

Sustainable Community Development Step 3: Create a Community Vision and Develop a Roadmap¹

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Overview

This document presents information on developing a design to create a sustainable community. The design process, also known as a charrette, is divided into three parts. This document also includes a community planning visioning exercise.

Create a Community Vision and Develop a Roadmap

Truly participative development involves diverse stakeholders with varying perceptions, motivations and values. Crafting a sustainable community must therefore begin with participants asking themselves which values they share and which are central to the community's cultural identity.

A charrette is a collaborative design process that can be used in community visioning to promote dialog, identify problems and needs, share ideas and develop innovative, sustainable solutions. This process often involves a series of public workshops, focus groups, community inventories and project design sessions, used to reach participant consensus

on a plan for the future. Charrettes are often a highly structured and facilitated process. While charrettes can be planned for any length of time, keep in mind the size of the group and the time and staff requirements needed. It may be best to begin a complex sustainability project with at least a 3-day program to encourage a fully collaborative effort.

Charrettes are often completed in three-steps. First, a steering committee determines the primary focus of the charrette, identifies issues and works with charrette facilitators. The second step involves the charrette itself, whereby participants establish a shared community vision. Finally, a post-charrette step consists of the formal documentation of the participants findings and often includes the preparation of a presentation, which is then delivered to all community members.

While the nature of the visioning exercises will vary for each community, it is important to ask people both what they like about their community and what they do not like and why. Ask participants to envision their ideal community, in order to ferret out community values. Additionally, ask stakeholders what legacy they would like to leave their children.

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1. This document is FCS7216-Eng, one of a series of the Family Youth and Community Sciences Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Original publication date September 2003. Reviewed September 2006 and August 2009. Visit the EDIS Web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
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Community Planning Visioning Exercise

During the charrette, a facilitator often asks participants to close their eyes and imagine they are walking through their neighborhood as it should be fifteen years into the future. What do they see? What do the buildings look like? Where do people gather? How do they make decisions? What are they eating? Where are they working? How are they traveling? What is happening on the street? Where is the center of the neighborhood? How does green space and water fit into the picture? What do you see when you walk around after dark? People record their visions in written or pictorial form -- in diagrams, sketches, models, photographic montages, and in written briefs. Sometimes a professional illustrator helps turn mental images into drawings of the city that people can extend and modify.

It helps to be visual in your visioning process. Include graphics and computer models when feasible to allow participants to visualize the community's future potential. For instance, in Chattanooga, Tennessee, visualization tools like impact and land use spatial analysis and GIS are used to assist communities in decision-making and community planning. Statewide networks of cooperative extension personnel often can provide access to these techniques.

Utilize visioning strategies that are culturally and language appropriate to your community. Consider literacy levels, social norms regarding gender, age, race and class, or other factors that may inhibit full participation in visioning exercises. Involve the community's young members in the visioning process, as the economic, social and environmental viability of our communities are dependent on the education, leadership and commitment toward sustainability of our youth. This may require separate gatherings of youth and adults to allow the community's youth to express their interests more freely. The goal of a visioning exercise is not to find the majority opinion, but rather to create a vision that reflects the interests of the diverse groups within the community.

Once a vision has been created, commit a vision statement to paper to formalize the results. A vision statement can serve as a reminder of the projects purpose, helping to keep it on track. Vision statements can be in graphic form as photos, maps or other images, or can consist of a list of ideas. Sustainable Seattle's vision, as reflected in their mission statement, is "to protect and improve our long-term health and vitality by applying sustainability to the links between economic prosperity, environmental vitality and social equity."

Thereafter, an action plan must be developed for realizing that vision. Action plans should specify goals and objectives and set time frames for achieving each. For instance, in Jacksonville, Florida, one community goal is to increase their public high school graduation rate to at least 78% by 2005.

Goals are generally articulated in terms of who will do what for what purpose? Goals must be clearly stated and specify what the result of the project will be. Objectives are measurable and state how it will be determined if goals are achieved. Meaningful objectives state who is involved, what the desired outcomes are, how progress is measured and what the time frame is for the outcome to occur. A goal and objective worksheet can assist you in this process. (See Table 1.)

Financial costs and resource needs should be estimated, issues, concerns and limitations should be identified, and responsibilities should be assigned. Good action plans should be specific, understandable, realistic and agreed upon by all members of the project team.

Table 1. Goals and Objectives Worksheet

<p>Directions: In the space provided, write your goal. Then for each objective write, who is involved; what the desired outcomes are; how progress will be measured and when the outcome will occur. Then put the pieces together into a sentence. Use a new worksheet for each goal.</p>
<p>Goal:</p>
<p>Objective 1: Who: What: How: When: Written Objective:</p>
<p>Objective 2: Who: What: How: When: Written Objective:</p>
<p>Objective 3: Who: What: How: When:</p>

Written Objective: