected officials. It is from these officials that the Committee should obtain its authority and hence gain credibility from the various departments and agencies of the local government. It is critical, of course, that these department and agency heads are sharing the same common language of sustainability – the four APA sustainability objectives or the Natural Step system conditions. They are more apt to do this if they have taken part in training and education sessions about the Natural Step and eco-municipality concepts, and also if the Mayor and Council, or the highest elected officials, have already endorsed this common language and decreed that departments will use this common language and work together to translate it into sustainable strategies and practices in their respective departments.

While this choice may offer the most effective means of keeping the array of municipal departments and agencies involved in the eco-municipality process over time, a challenge inherent in this organization alternative is the creation and oversight of a broader community change process. Ideally, the eco-municipality change process – is going on concurrently in the local government structure, among community citizens, and among the businesses and institutions of the community. One way of addressing this could be a community advisory committee with members drawn from the citizenry, business, and institutional sectors, or to include representatives from these sectors on the overseeing Committee itself, moving closer to the public/private partnership model described below.

b) A single public agency or department

Some U.S. municipalities that have made commitments to sustainable development have either established an office to implement sustainable development projects or have made

this the charge of one particular department. Many Swedish municipalities also took this route to implement their commitments to the United Nations Local Guide for Sustainable Development called *Agenda 21*. The challenges inherent in this organizational choice, documented by Swedish planners and sustainable development coordinators[11], is that the commitment to participate in the eco-municipality process often does not extend to other municipal departments and agencies beyond the initiating agency. In Sweden, where many municipal environmental departments took up the charge to implement the *Agenda 21* local sustainable development, other municipal departments came to see the *Agenda 21* process as a responsibility of that department only.

Some years ago, the Mayor of a Northeast city in the U.S. established a sustainable city initiative and created and staffed an office to implement this initiative. A few years later, only a couple of discrete sustainable development projects were occurring, administered by this office. The initiative had not spread to other city departments and agencies. If a municipality does choose this organizational route, it is critical that the elected officials make it clear to all departments and agencies that they must work with the sustainability office to implement change. Of course, with this organizational choice, as with the interagency Committee choice described above, the challenge of connecting to the larger community remains

c) A private, non-profit community-based organization

This alternative has often been the organizational choice for fire souls leading initiatives within emerging eco-municipalities. In cases where local governments are not ready to establish an ongoing organizational structure to oversee an eco-municipality initiative for whatever reason – political commitment not yet there, lack of staff and/or financial resources - setting up a non-profit organization may be a realistic alternative. If the non-profit is structured as a charitable educational organization (for e.g., a U.S. tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization), a big advantage is the ability to then receive both public funds and private charitable funding from foundations and individuals. The Board of Directors of such organizations can be comprised of individuals from the range of community interests – citizens, businesses, and institutions, as well as have public representatives appointed by the municipal elected officials to create an organizational link to the local government.

A challenge of this organizational choice, however, is that it may become separate and disconnected from the local government – despite having local government representatives on its Board – and be perceived, rightly or wrongly, as an initiative that does not involve the local government. Having a private organization, albeit a non-profit one, spearheading the effort may create a sustainable community initiative, but it will not become an eco-municipality initiative unless the local government is centrally involved in the effort and in the organization spearheading it. Herein lies a key difference between a sustainable community initiative and an eco-municipality initiative. The local government must be involved – as well as the larger citizenry, business, and institutional sectors. Otherwise, the

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[11] Bengt Westman, "Local Agenda 21 in Sweden", *Swedish Planning Toward Sustainable Development,* The Swedish Society for Town & Country Planning, 1997, pp.82-86.

chance for institutionalization of sustainable practices on an ongoing basis within the community is greatly diminished.

d) Public/private partnership or task force

An organization that is seen as a true partnership between the local government and the larger community, consisting of citizens, businesses, and institutions, may have the largest chance of success, at least in being perceived as being an entity that represents the full spectrum of public and private interests within the community. If it is established or sanctioned by the top elected official or officials, so much the better in establishing its credibility and the community perception that the local government will take its recommendations seriously. While it may not initially start as a formal organization, the appropriate organizational form may evolve organically over time. A challenge is ensuring that individuals appointed to the partnership to represent community citizens are ones that are drawn not just from the "usual suspects" – known community citizen activists and opinion leaders - but also from "just regular folks". Ultimately, the choice of organization needs to be one that everyone in the community can feel represents their interests and can feel that they are a part of.

e) What should the organization or committee do?

The ultimate mission of whatever entity is set up to oversee the eco-municipality initiative is to assure that the local government, all its departments, agencies, boards, and all community sectors including households, businesses, and institutions, all start and continue moving in the direction of the four sustainability objectives and/or the four system conditions of the Natural Step – in other words, to move toward becoming a sustainable community. The organization or committee or public/private partnership can direct a multi-year process, described in the section to come, that involves widespread education about the four sustainability objectives, engagement of all public and private sectors in carrying out the four-point strategic planning process known as the ABCD process [12]to come up with and implement sustainable strategies, and to see that these are institutionalized over time. The process leader, described in the next section, should be answerable to the organization, agency, committee, or partnership, and be responsible for the day-to-day implementation of this mission.

D. A PROCESS LEADER

There are critical choices to be made in selecting those who are to play lead roles in the eco-municipality planning initiative. Two positions or roles are critical. First, there has to be a local committee or agency chaired by a local person or municipal official to head the effort. Ideally, this is not a paid professional. With the process leader leading from the side, this chairperson needs to have the abilities to run meetings, resolve conflicts, bring people to the process, and earn respect.

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[12] Among the Swedish eco-municipalities, the ABCD process has been nicknamed "the Compass".

Second, it is a big asset to have a skilled process leader - a person to organize the overall initiative, organize citizen and sectoral groups, run meetings, give presentations, bring technical resources into the process, and possibly also do educational and training workshops on the eco-municipality process and how to use the Natural Step framework , even if this is initially provided by an outside consulting team or organization. Typically, this person will be a paid professional. Ideally, that person has:

- Strong process skills for making meetings work and moving people towards agreement: no amount of technical understanding can substitute for ability to make group processes productive;

- Understanding and ability to work within the community's decision process. This can help assure that intentions can become adopted concrete actions;

- Understanding of the content of what is being taught and planned: "facilitators" without content background haven't proven effective at this kind of process;

- No personal or professional stake in the outcome; and

- Respect of those who *do* have stakes in the outcomes.

Both the program leadership and technical management roles can be carried out by a single person, but be careful, it is rare for all the necessary qualities to lie in a single individual; there are potential role conflicts down the road.

For more about the qualities and perspectives needed in a process leader, see "Sustainable Processes and the Role of the Process Leader", Chapter 8, *The Eco-municipality Education Guide*, and Chapter 18: "Inside the Head of a Process Leader", *The Natural Step for Communities*.

E. AN OFFICE

The choice of where to locate an office for the sustainability initiative may seem like a minor point, but it can strongly influence whether the initiative is perceived by all local parties as a municipal initiative or one occurring outside of local government. If possible, it is good to locate an office for the initiative in a public building. The initiative should be perceived as a municipal one that is working collaboratively with the larger community.

F. ARRANGE FOR RESOURCES

Technical support can almost always be helpful. It may come from local staff, though few small towns have deep staff resources. It may come from a regional planning agency, if the agency has the capacity and is locally viewed as an appropriate resource. Sometimes

excellent agencies may be inappropriate because of tensions over local versus regional political concerns.

Support may come at little or no cost from a university or non-profit organization. Often there are programs in such organizations eager to find applications in community-based projects. Finally, technical support may come from consultants, if funding will permit that.

G. MAKE A PLAN FOR PLANNING

Laying out what is to be done, by whom and when, denotes making a real plan, and deserves the same care, which the next cycle of planning will be given. Participation in this planning for planning should be as broad as possible, real alternatives should be weighed, and contingencies should be considered. Real commitments are critical: there should be a written outline of the program design, explicitly assigning roles and establishing mileposts along the way, agreed to by all participating parties. Planning is notoriously easy to extend. Realistic but respected time targets are a critical part of program design.

H. DESIGNING BROAD-BASED COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Figure 6

At best, participatory activities are the vehicle through which citizens are able to take charge of the planning, fundamentally shape it, and take proprietary interest in it. At minimum, those activities should be the means through which citizen views are heard early

in the program, not randomly, but through an information-sharing process of mutual learning.

Why should effort go into designing and organizing community participation? The best way to answer this is to consider what can happen in its absence. Planning and municipal affairs are rife with examples of what can occur – angry citizens, blocked projects or proposals, even if those projects or proposals have substantial technical merit.

A deeper reason can be found in Manfred Max-Neef's typology of fundamental human needs, described in the *Eco-municipality Education Guide*'s Chapter 4. According to Max-Neef, participation is one of nine or ten fundamental human needs that have existed throughout time and across cultures. When people are blocked from meeting these needs, such as the need to participate in the affairs that shape one's life, pathological behavior can occur. Our democratic tradition in the United States is based upon participation, even if the modes of satisfying this do not always work well.

The book *The Natural Step for Communities* identifies seven key process steps in the journey to become an eco-municipality. One of these seven key steps is called *involving the implementers*. "Implementers" are people whose actions will be those that translate the sustainability plan into actual sustainable practices in their own homes, workplaces, departments, and businesses. Implementers include municipal employees, citizens, and people from the business community and institutional community. When people are involved from the beginning in developing a plan or proposal, they are far more likely to carry it out when completed than they would be to carry out a plan developed by others and imposed upon them. If common sense alone does not affirm this, the 40+ year history of the *Open* Planning process in the United States does. So, to create a plan that is effective and that works, those who will be implementing it need to be involved from the start, so that it becomes their plan.

For many purposes, workshops are an ideal vehicle for participation, especially if structured to allow small-group dialogue. Other techniques can also serve well, but each commonly has drawbacks. Sole reliance on big forum-style meetings or conferences does not allow much real interchange or regular-folks creativity. Attitude surveys reach lots of people, but do not improve their understanding, do not really allow for exchange, and centralize information in the hands of the surveyors. New technology, such as interactive video or various computer-aided techniques are promising, but at this stage may still focus more attention on the medium than on the content.

Here in some detail is one approach to how such workshops might be carried out. The *Open* Planning approach has proven to be highly effective in serving the intentions outlined in this material. The elements of the *Open* Planning for Sustainability process include:

- Designing/organizing broad-based citizen and community participation
- Community Workshop
- Organizing Topic Groups
- Community Forum

- Synthesizing Results/Official endorsement
- Institutionalization: keeping it going

These workshops and process model can be adapted and used at any stage of the ABCD strategic planning process – Initial Awareness and Education, Baseline Analysis, Creating a Vision, and Developing an Action Plan, described in following sections. These workshops can also be and have been used as a means of introducing community citizens to the sustainability objectives and Natural Step system conditions, and kick-starting a community eco-municipality initiative. In each case, the structure of the workshop would be essentially the same. The task assignment for small group work in the workshop, however, would vary according to the stage of the ABCD process, as described later.

1. Identify and Organize Affinity (Interest) Groups for the first Community Workshop

The *Open* Planning process relies upon dialogue first within carefully structured "affinity groups," then between those groups, followed by dialogue across restructured groups, this time containing a diversity of interests. Structuring the process to begin with small groups can avoid the intimidation and speech making which sole reliance on large-group sessions often produces. Structure the initial small groups to bring together people who are likely to be in agreement, keeping folks having potentially conflicting views in different groups. Sometimes, small workshop groups are organized by topic, such as "housing" or "transportation" or "energy", but, especially at the beginning of an eco-municipality initiative, process groups will function better if organized to allow like-minded people to support each other's ideas, rather than using this time for cross-interest dialogue. That cross-interest dialogue is vitally needed, but is better reserved for later, after people are better grounded in their own ideas and comfortable with the process.

By "affinity" we mean people's life situation that affects the way they view civic affairs. For example, senior citizens will view civic affairs and municipal expenditures in a markedly different way than will parents with children in public schools. In a resort community, year-round homeowners will view community and civic issues quite differently than will seasonal homeowners. Homeowners will have a different perspective than renters. Community youth will have their own perspective. Businesspeople will have their own perspective, as will those who work for institutions such as universities or hospitals. To assure that the range of community interests is represented, it is important to have a brainstorming session with the overseeing Committee, presumably made up of individuals who know the community very well and are able to identify, in a facilitated discussion, the range of interests that exists in the community.

Organization by interests is very different from structuring groups made up of representatives from existing community organizations: neighborhood associations, business groups, and other civic organizations, for example. In most cases those groups should be given an opportunity to play a role in the planning program, but substituting them for "affinity groups" is the wrong way. First, existing organizations never reflect the

full diversity of the community. Second, having participants "represent" an organization limits their ability to exchange freely based on their individual views.

Identifying and recruiting on the basis of affinity is also different than the common participation target to identify and involve "stakeholders". Stakeholders are people or organizations with vested interests in the outcome. They are often "the usual suspects" – individuals, organizations, or groups with a particular ideology or position that are well known and who are often outspoken and visible in public issues and affairs. To be sure, these people and organizations are welcome and need to be part of the eco-municipality process. Initially designing participation, especially for the first community workshop – on the basis of affinity, however, can assure that the full range of community will be represented and will participate in the workshop that defines the vision, sets the planning agenda, for the overall process. When people have not been recruited as representatives of an organization or ideology, they customarily have felt freer to express their own individual perspectives, rather than being expected to hold to or represent an organization's position.

Figure 6

There are important benefits of initially organizing by affinity rather than by topic. First, it gives legitimacy to the entire process by making clear that diverse perspectives have been given real opportunity to effectively participate. It often gives legitimacy to interests who initially do not have it: teen-agers, for example, or large landowners. As group members are likely to "think alike," their discussions are likely to be free flowing and positive. Importantly, this approach sets up the possibility of discovering, when the groups reconvene, that supposedly polarized interests really have common ground and even have similar proposals, though perhaps for different reasons.

Finally, organizing by affinity rather than topic avoids the pitfall of the program managers pre-determining outcomes by initially structuring groups around topics from their own agenda, rather than allowing topics of concern to emerge from the participants. Outcomes depend crucially upon how the initial groups are structured. That raises concern about "original sin". By "engineering" the process, those initiating it also shape the outcomes, despite wishing the outcomes to be only those of the participants. The paradox can be mitigated, but not escaped, by giving participants as much opportunity as possible to shape the process.

One of the important functions of an early Community Workshop is to scope what topics are important to the community and hence what topics the sustainability planning effort should focus on. Organizing groups immediately by topic preempts that function, and also

skews participation. Identifying key topics for sustainability analyses can come after the initial Community Workshop, where important topics that have not been identified by citizens can still be added for investigation and analysis.

Given the multi-dimensional nature of interests, even in a small community, designing a small set of affinity groups to reflect critical interest cleavages requires careful design. Organizing groups so that issue conflicts cut between rather than within them facilitates easy discussion and reaching agreements within each group. More importantly, our working presumption is that no matter how sharply interests may be divided between groups, there will be large areas of agreement among them. When consensus across such diverse groups is found, it has credibility as a **community** consensus, which could not be provided by groups structured around topics or organizations.

Commonly, affinity groups are structured around *geography* (different neighborhoods or districts of the community), *social characteristics* (newcomer or native, school age or golden age, homeowners or renters), or *economic role* (business operators, large landowners, downtown property owners), in various combinations and permutations. Limit the number of groups so that each can present its findings to the others in a single session, which means no more than about eight groups. Limit the size of the individual groups to allow comfortable discussion: six to eight people is ideal; more than ten grows increasingly difficult.

When a potential set of groups begins to emerge in an initial brainstorming session with the overseeing committee, test it. Make sure that no one with an interest in what is being planned would be excluded because of being unable to fit into any of the proposed groups. Be sure that the major divisions in the community really are reflected in the group definitions selected. It may take at least two meetings to arrive at agreement on a design for the groups, "brainstorming" at a first meeting, then more reflectively deciding at a second.

2. RECRUITING CONVENERS.

"Conveners" are individuals who have one of the particular affinities identified in the brainstorming session and who agree to contact and recruit 6-8 more individuals sharing that affinity to participate in the Community Workshop. These people should be individually recruited, rather than relying on volunteers. To accomplish that, conveners are typically recruited by members of the lead agency or overseeing committee.

Figure 7

Note that this method of recruitment involves a network of personal acquaintances between members of the lead organization and the community of the planning. There is a corollary: the lead agency or overseeing committee has to be connected with the place being planned: leadership cannot be successfully provided by people from "away".

Conveners will tend to recruit people much like themselves, so there should be diversity among the conveners along dimensions, which couldn't be reflected in structuring the eight or fewer groups. For example, if geographic location is the primary group structuring dimension, it would be good to include within the set of conveners both men and women, long term residents and newer ones, young people and older ones, the politically active and the politically inactive.

Conveners are just that, not group leaders. It is important that the conveners not inadvertently dampen discussion within the group by their dominance. For that reason, senior municipal officials shouldn't be selected as conveners, nor should others whose seemingly superior understanding of the issues (or style) would intimidate inexperienced participants. Usually it is best if conveners not be persons with known strong positions on the issues in order that groups are not seen as predisposed towards answers. On the other hand, the conveners need to have the community ties which will enable them to assemble their groups.

3."DRY RUN" WITH CONVENERS

In an ideal process, the conveners initially meet together with the process leader. At that meeting, they will go through a rapid simulation of the process the groups are going to go through. Doing that enables everyone to better understand what they are asking recruits to agree to do. It enables the process leader to offer suggestions to the conveners about group management: how to make sure everyone participates, how to avoid anyone dominating, how to keep on schedule, how to guide the group towards closure, how best to graphically represent their proposals.

Given that introduction, better understanding of the nature of the process, and an expanded set of people to reflect on it, the program leaders, together with the initial set of conveners, can reconsider the structure of groups, and revise it if appropriate. Some groups may be dropped, others combined, still others subdivided, and wholly new potential groups may be identified.

At about this point, media coverage can be used to invite the larger community to attend and participate in the Workshop. That is an important step, visibly assuring that the process is really open. Any community citizen not specifically recruited but who shows up at the Workshop can be invited to join and work with the group with whom they feel the most affinity. In our experience, this rarely results in additional groups; if the range of groups has been properly designed, any incoming citizen should be able to identify which group they feel the most affinity with and join that group. This defuses the common

criticism that the organizing structure has been engineered to produce predetermined outcomes.

4. Recruit affinity group members.

Each convener is asked to contact 6-8 individuals who share her/his particular affinity – senior citizen, parent with school-age children, resident of a particular neighborhood – for example – and recruit them to participate in the first Community Workshop. Each group should ideally have about six to eight members, but any number from three to ten is tolerable. Conveners should <u>not</u> be told by name whom to recruit (although providing lists of possible names is okay). Many of the qualities that are considered in selecting conveners should also apply to each set of participants. In general, within each group there should be as much diversity as possible, again considering dimensions not reflected in the overall group structure, which might mean noting gender, age, length of residence, tenure, activism, and location within the area or Town. Special effort should be made to include many people not normally heard from, getting outside the small circle of consistent contributors to community dialogue. Those people will be heard from in any event.

Persons should be recruited as individuals, not as representatives of organizations or even of informal groups. It is important that participants be able to speak for themselves, without having to check back with anyone else. Participants should reflect diversity, but not **represent** its elements.

There often is skepticism about the ability of conveners to fill their groups, but experience has demonstrated how reliably they are able to do so. Potential participants need to understand that they really have all the competence that is required. Often people think knowledge of government or planning or mapping or sustainability is required, but the key expertise is simply that of being a citizen.

Motivation comes in part from being personally approached, in part out of self-interest. Participating can be an important way to gain public policies and actions favorable to one's own concerns. Further, the involvement is relatively limited in time, requiring only one meeting, or more if desired, and should be fun. Participants will be meeting with convivial people, brainstorming about a sustainable future, while actually having officials listening.

5. Organize a Community Sustainability Workshop

The first Community-wide Sustainability Workshop is arguably the most important public event in the entire process of developing a community-based sustainability plan. It is this event that will introduce the sustainability objectives as the common language, identify the overall vision for the community, and set the agenda for the sustainability planning topics that will be developed into topical sub-plans over the coming year or two. For these reasons, it is critical that the participants in this Workshop to the greatest extent possible reflect the actual range of interest in the community so that, even if the actual number of

workshop participants constitutes a small percentage of the overall population, the views and perspectives of these individuals will be representative of those of the entire community. If affinity groups are carefully identified and the recruitment process works successfully, as described in the previous sections, this almost certainly will be the case.

Particularly in larger communities such as cities, the question is sometimes asked whether there several workshops should be organized, for example, in the different neighborhoods of the City, rather than just organizing one workshop, so that greater numbers of people can take part. It is certainly possible to do this. However, there is no substitute for a community-wide event where people from different parts of a city and representing a range of interests are able to listen to and hear what their counterparts in other parts of the City or representing different interests have to say about what they want the future of their community to be. Almost inevitably, groups with varying interests and from varying parts of the community hear and learn that what other groups want for a community future is almost the same as what they want. This phenomenon serves as a critical transformative catalyst in bringing about people from varying neighborhoods, backgrounds and interests joining together in a common vision and plan agenda for their community. In the case of a large city or county, it may make sense to hold a city-wide or County-wide community workshop that focuses on the vision and actions for the entire city, then to organize neighborhood workshops that focus on each neighborhood within the city.

Figure 8

At the Community Workshop, there should be an initial orientation where all participants come together and receive the same briefing about what will happen in the Workshop. Room arrangements should be made ahead of time so that the individual affinity groups can separately meet during the Workshop, then reconvene to hear back from all groups. Schools have been the most common venue for combining a large gathering place with nearby smaller classrooms for group work. At the Workshop, the process leader and lead agency members can circulate among the groups, helping to iron out inevitable contingencies. It works best if lead agency members do not join affinity group discussions, but rather observe and listen to what is transpiring. Lead agency members will have plenty of other opportunities to make their views known in the process.

There almost always are surprises at such a meeting. Some groups may not materialize, some people not part of any group may show up, and some groups may turn out to be too large to be manageable. Accordingly, some *ad hoc* restructuring may well take place. Although being done extemporaneously, any restructuring should be consistent in principle with the initial structuring design.

One of the key things to take place at the initial orientation at the beginning of the Workshop is to make clear (again) the "contract" binding the municipality or lead agency and the participants. Its nature will vary among programs, but commonly the agreement might include these elements.

- The calendar should be defined. Participants are expected to take part in all of the workshops in the series, if there is indeed a series. They should not begin if they are not prepared to stick with it, especially since the series is a short one.

- The scope of the program should be made clear. In this outline the program charge is presumed to be a comprehensive sustainability plan, in which case the targeted scope should be described, but with as little limiting direction as possible. For example, it may be enough to explain that the scope is the whole range of topics, which the local government can expect to address in their implementing efforts.

- The lead agency may commit itself to draw its action agenda for the next year exclusively from the outcomes of this process. The agency probably cannot reasonably commit in advance to support all of the outcomes. However, by agreeing to focus its energies for some time on these products the agency gives the process political relevance.

- Any compensation arrangements should be made clear. Sometimes it is possible to reimburse expenses for childcare or travel, usually not. This may be a good time for briefing on background information, which is important for all participants to know about. If time does not permit this, a written background information piece of a few pages can suffice. Some of the early exercises will also contribute to that, but hearing basic things while all together is sometimes important to alleviate concerns.

6. SMALL GROUP BRAINSTORMING IN THE COMMUNITY WORKSHOP.

These brainstorming workshops are intended:

- To allow participants to broaden, through discussion, their own understanding of the community or region and the sustainability issues at hand;

- To allow participants to become more familiar with the spatial patterns of the community or region (it helps to have large maps of the community or region available for each group)

- To facilitate affinity groups developing a well-considered statement of their views;

- To uncover what participants believe the real topics of community concern are; and

– To freely explore for creative ideas.

Figure 9

Final "plans" will not emerge from these steps, but concepts and individual proposals and expressions of policy will do so.

A structured series of steps is provided to the groups, typically through written instructions, since "staffing" each group is unreasonably costly and possibly inhibiting. The ordering of these steps is designed to build group ease and familiarity, as well as competence, while the dialogue moves from easy non-controversial material to ultimately seeking group consensus across difficult value-laden choices.

The primary medium for recording ideas can be either wall-size "poster-maps," maps of the town suitable for marking up with fat felt-tip pens, or flipchart sheets that can be held up or posted on the wall when time comes for groups to present.

Maps serve a number of purposes. They facilitate dealing with place-related topics, which for a physical sustainability planning program is important. Using maps influences choices of issues people will discuss, tilting it towards issues with which the usual planning agency can deal. For many people, maps are fun. Many have never seen such maps of their own turf, and they make many personal discoveries on them. Importantly, big maps can provide a physical rather than personal focus for the dialogue. It is less confronting to disagree with what is on a map (or a poster-list) on the wall than to disagree with a notion only represented by a person.

This entire process can be completed in a few hours. It can also entail two or three evenings. Some groups have chosen to expand the effort, meeting up to a dozen times, conducting mini-"focus group" meetings in addition to their own. However, it is important that participants stick with the process during the series of workshop meetings.

7. DESIGNING THE SMALL GROUP ASSIGNMENTS

8.

Figure 10: Lawrence Township, NJ citizens apply the four sustainability objectives to planning topics in their town.

Each affinity group has the following assignment:

a. **Introductions**: If a large map is available, each group member in turn can sign in, indicating where s/he lives, with a few comments (Breaking ice; getting to know each other).

b. **Existing unsustainable/sustainable**: on a second map, if available, group members should take turns indicating a couple of existing things or community aspects each thinks are sustainable (in green), and a couple of unsustainable (things in red) in the community or region, using the four sustainability objectives as a guide. These can be places or the kinds of relationships a map can show, but they also could be conditions or qualities that do not fit on a map, such as lack of participation on civic affairs. Just use the map as a poster in such a case.

Note that this map is a collection of individuals' views, not a group concurrence. If one person thinks a community feature, such as a hydroelectric dam, is a good thing and another thinks it is bad, just circle it twice: one green and one red (Group members all induced to participate; values clearly expressed; individuals becoming a group with no need yet to confront divergence).

c. **Sustainable Community Vision:** on a third map, each group should indicate how the community or region would be or look like if it met each of the four sustainability objectives.   To keep everyone involved, perhaps have each person offer two ideas. These ideas should be offered without worrying about other group's interests or legal, political, or economic constraints.

Do not quash ideas because they seem absurd: by definition there is no such thing as an absurd utopian notion. Put everyone's ideas on the map, even if they conflict with someone else's proposal: use color coding or some other device to get past the moment. [Real brainstorming is very difficult: criticism is difficult to restrain, even for your own ideas, but this is a critical effort to try to be free and creative].

d. **Actions**: on a fourth map, indicate sustainable actions the group realistically thinks the municipality or local government can take over the next few years with regard to moving in the direction of each of the four sustainability objective, this time taking into account the realities of law, finance, and other people's interests. What actions should be taken to change land use regulations, switch to renewable forms of energy, changing municipal organization, to raise revenue, develop waste-as-a-resource facilities, plan or educate people? (This map or list for each group, along with the sustainable community map, will be the primary physical products of the workshop. Finally, require group concurrence, which by then is easy, sometimes by exhaustion).

After each group has identified its list of items for each sustainability objective, a next step is to go back through that list and put a star next to those items which go in the direction of all four sustainability objectives. This can also be used to indicate which actions may be ones for higher priority attention, as they will address several problems at once. It also helps to demonstrate the "systems" approach and to introduce participants to a simplified sustainability analysis.

Setting Priorities. As a final step, select the group's 3-5 highest priority actions. These can include but needn't be limited to those actions that meet all four objectives from the array already developed. If time and patience are running thin, resorting to a nominating and voting scheme may make sense (Nb: if the red-dot voting method, described at the end of this section, is to be used, it is a good idea of provide the small groups with 4-5 large strips of paper on which to record each of the 3-5 priorities respectively).

Alternative Group Assignments for Workshops

Alternative forms of this Workshop can be used during the different stages of the sustainability strategic planning process called ABCD that is described in the topic group processes to come. The basic structure for small group assignments in these Workshops is to use the four sustainability objectives as questions that apply to the given community or region in question. Those questions will vary according to the phase of the planning process is taking place (i.e., the ABCD strategic planning process described in following sections). If the Open Planning workshop model is used at the Vision Phase, for example, then the questions become:

> 1) What would our community/region look like if it were free of fossil fuel dependency? What would it be like with no dependency on scarce metals such as lead or mercury on minerals such as phosphorus?

2) What would our community/region look like if it were free of dependency on persistent synthetic chemicals?

3) What would our community/region look like if it did not encroach upon Nature (land, water, wildlife, soils, forests, etc.)

4) What would our community/region look like if its human needs were met fairly and efficiently?[13]

For the Baseline Analysis Phase, the questions given to small groups would be:

1) In what ways is our community/region dependent on fossil fuels? On scarce metals? On minerals? And so on for #2,3,4.

For the Creating an Action Plan Phase, the questions would be:

1) What actions can be taken in our community/region to eliminate contributions to fossil fuel dependency? To dependent use of scarce metals and minerals? And so on for #2,3,4.

Figure 11: Chequamegon Bay citizens apply the four sustainability objectives to planning topics in their region (Feb, 2005).

Depending upon the time for group work available, groups can come up with a series of items ranging from 2-3 to several for each question, and record these on a flipchart sheet to be presented to the entire audience. Experience has shown that the minimal time for a small group to do this task successfully is about 1 hour, with 1 ½+ hours being more effective.

8. MAKING GROUP PRESENTATIONS

Following the small group exercise, have all the groups meet together, joined by any "outside" groups which have gone through a similar brainstorming

Figure 12

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[13] How deeply groups can get into #4 will depend on the time available. If 1-2 hours is available for group work, then it is likely only that they can identify a few, and will be u *Figure 12* at this time. However, topic groups that form after the first Worksho analysis – ecological analysis, needs analysis, and process analysis, to their topic over a period of months.

x

effort, to present their results to the entire audience. Groups can display their maps and flipchart sheets on the wall, and later browse among those of other groups. The "brainstorming" ethic continues: no debate, everyone's ideas are OK. Local officials and lead agency or Committee members are encouraged to attend and to listen to what a representative cross-section of community citizens has come up with. Presentations should be mercifully concise and chiefly focus on those chosen as highest priority. Experience has shown that 6-8 small groups are optimal; any more and the attention span of the audience during group presentations drops off sharply.

9. DEVELOP CONCURRENCE.

Next, the task is to draw concurrence from participants based on the work they have developed to that point. Without fail, the small groups have produced an overwhelming array of proposals and ideas. Normally there is not much conflict between ideas of one group and those of another, but the key is selecting those which are of the highest priority.

Immediate agreement can be expected on some proposals, immediate "back burner" placement of others, and identification of a larger set of topics on which further study effort is warranted. These topics will be the community-identified themes for the overall sustainable planning initiative that will go far towards setting the agenda for the remainder of the initiative. These community-identified topics can be supplemented with additional key topics for investigation by the next round of groups to be formed – the topic groups.

Again, this session is intended for the brainstorming participants, with officials and lead agency people as observers and resource people. Managing this session requires real skill: the person to do it, ideally the process leader, should be selected based on having that capability, not on formal role or position.

Space does not allow outlining all the techniques for finding concurrence, but these are a few observations:

– Finding concurrence should happen through dialogue at the meeting, not afterwards through analyzing participant's results in some technician's or official's office. It is crucial that these delicate transformations from dreams to explicit public policy happen before everyone's eyes if the resulting plan is to be theirs, not a technician's.

– Attacking other people's pet ideas hurts. If possible, the whole process should be positive. Accordingly, it is better to seek nomination of items from the previous workshops for inclusion in the "short list" of major proposals than to delete items from a comprehensive list. At this point voting is not a bad idea. Judging where interest lies by the amount of discussion can be deceptive. Commonly, a little-discussed proposal will be on almost everyone's list of ten favored topics, while another item, which drew huge and largely supportive discussion, may not gain even its proponent's vote.

- The process leader or other workshop facilitator needs to walk a fine line in both being a real participant, letting his or her own views be known, and not intimidating others from taking contrary positions. S/he may well have to reformulate what people are saying in order to give their thoughts a form around which agreement can be found. S/he has to listen extraordinarily well to what people are really saying, as well as to what people are **not** saying.

- It is critical that the concurrence be visibly recorded on maps or lists bold enough to be read, so that the session has a product, which later can be referred to. Meeting minutes or notes later distributed are a good idea, but do not substitute for evidence provided during the process. The workshop facilitator may be the appropriate person to do the recording, but if possible, give that task to a second person. That will help lighten the meeting facilitator's load, and also allow a second set of insights to come into play through creative recording.

Red-Dot Voting: alternative(or supplement) to setting priorities by discussion

As an alternative or a supplement to setting priorities by group discussion, another technique called "red-dot voting" has proved successful for identifying community priorities. Strips of 4 or 5 red "sticky dots" are given to each meeting participant. Before leaving the meeting at the end, participants are invited to stick their dots on those actions or items on the wall that they think are the highest priority for attention. Participants can "spread" their dots among several items, or put them all next to one particular item they may feel is imperative (In order for this method to work effectively, it works best when each item or action has been printed in big letters on separate strips of paper by the small groups as described above. These can be then posted on the wall after each group presentation). While small groups are presenting, knowledgeable volunteers and the process leader can be grouping paper strips with priority actions on the wall, according to functional area or topic theme that is emerging. Red dots for each action or item can then be counted, and the items then listed in order of number of dots – community priority. The groups of priority actions on the wall will indicate the major community "themes" or topics emerging as those to be addressed in the overall eco-municipality planning process, and around which the next round of groups – topic groups – should be organized.

Figure 13: Citizens indicating their action priorities in red-dot voting.

10. RECORDING WORKSHOP RESULTS

To "keep the faith" with workshop participants and to make sure that nothing is lost or left out, it is good to transcribe all participant flipchart sheets, and priority items, into a summary document which can then be made available either through hard copy or Web posting for all to see.

I. ORGANIZE OFFICIALS' AND MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEE TRAINING WORKSHOPS

Just as it is vital to have citizens play a creative role in the sustainability planning effort, and to take a proprietary attitude towards its outcomes, it also is important for local officials and municipal staff to be similarly engaged. Their efforts are absolutely essential to success in carrying out the intentions of the planning, and their insights are of enormous value. It is striking how often well-intentioned community-based planning fails to be effective because by inadvertence or, worse, by design, it leaves officials outside of the planning, creating rather than overcoming alienation.

Again, there are many models for how this might be done, with suitability depending upon the particulars of the case and the actors. A technique that has often proven useful is to organize a half-day workshop among appropriate officials and Board members that parallels the Workshop model for citizens described above. Frequently, the actions surfaced from this process closely parallel those produced with citizen groups, and sometimes there are helpful instances where one process spots issues that the other did not. Either way that is a beneficial outcome. Having each Department and agency receive sustainability training and then engage in the ABCD strategic planning process for their Department is a good approach for beginning the integration and implementation of the four sustainability objectives throughout the local government.

J. DEVELOP TOPICAL SUSTAINABILITY SUB-PLANS

1. ORGANIZE TOPIC GROUPS

At this point it almost certainly will be appropriate to form groups organized around the thematic topics which emerge from the first Community Workshop as the ones for near-term action. This next phase is extraordinarily difficult. It is essential that citizens not be asked to act in ignorance. Brainstorming in the first Community Workshop respects that, since it calls upon and builds around people's community experience, attitudes, and values. However, topical studies and proposal development commonly

Figure 14

require technical knowledge which resident participants may well not have. The mission of these topic groups is to develop plans for their particular topic, using the ABCD strategic planning process (described in the next section), that will eventually be incorporated into an overall sustainability plan for the community.

Accordingly, there needs to be careful augmenting of the topics so that the available technical support, whether planning staff or consultants, other agency staff, or volunteering citizens, can adequately cover all topics, which are now to proceed. The role for residents who are not expert in that topical area has to be sensitively designed to join their community understanding and caring about that topic with the technical skills which are needed.

Typically, these topic groups will include some of the people from the first Community Workshop, but there should be no obligation for those people to carry on into this phase. Further, there should be no obligation to find roles on those task forces for all of the brainstorming participants, in the happy event that there is a surplus of willing hands.

It is, however, crucial that the topic groups reflect the diversity of interests around which the initial workshop groups were structured. These topic groups provide a supportive setting for cross-interest dialogue aimed at finding consensus on real questions. To achieve that, the full array of interests needs to be part of the process.

Topic themes emerging from community workshops almost always include many, if not most of the topics that need to be addressed in, say, a comprehensive plan or a

sustainability plan – for example, housing, economic development, natural resource preservation, land use, transportation. It may well be the case, however, that key topics do not emerge from the workshop, but nevertheless need to be addressed in a comprehensive sustainability plan. Dealing with waste is one example; another is food. These important components of community life, often a source of unsustainable practices, do need to be examined through the ABCD strategic analysis. Hence the lead agency or Committee, working with the process leader, should ensure that groups are organized for a comprehensive set of topics.

These topics are almost always what Manfred Max-Neef calls *need satisfiers*. According to Max-Neef, topics such as housing, transportation, energy, etc. are not in themselves human needs, but rather types of *satisfiers* for those needs. Understanding the difference between a fundamental human need and a need satisfier is critical to being able to design actions that truly meet the four sustainability objectives. Fundamental human needs and need satisfiers are discussed in depth in *The Eco-municipality Education Guide*'s Chapter 4.

Experience in the Swedish eco-municipalities and *Open* Planning communities has revealed the following list of topics, or needs satisfiers, to be important ones to address in a sustainability plan:

Housing	Economic development	Natural Resources
Energy	Food	Waste
Land use	Recreation	Cultural Resources
Mobility (Transportation)		Education

Another important topic is public facilities; however, if there is a parallel process going on involving municipal employees, public facilities can be addressed through that process.

The process that has evolved from the experience of the Swedish eco-municipalities has been to involve individuals from all parts of the "cycle" of a given topic area. In the case of food, for example, topic group organization[14] included food producers, i.e., farmers, food consumers, restaurants, and institutions with food facilities, such as universities. In organizing these groups, efforts should be made to get as broad a diversity as possible in terms of enterprise owners, employees, end users, as well as community citizens representing the broader community in which these activities are taking place.

To reiterate, it makes sense to first start the process of identifying topics, or community needs satisfiers, through a community workshop such as that described earlier to identify what topics are particularly important community issues. Starting this way assures there will not be topics important to the community that are left out of the ABCD examination. For example, in one *Open* Planning community, a topic theme that emerged from the first

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[14] In the Robertsfors model and among the Swedish eco-municipalities, these are referred to as "horizontal programs" or "subprogram groups".

community workshop was to develop a Town Center. This community had no existing central gathering or shopping place, and many citizens felt their community and community life to be fragmented because of this. Communication was another priority theme that emerged from one community's first workshop – communication between municipal departments, between the municipal government and institutions of the community, and between the municipal government and community citizens. If a series of planning topics had been imposed without the input from the Community Workshop, these important community priorities might have been lost. After the Community Workshop, topics from the above list or others can be added to those emerging from the Workshop around which groups are to be organized.

Development of municipal department and agency sub-plans can be going on concurrently with the topic group strategic planning process. And in Robertsfors, municipal officials were going through an "ABCD" strategic planning process focusing on the entire municipality concurrently with the topic group ABCD planning process described in the next section.

2. Topic Group Processes

The job of the topic groups is to come up with a sustainability "sub-plan" [15] for their topic area, including any relevant recommended actions that emerged from the Community Workshop. This topic plan will eventually be included in the overall comprehensive sustainability plan for the local government and its larger community. That comprehensive sustainability plan, including all topic group sub-plans and those generated by municipal and public agency employees, is that which should ultimately be officially endorsed and adopted by the top elected officials.

The time that topic groups have to do their work will vary according to the local situation and circumstances. In some *Open* Planning communities, it has been as little as three months. In later-generation Swedish eco-municipalities such as Robertsfors, groups took about a year and a half to develop topic sub-plans. To accomplish a thorough analysis such as that described below, however, it likely will take some months.

3. Applying the ABCD Process

To develop their sub-plans, topic groups can use the four-phase strategic planning process known among the Swedish eco-municipalities as "the Compass" and in The Natural Step terminology as the ABCD process. It is also frequently called the "Back-casting methodology". This planning strategy, described in more detail in the Eco-municipality Education Guide, *The Natural Step for Communities*, and in The Natural Step E-Learning Course, contains the following phases:

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[15] In the Robertsfors process model and among the Swedish eco-municipality processes, these are called "subprograms".

A. **Awareness**: learning the common language of sustainability as provided by the Natural Step system conditions and the four sustainability objectives based upon it;

B. **Baseline Analysis**: scoping out where we are today in terms of the particular topic. What is happening that is unsustainable, using the four sustainability objectives as an analysis tool? And what is happening within the topic area that is already meeting those objectives – i.e., the "good examples"?

C. **Creating the Vision**: where do we want our community/region to be, with regard to this topic, in 20 years? In 10 years? In 5 years? How will this needs satisfier function in our community/region if it met the four sustainability objectives?

D. **Doing the Action Plan:** "Back-casting" from the vision to today, figuring out what steps we need to take to get to where we want to be, along with a timeline for accomplishing this. Then developing indicators, or metrics, to measure progress.

These four phases do not necessarily have to happen in sequence, although they all need to occur at some point. In particular, it may make sense to conduct the "C" phase – creating the vision – before carrying out the baseline analysis, as has been the case with the traditional *Open* Planning process. Defining the vision first enables the baseline analysis work to be targeted and streamlined toward the vision components. Otherwise, baseline analysis can go on and on, eating up time and resources that might better be spent on generating the action plan. Another reason is a psycho-social one – when people have a clear, positive vision of where they are heading, it will be easier from them to face and address the seemingly overwhelming tally of unsustainable activities identified in a baseline analysis or inventory of unsustainable conditions. It is also possible to carry out the "B" and "C" processes concurrently. It is also important to remember that the topic groups as well should be looking for and perhaps helping to initiate "early actions" that are easy to carry out, not that costly, and around which there is broad agreement and support, as they go through the four planning phases of the ABCD process.

In carrying out these phases, it is likely that topic groups may need technical assistance, particularly during the baseline analyses and action plan phases – for example, carrying out a water quality study or energy audits. Topic groups' ability to do this will, of course, depend upon the resources available. If funds do not permit commissioning a technical consultant, there may be professionals within the community or region who might be able to contribute assistance. There may be NGOs (non-governmental organizations) that can help provide guidance and technical support for particular issue analyses such as the community greenhouse gas emissions analysis provided by ICLEI for municipalities undertaking climate protection programs. Public agencies such as U.S. EPA or the U.S. Department of Energy may have particular programs that fund or support particular issue areas such as hazardous substance analysis, energy audits, and programs that fund actions to address these. If no such resources are available to a municipality, topic groups can still carry out these phases, doing the best they can with the resources and knowledge available.

4.ANALYSES WITHIN EACH OF THE ABCD STAGES

Some Swedish eco-municipalities used a three-part analysis that took place within each phase of the ABCD process. These are: a needs analysis, a sustainability analysis, and a process analysis. Topic groups can use these as a guide, employing the questions in the *EE Guide* Workbooks to conduct a methodological process for each phase of the ABCD process – Awareness, Baseline Analysis, Creating a Vision, and Doing an Action Plan to come up with their sub-plans for their particular topic area.

a)Needs Analysis

Using the Max-Neef typology of fundamental human needs described in the *EE Guide*'s Chapter 4, topic groups can examine the deeper human needs that underlie community dynamics. For example, in the Baseline Analysis phase for a topic, or needs satisfier such as housing, what needs are being addressed and which are not being addressed in the community or region? One of Max-Neef's fundamental human needs is participation. Are there groups within the community who are systematically being barred from certain types of housing or housing locations? Another fundamental need is subsistence. Are there individuals and groups within the community who are not able to meet their subsistence needs, lacking food or shelter? In the Creating a Vision stage, a question might be, how can a need satisfier such as housing be designed to meet as many of the fundamental human needs as possible? Or if the vision for housing has already been created that meets the four sustainability objectives, how does that housing vision relate to the fundamental needs, and can the vision be adjusted to better meet them?

b)Sustainability Analysis

This analysis is carried out in three components – ecological sustainability, economic sustainability, and psycho-social sustainability.

> i) *Ecological sustainability analysis:* The ecological sustainability analysis for the topic area, or need satisfier – for example again, housing, can be carried out within the particular ABCD phase using the first three sustainability objectives as an analytic tool. For example, in the Creating a Vision phase, what will housing in our community/region look like with no dependence upon fossil fuels? With no dependence on scarce metals such as lead or cadmium, and minerals? And so on, for Objectives #2 and #3.

> ii) *Economic sustainability analysis:* This addresses the efficiency part of Sustainability Objective #4. During each phase of the ABCD process, topic groups examine their topic, or need satisfier, in terms of the business economic model discussed in Chapter 6: "Economic Sustainability" of the Eco-municipality Education Guide:

Costs (real resources used and how productive they are)
Revenues (social benefits related to satisfying fundamental needs)
Social Efficiency (the balance between these costs and revenues)

iii) Psycho-social sustainability analysis: This analysis examines the given topic, or need satisfier, in terms of three components discussed in the Eco-municipality Education Guide's Chapter 7:
Social Stability
Social Dynamism
Social Wisdom

Social stability has to do with strong common values and a common world view. Social dynamism has to do with the ability and will to change, and the ability to flexibly adapt to the needs of the individual. A sustainable society needs a balance between these two. Social wisdom means community capacity, self-awareness, and emotional and spiritual maturity, understanding the contribution of diversity to community life, and knowledge and understanding about the importance of a just community.

c)Process Analysis

The process analysis for a given topic in each phase of the ABCD process examines such questions as: how can we better involve people? What is a truly democratic and participatory approach to shaping this topic, or need satisfier, within our community? In the Baseline Analysis Phase, for example, the process analysis might ask, what are the conflicts – both open and hidden, within our community? To what degree are our municipal and civic processes democratic and participatory? Are we able to learn from our experiences, both positive and negative?

5.TOPIC GROUP FORMULATION OF SUB-PLANS

Having gone through the four ABCD phases for their topic, using the three analytic processes just described for each, topic groups can synthesize their work into a sub-plan for their particular topic. Hence these sub-plans will include a vision, a baseline analysis of current conditions, an action plan, and proposed measurements or indicators for those actions. Municipal departments and agencies can be doing the same. The task then becomes synthesizing all topic plans and department/agency plans into one overall "umbrella" sustainability plan for the community or region.
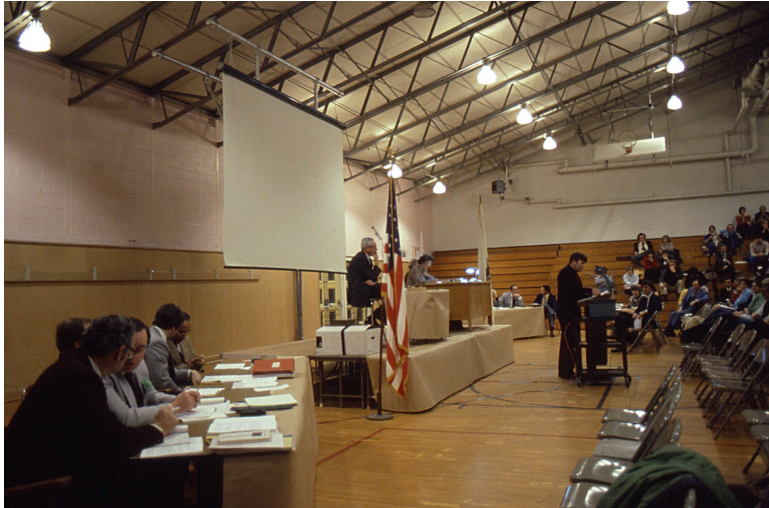
K. HOLD A COMMUNITY FORUM

Figure 15: Topic group spokesperson presents to the community and local officials.

Unavoidably, the topic group work to this point will have involved a relatively small number of those with interests in the community, so it is important to present the results to the broader public for comment and further development. A Community Forum is a good way of accomplishing that. At this meeting, everyone should be urged to come: earlier participants, agency officials, members of various civic organizations, and all the rest of the people who can be induced to attend. Local video coverage is a terrific addition.

Sub-plan proposals at the Forum ideally should be presented by spokespeople designated by each topic group. Hopefully, municipal departments and agencies have been developing sub-plans for their departments concurrently with the topic groups; it would be ideal if these departments and agencies, too, can present their sub-plans at the Community Forum as a way of starting to bring these together into one overall sustainability plan. There should be room in the Forum for lots of discussion.

This Forum functions much like a public hearing. Designated spokespeople from the topic groups are the presenters. The sponsoring agency or Committee, which absolutely must be in attendance, in effect is hearing public comment on the proposals, and at this point moving towards making them their own.

At this event, the lead agency is being called upon to lead. It must decide how to proceed through the next steps of synthesizing all topic sub-plans into an overall sustainability plan, plan writing, concurrent movement on implementing actions, or whatever. The lead agency may prefer that the process leader take the lead on this, either through oral presentation or, more commonly, through a written report. Again, however, it is critical that the reality of authorship by citizens is not obscured at this point, and that if the "product" is prepared by a professional that it be thoughtfully endorsed by those who really generated its content.

L. FULL PLAN DEVELOPMENT

The Community Forum undoubtedly will generate some degree of revisions for incorporation into the overall sustainability plan. It is important, however, to keep true to the major thrust of the Plan and its objectives provided by the early direction and proposals that emerged from the first Community Workshop from participants who represented the broad range of interests in the community. As mentioned, it is time now to bring together municipal and public agency sub-plans with the sub-plans developed by community topic groups into one overall sustainability plan.

It is too seldom recognized that the real product of planning is the development of agreed intentions, not a report. However, it also is possible to err the other way, and to be so intent on the ongoing process that there is inadequate documentation of those agreements. It really is important that the program be pulled together into some form of documentation which can be used by those who will follow, as well as for regional, state, and federal agencies which are understandably obliged to rely on paper, not process.

Again, there are some useful hints.

- Carefully tie each specific proposal to a consistent policy context: no "floating" proposals just because the group likes them.

- Make explanations clear and simple but do not patronize people:

  - Do not expect most people to read much, but anticipate that some will read fully and carefully.

  - Do not expect most people to absorb lots of numbers, but anticipate that some will, with great insight.

  - Know more than you present: have a full additional layer of analysis available for explanation when asked.

  - Vividly describe the outcomes that are wanted: picture pictures, word pictures, even data pictures, but not just dry analysis.

  - Try to make bright line hard edge statements, not mushy ones. Too many planning documents try to avoid dissent by blurring what is said. With a good process, that is not necessary.

  - Exclude "stuffing". Consider placing the policy part, the statement of intentions and implementing actions in one volume and the backup information and technical analysis in a second. A comprehensive sustainability plan short enough to be

printed in full in the local newspaper is a nice goal, typically made possible only by such separation.

M. OFFICIAL PLAN ENDORSEMENT

The lead agency or Committee will of course need to okay the overall plan when it is synthesized. Next, the sustainability plan will need to be presented to and ultimately officially accepted by the local governing body as the official guide for the local government. The local governing body may be a city council, Board of Aldermen, a County Board. Ideally it should also be endorsed or adopted by the Planning Board or Planning Commission, since the Plan will almost certainly contain recommended actions with respect to topics such as land use, housing, and transportation, for example, which fall within the scope of a master plan or comprehensive plan. The authority for developing and approving comprehensive plans in most cases belongs to the local Planning Board or Planning Commission.

The presentation to the local officials of course needs to occur in a public context. It will help underscore to local officials the fact that this plan is a community-based one, if various individuals who helped develop parts of the plan, such as topic group leaders or spokespeople, help present it.

Official endorsement of the Plan, and acceptance that it will become an official guide for the local government, is very important. This will make it clear to all departments, public agencies, and to the citizens, businesses, and institutions of the community that the municipality or local government means business. It is a vital step to begin the institutionalization of the sustainable actions and practices recommended by the Plan into ongoing local government department and agency practices.

N. FOLLOW THROUGH TO ACTION

As implementing action proposals from the Sustainability Plan are developed, they will move into the normal municipal and planning process for adoption. Typically this involves public hearings and, perhaps, adoption by designated agencies. It is critical that the process results in those agencies being "invested" in the proposals and their outcomes. The intention should be that by the time of adoption (usually but not always by vote of town meeting or other legislative body) the agency will have become the sponsor for the proposal, supported by but no longer led by the citizens who helped in its development.

With a planning process such as has been outlined, town meeting or other legislative action on implementing actions, such as zoning changes, often is almost anti-climactic, since by then it will be well known that the proposals enjoy wide support. Sometimes, however, proposals may be brought to a vote more for testing than with assurance of adoption and without investment of organizational ego in passage. In such cases, legislative debate is being used as a vehicle for learning, no less so than when proposals are adopted.

The various hints about process earlier listed apply to the process of implementing Plan action proposals, as well, plus a few additional ones.

- Invest the necessary effort in **creative design** of action proposals that really serve multiple interests, rather than settling for easier proposals which can squeak through with majority approval. Real concurrence comes as much from creative proposal design as it does from a careful process.

- Break big multi-part action proposals into a number of independent but **complementary options**. Acting on them separately can reduce the likelihood of opposition accumulating, avoid excessive complexity of a single proposal, avoid delays because some one or two parts require further study, and preempt the appearance (or reality) of manipulative "bundling" of proposals in a "take it or leave it" package.

- Anticipate and **fast-track** (act in parallel on) the reasons for agency deferral of action on early steps, such as setting hearings: more proposals die of neglect and old age than are defeated.

- **Arrange the sequence of implementing actions** to take advantage of the learning which early actions can provide for later ones. Debate on a specific area rezoning might better reveal local attitude towards housing policy than any number of studies, so scheduling action on that proposal before more sweeping ones would be helpful to the design of the later ones.

- Include in each set of proposed actions some which are **low-risk items**, or "low-hanging fruits" - very likely to achieve success, in order to make as unlikely as possible the destructive consequence of an action "wipeout:" even small success can help maintain program momentum.

- For each action proposal, have a willing and competent individual **citizen or organizational advocate**.

The overall process of developing the sustainability plan, from initial official endorsement of the sustainability objectives, to official adoption of the plan, can be accomplished in about two to five years, depending upon the depth of analysis and planning that takes place. It is important to remember, however, that a multi-year eco-municipality planning process is not just about producing an eventual Plan and resulting Plan document. It is about changing to sustainable practices systematically throughout all sectors of the local government and larger community. From the very beginning, the eco-municipality initiative should have been creating concurrent, visible actions – identifying and bringing into being "low-hanging fruit" projects and initiatives that are relatively easy to implement and which can serve as a visible reminder and assurance to community citizens and others

that concrete change is indeed possible and is really happening. As discussed earlier, these actions can help inform and possibly adjust the planning process underway. Work on concurrent projects can also help to inform and refine the longer-term planning process underway. The challenge is to assure that the concurrent work on discrete projects does not take too much energy, time, and resources from the longer-term sustainability planning initiative.

L.INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND ONGOING CYCLES

- Creating an official sustainability plan for a local government and its larger community through a community-based process is a remarkable accomplishment. Because the "implementers – municipal staff, boards, agencies, businesses, institutions, and citizens have been involved from the onset in its development, the probability of successful implementation over time is high. At the same time, it is important to continue working to assure that the plan's implementing actions are carried out, and that the range of municipal policy and regulatory tools are changed over time to be able to carry out the plan's goals and the four sustainability objectives. The plan should contain an implementation schedule for revising these municipal tools, and also identify what department, agency, or organization is responsible for spearheading the effort. If not, it is helpful, and important to develop such a schedule. Success will critically depend upon the skill with which the plan coordinators work with the implementers on the tasks of initiating specific actions, getting them fully developed, and then moving for their adoption.

It is important to recognize that, while this plan is an official municipality plan, it should also serve as an "umbrella plan" for the businesses and institutions of the larger community who presumably have been involved in its development, particularly in developing the detailed topical sub-plans. Everyone should share the overall vision. Businesses, organizations, and institutions, however, will need to be responsible for implementing their own parts and changes to sustainable practices as outlined in the sustainability plan. The local government, for all practical purposes, does not hold authority over the businesses and institutions of its community in the way it which it holds authority over its departments and agencies. Although, if the participatory process has worked, - meaning businesses and institutions have been involved from the beginning, - the probability of their implementation of plan outcomes should be fairly well assured.

Figure 16

1. MUNICIPAL POLICIES AND REGULATIONS

Figure 17

Here are some of the local policy tools, practices, and regulations that will need to be brought into alignment with the overall sustainability plan and the four sustainability objectives:

- Annual municipal or county budget process
- Capital improvements plan and planning process
- Master Plan, also known as a comprehensive plan, or general plan
- Land use regulations:
    - zoning code, bylaws, or ordinance
    - subdivision regulations
    - site plan review criteria & process
    - special permit review
    - other development review standards
    - earth removal bylaws
- Building codes[16]
- Health codes

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[16] Some local governments have their own building code; other use the state building code. In either event, if efforts have not begun to align a state building code with green building standards, it would be good to begin to do so, working in conjunction with other eco-municipalities and motivated local governments.

- Water and sewer system policies and practices
- Conservation Commission reviews
- Local housing authority policies and practices
- Local redevelopment authority policies and practices
- School budgeting and capital planning process
- School curricula

The process for bringing these policies and tools into alignment with the four sustainability objectives is in its essence a simple one. Each regulation, standard, or policy can be reviewed according to whether and how it furthers each of the four sustainability objectives. Using the image of a tree can help manage deepening complexity of, for example, revising a complex zoning ordinance or building code. If the sustainability objectives can be inserted into the overall purpose of the code – the trunk of the tree – then all the limbs, branches, and leaves of that code – the sets of sub-regulations- can be revised in a systematic approach to come into alignment with that purpose. If time and resources permit a comprehensive overhaul of the entire code at one time, so much the better for bringing about a new code that truly works as a systemic instrument. If this is not possible, then, as long as the sustainability objectives are imbedded in the overall purpose of the code or policy, the sub-regulations – the limbs and branches of that code or policy - can be brought into alignment in phases over time.

As mentioned, there may be opportunities that arise before the sustainability plan is actually completed to integrate sustainability objectives in these important tools and platforms of local government. If so, carpe diem!

2. INDICATORS, MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Developing sustainability indicators after a plan of implementing actions has been identified is the optimal time to do so, since the indicators can be tied to those specific actions and can measure their degree of effectiveness. Indicators can also be derived from the Natural Step system conditions and the sustainability objectives based upon them to measure overall progress toward these objectives.

Often, sustainability indicators have been developed by localities before any action plan or overall planning effort has been undertaken. When this occurs, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to connect any change in the indicator with specific activities and more than likely it cannot be established what is bringing about the change either in a positive or negative direction. It is also important to assign responsibility for monitoring the changes over time that the indicators are supposed to be measuring to a specific department, agency, or organization.

An excellent model for developing indictors based upon the Natural Step system conditions are those of the Sånga Säby Hotel and Conference Center.[17]

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[17] Sånga Säby Kurs & Konferens 1996 Environmental report

Environmental management systems, such as ISO 140001, are another tool for monitoring and managing local government environmental activities over time.[18] It is important to remember, however, that environmental management systems do not offer the overall goal and objectives for success as a sustainable community that are provided by the Natural Step system conditions and related sustainability objectives. An effective approach can be to combine use of these two – the sustainability objectives providing the direction for success, and the environmental management system providing the mechanism for moving toward these.[19]

3. Ongoing education

Figure 18

The process of education about sustainability, why it is important, the conditions for success as provided by the Natural Step system conditions, and the clear direction provided by the four sustainability objectives will need to be ongoing in the local government and the larger community. New municipal employees will be coming in, as will citizens, businesspeople, and institutional staff. Periodic refresher courses and training using the *Eco-municipality Education Guide*, and the Natural Step e-Learning Course, are a good idea. Providing ongoing education can be one of the functions of a community capacity center, described later.

M. REPEAT THE CYCLE.

In a well-designed program, there is the expectation of returning on several occasions to seek the adoption of proposals, among other things in order to take advantage of the learning that comes from experiencing the process and observing responses. Accordingly, regardless of legislative vote outcomes, it presumably will be appropriate to again go through a cycle of (re)considering appropriate topics for action, organizing citizen groups, whether affinity or topical or both, developing concurrence, and preparing proposals. That recursive path will, in time, bring you back to the legislative body, not because of failure the first time, but because that was the design from the outset.

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[18] For an in-depth discussion of the relationship between The Natural Step framework and tools such as EMSs, see *The Natural Step Story* by Karl-Henrik Robèrt, Appendix 3: "The TNS Framework and Tools for Sustainable Development", pp.241-263(New Society Publishers, 2002.

[19] The Natural Step UK office and the Oakland, CA firm Natural Strategies have developed an approach for integrating The Natural Step framework and environmental management systems. See "The Natural Step and ISO 14001: Guidance on the Integration of a Framework for Sustainable Development into Environmental Management Systems," by Edward Rowland and Christopher Sheldon. Go to www.tnsuk.demon.co.uk or www.naturalstrategies.com.

In Sustainable Robertsfors' official sustainability plan, developed between 2001-2006, the plan was structured so that the participants in the detailed sub-plan development can change and revise those sub-plans any time. Then, periodically, the municipal council will review and ok these changes. In this way, the plan functions as a living document that is continually revised and updated as new learning is acquired.

N. SUSTAINABILITY CAPACITY CENTER

It is a good idea to organize and seek resources to support an ongoing center within the community to assist citizens, businesses, and institutions, as well as the local government, to function as an ongoing source of technical assistance in sustainable development and sustainable practices. Such a center can also help to carry on ongoing sustainability education within the community and also assist in developing and maintaining networking relationships with other eco-municipalities on the regional, state, national, and international levels. Ideally, this center would be led by a partnership of municipal, business, institutions, and citizen interests, in keeping with the broad-based community approach employed throughout the sustainability planning process. It could also be housed in a nearby college or university. While the responsibility for changing to sustainable practices and maintaining these over time still rests with the local government and the individual businesses, institutions, and households of the community, an ongoing center can provide the technical and educational support the community may well need over time.

VI.A P P E N D I X : 2-5-YEAR *OPEN* PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABILITY PROCESS

The following outline summarizes what a two-to- five-year *Open P*lanning for Sustainability process might look like to bring about a transformation of a local government to an eco-municipality. This is not to suggest that a municipality and its larger community would become completely sustainable during that time, but rather that the municipality would have a clear, official, and comprehensive blueprint for its policies and practices by that time, with many of the implementing actions begun if not completed. This outline is not intended to be a rigid structure, but rather a guide for seeing how all the components and phases of a municipal and community sustainability plan fit together. Some elements might take longer in some communities than others: others might start phases much earlier if opportunities present themselves. For example, even though the following outline lists institutionalization toward the end of the planning period, if a local government is about to revise its zoning and land use regulations during the first or second year of the sustainability planning initiative, then this is a great opportunity to use the sustainability objectives to bring about a set of zoning regulations that move in those four directions.

The *Open* Planning for Sustainability Process – a Multi-Year Eco-municipality Initiative

Phase I: Getting the Community's Big Picture

- Form steering committee with municipal officials, local leaders, community citizens. If possible, hire a local process leader that reports to this steering committee.

- Major outreach, education and training begins for municipal staff, citizens, sectors in the community. Education includes introduction to the Natural Step framework, science-based reasons, the systems approach, and how the ABCD or "Compass" planning strategy works.

- Develop local process strategy with community citizen involvement, business, institutional and municipal sector involvement.

- Local officials officially endorse/adopt 4 sustainability objectives (APA and/or TNS sustainability objectives) as guiding municipal policy, and agree to begin an eco-municipality initiative.

- First *Open* Planning Community Sustainability Workshop

- Overall Community Sustainability Vision and Planning Agenda

- Form *Open* Planning "Topic Groups" based upon planning agenda emerged from Community Workshop

- Identify local "good examples" and initiate "low-hanging fruit" visible projects.

- Continue to build community and regional support for an ongoing eco-municipality initiative.

Phase 2: Getting the Detailed Picture

- Training & education for municipal staff & community citizens continues.

- Municipal staff/Topic working groups obtain any needed technical support in specific areas of sustainable development (energy, food, waste-as-a-resource, etc.).

- Municipal departments, community topic groups prepare sub-plans using the ABCD process and guided by the APA sustainability objectives or TNS system conditions.

- Community Forum where municipal departments and topic groups present sub-plans publicly, and obtain official municipal endorsement.

- Departments, citizen groups, topical groups implement their sustainable practices sub-plans.

- These working groups develop resource reduction goals and indicators based upon Natural Step system conditions/APA sustainability objectives to measure results.

- All sub-plans – municipal department, topical , and community citizen sub-plans – are gathered and synthesized into one overall municipal and community sustainability plan that is presented at a public community forum for approval. Finally, the plan is officially adopted or endorsed by the top elected officials as guiding municipal policy.

Phase 3: Ongoing Sustainable Actions

- Revise municipal tools (platforms) such as Master Plan, zoning & building codes, capital improvement plan, budgeting, etc.,(if opportunities to do this have not already arisen).

- Establishing ongoing monitoring, (indicator program), evaluation mechanisms, ongoing education measures for existing and incoming municipal staff and citizens.

- Work to set up a public/private community capacity center to provide ongoing education and support to the sustainability initiative.

Ongoing Phases

- Continue ongoing community, business, institutional, municipal department education to integrate use of the sustainability objectives or Natural Step system conditions in everyday life and work activities.

- Continually seek opportunities to integrate sustainability objectives into municipal tools, policies, and platforms.

- Work at regional, national, and international levels to strengthen ties and working relationships with other eco-municipalities, and to provide guidance and assistance to emerging eco-municipalities.

VII.A P P E N D I X – CITY RESOLUTIONS

RESOLUTION # _____

City of Ashland, Wisconsin

Eco-Municipality Designation Resolution

Adoption of Sustainable Community Development Policy

WHEREAS, the City of Ashland has adopted a Comprehensive Plan (2004 – 2024) that calls for "The Making of an Exceptional City", and includes dozens of references to sustainable practices; and

WHEREAS, the adoption of the four systems conditions of the Natural Step can provide a framework that will assist city employees and elected officials in moving in a more sustainable direction; and

WHEREAS, the willingness of the city to move in the direction of becoming an eco-municipality can serve as a model for others and encourage economic development along similar lines in our city and region; and,

WHEREAS, the City of Ashland has a pledge of support through mentorship and consulting from The National Association of Swedish Eco-Municipalities; and

WHEREAS, the following four guidelines were developed by the American Planning Association to help communities implement sustainable practices:
    1. Reduce dependence upon fossil fuels, and extracted underground metals and minerals.
    2. Reduce dependence on chemicals and other manufactured substances that can accumulate in Nature.
    3. Reduce dependence on activities that harm life-sustaining ecosystems**.**
    4. Meet the hierarchy of present and future human needs fairly and efficiently.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that The City of Ashland hereby endorses the principles of sustainable community development described herein, and agrees to apply these principles whenever possible in its planning, policy making, and municipal practices.

Adopted by the City Council of Ashland, Wisconsin this 13th day of September, 2005

_____   _____
            Fred Schnook, Mayor   Date
             _____ _____
_____ _____
            Attorney   Date   City Clerk

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RESOLUTION #05-021

City of Washburn, Wisconsin

Adoption of Sustainable Community Development Policy

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WHEREAS, in the sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth's crust, because human society mines and brings into use substances from below the Earth's surface, that along with their emissions are steadily accumulating at levels far greater than their natural occurrence and cannot break down further; and,

WHEREAS, in the sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing concentrations of substances produced by society, because human society has been manufacturing synthetic substances faster than these materials can be broken down, and,

WHEREAS, in the sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing degradation by physical means, because human activity is breaking down natural systems—land, water, forests, soil, ecosystems—by depletion and destruction faster than these natural systems can renew themselves; and,

WHEREAS, in the sustainable society, human needs are met worldwide, because if people around the world cannot meet basic human needs—air, water, food, shelter, means of livelihood, mobility, equal treatment, equal access, safety, participation in decisions that affect our lives, the right to peaceful enjoyment of life, a connection with nature, and psychological and spiritual connection and meaning— then this inequality will continually undermine the goals identified above; and,

WHEREAS, by endorsing sustainable community development, The City of Washburn is joining an international network of eco-municipalities, and taking the initiative to become one of the first four eco-municipalities in the United States; and,

WHEREAS, the City of Washburn has a pledge of support through mentorship and consulting from The National Association of Swedish Eco-Municipalities;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that The City of Washburn hereby endorses the principles of sustainable community development, as proposed in The Natural Step Program, and agrees to apply these principles in its planning, policy making, and municipal practices.

Adopted by the Common Council for the City of Washburn, Wisconsin this 11th Day of July, 2005.

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Irene Blakely, Mayor

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Philip B. Herr

Philip B. Herr is the principal of Philip B. Herr & Associates, a city and town planning consulting firm with over forty years of experience, based in Newton, MA. He developed the community participatory planning approach first known as "Swamp Yankee Planning", successfully used in over 100 communities in the U.S. and beyond, that is now known as *Open* Planning. He is the author of "The Art of Swamp Yankee Planning", upon which this present manual has been developed. He was an adjunct professor of city planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for over thirty years.

Sarah James

Sarah James is the Co-Director of the Institute for Eco-municipality Education & Assistance (IEMEA) based in Cambridge, MA, and the co-author of *The Natural Step for Communities: How Cities & Towns Can Change to Sustainable Practices* (New Society Publishers, 2004). She also co-authored the American Planning Association's *Planning for Sustainability Policy Guide* adopted in 2000. She has operated a city & town planning consulting practice since 1986, and worked with Philip B. Herr as Herr & James Associates for over fifteen years using the *Open* Planning approach in comprehensive planning for local governments.