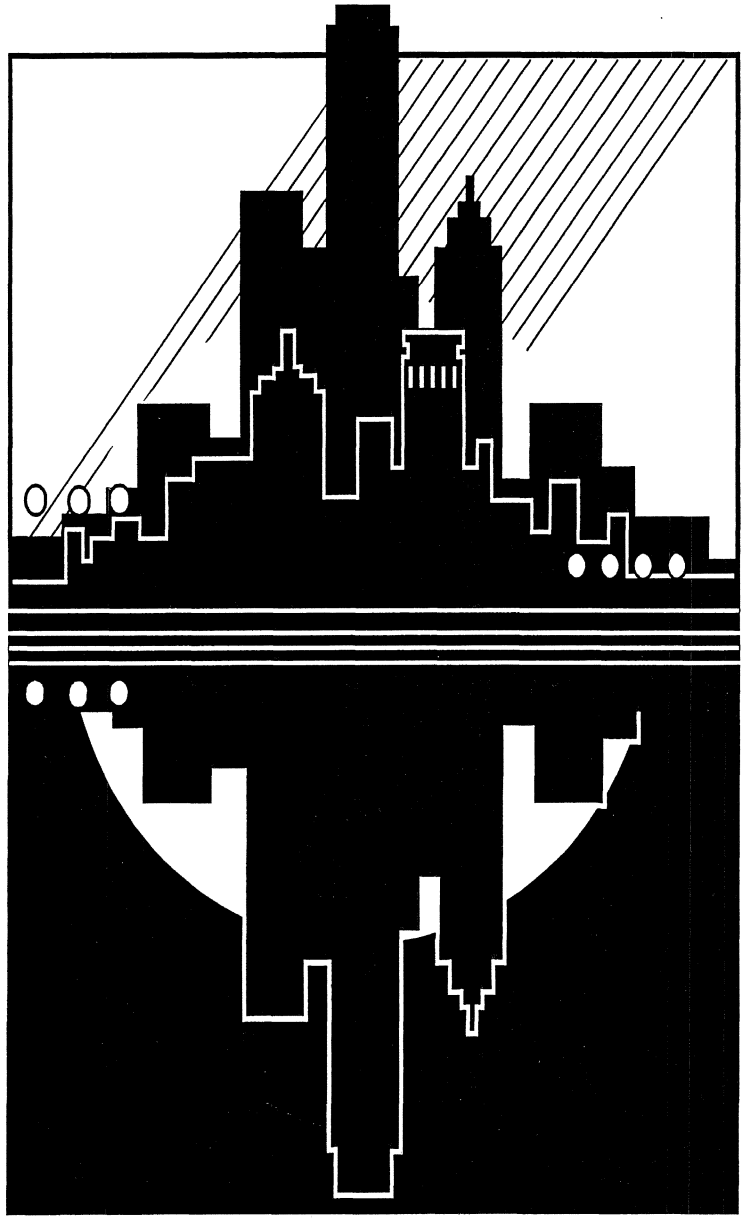

In Pursuit of Livability:
A Strategic Planning Cooperative

A Cooperative Program of:
The U.S. Department of Housing and
Urban Development and
Partners for Livable Communities

in conjunction with the following communities:
Chattanooga, Tennessee
Noblesville, Indiana
Orlando, Florida
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Rochester, New York
Scottsdale, Arizona
and
Somerset County, New Jersey

Contents

Introduction

In Pursuit of Livability: A Strategic Planning Cooperative is an eighteen-month collaborative effort of Partners for Livable Communities and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. This program has been carried out as a joint venture of eight communities: Chattanooga, Tennessee; Noblesville, Indiana; Orlando, Florida; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Rochester, New York; Scottsdale, Arizona; Somerset County, New Jersey; and the Alpine Diamond Region of Europe. These communities were charged with the task of addressing the elements of a model process for community-driven development strategies.

This process took place through a series of workshops attended by three-person delegations from each of the participating communities. These community delegations were diverse and representative cross-sections of the community leadership. Each workshop featured facilitated discussion sessions and a series of presentations by technical consultants that were intended to educate the participants and inform the workshop dialogue. Partners for Livable Communities worked in collaboration with the staff of Governing Magazine to extract form the contributions of the participants and the presenters a holistic process of community change and development applicable in communities of varying size and complexity.

In addition the the participants from each of the communities, many other individuals have made significant contributions to this program. These individuals were asked to participate on the basis of their extensive experience and expertise in the subject areas. They include David Rusk, a nationally renowned author and former mayor of Albuquerque, New Mexico; Gianni Longo, president of Urban Initiatives, Inc., in New York City; John Krauss, Senior Fellow at the Indiana University Center for Public Affairs and the Environment, and former deputy mayor of Indianapolis, Indiana; Dr. Vaughn Grisham of the University of Mississippi; James Wheeler of the Hudson Institute; Dr. Beverly Flynn, Head of the World Health Organization Collaborating Center in Healthy Cities, Indiana University School of Nursing; and Jamie Palmer and Drew Klacik of the Center of Urban Policy and the Environment at Indiana University. Special recognition should also be given to the staff of Governing

Magazine for their collaboration and assistance on this initiative. Specifically, Peter Harkness, Editor and Publisher; Elder Witt, Deputy Publisher; and writers Jonathan Walters and Rob Gurwitt are to be recognized for their contributions to this process.

In Pursuit of Livability

In today's era of reduced federal involvement and assistance, it is imperative that we cultivate successful local solutions to local problems. This in turn requires that communities have the skills and tools with which to solve their problems. Partners for Livable Communities and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development set out in 1995 to develop a model process for community-driven development strategies. From the beginning it was intended that the model be a generic process, one that could be adapted to serve the needs of communities of varying size and complexity.

In collaboration with eight urban regions, Partners has recently concluded an eighteen-month program to develop a model process made up of five distinct components:

- broad based public participation, community visioning, and goal setting
- accountability though the use of benchmarks and indicators
- a consolidated planning framework
- aggregation for regional improvement strategies
- an inclusive stewardship body.

A group of 45 community leaders from eight participating communities was then invited to take part in a series of workshops to discuss each of the five components, study trends related to each component, and identify the manner in which these components can be integrated into a holistic process.

The participating communities were:

- Chattanooga, Tennessee
- Noblesville, Indiana
- Orlando, Florida
- Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
- Rochester, New York
- Scottsdale, Arizona
- Somerset County, New Jersey
- Alpine Diamond, Europe

The three workshops were held in communities chosen for their direct experience with some aspect of the workshop subject. Workshop I, held in Chattanooga, Tennessee, where a strong stewardship organization has overseen an effective program leading to a community vision, concentrated on public participation, visioning, and stewardship bodies. Workshop II, held in Noblesville, Indiana, rare among cities of any size for its ground-breaking benchmarking program, concentrated on benchmarking and indicators. Workshop III, held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where suburban development has not isolated the center

Five Steps to Comprehensive Community Planning

- *Step One: Organizing the Community for Action*
- *Step Two: Developing a Community Vision through Public Participation*
- *Step Three: Setting Community Benchmarks and Indicators*
- *Step Four: Taking Action*
- *Step Five: Establishing a Stewardship Body*

city, concentrated on regionalism and the importance of moving from plans to action.

The participants were from communities of different sizes, with different histories and experiences, and as individuals, they represented a variety of points of view. And while they disagreed on specifics from time to time, they did agree on general principles:

- Successful community futures don't come out of nowhere; the ground has to be prepared.
- A community needs a vision of its future, but that vision needs to be developed with broad public participation.
- Regional cooperation is one significant leg of a community's livability strategy. (Although participant did not agree on any clear definition of "region.")
- There is no hard and fast line separating the visioning process from action to implement the goals it produces.
- The force that drives the process early on is often not the one that pushes it from vision to action.

From those general principles, it was possible to distill five pivotal steps through which a community can undertake a comprehensive community planning process.:

Step One: Organizing the Community for Action A citizen-driven environment in which change can happend must be created.

Step Two: Developing a Community Vision through Public Participation "A vision talks about the kind of place we want to be, not where we are." "The people who get shaken and moved need to be around the people who move and shake."

Step Three: Setting Community Benchmarks and Indicators "Develop good measurements that reflect [your] standards and then measure your progress."

Step Four: Taking Action "The victory isn't coming up with 1,400 action steps but implementing and tracking them."

Step Five: Establishing a Stewardship Body. "It's not enough to be out there in the community with a good idea. You have to have a support system and a network that ties you in to services and contacts and fundraising."

As the reporting of the workshops shows, there was considerable give and take on the specifics of all five of these steps. Some of the steps carry commonalities across all communities. Generally though no two communities are the same, these steps leave the individual community considerable leeway to tailor the process to fit local needs. They provide a process that can be replicated in any community and a framework in which any community can proceed.

About This Report

To understand the workshops, it helps to understand the participating communities and some of the thinking behind the program. That is because the links connecting the five components of community strategic planning -

- broad based public participation, community visioning, and goal setting;
- accountability through the use of benchmarks and indicators;
- a consolidated planning framework;
- aggregation for regional improvement strategies;
- and a nonpolitical stewardship body -

permeated not only the discussions but the communities in which they were held and the experience of the participants themselves.

This report relies in large part on reporting from the workshops, but where necessary it draws on background materials on the communities and the individual initiatives of the participants, as well as on background material given the participants as part of the program.

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Step One: Organizing the Community For Action

Any community that wants to have a hand in its own improvement, its own future, must organize for action.

Organizing a community for action follows a course that can be easily marked.

Community leaders must be identified.

Partnerships must be built - between private and public bodies, between for-profit and nonprofit operations, between government and the community, and between the people and the community.

Community leadership must be depersonalized and institutionalized to make sure that it endures.

A climate for leadership must be fostered to make sure that community leadership is replenished and rewarded.

Out of the community and its leaders a team must be forged. Shared experiences - study trips, meetings, even experiences as simple as dinner - help bring the team together. Useful work helps make the team feel worthwhile.

And out of the effort to organize the community must come a change agent - an entity that can maintain the community organization, sustain the community leadership, and carry out the activities involved in generating public participation and developing a community vision.

Organizing for Action

Leadership needs to be:

- *Depersonalized*
- *Institutionalized*
- *Cultivated*

Leadership bodies need:

- *Shared experiences*
- *Useful work*
- *A regional mind set*

Throughout the process of organizing for action, it is important to think regionally. Many of the factors that contribute to community livability are heavily influenced by the actions or inaction of a number of jurisdictions within a region. A vision that stops at the city line is only partially successful.

Comments from the Workshops

Successful visions don't come out of nowhere. The ground has to be prepared.

How that's done, though, is more than anything else a function of the idiosyncrasies of each community. Before Chattanooga's Vision 2000 ever began, for instance, there were many disparate and often unfocused community based efforts going on - from plans to develop a particular bend of the riverfront to efforts to clean up the city's air to ad hoc groups of neighbors worried about local pollution problems.

The energy to change the city, in other words, already existed, but in scattered form. It took the efforts of the Lyndhurst Foundation, Councilwoman Mai Bell Hurley, and a core of other citizens to get the visioning process on track. The result, said the Rev. Paul McDaniel, chairman of the Hamilton County Commission, was the creation of an "environment and atmosphere where ideas could come forth and emerge and have a sense of hope. People came up with ideas and then the official leadership came up with the resources."

Pittsburgh may have to travel a different route, commented Vivian Loftness, who heads the architecture department at Carnegie-Mellon University. "It may be that government is the best instrument to enact change, because we have a very dispirited industry that is fighting for its life, and a very fragmented community, " she said. "I think each city has to decide who makes the first move."

Indeed, Rochester's effort has been organized by local government, not by an ad hoc group of citizens. With its network of strong neighborhood associations, it has far more of a community structure in place than Chattanooga did at the start. Even so, several changes had to take place before the comprehensive planning process truly got under way. Most important, the nature of civic participation had to shift, in large part at the insistence of Tom Argust, the city's community development director.

In essence, what Argust has done is urge that the planning process be rooted not just in the neighborhood organizations, but in neighborhood residents. "What we're trying to do is community organization at large,"

he said. "We're asking whether we can push already well-established community organizations to get more people involved with that organization."

And just as important, he has pushed both city staff and elected officials to give weight to what residents have to say, and not simply to listen to what nonprofit or paid neighborhood staff want them to hear. "We take much more seriously these days the opinions of someone who lives on Aberdeen Street," he says, "than those of someone who is paid by a neighborhood organization or a social service agency who lives in the suburbs and comes in and says, 'I represent the people who live on Aberdeen Street."'

"Tom has moved the local community away from having 'speak outs,'" Wade Norwood, a Rochester city council member, explained at one point, "away from having a communication process that is dominated by advocates, away from having us as elected officials spending our time engaged with the nonprofit bureaucracy - he's really restoring us to talking with people and residents. Because of the fact that we as a community have embraced this change in the manner in which we talk to each other, our visioning process has been more successful."

Thinking Regionally

There is much that happens in any jurisdiction that is beyond its control.

"I'm more and more convinced that in order to compete globally, we have to try to reduce competition locally," said Tom Argust. "We need an economic infrastructure where everyone shares in regional wealth."

"What you want to do, or what kind of community you want to be, involves lots of regional issues, and forces beyond your control," added Ann Coulter, Executive Director of the Chattanooga-Hamiolton County Planning Commission. "We haven't always done a good job of bringing in those outside entities that really have to buy in to achieve our goals."

Despite its great potential, going the regional route is a strategy fraught with unlimited complications and manifold potential conflicts. As Somerset County Chamber of Commerce chairman James B. Ventantonio described it, it is somewhat akin to wrestling a "multi-headed hydra." But it is also absolutely critical to the whole concept of creating healthy and sustainable communities on a broad basis.

One of the central facts governing urban life these days is that a community's health is inextricably bound up with events that transpire beyond its borders. Regional cooperation is one significant leg of a community's livability strategy.

Regional cooperation is one significant leg of a community's livability strategy.

The Pittsburgh Story

Two things strike a first-time visitor to downtown Pittsburgh. The first is that the city is remarkably intact. From its meticulously restored gem of a concert hall, Heinz Hall, to the elegant art deco and classical revival office buildings that date from its heyday as a banking and business power house, to the towering corporate headquarters that give its skyline a sort of airy density, downtown Pittsburgh has clearly remained a "central business district" in far more than name alone.

The second, not unrelated discovery is that even on a Saturday afternoon downtown is bustling. Some of its stores and restaurants may be a bit down at the heels, and shoppers are certainly a more varied lot than you would find at your typical suburban boutique mall, but there is none of the post-apocalyptic cheerlessness that the center of many old, industrial cities take on after weekday business hours. Downtown life in Pittsburgh retains an energy that many cities would envy.

There are some obvious explanations for this vitality, ranging from the ongoing activities of Pittsburgh's large corporate community to the willingness of the city's monied families to support its cultural life. But what may be the most important ingredient is something that hasn't happened. No beltway rings the city.

These highways, a dozen or so miles beyond the corporate limits of many cities, both enable drivers to avoid the city and, not coincidentally, foster suburban development. By contrast, the highways outside Pittsburgh lead to the city; despite the rapid growth of several counties that abut Allegheny County, Pittsburgh has remained the region's focus.

So while the city has struggled with all the problems that aging cities face, it has at least one significant advantage. So far, it has managed to moderate the wholesale flight of money and jobs that suburban highway building has encouraged elsewhere.

Business leaders in the Pittsburgh area, acting through the Allegheny Conference, have over the last few years mounted a concerted push-along with some local officials-to make regionalism a part of the common political parlance of the area. "When I first moved here about eight years ago," said Eloise Hirsh, Pittsburgh's director of city planning, "talking about regionalism and consolidated government and so forth was something that was immediately met with, 'Impossible! It'll never happen.' But eight years later it is starting to be part of the coin of the realm. That's in large part due to the efforts that have been made by the Allegheny Conference, the current mayor of Pittsburgh, and the former county government."

Perhaps the most significant common endeavor in Pittsburgh, says Eloise Hirsh, is its Cultural Trust. It is, she said, evidence of a "regional commitment to maintain a civic life while the economic life is disintegrating." As the region went through wrenching economic dislocation, with the decline of Big Steel and wholesale restructuring of its corporate community, Hirsh said, "one of the most important things this community did was to make a major commitment to maintaining and strengthening its cultural life, both in terms of the institutions that we have and their being in the physical, central place of downtown."

Though the Trust's purpose is to guard the financial health of Pittsburgh's symphony, ballet, museums and other institutions, it has taken on more far-reaching significance as well. Because its board includes representatives of some of the region's wealthiest families, it is considered one of the Pittsburgh area's more prestigious board memberships. Which, in turn, means that "the people who live in wealthy suburbs had something in common with the destiny and health of the city, because all these facilities are downtown," said Hirsh. "It is a really vital piece of what makes our community sustainable, in the sense that it has a full, rich civic life that makes people want to be here."

Moreover, the location of the region's premier cultural facilities downtown means that even suburbanites view them as crucial reasons to rebuild downtown housing for artists and others who want to live nearby. Indeed, the Trust will be providing gap financing for housing being developed on the edge of downtown. And that interest on the part of board members in the health of downtown cultural institutions, Hirsh suggests, has given Pittsburgh's mayor an opening to argue that they ought also to be paying attention so tome of the deteriorating neighborhoods that abut the city's central business district. "There is a very high general awareness of how important [culture] is to the economic health of the city," she said. "Culture and the arts are an economic force."

It is important, at the beginning, to note that participants did not agree on any clear definition of "region." They did agree with Somerset County Planning Board member Bernard Navatto that a region is rarely defined by formal political jurisdictions. "Problems go back and forth across boundaries," he said. "When it comes to creating problems or to solving them, the boundaries we have created don't exist." Indeed, added Ann Coulter, the planning director in Hamilton County, Tennessee, "Regionalism can be thought of as a creative way to deal with the limitations of political boundaries. Political entities are artificial boundaries that make regionalism important."

Given examples ranging from the centuries-old economic and historic ties that create the "Alpine Diamond" in France, Switzerland and Italy, to the more prosaic need for coordination that has driven towns in Somerset County, New Jersey to cooperate with one another, participants suggested that "region" has a floating definition that depends, in essence, on the problems to be solved.

It is, said Scottsdale architect Vern Swaback, "a constructed, problem-solving, opportunity seeking" device created by circumstance. "When we're somewhat isolated and unaware of or unaffected by other areas," he explained, "then we can define regionalism to be the smallest thing we want it to be. When we are forced into global competition or even state competition, we then have to redefine ourselves in terms that are problem-solving opportunities." Given the sense, then, that a region is what you make it, the discussion revolved around the circumstances that make a regional approach appropriate, and the necessary steps in accomplishing one.

Montgomery County, Maryland, tackled one of the knottiest issues that communities face-the tendency for housing to be segregated by class. In 1973, the county approved a policy requiring that new housing developments of 50 or more units include at least 10 percent affordable units and another 5 percent available for the public housing authority to buy. The result: public and affordable housing units are scattered throughout the county. Poor residents, in other words, are not concentrated in any one community-and families of moderate means have not been priced out of one of the country' s wealthiest counties. Indeed, almost one-fifth of the county's schoolchildren come from low- and moderate-income families.

These examples reinforce the idea that for communities to prosper, they must act collectively to ensure that they and their neighbors remain healthy - and that, as Rochester's Wade Norwood put it, "we're not leaving anyone behind." Central cities, Rusk insisted, must find ways to reach out to surrounding communities, where the fastest growth and the highest levels of private investment tend to be taking place. "This

cannot work on the basis of policies solely carried out by the core community," he said. "The core central city just isn't where it's happening any more."

Forging A Region

Forging a sense of regional identity can be immensely difficult. Most communities are unaccustomed to thinking in those terms. Many - particularly in the case of those fortunate suburbs to which developers have gravitated - believe they are better off remaining apart. As Vern Swaback noted, "It's somewhat difficult to get people to feel the flow of juice for a theoretically large area. It's much easier to appeal to something that's a little more parochial, be it a neighborhood or a city."

Regionalism and Urban Survival

Leading that discussion was David Rusk, the former mayor of Albuquerque, New Mexico, and in recent years a leading apostle of regionalism. His close study of racial concentration and urban sprawl in the last 50 years concludes that older central cities with fixed borders, unable to annex wealthier suburban territory, have suffered far more dislocation than those "elastic" cities that have been able to grow.

The chief culprit, he argues, is sprawl - the ability of people with the means to do so, most of them white, leave behind problem schools, unsafe neighborhoods, ailing business and retail districts and all the other problems of distressed cities. Overall, Rusk said, the suburbs surrounding inelastic cities are wealthier, whiter and in better economic shape than the city, and the greater the disparity, the less likely the city is to recover.

The answer, Rusk suggested, lies in finding ways of sharing the city's burden of housing the poor or contributing economic help. He outlined the approach of three different metropolitan areas around the country:

- the effort to smooth out fiscal disparities between slower-growing cities and towns and fast growing suburbs in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area;
- Portland, Oregon's effort to manage regional growth to concentrate it in and near the city;
- and the "inclusionary zoning" laws employed by Montgomery County, Maryland, to ensure that decent, unsegregated housing is available county-wide for low- and moderate-income residents.

The Twin Cities plan, which is now a little over two decades old, covers 187 cities and towns in a seven-county area. It allocates 40 percent of the increase in commercial and industrial property tax valuation to a regional pool, assuring that the good fortune of one particular jurisdiction is shared with all the others. As Rusk put it, "Every one of the local communities in the

region gets a piece of the Mall of America." The result: the 47 fastest-growing communities-most of them clustered around the beltway to the west and south of Minneapolis-have helped keep intact the central cities, blue collar suburbs and rural townships that might otherwise have seen their tax revenues evaporate.

Even so, there are plenty of examples of places where a regional mindset has begun to take hold. The Denver area, for example, has created a scientific and cultural facilities district to fund such amenities, and built its new baseball stadium, Coors Field, by creating a special district that takes in several counties in the metropolitan area. So, too, Cleveland was able to build Jacobs Field after Cuyahoga County residents passed a tax on alcohol and cigarettes. In Allegheny County, Three Rivers Stadium and Pittsburgh's parks, museums, zoo and symphony all were able to benefit from an increase in the county's sales tax after city and county officials and business leaders, in an unprecedented united front, lobbied the state legislature to allow it.

These might all seem small steps, but as one participant commented, they all "help begin to establish the sense of community that is an essential part of any sort of regional structure." In fact, another participant suggested, even something as mundane as investing in infrastructure can help create that sense. "There may be a major airport or rail system that is vital to the economy and that needs regional investment in order to expand and improve it. Or there may be different forms of regional service agreements-fire, police or whatever. All of those things begin to break down some of the little barriers and force people to think more in terms of a regional perspective," he said.

Still, participants agreed that the most difficult issues on which to achieve regional cooperation are also the most crucial to the overall health of metropolitan areas and the renewed vigor of central cities-avoiding sprawl, spreading low- and moderate-income housing throughout a region, sharing taxes, consolidating government services, steering job development to cities as well as suburbs, and deconcentrating race and poverty.

Cities will live or die on this last issue in particular, argued Rochester's Tom Argust. "This concentration of poverty by race, neighborhood and jurisdiction is not just the result of natural or free-market forces," he argued at one point, "but very much the product of public policy reinforcing private prejudices. We have some consolidation of services with the county. We have some tax-revenue sharing. But it doesn't ultimately mean a hill of beans if we cannot deal with the issue of poverty and race and the concentration of such in our American communities."

In the end, suggested Partners president Robert McNulty, regionalism is both a tool and a state of mind. It is a tool, he said, "to

Regionalism is both a tool and a state of mind

accumulate resources, political or economic, to solve a problem that you can't solve in your community. If your community happens to be in the center of an urban area that doesn't have a lot of resources, then regionalism is a way to create wealth or to create the political will to solve a problem that can't be solved within that unit. If we can solve it in our neighborhood, we don't need to take it to a regional agenda."

At the same time, though, in order for regional thinking to have a chance of flourishing, especially if it is to be applied to such tangled issues as where people of different races and classes will live, work and go to school, it needs to become a natural part of how residents think about resolving problems.

Sometimes, people in a region do simply agree that collective action is crucial to their future. The Portland area in particular, noted David Rusk, is a region "where people have not turned their back on the notion that individual goals in terms of quality of life must often be achieved through collective action." Yet there was general agreement that Portland is far more the exception than the rule. The challenge elsewhere is to find ways of making regionalism a habit of mind.

The Need for Leadership

To some extent, the coercion of outside forces-federal clean air laws, for instance, or some larger economic crisis-can sometimes lead to greater regional awareness. But in the end, most participants agreed. the leadership of a single person or a few committed individuals is crucial. "The region is formed based on the power of persuasion," said Noblesville, Indiana activist Jim Bray - regionalism, in other words, must often start in the minds of a few, who take responsibility for spreading it as an attractive idea. That is, said Michel Rivoire of Lyons, France, how the Alpine Diamond-the French, Swiss and Italian collective bounded by Lyon Geneva and Turin-had its genesis: in the "extraordinary idea" that he and Robert McNulty hatched together.

Closer to home, business leaders in the Pittsburgh area, acting through the Allegheny Conference, have over the last few years mounted a concerted push-along with some local officials to make regionalism part of the common political parlance of the area. "When I first moved here about eight years ago," said Eloise Hirsh, "talking about regionalism and consolidated government and so forth was something that was immediately met with, 'Impossible! It'll never happen!' But eight years later it is starting to be part of the coin of the realm. That's in large part due

to the efforts that have been made by the Allegheny Conference, the current mayor of Pittsburgh and the former county government."

Similarly, Rusk noted, in 1995 the Minnesota Legislature added the taxes on residential property worth over $200,000 to the shared regional pool, a move that many had thought politically impossible, given the strength of suburban lawmakers. It did so because Minneapolis Democrat Myron Orfield was able to show other legislators that the vast bulk of all the homes in the region worth more than $200,000 are located in districts that hold just a quarter of the area's voters. "In effect," Rusk said, "three-quarters of the voters were in districts that would be net recipients. So [Orfield] was able to put together a coalition that crossed party lines." Even so, the measure was vetoed by the governor, himself a suburban Republican.

Scottsdale city manager Dick Bowers also suggested that on any given issue, there is a "neutral moment" that provides the political space for a shift toward regionalism. "It's a time in which there's nothing dynamically occurring," he said, "and it precedes an obvious time when something will occur - when the freeway's there. It's saying that while that freeway's coming, we have a time to talk about collaboration and revenue sharing. But once the freeway is there, that time is gone."

Step Two: Developing a Community Vision Through Public Participation

Visioning is: a process by which a community envisions the future it wants, and plans how to achieve it. Put another way, visioning is a community strategic planning effort in which citizens and leaders work together to identify a series of shared goals, encompassing all aspects of community life.

Five Guiding Principles of Visioning

It must be inclusive. A vision must be inclusive. It must seek out and involve all members of a community, including those groups that exist at the edges of the civic dialogue, isolated and disenfranchised. Inclusiveness creates ownership of the goals and the vision. Ownership, in turn, translates into support for the implementation of projects and initiatives, continuity over time, consistency in the decision-making process, and a strong sense of community identity.

It must have a flagship idea. A vision must have a flagship idea, an idea that bridges all the key issues, that can be a cornerstone for a campaign, that can generate a succinct statement about community direction, that can establish a focal point for initial civic cooperation.

More than a decade ago, Chattanooga determined that it wanted to be "the best mid-size town in America." That was an idea that everybody could wrap their arms around. It was understandable and achievable, and it was broad enough to appeal to the various factions and agendas within the community. Communities can expend a tremendous amount of energy in identifying resources, finding money to support their on-going efforts, and setting doable goals, but without a flagship idea to provide the unifying "glue," they can lose momentum or fragment.

A Visioning Process

- *begins with a handful of citizens dedicated to improving the life of the community*
- *includes the powerful and the ordinary*
- *has legitimacy in the eyes of the community*
- *focuses on the long term*
- *remains open to ideas*
- *creates room for energized citizens to enlist in making their community a better place to live*
- *creates more energy than it consumes*
- *produces more action than talk.*

Each of these communities has gone about its efforts in different fashion. Indeed, "sometimes people pick up those visions without going through the whole exercise," notes Mayor Glenda Hood of Orlando. "Every speech I give I always say that I want Orlando to be "a place we call home." People have picked that up and are using it."

It must be comprehensive. A vision must deal with all areas of concern to residents-economic development, job creation, the environment, recreation, education, social life, etc. An open and comprehensive vision will tap the knowledge and good will of residents, provide a complete picture of the needs and aspirations of a community, and link issues across traditional, professional, and institutional boundaries.

It must be community-driven. It must be implemented and managed by citizens who reflect the economic, social, and racial makeup of the community. The leadership of the vision must include, among others, established private and public sector leaders, residents, and professionals.

It must address implementation. A vision must lead seamlessly into an implementation phase. The participation and involvement of community leadership must be harnessed to move beyond defining a generic plan to implementing a concrete strategy. Implementation must be driven by a system that ensures accountability and sustainability.

Designing the Process

A vision must be carefully designed in all its aspects. There are four specific areas that need to be addressed:

- Outreach, to ensure broad involvement
- Marketing, to create a general awareness of the program's goals
- Logistics, to attend to the specific needs of meetings
- Meeting design, to ensure that the meetings are safe, structured, accessible, consistent, enjoyable, and effective.

Comments from the Workshops

In the end, what visioning is, explained Gianni Longo, the consultant who worked with Chattanooga on the process, is the process of identifying a community's goals. "Are they all the goals a community can aspire to?" he asked. "No. They are the ones the community can share, the goals that many people can see themselves working together to reach."

What all the communities shared was a conviction that they should be as inclusive as possible, and a dedication to taking the trouble - what Gianni Longo called "an almost door-to-door effort" - to involve a broad cross-section of their community in this process. "In the more democratic world we live in today, the power broker model won't work and total neighborhood involvement won't work," said John Krauss, former executive director of the Greater Indianapolis Progress Committee. "It has to be a balance - the people who get shaken and moved need to be around the people who move and shake."

Encouraging Participation

Yet what emerged from the first day's discussion was a sense that the mechanics of inclusion - when and where to schedule meetings, what sort of flyers or newspaper inserts to prepare, how to organize the outreach effort - were less compelling to participants than the fundamental challenge of igniting residents' desire to participate.

There was clear concern with finding ways to break through what Gianni Longo called the "privatization, isolation, passivity and civic disengagement" that mark this era. Too many of our citizens, he commented, "are relinquishing their responsibilities of citizenship and turning into frustrated, unhappy, critical and disengaged taxpayers. We no longer even call them citizens any more; we call them taxpayers."

This is not a problem only for cities like Pittsburgh and Rochester, with large populations of residents - usually poor and often African American - who have long felt excluded from the civic process. "For those of us who have tried to get people involved, we know that there are lots of populations that are difficult to reach and keep involved," said Eleanor Cooper at one point. When Chattanooga began its visioning process, she went on to explain, its activists discovered a large and talented pool of middle class managers who had moved to town to work in its burgeoning service industries. They had had no part in running the city, and were disconnected

Nobody tries to do anything any more without involving a lot of people.

The Chattanooga Story

In 1970, the secretary of what was then the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare cited Chattanooga as the most polluted city in the country. Its decaying industrial base, down-at-the-heels appearance, and apparent lack of cultural spark led one writer at the time to label it "a dirty, depressing Nowheresville." Its residents were, for the most part, passive bystanders whenever decisions about the community's life were being made. Chattanooga was, by any reckoning, a city in decline.

That is difficult to imagine these days. The banks of the Tennessee River, once lined with vacant factories and warehouses and all but irrelevant to the life of the city, are now increasingly the community's focal point. The Tennessee Aquarium, the nearby Children's Discovery Museum, revitalized neighborhoods on the river bluffs, plans for new housing and commercial spaces where downtown meets the riverfront - all are reorienting and invigorating the city's heart.

Less obvious to visitors, but no less crucial to the city's budding renaissance, a host of endeavors - from housing for low-income families to a citizen-sponsored family violence shelter to the public design center where anyone who's curious can see the city's physical future taking shape - have become part of the community's life. And perhaps most important of all, suffusing Chattanooga these days is genuine interest in its communal welfare, a concern "for more than just one's own little piece of earth," as Ann Coulter, director of the regional planning commission, puts it.

All of this - the aquarium, the low-income housing, the broadened sense of collective responsibility - can be traced to the visioning process that Chattanooga undertook beginning in 1984. That enterprise, labeled "Vision 2000," served as a sort of collective gathering of wits, a chance for the city's residents - its political, business and religious leaders, its architects and educators, its neighborhood activists and its ordinary citizens - to step back from the city's daily life and talk about what it might become. It had its genesis in informal conversations among a few dozen residents concerned about the direction the city was taking, but it became a citywide endeavor that ultimately brought 1,700 Chattanoogans together over five months to say, in the concrete terms of 40 goals, where the community ought to put its collective energies.

The single most important step Chattanooga and its citizens took in the wake of its visioning effort, Ann Coulter maintains, was to start with an analysis of their strengths and assets. So it wasn't the city's development of its riverfront, for example, or its decision to merge its school system with the county's, she insisted, but its ability to build from a simple recognition of where its strengths lay that allowed it to translate the visioning process into concrete improvements.

In the wake of the visioning effort, Coulter said, residents concluded that Chattanooga's major asset was the physical beauty of its surroundings. That, in turn, drew their attention to the Tennessee River and its importance in the city's life. "It was described as the front porch of our community," she reported, "and here we had neglected it, we had polluted it, we had cut off our access to it. By focusing on that asset as a strength, other things flowed from it: the riverwalk, the aquarium, the renewal of downtown."

And that practice in focusing on the city's strong points, Coulter suggests, changed the way citizens thought about their community. "We began to see opportunities where before we had seen only problems," she said. "Had we not begun to make that kind of a mind change in our approach to civic life, then something as courageous as deciding to merge the school systems probably wouldn't have happened. Because the only thing the community really brought into that debate was that in merging systems, we had an opportunity to totally rethink public education county-wide, to throw out the rule books and really think about what education means and what it can do for the community."

from the process until Vision 2000 organizers brought them in.

Even Scottsdale, with its relatively affluent population, faced a problem. "It is hard to get an affluent person to show up," said Vern Swaback, an architect in the city who acted, essentially, as the convener of its visioning project. "This person has ordered their priorities in such a way that they don't need the community any more than the disenfranchised person thinks the community needs him or her." Rochester faces its own variation on that problem as it works on its comprehensive plan: While its neighborhood associations have guaranteed plenty of input from ordinary citizens, the city's corporate and philanthropic movers and shakers have yet to become involved in the process. Without them, noted Community Development Director Tom Argust, the process won't get far. "While you have to have the bottom up," he said at one point, "you also have to have the top down at the same time." It may well be that simply learning to recognize who's missing from the table is half the battle of getting them there. Over the course of the discussion, though, several other elements of a successful participatory process emerged as well. Prime among them was the notion that it must widely be seen as legitimate, serving neither a particular interest group nor a set of individuals, but instead providing a neutral forum in which community interests can be expressed.

One key step to achieving that legitimacy is the creation of some sort of convening group - call it steering committee, sponsoring body or whatever - with an ability to reach into a community's various constituencies. It may be put together by citizens who spark the whole thing but are, themselves, not particularly representative of the community as a whole, but in the end it has to have broad credibility, both with ordinary citizens and with those in power.

What one might want in such a group can vary. Mai Bell Hurley, who now chairs the Chattanooga City Council and was one of the prime forces behind Chattanooga's visioning process, commented that early on, "we wanted everyone to come who was hopeful and helpful." Chattanooga had been so beaten down, she said, that most of its residents simply assumed it couldn't accomplish anything. So while an invitation to the hopeful and helpful may initially have excluded people who traditionally felt left out, she conceded, to get things rolling "you need to mobilize those with ideas to make things better." The ensuing debate, then, "wasn't around whether Chattanooga was ever going to be anything, but what it was going to be and how to become it."

In contrast, Scottsdale deliberately set out to form a steering committee made up of those who had not participated in the past, of individuals who simply would not have come together otherwise. He and others in the initial stages of Scottsdale Visioning sat

down and persuaded community leaders who felt they were too busy, found teenagers who had the gumption to stick with the process, identified minority citizens and jawboned them until they agreed to take part. "We literally went on an exploration for resource people in the community who might not have even regarded themselves as resources," he reported. "We then had a group that was formed with people no one had heard of; we brought into the community dialogue a new group of people. That in itself was refreshing and it gave an inspiration to the process."

Building Credibility

Those are all rather different approaches to the same problem, but what they have in common is the desire to create a credible force for change. In fact, the theme of credibility ran like a bright thread throughout the discussion of the visioning process. Without credibility, participants agreed, it is virtually impossible to get citizens to buy into any planning effort. And to achieve it, they also agreed, it's crucial to cultivate the belief that participation produces results.

"If you're talking about having a meeting to generate a report, you can forget it," said Pittsburgh City Councilwoman Valerie McDonald in talking of her mostly poor, African-American constituency. "You're not going to get those people you really want to get. Most hard-to-reach people are concerned with day-to-day living - about their sidewalks being fixed and their garbage picked up like other communities. They are concerned about equity...For most of them the vision is getting to the next day, it's getting a job, it's getting off welfare. It's not about making a pretty city."

She was echoed by Rochester City Councilman Wade Norwood. "Frankly, there is a real issue about how is it that we get poor, black people who have been screwed over in their own minds by government. The answer is that there must be demonstrable results. There must be action. Nothing restores good will better than real action that benefits people's lives directly."

It quickly became apparent, though, that action speaks universally, not just to the disenfranchised. Bernard Navatto, chairman of the planning board in Somerville, noted that his suburban town's relatively focused downtown planning effort had gotten high public turnout in large part because, several years before, planners had paid attention to public input in its master planning process. "I think a lot of the reason they came was that a large part of what they told us two years earlier had been incorporated into the master plan," he said.

Indeed, what emerged from the subsequent discussion was the recognition that there is no hard and fast line

What emerged from the discussion was the recognition that there is no hard and fast line separating the visioning process from action to implement the goals it produces.

separating the visioning process from action to implement the goals it produces. Working with local government to line up some "successes" in advance, or simply finding ways to act quickly on goals that emerge may be the best way to ensure that the process develops the momentum it needs. "If you ask people to come and begin work on something that will take 25 years, it's not going to happen," said Robert McNulty at one point. "Things need to happen in the first two years to spur on the next years."

In fact, Councilman Norwood commented that he had come to the conference thinking that Rochester's planning process needed to finish before any action was taken on it, so that citizens didn't feel the city was violating the public trust. But he would return to Rochester, he said, believing "there are some things that we need to do right now to start putting more money into that bank of good will, so that people will understand that we are very serious when we say we are going to listen to the community and that their participation will result in direct action."

In a sense, commented Richard Bowers, Scottsdale's city manager, a community's leaders - and especially its government - hold the sort of "emotional bank accounts" that Stephen Covey, author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People,* writes about. "We have those with our communities," said Mr. Bowers. "If we have a lot on the positive side we can proceed with substantial freedom. But if we don't have a strong emotional bank account we had better start making deposits while we're doing our strategic plan or there won't be anything to draw from - the first mistake means the plan is dead."

It was also readily apparent that real bank accounts come into play in building a visioning effort's credibility. Councilwoman McDonald argued that people in her district would be far more likely to turn out if there were money to be allocated, with its implication that concrete improvements would follow. Geri Spring, who directs Chattanooga's Neighborhood Network, pointed out that making money available for neighborhood associations to use in developing their communities can bring a "tenfold" return in terms of helping them buy in to the process. And it is a simple fact that much of Chattanooga's success rested on the presence of a local foundation - the Lyndhurst Foundation - with the wherewithal to seed both the visioning process itself and the specific efforts that arose out of it.

The gatherings that produced these goals were themselves part of the process of changing Chattanooga, said Eleanor McCallie Cooper, a key participant in the process of realizing the city's vision. "A real key was that all those classes and races were together for the first time in the same room. What's important is that we get in the same room and talk to each other. It can't be done through surveys. It can't be

done electronically. It can't be done on television. It's the reality of our human presence. "

In a sense, the city's true transformation has come as it has sought to make the vision real, as residents have enlisted to serve on boards of one project or another, have created new vehicles for attacking the city's problems, and have forged an ethic of civic engagement that has changed, for good, how the city works. "Nobody tries to do anything any more without involving a lot of people, " says Ann Coulter, "without sitting down and thinking, If this is worth doing, who needs to be at the table?' and then going out of their way to involve people you wouldn't otherwise consider."

Focus on the Long Term

As Mr. Longo pointed out to conference participants, the visioning process per se "lasts only four, six, at most eight months. Implementation in Chattanooga has lasted 10 years. A vision is a moving target, something that continues to shift."

That does not mean ignoring the near term, however. Whether it is seen as lining up some successes in advance, finding ways to act quickly on emerging goals, or as councilman Norwood put it, :putting more money into that bank of good will," a community needs to support its long-term planing with shorter term strategies. Specifically, a community needs to outline a five-year investment strategy to identify the most immediate projects and a one-year action plan to get things started. That way community leaders and citizens can look forward to the initial successes that give the long-term plan credibility and momentum.

The Theory of Eleven

John Krauss, who directs the Urban Center at the joint Indiana University-Purdue University campus in Indianapolis, offered a more structured version of what a core group might look like, based on what he called his "theory of eleven."

"You identify five people who can make something happen in your community, " he explained. "Then you identify five people who can stop something from happening in your community. And then you identify one person who can talk to both groups of five. That's your core group, whether you do it with 11 people or 22 or 33."

Step Three: Setting Community Benchmarks And Indicators

Benchmarks are models of a community's aspirations. They focus a community's energy and resource on specific problems and provide a way to measure progress toward solutions.

A big challenge in setting community benchmarks is deciding how to approach benchmarking. Communities can use three different types of benchmarks:

Identifying the best practices of other communities: Many communities routinely search for best practices when they want to improve some aspect of livability. They look at what other communities are doing and adopt and adapt practices that seem to promise improvements. Searching for other communities' best practices is relatively noncontroversial, and while it may lead to some unfair comparisons, it does provide many communities with good ideas for improvement.

Comparing themselves against similar communities: Communities also gather key performance data from other communities that are similar in size or location or demographics, for example, and measure their activities against that data. This kind of competitive benchmarking strikes some community leaders as leading to unfair comparisons or as creating false complacency.

Setting measurable goals based on specific desired outcomes: Some communities actually set specific measurable goals based on what they want to accomplish in areas affecting livability. This approach to community benchmarking can be a challenge for a community, as many aspects of livability do not seem to lend themselves to numerical measures. But done well it can give a community a guide to its future and a yardstick for measuring progress.

Benchmarks

Vision begets

- *more specific goals*
- *which beget very specific performance indicators related to those goals*
- *which beget an accountability system of performance measurement*

Setting Benchmarks

Make sure data are:

- *relevant*
- *reliable and relatively stable*
- *valid*

Choose data that:

- *can be gathered in a timely, cost-efficient, and reliable way*
- *allow comparisons to other jurisdictions*
- *are easy to understand*
- *clearly reflect some identifiable cause and effect*

Community benchmarking raises questions about deciding who defines the benchmarks and selects the outcomes to measure. To make benchmarks meaningful, a community must generate wide public participation in the process.

Fundamental to any benchmarking effort is a strategic plan that looks as many as 20 to 30 years ahead. Often benchmarks are a result of the visioning process, as visions lead to goals and goals lead to measurable benchmarks.

And just as action speaks louder than planning, measuring progress speaks louder than benchmarking. The best set of benchmarks and indices accomplish little if they are not used to improve the community.

Comments from the Workshops

There's still a long way to go, but Noblesville has taken the key first steps toward a major shift in public policy focus: from measuring inputs to measuring outcomes.

It's a deceptively simple-sounding proposition. As the Noblesville discussion demonstrated, performance measurement is a complicated and messy business.

While highlighting the opportunities and benefits that benchmarks and indices present, the conference also illustrated just how confusing the task of benchmarking is to local governments and partner communities, and how daunting an effort developing and implementing benchmarks and indices can be.

Nonetheless, Noblesville is still an excellent example of a community that has gamely tackled the task. The city of 20,000 has recently completed a broad and remarkable exercise that produced ambitious benchmarks and indices, a process that drew in thousands of residents in an attempt to start putting a clear performance measurement template over the vision and goals that the city and its citizens have adopted.

And the Noblesville experience was certainly rich material with which to fuel a broader discussion among conference participants, all of whom represented jurisdictions that had in some way or another begun to consider performance measurement in government.

Definitions

Underlying the discussion throughout the conference was the problem of definitions. For some at the conference, benchmarking was simply the search for best practices. If one community has done a solid waterfront or neighborhood revival, does it offer lessons for another? Who does trash collection better than anyone else? Economic development? Can they be copied?

For others, benchmarking was the straightforward process of comparing one locality's performance to that of another: Here's how we perform when it comes to the cost of providing certain services, how do we stack up against other cities?

And for others, still, benchmarking was the whole process of setting goals, developing indicators and finding the numbers to plug into those indicators that would allow a more solid assessment of progress - or lack of it - toward those goals. That is the definition embodied in the "Oregon Benchmarks" process that has received much national attention.

For the purposes of discussion, two broad definitions of benchmarking did sift out. The first definition represents the traditional use of the word, derived mostly from its practice in the corporate world: A search for best practices (along with the related practice of comparing performances in common areas among like enterprises).

The Noblesville Story

For Noblesville, benchmarking represented the entire process of setting goals, developing indicators to measure progress toward those goals, looking out for best practices in a given area of performance, and also setting specific targets for performance under each of the indicators in out years; that is, a commitment to achieving specific outcomes by the years 2000, 2005, 2010, and so forth, whether it's lowering reported drug use among the city's 12th graders, or lifting the percentage citizens living above the poverty level.

The impetus for Noblesville's benchmarking effort, which it titled "Planning for the Year 2010-Changing Business as Usual"- was an update of its master plan. "We were working off a 1980 master plan based on 1970s data," said Noblesville Mayor Mary Sue Rowland. It was time, she noted, for a thorough overhaul.

The Noblesville Planning Department-with a staff of eight-was the lead city department on the benchmarking project. Phase one involved identifying key members of the community to put on a Benchmarking Committee, which would serve throughout the process as the predominant steering body.

Sixty members of the community, representing the broadest possible spectrum of interests, from neighborhood groups, to business, to educational interests and religious organizations, came together on the committee. Its first order of business was visioning, a process that began with a lot of community visits. "We went out and visited as many individuals and organizations in the community as possible," said planning department director Steve Huntley, "and we asked them all two simple questions: 'What do you like about Noblesville; What don't you like?"'

In all, Huntley estimates that more than 3,000 residents answered the questions over a six-month period, leaving the city with a stack of comments with which to develop a vision statement. To help with that process-and the entire job of developing goals and indicators based on the vision statement-the city contracted with the Indiana University's Indiana Center for Urban Policy and the Environment. "Once we had all that information," said Huntley, "we lateralled it to the university to organize and analyze."

There was a strong consensus among the city's citizens that they wished to preserve "Noblesville's small-town feel." The job of translating such an abstract sentiment into a benchmark plan was turned over to the Benchmarking Committee, which worked with Indiana University staff to start putting a more solid foundation under the city's "warm and fuzzy" vision.

Before digging into the actual benchmark design effort, though, the full committee went through two exercises to give members some perspective on context and consequences. First the Benchmarking Committee was treated to a series of presentations on "megatrends," the external forces that affect Noblesville, including relevant state, national and international forces, social to economic. Second, the committee considered a "no-change" scenario, thinking about what might happen if Noblesville continued on its current course in the face of those outside trends.

Conttinued

The Noblesville Story

Then the Benchmarking Committee got down to work. Through a series of roundtable discussions it developed three overarching goals embodying Noblesville's vision: goals for land use, people and the economy. A subcommittee was created for each area. The three subcommittees hammered out three sets of "subgoals," more specific, tangible targets reflecting the broader vision. The subcommittees then developed even more specific indicators, or "benchmarks," to serve as the measurable building blocks which the community would use to attain the subgoals and goals.

For example, the city's vision for its economy is to "expand and support a diverse business community." One subgoal focused on attracting tourism-related industries. One benchmark established by the economic subcommittee for measuring progress toward that subgoal is the number of specialty shops, traditional retail and restaurants downtown.

The subcommittees attempted to limit the number of benchmarks but eventually listed more than 200 across the three vision statement areas. Some felt that that might be too many: "If I was going to do it again, I would choose as few benchmarks as possible; I would pick those that really get the point across," said Jamie Palmer, who worked on the project as a staff member of the Indiana Center for Urban Policy and the Environment.

The appropriate number of benchmarks appeared to vary with the individual's point-of-view. Mayor Mary Sue Rowland noted that while indices might be winnowed down as the process progresses, it was probably important at first to list as many as people came up with. That sort of open-minded, open-ended approach, she explained, allowed all good ideas to make it onto the table, encouraging citizen input.

But it was Palmer's job to plug the actual data into the benchmarks. In doing so, she realized how far benchmarking was from an exact science. "You have to accept right now that the data is often messy and imperfect. If you're really a compulsive person, then benchmarking may not be the thing for you."

"It's also important to realize that you can have a clear sense of specific goals, but that you sometimes simply can't get a number that has any meaning in relation to that goal," she said. "On the other hand, sometimes just by establishing an indicator, you're working toward your goal." For example-and again using the subgoal of building tourism-related businesses-vacancy rates of hotels in Noblesville had never been tracked. Now, however, it's on the economic development radar screen, and will spur both monitoring and action.

"Not only are there a lot of benchmarks, some of them may be contradictory," noted Drew Klacik, also with the urban policy and environment center. "You just have to live with that." For example, goals of open space preservation and healthy economic development, both benchmark Ed in the Noblesville report, will at some point in some instance probably directly clash.

The second definition is the one that has started to dominate in state and local government circles: Setting public goals and then developing the sorts of performance indicators that will allow governments and communities to gauge progress toward those goals.

And as the discussion over definitions developed at the conference, so did a hierarchy of abstraction for the purposes of getting from "vision" to "indices."

"Vision" begets more specific "goals," which beget very specific "performance indicators" related to those goals.

For example, a vision statement might include "a healthy community." A related goal might be healthy kids. A performance measure under that goal might include child immunization rates.

Indices, as Partners' Robert McNulty succinctly stated, "are those tangible, salient elements that illustrate successes and deficiencies and provide a reference point for action."

Impact and Survival

It is too early to assess Noblesville's benchmarking effort, but the questions that peppered the Noblesville team made clear some of the standards against which they will be measured.

Two questions were of particular interest.

- Have budgeting or policy changed as a result of the benchmarks?

- What mechanisms will ensure the survival and efficacy of the benchmarking effort?

On budgeting, Mayor Rowland said, "It has not affected the process as much as we would have liked, at least in the first budget cycle after the report. We didn't come together as a council or administration and tie dollars to benchmarks." As the benchmarks become more familiar to council members, however, Rowland hopes they will become key factors in, if not drivers of, specific budgeting decisions.

As for policy, Steve Huntley noted that Noblesville is updating its zoning ordinance in response to the benchmarks report. Mayor Rowland noted that development plans for a major city thoroughfare gained momentum after the road was identified as a key axis during the benchmarks process. Tthe city is currently taking concrete steps toward more rational planning; commercial and residential zones will become more sharply delineated, for one example.

But clearly the city has just begun the process of translating the benchmarking effort into budgeting and policy decisions, a process that will take time, effort and buy-in by citizens, interest groups and elected officials, alike.

Jim Bray, a citizen activist who was on the benchmarking committee, said he hopes that the community as a whole will internalize the benchmarks and act on them across the board, instead of leaving it solely to government to incorporate the benchmarks in official budget and policy decisions. "By having benchmarks in these key areas, both public and private, I think we have a map to the future. It doesn't necessarily need central authority or clear lines of leadership. I hope that it will provide for simultaneous action by disparate groups toward a common goal," he explained.

If that sounds a bit idealistic, there is already some evidence that Bray's hopes may be realized. A local preservation group recently used the benchmarks report as the basis for successfully opposing demolition of several older houses adjacent to the city's traditional commercial core, demolition supposed as necessary to make way for commercial development. "They used the benchmarking terminology to argue in favor of saving the houses and containing commercial activity downtown," said Mayor Rowland, "which is one subgoal of the benchmarks report."

To help keep Noblesville focused on the benchmarks, a stewardship group -whose structure and role was not yet fully defined - will be charged with monitoring results and modifying benchmarks as circumstances dictate. The city council approved spending $15,000 to support the effort-the stewardship group hopes to buy computer equipment-and the council was expected to vote soon to officially recognize it.

Mayor Rowland is confident that benchmarking in Noblesville has come to stay. The city's investment so far has been

around $200,000 ($140,000 went to Indiana University for their work as consultants to the project). "That was money allocated by the city council, so they're in it," comments Rowland.

To help ensure the benchmarks survive, thrive and have impact, Bray says he hopes to use the stewardship group to begin recruiting key stakeholders as soon as possible. "We plan to identify and contact key members of the community who have impact on various benchmarks. My hope is that our group evolves into an organization that can promote, initiate and engineer cooperation of people throughout the community around the benchmarks."

One of the important-and sustaining-jobs of the stewardship group, noted Bray, will be to report to the community on the city's performance. Key to continuity he added will be the next performance report card, which will assess the city's progress across all 200 benchmarks. It is due in 1996.

Benefits of Benchmarking

By the end of the session, it was obvious that Noblesville had both come a great distance and had a great distance to go in its benchmarks effort. But as with any messy, pioneering effort, there were significant unintended benefits, some of which may ultimately prove important to progress in many of the benchmarked areas.

One of the most significant dividends of the process was a far greater understanding of government on the part

The Scottsdale Story

Scottsdale's visioning process grew out of a crisis of disorientation. The community found itself in 1991 with a decade having gone by since it had last taken stock of itself, some 100,000 residents who had arrived in the meantime, a city council that routinely split 4-3 on votes, and a growing sense that the city lacked the concord it needed to figure out where it wanted to head. "The politics," said Council Member Greg Bielli, "was so disruptive and damaging that there was no progress." And so, as Dick Bowers, Scottsdale's city manager, put it, visioning "was a great idea born out of discord, and an attempt to deal with the discord by turning it over to the citizens to ask for their perspective." The result was not only a clear set of directions from the citizens, but, Bowers argued, great "tactical freedom" in choosing how to meet those goals.

Scottsdale's citizen-based visioning and self-assessment initiative was known as the Shared Vision Program. To make sure that it was run by and for community members, the city council created the Citizen Vision Advisory Committee; this group of community volunteers set up nin subcommittees to represent the primary interests in the community. Each subcommittee held a series of indepenent public meetings over the course of the eighteen-month visioning process to identify the community's values and goals for each topic area. From this process, four dominant community identities for Scottsdale emerged - Sonoran Desert community, resort community, health and research community, and center for arts and culture. The Citizen Vision Advisory Committe then identified twenty-four concrete steps, known as VisionTasks, to serve as the basis for enhancing the four identities.

The city has adopted two community-building approaches it considers important. One is to use schools as community campuses. Every time the district builds a new school, a portion of it is set aside for city use, whether as a citizen service center, drug use prevention office, or, as in one case, public library. The program is modeled on the city's experience in converting a closed elementary school into a community center, which had a positive impact on its fraying neighborhood: "It's helping to re-instill a sense of community that comes with having a gathering place," said Bowers.

The other tactic is a program called "Links," which brings together social service agencies throughout the region to forge a common approach to problems affecting young people. "We helped to create the perception of an impending crisis that we believe is very real," said Bowers. "We made it clear that if we didn't come together, we would do a spotty job of dealing with our emerging social problems."

Overall, Bowers said, the values that drive Scottsdale's approach to its issues are pro-active and preemptive: "We like to intervene in issues before they become serious, and we want to be results-oriented, so that we measure not the process, but the outcome and results."

of many of the city's citizens. "Participants came away with a much greater appreciation for what it means to make public sector decisions," said Klacik. "They didn't realize how complicated the business of government really is." City planner Steve Huntley agreed. "One of the real benefits was that as we discussed these issues, citizens started to realize how the city worked and why certain things could or couldn't be done."

Furthermore, citizens started to understand that governing is a nonstop and tricky exercise in tradeoffs. "Doing numerical benchmarks helps people understand potential conflicts," noted Klacik. "People said they wanted more of this or that, but that they didn't want higher taxes. Well, they now realize that local governments can't just print money."

And participants also realized for progress to be made toward a common vision, every interest group in the city had to give a little. "Having a group work together like that tempers extremism," said Klacik. "Normally you have factions like preservationists versus developers. But through this exercise, everyone got into the spirit of compromise."

Perhaps it is that spirit, above all, that will allow Noblesville to make real progress toward its visions. In fact, one subgoal in the benchmarks report is to "increase opportunities for the community to work together." Indices for measuring progress include the number of organizations and clubs in the city, and the number of school activities sponsored by outside organizations. But clearly the process of working together to develop a broad-based benchmarks report will also demonstrate progress toward that subgoal.

Threshold Questions

Mayor Rowland offered some words of caution, however, for those considering embarking on a benchmarking effort. "It is not easy; it is not cheap." And she went on to set out four basic questions that a community has to ask itself before it decides whether to embark on a Noblesville-style benchmarking effort:

- Do you have a window of opportunity/is the community willing to change?
- Do you have talented people willing to devote their time to the effort?
- Is your local government willing to risk the sort of scrutiny that comes with such a close examination of goals and performance?
- Is there a critical mass of outside leadership and interest that can bring resources to the process, and do so without dominating it?

It was clear that the Noblesville experience gave conference participants a much better understanding of the whole

concept of benchmarks and indices, as well as a strong dose of reality about how far they, too, had to go in developing their own performance measurement plans.

"We've come here to find out how you measure action," said Tom Argust, commissioner of the Department of Community Development in Rochester. "In some cases an action plan is as simple as Fix this.' But I think progress on broader things like comprehensive plans needs to be measurable. One failure of our previous plan was that it looked nice up on the wall, but there was no way to tell if we were really on track. We don't want to fall into that same trap."

Having just completed a major, city-wide neighborhood visioning and planning process, Rochester is clearly headed for some sort of benchmarking effort. "The mayor has asked us to track the success of our nieghborhood plans," said Argust.

In Pittsburgh, on the other hand, officials have been pursuing some corporate-style benchmarking, noted Eloise Hirsh, director of planning. "Over half our African-American population lives in public housing. Over 70 percent of our poorest residents live in public housing." And so the city asked for and received pro bono help from the management consulting farm of McKinsey & Company to help the city "rethink and overhaul the city housing authority," said Hirsh.

"We went around to see best practices, and also began to establish indices for performance. We even involved workers from our public housing authority, taking them around the country and showing them housing projects that work... and there are some that do."

Also of serious concern in Pittsburgh: jobs. "We spent months going through a process to look at our regional economy," said Harold Miller with the Allegheny Conference on Community Development. Out of that evaluation came a white paper "which had some very specific quantitative and qualitative benchmarking results, and they were quite clear.

"Pittsburgh was the last in the country when measured by loss of manufacturing jobs and the slowest in growth in service sector jobs over the last 20 years. "

And so the region is doing a little goal-setting and performance measurement in the area of employment. One goal of what has been labeled the "Regional Economic Revitalization Initiative," says Miller, is to create 100,000 net new jobs in the Pittsburgh area by the year 2000. "Now that may not be achievable, but it's very measurable. "

Orlando, noted mayoral assistant Brenda Robinson, has loosely pursued a strategy similar to Noblesville's. Three years ago, the city did a citizen survey asking residents their likes and dislikes about Orlando. As in Noblesville, Mayor Glenda Hood then used the survey to develop three major goals for the city: making the city safe, making

neighborhoods livable and making the city a good place in which to do business.

Orlando has not embraced the idea of benchmarks, however. Rather, the mayor has worked to build bridges to key citizen groups as a way to encourage input and feedback on city policies, while making sure her top executive staff stays focused on the city's goals. Simply tackling areas identified as priorities has worked for Orlando, Robinson said, and Orlando is unlikely to undertake a full-blown, Noblesville-style benchmarks effort.

Scottsdale, Arizona, also tracks broad areas of performance rather than lots of specific ones. Performance indicators in Scottsdale include more all-encompassing calculations of costs of government services per citizen, its bond rating, city employees per thousand residents, Federal Bureau of Investigation Uniform Crime Reporting statistics and so forth, noted the city manager Dick Bowers. For example, despite its rapid growth, Scottsdale's per capita cost has dropped from $780 to $709 over the past five years, and it carries a AA-plus bond rating. "We see that as a bottom-line indicator," said Bowers. Added city council member Greg Bielli, "Ours is not as specific an effort as Noblesville's. But we have worked with departments in getting them to relate what they are doing in their departments to the city's vision."

Benchmarks for Health

Dr. Beverly Flynn, head of the World Health Organization's Collaborating Center in Healthy Cities and a professor at the Indiana University School of Nursing, is working with cities in "Healthy City Projects" that are designed to promote health as a focus of public policy.

While Healthy Cities hasn't yet established a uniform set of performance measures, Flynn had solid suggestions for communities on how to develop specific indices, suggestions that could certainly be applied to other areas of public policy and performance measurement outside of public health.

Among her suggestions:

Make sure the data are:

- relevant to the chosen area of policy.
- reliable and relatively stable (track trends, not shifting events influenced by short-term factors).
- valid (well documented, from a reliable source).

Choose data that:

- can be gathered in a timely and reliable way.
- allow comparisons to other jurisdictions.
- is easy to understand.
- clearly reflect some identifiable cause and effect.

Flynn pointed out that tackling an area like health using performance measures can be an all-encompassing effort, given

that everything from income levels to general environmental conditions can directly impact health, and that performance can be measured in many ways from the percentage of a city's children who have been fully immunized to number of toxic spills.

Benchmarks for Economic Development

An even more specific treatise on measuring performance was offered by James Wheeler, a senior fellow of the Hudson Institute. He discussed one particular use of benchmarks of which cities nationwide are becoming keenly aware - their use in recruiting and retaining business in their area.

Businesses look at many issues when trying to decide where to locate, said Wheeler. And in a time of increasing global competition, there are a host of performance measures that cities should be developing in order to make their case to business. "These are not just simple indicators of government performance," said Wheeler, referring to "full time equivalents, cost of services, the quality of roads and sewers, and so forth. But an assessment of governance."

For example, businesses are interested in knowing how well a particular government is doing in positioning itself to compete in a global economy. And often, said Wheeler, a significant element of that is the quality of the local labor force. "I've been involved in an effort to attract a major South Korean firm to the Indianapolis area," said Wheeler. "We ranked high in all variables except people. We have a shortage of new people entering the skilled manufacturing labor market both from out of state and from our own technical schools. It is estimated that we need 8,000 high-skill technical people a year to come into our labor market. Our estimate is that only about 2,500 are coming in." The company eventually opted for another U.S. city that offered a more certain supply of skilled labor.

By benchmarking against other communities, noted Wheeler, it was clear that Indianapolis was lagging behind when it came to building a workforce ready to compete. Had Indianapolis had specific indices for gauging and tracking the size and quality of its workforce, it might have realized earlier that its workforce needed beefing up. Furthermore, Indianapolis would do well to study jurisdictions that clearly do a good job of bringing high-skilled technical people into the workforce, and perhaps emulating what it is those jurisdictions are doing to achieve that high performance, noted Wheeler.

To be useful, comparisons must be realistic. Not every city can compete for every kind of economic development. But benchmarking can give a city an idea of where its strengths and weaknesses lie, and

help it develop public policy and public private partnerships, accordingly.

Finally, said Wheeler, there is one overall economic development benchmark that all cities should consider calculating: "Are you creating wealth and income at the same rate as other communities?" said Wheeler. Again, he noted, comparisons should focus on your real and realistic competitors, and not on every other jurisdiction in the country or the world.

Concerns and Conclusions

The question of inter-governmental comparisons clearly struck a chord-or nerve-with those at the conference. Should benchmarking be an internal exercise, designed to spur self-improvement? Or should it be used to compare one city's performance to that of another.

"Particularly in an urban setting, educators continue to assert that they can't do comparisons of performance among school districts," said Rochester councilman Wade Norwood. "They say they are too different, and so comparisons are invalid."

Wheeler suggested a way around that: Let the local job market set the standard. "Then don't compare yourself to others," said Wheeler. "Business people are looking for people with reading skills and a good work ethic. Develop good measurements that reflect those standards and then measure your progress internally. "

Others at the conference, though, regarded intergovernmental comparisons as key. "I think it's important to compare yourself with other cities, but the comparisons have to be intelligent," said the Allegheny Conference's Miller. "If you only look within yourselves, you'll never know what is possible. I think it would be helpful to identify whether there are certain areas that communities in general are trying to measure. Are there ways to do that? Comparing Pittsburgh to Scottsdale on measure X may be silly, but comparing Pittsburgh to Rochester on measure Y might make a lot of sense. I think that would be helpful. What good is data without something to compare it to?"

Miller suggested the group might define common areas where some intergovernmental measures would be useful: "Five (comparative) measures we would all love to have but have difficulty finding."

But the group could not agree on the value of external comparisons. One major concern: the media's use of such measures. Some worried that setting up such comparisons would invite negative stories about cities that don't measure up, despite the fact such comparison could be a positive incentive to action.

On the other hand, Mayor Rowland argued that benchmarks offer better proof of a city's performance; data, in fact, with which to refute negative coverage.

Tom Argust had an inverse concern: Rochester, he said, has been worried about single family home vacancy rates. So the city did some comparative research and discovered the average vacancy rate for cities nationwide is 1.9 percent; for the northeast, 2.1 percent. In Rochester, it's 1.8 percent. "Will that lull us into a false sense of how great we're doing," he asked.

"That's why the whole notion of making the benchmarking effort one that is bottom-up is critical," said Carol Schwartz, executive director of the Group 14621 Neighborhood Association in Rochester (named for its ZIP code). "If we are looking at public safety as an issue, for example, that is certainly an area that can be measured city-wide. But crime rates may be much higher in one neighborhood than another. "

What the group did seem to agree on, is that benchmarking must be carefully managed to ensure that its mechanical aspects do not outweigh the less quantifiable benefits that flow from the shared effort and common goals developed through the benchmarking process.

It is just as important that benchmarks not be used to paper over the complexities of those elements of "community" that benchmarks try to quantify. "I continue to worry about the triumph of process over culture," said Scottsdale's Dick Bowers. "I worry about it when we seem compelled to reduce everything to numbers to improve decision-making, when it's all much more chaotic and unpredictable than that. "

Added Pittsburgh's Eloise Hirsh, "In all the benchmarks I've seen, very few of them are physical. They are social or economic indicators that can be measured, but what about vacant storefronts, linear feet of sidewalks, empty parking lots? I think we're fast losing the physical space that embodies a lot of community spirit. I think any benchmarks you develop should include more visual elements."

After two days of presentation and discussion, it was obvious that not everybody was convinced of the value or necessity of exhaustive benchmarking. As an elected official, Wade Norwood said he was still very uncomfortable with the fact that his performance as a policy maker might be judged on the basis of what is still a rather unclear and perhaps inherently ambiguous exercise.

Rochester neighborhood activist Carol Schwartz, on the other hand, was convinced: "I used to believe that almost nothing could be measured. I thought that there were all these unquantifiables that we were working toward that you could never apply any concrete measurement to. I'm beginning to come all the way to the point where I think you can measure almost everything in some way. It may be measuring a perception, but I now think almost everything can be quantified, and nearly has to be."

More than anything else, the conference highlighted the complexity of the undertaking and the vital importance of ensuring that each community's particular set of values drive any benchmarks effort. But Noblesville illustrated, for those jurisdictions interested in looking into benchmarking, there are those that have taken the job on, and who are wrestling successfully with its ambiguities, contradictions and complexities.

Step Four: Taking Action

Some ingredients that are constants in community action:

Partnerships: Few, if any, community improvements come about without some sort of partnership - between public and private bodies, for example, or between government and the community.

Leadership: Little happens without leadership. Community leadership, if it is to endure, has to be lodged in a depersonalized, and institutionalized leadership body.

Will: Little happens unless there is the will to change the community. And the will to change is often the product of effective community leadership.

Stewardship: Because communities don't change over night, some stewardship body mustt oversee and nurture community change for the long term.

Community assets: Improvement in community livability rests on the assessment and intelligent use of community assets, whether they are physical assets, environmental assets, cultural assets, or historic assets.

Resources: Ultimately, improving community livability requires resources. Money, of course, is important, and communities need to find sources of support for improving livability. But leadership, energy, creativity, and sweat, are also valuable community resources.

Certain qualities are essential for effective, positive community action:

Hopefulness: There must be a shared, sustained hope that things can improve.

Trust: There must be trust - in other residents, incommunity leadership, in the other players in the process of improving livability.

Elements of Community Action

Constant ingredients of actions

- *partnerships*
- *leadership*
- *will*
- *stewardship*
- *community assets*
- *resources*

Essential qualities of community action

- *hopefulness*
- *trust*
- *civic responsibility*

Civic responsibility: And finally, there must be a growing culture of civic responsibility - the idea that being responsible for the community makes the community more livable for oneself and for others.

Comments from the Workshops

Ultimately, the effectiveness of regional approaches, visioning and benchmarking in making communities more livable places depends on the community's ability to translate the raw material of discussion and good will into tangible steps to improve the quality of life.

To explore how communities turn talk into action-that is, how they ensure that concrete progress actually emerges from visioning, benchmarking, strategic planning and other efforts that involve broad public participation-the conference turned to the story of Tupelo, Mississippi.

Different Approaches

In looking at the path each community has followed, what may be most obvious is that each has taken a different route to turning talk into action. There is, for example, the "monomaniac with a fixation," as Robert McNulty put it, like Tupelo's George McLean. There's Chattanooga Venture, the organization that served as an incubator in that city following its visioning process, making sure that good ideas got not only a hearing, but a place in which to take root and flourish organizationally. There's the Somerset Alliance, a semi-official body created by the business community to work with government in giving form and focus to the rapid development shaking Somerset County.

"So what's needed?" McNulty asked participants. "The individual with a fixation who makes us all live up to our best opportunities? The partnership model [such as Tupelo's Community Development Foundation]? The open-house model like Chattanooga Venture, where every good idea has a chance to move ahead? The officially designated [group] that has to get the job done and we hire and fire the executive officer based upon whether they do a good job implementing our dream?"

The answer, participants agreed, is all or any of them, depending on the circumstances. Indeed, suggested Ann Coulter. The formal vehicle used to get things done matters less than do more intangible issues. "I don't think it's so much a matter of which method you use as it is what level of attention you give it," she said. "If nobody listens to that monomaniac, then that's all he is. But if the

The Tupelo Story

Tupelo, Mississippi, and surrounding Lee County transformed themselves from one of the poorest, most backward areas of the country in the 1940s into one of the most prosperous regions in the South, according to Vaughan Grisham, a community development scholar and activist at the University of Mississippi. Even though the issues Tupelo faced as a rural market town are clearly smaller in scale than the challenges big cities in decline must confront, its success bears hallmarks from which cities many times its size can learn.

Tupelo's story begins with newspaper publisher George McLean, who in the early 1940s convinced the town's merchants and bankers that it was in their interest to bankroll the purchase of a high-quality bull that could help area farmers establish themselves as dairymen, an occupation that promised a more secure and steady income than cotton farming, on which they had so long depended. If the county's poorest - its farmers and farm workers could boost their incomes, he argued, the town in which they shopped would also benefit.

That is exactly what happened, and with that experience behind them, Tupelo's business leaders agreed to help rural communities establish their own community development organizations, which focused both on community issues and on helping small-town residents improve their own lives. McLean also set up Tupelo's Community Development Foundation, which became the vehicle through which Tupelo industrialized and managed to attract one of the most concentrated collections of employers in the South. The CDF and its offshoots have also taken up such issues a work force training, public education, labor-management relations and a host of other matters they consider crucial to remaining economically competitive.

Several lessons can be drawn from these experiences. The first is the importance of inclusiveness. In Tupelo, economic development did not take place until the poorest, most disenfranchised residents of Lee County had the opportunity to take a hand in their own development. As Grisham put it, "Community development precedes economic development."

It was McLean's ability to convince Tupelo's leaders that their fortunes were tied to those of people they usually ignored that started Lee County on its path. In order to do so, though, McLean needed to gain the trust of Tupelo's leaders. And that he did through hosting a weekly Bible study at his house, to which many of the town's more important leaders often came. "They told me in hindsight," Grisham said, "that they came to trust him first as a person before they ever even paid attention to his ideas or his vision. It took six years for them to trust him as a person."

Equally important, though McLean and other Tupelo leaders were the moving forces behind the community's ability to remake itself, their influence lay in their ability to make change possible, not to create it themselves. "McLean taught me that leadership isn't about doing things," Grisham explained. "Leadership is about creating an environment in which things get done. Basically what you're trying to do is to help people to help themselves." They did that, he went on to say, by doing two things: convincing people-from dirt-poor farmers to wealthy bankers-that it was in their self-interest to get involved; and by creating organizations that could focus the energies they stoked and carry on their work from year to year.

And finally, Grisham commented, "If George McLean had one message, it was that nobody else cares a damn about you. The only people who care about your community are the people who live there." The federal government, outside foundations, the state, social service providers-all eventually came to help Tupelo, but without the active, controlling involvement of members of the community, none of the area's transformation would have been possible.

idea or the vision reaches a certain level of attention and enough people are willing to listen, then it will happen regardless of which method or combinations of methods you apply."

Common Constants

While methods vary from community to community, there do appear to be certain constant elements in each successful community's experience. Pittsburgh's Vivian Loftness summarized them as::

- Partnerships: They foster effective collaboration among all stakeholders;
- Leadership: Risk-takers and team-builders surface from the ranks of ordinary citizens as well as acknowledged community leaders, who help shepherd the process along;
- Will: Genuine commitment on the part of participants in the process and a determination to follow through on its promises and goals;
- Stewardship: The ability to institutionalize change is critical - to create organizations that can, in essence, carry the community's goals into the streets;
- Community Assets: Each community either began by rooting its efforts in its culture and heritage, or found itself returning to them for insight and nourishment during the process;
- Resources: Both the strategic planning process and its translation into action require money, knowledge and technical capacity, most of which has to come from within the community itself.

Essential Qualities

And underlying all those elements, participants agreed, are a set of qualities that successful communities either start with or, more commonly, develop within themselves as they go along: Hopefulness, trust and community-mindedness or civic responsibility.

"I don't think the vision process works," said Mai Bell Hurley, "unless the people who come to the table have hope and trust and a sense of community or interdependence or civic responsibility - they all mean the same, whatever you call them."

These are, participants suggested. the key ingredients to success, and as such, the conference spent much of its last session discussing them.

The character of each community's process must operate to foster these qualities. Inclusiveness, for example, fosters them all. "This thought that nobody will be left out is a value that you embrace at the very start of it," said Wade Norwood. "And we ought to be arguing that whatever this product is, it's transformative. That it changes the way people, the governed, relate to government."

Dick Bowers came at the point from another angle, noting that the community's values should be distilled from the livability process, not dictated at the start. "One of the strengths of the process is the dialogue that leads to a conclusion. People talk it through and they get excited about it and the values for community emerge. I think we should encourage people to understand these values and to form a vision and a process to achieve it, but I don't think we can simply say, Here's a set of regional values, enforce them."'

Trust

Building trust is no easy process, especially for local government officials accustomed to making decisions either without much input from citizens, or without paying attention to the input they get. "I've been in planning for 25 years," said Steve Huntley, "and unfortunately many communities used the system to keep things out that we didn't want. We weren't willing to share the system with the public. To earn trust, you share the system and help citizens get through the process. It's not my community, it's not Jim's community, it's the citizens' community."

Making that real, Wade Norwood suggested, requires three things that might be labeled inclusivity, accomplishment and saliency. "You've got to be committed that you're going to let everybody in the room, even when what they are saying is going to make you squirm," he explained. "It has also been very important in Rochester that we are bankrolling some very quick victories by which we can build up our social capital. And that leads to the last point, which is that people have to believe

The Rochester Story

What began as an attempt to update Rochester's comprehensive plan has wound up reshaping how the city operates. When city officials encouraged the neighborhoods to create their own plans for the future, which would then form the building blocks for the citywide comprehensive plan, they set in motion a reinvigorating process of civic renewal.

To begin with, the neighborhoods asked for the city's help in figuring out how to plan, how to facilitate local planning meetings, and how to meet their needs for hard information and technical expertise. The city obliged, laying the groundwork for what continued throughout the planning process to be a partnership that, over its 18 months, replaced the mistrust of city government with a strong new partnership. "It has built an awful lot of trust among people and a lot of trust between people in the neighborhoods and the city," Planning Director Larry Stid said.

It also has changed the way the city does business, he argued. City council members started pressing departments to relate their own plans to the neighborhood plans. The mayor has now told department heads that their budget proposals should respond to the requests in those neighborhood plans. And, said Stid, the city is using the mayor's clout and the neighborhood plans to approach Rochester's many social service organizations "and point out that they should not be running out trying to do their own planning process. The citizens have already said what they think those organizations ought to be doing."

Just as important, neighborhood leader Carol Schwartz said, the process has transformed its participants "from being cynical and distrustful to saying, 'Okay, it really doesn't matter what the city does bottom-line, because there are things we can identify that we can do ourselves.'" That was, said Schwartz, "the greatest thing that happened-there is this sense of hope, people are less cynical and they are more involved as citizens."

In short, said Wade Norwood, a Rochester city council member, "I really believe that what we have been doing in Rochester is the last, best hope for Rochester, because we have reconnected people to government. We have restored people's ability to believe that they can express what is needed in their life and that they can effect change in their environment.... I think what we are talking about is the answer to how local governments should be built. They should be built in such a way that people feel as if they are in control of their lives, as if they are free to bond with their neighbors and attack the challenges that affect their environment."

this means something and that it's going to make a difference in their lives.

"You build trust by making sure actions are salient, by making sure everybody is included, and by having some demonstrable victories up front so that it's not the same old game where everybody sits down and builds a blue-ribbon plan that's going to sit on the shelf while life continues to go down the toilet."

Moreover, said Tom Argust, it's crucial that the victories be neither symbolic nor short-lived, but instead serve as a down-payment on actual delivery of the goods. "The victory isn't coming up with 1,400 different action steps," he said, "but implementing and tracking them." In Rochester's case, the city has sorted each neighborhood's proposals by who's responsible for action, whether it's the neighborhoods, the city, social service agencies or local businesses, and then has begun to track their progress. The overall result of this process, he said, is change in "the whole accountability system, as well as the way that the city is governed - you turn it upside down, so that you're going where the citizens want to be going, not where the city thinks the citizens want to go."

As Argust suggests, the government's role in gaining and building trust is a complicated one, requiring both an openness to accepting direction from citizens and a willingness to take the lead in acting on those directions. Government has played that dual role not just in Rochester, Greg Bielli noted, but in Scottsdale as well. "We have a history of the city council being very strong," he said. "We have a lot of strong nonprofits, we have a strong Chamber of Commerce, but still, the council is seen as the body that needs to take the report and then start implementing it. If we had not done that, then everything that had been done [in the visioning process] would have fallen apart."

Even that, though, has required a deft touch. Vern Swaback commented. "The government absolutely empowered, funded, structured and made happen the visioning process. But then it totally withdrew itself. While the citizens were doing their work, they made sure that the government stayed out of it. And when the citizens finished their work, then they wanted government to bless it. So if the official body, the city council, didn't affirm the completion of this report, it could not have been completed. And yet a week before, that same group would not have wanted the government to be involved. Disengagement had to be as intentional as engagement."

In short, said Eloise Hirsh, "There's a list of names for government: enabler, convener, facilitator, articulator of the vision, and implemented." And which roles government plays "depends on where you are in the process, and on the culture of your community."

Hopefulness

As important as government may be, though, there was no question in participants' minds about where the ultimate responsibility for action lies: with a community's citizens. And getting citizens involved requires hope, the hope that their involvement will pay off. "Part of the challenge we face is getting people to believe that they can do things on their own," said one participant. "Their first response to a problem is always, 'We've got to really get on city hall to come and do their job.' I think the challenge is to help people see all the opportunities and possibilities that exist to do things themselves. "

Vivian Loftness speculated that part of the difficulty of getting citizens involved is low expectations: "I think that there are individuals who have the energy to give, and the idea of where they want to put that energy, who believe there are too many institutional barriers" to overcome. They lack, in other words, any hope that they can have an impact.

But once a few people have that hope, it can be contagious. Chattanooga's visioning effort got underway because despite the general atmosphere of gloom that pervaded the city in the early 1980s, there were enough residents who were hopeful that they could change things to form the vibrant core of activists the effort needed.

And there are ways to nurture that spark of hope. One, said Mary Sue Rowland, is to structure an inclusive effort and give it time to work. Noblesville's benchmarking process was preceded by a four-year stretch during which 27 different citizens' committees met to talk about everything from river walks to economic development. "I think had we not spent four years getting it all together and encouraging people that they could make a difference in what they wanted for their community, I'm not sure our benchmarking would have been so successful," she said.

Noblesville has built that sort of nurturing process into its civic structure now. An effort called People Helping People, brings together representatives from the city's churches, social service agencies, teachers, hospitals and city hall, to meet regularly over the lunch hour to help figure out how to resolve particular problems. Scottsdale has established a Citizen Service Department in one of the city's malls where residents can find city employees who can both advise them on how to take care of their problems and shepherd their ideas through the bureaucratic process.

And in Rochester, said Carol Schwartz, neighborhood organizations take on some of those functions. "We help people on a given street who might have an idea and pull them together with their neighbors so that they can collectively carry out some kind of activity to improve or deal with

whatever concern they might have," she said.

Civic Responsibility

The roots of civic involvement almost always rest in self-interest, said Vaughn Grisham. "What they learned to do in Tupelo better than anyplace I've seen," he said, "is just convince people it would be to their self-interest to get involved." The question then, is, How do you tap into citizens' self interest and make it civicly responsible?

Make clear the tie between community issues and self-interest, said Vivian Loftness. "Try, for example, to convince people that the economy of the region is critical to the success of their own neighborhood," she said. "Decline is something we all share."

That is what happened in Noblesville, said Jim Bray, when it became clear that changes occurring in the global, national and local economies were clearly going to have an impact on the community. "We stimulated action in our community simply by purveying the idea that if you don't do something, it will be done to you," he said.

But Bray also pointed out that whatever brings people to the table or community meeting is not necessarily what keeps them there. Indeed, said Carol Schwartz, it is often the process of discussion that transforms self-interest into something healthier and more universal.

And it is not entirely government's role to provide the opportunity for such discussions to take place, said Dick Bowers. Other institutions also have a role to play in helping to develop civic responsibility. Religious institutions, schools, Rotary clubs and other service organizations-all have their place. "The places where dialogue occurs about shaping community are the areas that need to take responsibility," he said. "Government can't go out and preach civic responsibility and expect people to salute it." Families, too, have their place, said Ann Coulter. She gave as an example a public housing development in Chattanooga where a number of women started working with single mothers to help them figure out how to strengthen their families. Though the program started by focusing on what members of the family are expected to do and how they should act, it moved on to community issues and family members' responsibilities are to their community and the city as a whole.

But "civic responsibility" must be informed civic responsibility, noted Tom Argust. In Rochester, a large church with a heavy suburban membership "felt called" to do something for the city and decided to open up a group home for homeless young people. It formed a non-profit organization that paid no property taxes to the city, planned to locate the home close to other group homes, creating a concentration in one neighborhood, and then suggested that the city provide a grant to cover its

operating costs. Not only would the city's taxpayers take it on the chin, but so would the neighborhood, said Argust. "Now, these folks clearly thought they were doing the right thing," he pointed out. "But they didn't have a clue as to what their civic responsibility was going to do to the people of this municipality. So there has to be something more than civic responsibility. There has to be some way of understanding, doing your homework, of understanding what the implication of your civic responsibility is."

Indeed, suggested Vern Swaback, citizen involvement is a question of quality as well as quantity. Those working to encourage citizen involvement must recognize the difference, between "the screaming citizen who has nothing but anger and often ignorance motivating what they're saying, and the citizen who has spent a great deal of time on the issues. If elective bodies or nonprofits or others can't distinguish between those two kinds of participants, then all this citizen involvement really doesn't come to fruition."

The quality of the involvement is shaped by the way in which the discussion is framed, said Ann Coulter. "If people are encouraged to think positively and contribute positive ideas, if you appeal to that and give them a sense that what they say will make a difference, then the process becomes more positive."

Step Five:
Establishing a Stewardship Body

One characteristic that helps define a healthy community , capable of handling the challenges of growth, change, and development, is the ability to manage and use the contributions of a wide range of community actors. A stewardship body facilitates this function by creating a forum for the articulation and transfer of ideas. It is the guardian of the community, facilitating growth, promoting healthy development, and solving problems when they arise.

In today's urban areas, elected officials, corporate executives, private sector groups, and a wide range of community actors all play a significant role in community affairs. Often, however, these individuals have a difficult time agreeing on issues and have interests that directly or indirectly conflict. A stewardship body - a nonpartisan, apolitical entity - can transcend barriers of intra-community rivalries to promote the good of the community over competing individual interests.

A stewardship body, then, protects the process of community improvement; serves as convener, nurturer, incubator; and refocuses public attention on the community and its needs and on ways to meet those needs.

Comments from the Workshops

The civic environment is crucial to visioning because it bears directly on what engines are available to drive the community's coming together. In Chattanooga, it was a collection of civic players, loosely organized at first, who pushed the process early on, eventually broadened their makeup and, through Chattanooga Venture, helped the community to coalesce. In Rochester, it was city officials, the mayor, and the planning department, working with citizens and an infrastructure of neighborhood organizations. In Scottsdale, the visioning process was carried out with the financial

A Stewardship Body

- *includes institutions, government, citizens, industry and philanthropy. It crosses formal boundaries within the community.*
- *is a convener and an incubator: It provides a place for fragile initiatives to gain strength, and meeting rooms for citizens to gather as they work on creating the city's future.*
- *keeps the community true to its vision, measuring progress and signaling failure.*
- *provides publicity and fosters celebration.*
- *is a legitimate, and, in a sense, a safe actor within the community.*
- *knows its limits.*

support of local government, but was organized and driven by Vern Swaback and other citizens concerned about the community's future. Mr. Swaback commented at one point on this complex juxtaposition of the need for a catalyst and the value of participation: "In a democracy there is this interesting element where we celebrate the decision-making of a public hearing," he said, "and yet underneath there is this unselected, strong-willed, insightful something or the other that is making things happen."

The force that drives the process early on, though, is often not the one Al that pushes it from vision to action. Visioning, participants made clear, is indeed a process-when it works, it creates its own future, spurring individuals and groups who might never have been active before to take the lead in pushing the community forward.

That is why the discussion of stewardship bodies during the conference was marked by a definite tension between those who articulated a need for a carefully designed structure capable of translating a community's vision into concrete accomplishments, and those who were fearful that too much structure would bottle up or defuse the energy created by the vision.

McNulty, for instance, suggested that, for a time at least, custody of the goals produced by a visioning process might need to rest with a group of "the true players who can wheel and deal and decide priorities, the people who can put together with one phone call the team that it takes to find money and resources, and force groups to work together to implement the agenda."

Momentum can be lost, he warned, after the community meetings are all finished and the report issued if there are no people to take the reins-especially the sort of people "who can pick up the phone and call the governor. " Without that sort of powerful support, the translation from paper to buildings and initiatives might never happen. "It's the basic step of laying a framework for collaboration," he explained. "Most people in your community have similar agendas, but the difficult part is getting them to work in the short term. It takes a structured process."

The participants from Scottsdale, on the other hand, urged against over regulating the process. Richard Bowers cited the example of a recent referendum on creating an open-space preserve within the city's bounds, a proposal that had come out of Scottsdale Visioning but that aroused some controversy within the community. The leader of the forces supporting the preserve turned out to be a woman from a middle-class neighborhood who emerged during the debate. "If we had formed a structure to seek her out, it might have been difficult to do so," Mr. Bowers said. "It's nice to have a structure, but an environment that allows leadership to

surfaces from anywhere should be nurtured."

That was, for the most part, the approach that Chattanooga took as well. The organizers did set up a "coordinating council" made up of the heads of the city's three biggest employers and its leading foundation, the mayor, the county executive, the chairwoman of Chattanooga Venture and the chairman of the Chamber of Commerce's economic development group. But the group did little during the vision process. It only became active once citizens had made it clear that reorienting the city toward the river was important to them. At that point, the council's members became the board of the organization that directed the redevelopment of the river area.

In fact, there was an almost deliberate effort in Chattanooga to avoid becoming too structured. The fact that Vision 2000 produced no formal report, Eleanor Cooper commented, may have turned out to be a strength: "After a while, " she said, "we sort of forgot what the vision was and we were just doing things." So, too, with the fact that no one ever set priorities for the city to follow once the public meetings had produced a set of goals. Instead, the steering group published the 40 goals that the visioning process had produced, and let whoever was interested act on whichever ones they chose. "If you prioritize, economic development and land use always rise to the top," Cooper explained.

The Somerset County Story

Somerset County has set about trying to create a sense of place in the sort of scattered, exurban American setting that has from the most part been highly resistant to such efforts. It has done so despite the difficulties imposed by the fact that its 21 towns jealously guard their jurisdictional privileges. "Home rule is sacrosanct," as Chamber of Commerce director Jim Ventantonio put it. "We cannot change our municipal boundaries and we cannot annex. So we are left with having to find a way to amalgamate what we have and work on it that way."

The county was spurred to do so following rapid growth in the 1970s, as large corporations moved there to set up headquarters or branch operations, their employees followed them, and urban refugees found respite there. As development invariably followed, communities found themselves fighting each other-sometimes in court-over the issues it raised.

As a result, two parallel efforts got underway in the late 1980s. One the one hand, the county recognized that, though they might be separate jurisdictions, the three communities at the center of the county-Somerville, Raritan, and Bridgewater-not only formed a county center, but were in fact quite dependent on each other; they needed, in other words, an integrated planning process. Backed up by the state, which recognized that suburban areas could have regional centers, the county formed a regional center advisory committee to guide and coordinate planning for the towns.

At the same time, business leaders in the county grew nervous about its rapid development and the lack of coordination among the 21 municipalities. They formed the Somerset Alliance for the Future as a forum, as Susan Schwartz puts it, "to bring the private sector and the public sector together to address the issues of growth that are affecting the county." In addition, the Chamber of Commerce emerged as one of the leading actors in trying to address such regional issues as the schools and economic development.

The result is that in both the public and private sectors, Somerset County residents have built forums in which they can collaborate to address their common problems. It is, said Bob Bzik, the county's planning director, "regionalism at a smaller scale."

The Somerset Alliance for the Future had its genesis in Somerset County's struggles in the last decade with rapid growth and its challenges-from traffic congestion to strip malls. SAF's board of directors is made up of members from 60 corporations in the area, all the mayors in the county, and leaders of such organizations as the United Way and the county's medical center. The Alliance has worked to discern the county's needs, and then to find ways of meeting them. It has funded a vision plan for the county seat of Somerville, offered technical assistance to other town centers, become the county's transportation management association, pressed for service-sharing arrangements among municipalities and school districts and worked with social service groups on dependent care facilities.

The Alliance has begun to recognize that its elite nature may limit its ability to have a greater impact on the county's future. "The organization has developed an awareness that to accomplish what it feels it needs to accomplish for the region, a CEO organization will not be able to do it by itself," said Susan Schwartz, vice president of the Alliance. "It does need a broader base of support."

"What's left out are the people things: human relationships, child care, spousal abuse. But those are the things that people want to volunteer for, and that have an impact on people's lives."

"The vision sends up these balloons in the community and you can grab them and fly with them," commented Gianni Longo about Chattanooga's experience. "I know there are leaders in this community who had not been engaged, but became engaged. " As David Crockett described it, "The vision process in Chattanooga was extremely important, but nothing happens in a city that is one event on which everybody swings like a gate on a hinge. There will be groups that are active that you won't even know about. If you try to structure it too much you will inhibit a lot of good things that can and should happen." Instead, he said, success depends on leaving the process open and creating "a mechanism to support whatever pops up. " That was, in essence, the role of Chattanooga Venture, the official "stewardship body" charged with carrying the vision forward: It served as an incubator, a convener and a broker, helping those individuals and groups with ideas to give them form.

For a community that has gone through a visioning process, a stewardship body like Chattanooga Venture serves as its long-term guardian, the agency through which, in the years that follow, the vision is given life. There is another approach, for communities that have not come together as Chattanooga or Scottsdale did, and that is to form a group-call it stewardship body or "change agent"-of community leaders who can articulate their community's needs and galvanize a response.

The conference was given two examples. John Krauss described the Greater Indianapolis Progress Committee, and its genesis in the mid-1960s as an effort to guide the city out of a sort of civic torpor. The committee, which still exists, is made up of about 150 people, appointed by the mayor from a wide range of constituencies. Over the decades, it has helped the city deal with urban renewal, worked to create a university campus within the city's bounds, revitalized the city's center, eased the transition to school desegregation and pushed Indianapolis into becoming a national center for amateur sports. It has been, Mr. Krauss said, at one and the same time a visioning body and an agent for change. "It was the focal point for discussion, " he said, "it would bring leadership to bear, it had good media coverage, and if something needed ongoing attention, it would create spinoffs."

Similarly, Susan Schwartz described the Somerset Alliance for the Future, a younger group that has had its genesis in Somerset County's struggles in the last decade with rapid growth and its challenges-from traffic congestion to strip malls. SAF's board of directors is made up of members from 60 corporations in the area, all the mayors in

the county and leaders of such organizations as the United Way and the county's medical center. Like its counterpart in Indianapolis, it has worked both to discern the county's needs, and then to find ways of meeting them. It has funded a vision plan for the county seat of Somerville, offered technical assistance to other town centers, become the county's transportation management association, pressed for service-sharing arrangements among municipalities and school districts and worked with social service groups on dependent care facilities.

Unlike GIPC, though, the Alliance has begun to recognize that its elite nature may limit its ability to have a greater impact on the county's future. "The organization has developed an awareness that to accomplish what it feels it needs to accomplish for the region, a CEO organization will not be able to do it by itself," Ms. Schwartz said. "It does need a broader base of support."

What SAF has recognized, of course, is that communities change, and that what was appropriate at one time may no longer be so. That is not an easy lesson for organizations to learn. A visioning body or a stewardship body that hangs on beyond its period of usefulness can become, in the words of Robert McNulty, "totally isolated from leadership development and block the way for a useful entity to be created."

"There are always going to be very important forces that find the current structure not doing the next things that need to be done," said Eloise Hirsh, Pittsburgh's planning director. "Whatever body there is, it has to have the capacity to change, or sunset, or do something that reflects the changing reality. " That is, in fact, the situation that Chattanooga faces. Mai Bell Hurley noted that over the years, the city has created a "climate" in which endeavors spring up to meet demands that citizens believe need answering. Projects that came out of the initial visioning process-Chattanooga Neighborhood Enterprise, which has constructed some 5,000 units of housing for low-income residents; River City, which is steering both the rebirth of the riverfront and downtown economic development; Geri Spring's Neighborhood Network, and its work with the city's discrete communities; a revitalized Chamber of Commerce, which has emerged as the leader of the city's efforts to focus on environmental quality-all have taken on a life and a spirit of enterprise all their own.

"Because these vehicles exist, I believe they make a formal stewardship organization less necessary," Councilwoman Hurley said. "I'm not sure Chattanooga Venture is as necessary [now], if you really see the vision process as changing the character of how decisions are made in a community, either in the institutions that are there or creating additional institutions with specific goals. "

At the same time, Geri Spring noted that one of the central roles Chattanooga

Venture played was to offer budding endeavors a place to grow while they were still fragile. "It's so difficult to start a new initiative," she said. "It's not enough just to be out there in the community with a good idea: You have to have a support system and a network that ties you in to services and contacts and fundraising. That's the role that Venture played. " Whether or not the organization's role as an incubator is finished yet is an issue that Chattanooga has yet to resolve.

The very fact that Chattanooga faces this dilemma, though, can easily be counted as a sign of its success. As Tom Argust commented, Chattanooga Venture "galvanized energy and guided it to a point where things could get spun off to existing or new systems. The action has become inbred into the life of the community, rather than having this group pulling the strings and making things happen. That is a much more healthy way of doing it. "

That the city can now count on new and revitalized institutions, active neighborhoods and a government with close links to the rest of the community may well be the most important achievement of the visioning process begun over a decade ago. It may also be the key to the issue of how much attention to pay to the formal structure of the process.

It is striking that participants from the two cities that have carried out formal visioning efforts, Chattanooga and Scottsdale, commented independently that the heart of the process lies outside its formal framework.

"I think we very much need structure," Vern Swaback said after the conference. "It's like a curriculum in education, in which you know there is a ladder from the point of entry to the exit, and all along the way you're being given feedback as to whether you're doing it right. Conducting the visioning process, the participants need the structure-you're using it to hold together disparate levels of interest, ability and imagination. But the heart and soul of it is something that can't be found within the structure. "

In a similar vein, Ann Coulter commented, "You could follow the book on visioning, meet all the checklists, and it still could be a failure."

The point that both make is that in the end, the strength of a vision lies in the spirit it instills and the forces it awakens within the community. Inevitably, those will transcend the structure designed to foster them, and those directing the visioning process have to be prepared to let them do so. After all, as Richard Bowers said near the end of the conference, "Visioning is not the end-all and be-all. The end-all is having an organized, self-sufficient, self-directed community."

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