

Co-Creating a Citizen Participation Compact

July 17, 2003
St. Anthony Main Event Centre

Sponsored by the
Center for Neighborhoods

Welcome and Opening Remarks by:

- Mayor R.T. Rybak – Minneapolis
- Anne Briseño, Assistant to the Mayor – St. Paul

State of the Neighborhoods
Address presented by Gretchen
Nicholls, Center for Neighborhoods

Community Summit Task Force
Members: Panel Presentation

- David Rubedor, Powderhorn Park Neighborhood Association
- Greg Luce, Project 504
- Ramon Leon, Latino Business Development Center

Discussion facilitated
by George Latimer

Citizen participation is an important facet of our public life. It nurtures our democratic values, fosters the opportunity for building community will and initiative, and engages people who ask “What can I do to help?” Minneapolis and St. Paul are known nationally for their commitment to civic engagement and citizen participation in community planning. Today we struggle to define how those systems will be sustained given the financial challenges that face our public sector, and how to make them more responsive to the diverse needs of our communities.

This year we take you on a journey through uncharted lands, through the jungles of the neighborhood movement, to glimpse the cascading waters of community intrigue, to embark on an expedition of adventure together, and to see where we end up.

The point we want to bring home is that we need to get there together. To bring together the connection of common interests that fill this room. To remind ourselves that the glue, the secret of success, the subliminal message, is the importance of

RELATIONSHIPS.

The central questions that we put forward for discussion tonight are: “What can be done to strengthen citizen participation in our cities? How can we engage more communities in citizen participation?”

We are intrigued by the notion of a compact—an agreement or treaty between two or more entities that seeks to establish a common intent among the partners involved, as well as roles and responsibilities for carrying those goals forward. Specifically, a compact would:

- Establish principles that assert the goals of the citizen participation system,
- Define actions that describe how those principles can be accomplished,
- Identify the roles and responsibilities of each of the partners toward fulfilling those goals, and
- Suggest ways for holding partners accountable to the principles and actions outlined in the compact.

Something to get us all on the same page—elected officials and community leaders alike. To utilize our broad networks and relationships to create a citizen participation compact that gives us direction, focus, and purpose.

Why is citizen participation so critical to our work?

At last year's address we identified five core themes or basic elements that help define the success (and challenges) of our work at the community level:

Building Community—creating a sense of place and social fabric. This work relies on the network of relationships, effective communications, and creating a sense of belonging.

Civic Engagement—the foundation of democracy. We can't do this work effectively without skilled organizers and continual outreach

Accountability, diversity, and organizational effectiveness. It is important to recognize that the strength of organizational capacity helps to solidify needed resources to provide impact on critical issues.

Innovative problem solving in partnership. These are places where new ideas percolate and sometimes take root.

Genuine long lasting improvements to neighborhood livability. On issues ranging from housing, public safety, the environment, land use, parks and recreation, families and youth, transportation, education, arts and culture, and economic development—neighborhoods are involved in efforts to improve their community.

While these themes help crystallize the content of the work we do, additional information is needed to understand what resources are needed to support and sustain it.

Early this year the Center worked with a team of neighborhood representatives from Minneapolis and St. Paul to provide an updated analysis of funding trends for neighborhood organizations, with research assistance provided by Sarah Friese through the Neighborhood Planning and Community Revitalization and CURA (Center for Urban and Regional Affairs).

In that report, five case studies were provided to demonstrate successful examples of how neighborhoods attract resources to their work. The case studies focused on three neighborhood organizations: Macalester Groveland Community Council, the Whittier Alliance, and the Powderhorn Park Neighborhood Association; and two collaborations: the Midtown Public Market and the Great Northern Corridor. It also gathered interviews from a variety of private funders to assess their interest in funding neighborhood organizations. The analysis indicates that four things are essential for adapting to today's funding environment:

- Organizational strength and stability, defining long term and short term goals
- Broad support and strong partnerships
- Results-based programs and projects—the ability to evaluate the impact that occurs
- Opportunities to generate revenue through events and programs, and look for nontraditional funding sources

In addition, the Center is currently conducting a survey of neighborhood capacity to determine resource needs of the existing organizations. In that survey three questions are

asked:

- What programs or projects does your organization currently administer? (rank them in priority)
- What are your priorities and staffing needs for the foreseeable future?
- What public and private funding sources did you receive in 2002?

To date we have a response rate of 86%—or 75 out of 87 Minneapolis and St. Paul organizations. Although these are still ballpark figures, of those polled the ratio of public to private funds are slightly less than 10:1 (over \$5 million in public funding and about \$600,000 in private funds). The public funds, however, reflect the presence of NRP, which has provided an enhanced resource pool for neighborhoods and their work in Minneapolis.

The ballpark figure for what it would take to continue funding these neighborhoods and district councils, given their future staffing needs is approximately \$2 million for St. Paul organizations, and \$4 million for Minneapolis organizations.

Approximately 75 percent of all neighborhood organizations rely solely on public resources.

Beyond identifying the capacity needs and priorities of these organizations, the analysis will also reflect what resources are dedicated to, and the array of programs and projects that neighborhoods are undertaking. Where does the money go?

The most popular priorities that neighborhoods undertake include: Environmental clean-up, community building activities (such as events and festivals), housing improvement grants and low-interest loans, community crime prevention, transportation and street improvements, and zoning and land-use planning. Families and youth programs were only listed by a handful of groups, and economic development is a priority primarily for areas along major commercial corridors.

St. Paul ties resources directly to citizen participation services and it shows up as a specific program area and priority in their work. The Minneapolis counterpart is funds provided by MCDA, although these funds are rarely identified for citizen participation by Minneapolis groups.

As they look to their future priorities and needs, Minneapolis neighborhoods indicate that they primarily see themselves as community improvement organizations rather than citizen participation groups.

What is expected in citizen participation?

Clearly there may be many different viewpoints.

The International Association for Public Participation offers the following list of core values for the practice of citizen or public participation:

- The public should have a say in decisions about actions that affect their lives.
- Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
- The public participation process communicates the

interests and meets the process needs of all participants.

- The public participation process seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected.
- The public participation process involves participants in defining how they participate.
- The public participation process communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.
- The public participation process provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.

As we grapple with our own investment in and practice of citizen participation, we must ask what is being expected, and are there structures in place to do it well?

How do we strengthen citizen participation?

Each city may have a different response. Both cities are wrestling with fewer resources to sustain basic city functions. Budget cuts have necessitated the need to look hard at all city expenditures, including citizen participation. Also, with the increasing diversity of our community, neighborhood meetings are largely filled with white people. Cultural communities have created methods outside of the neighborhood process for getting their voices and needs heard.

It is fascinating to observe the cultures of St. Paul and Minneapolis as they wrestle with this question.

In St. Paul there has been the tendency to create parallel systems. Special advisory committees are set up to engage different interest groups (such as cultural groups or business interests), while the District Councils maintain their own constituencies. What is clear is that no one in St. Paul wants to rock the boat. Questions raised by the Planning Commission in 2002 raised fears that the District Council system may be in jeopardy. And with a council that serves in a part-time capacity, the need for community input through the district councils is clear.

In Minneapolis the debate over the future of the NRP, and the City's efforts to restructure its community development and service delivery, has put the question of citizen participation squarely on the table. As a joint powers agreement between the city, county, parks, library, and schools, the resources dedicated to NRP provide no assurance that city priorities and goals will be met. And with limited resources available to community development, the City is hard pressed to give it away. The standoff has created an intensifying uncertainty for neighborhood work. Some of the more skilled neighborhood organizations that have completed their NRP Phase I plans are now undergoing dramatic downsizing while others are still comfortably spending down their Phase I resources.

The Community Summit

In March of 2003, the Community Summit emerged with the intent to broaden the discussion and to identify goals and outcomes for the future of community-based planning in Minneapolis. Twenty-four community leaders

were invited to participate in a facilitated conversation to clarify the strengths and weaknesses of the current citizen participation system, and recognizing that there was room for improvement, find ways to build on what was already working well to engage a broader set of communities in that system. Participants represented a range of community interests and perspectives, such as neighborhoods, issue-based groups (such as affordable housing, renters, youth programs), cultural communities, business associations, and community developers.

The Summit participants explored a variety of models or scenarios for how a citizen participation system could be structured. Providing a spectrum of approaches, considering elements such as:

- Neighborhood vs. larger scale
- Open competition vs. designated group to coordinate planning and citizen engagement efforts
- Integration vs. parallel processes for racial, cultural, and nongeographic-based issues
- Establish standards as prerequisite vs. incentives or rewards for self-organizing processes

The group also discussed a ratio of costs for process (organizational capacity) vs. programs and projects. The group identified their preferences, exploring the pros and cons of the various models, and creating hybrids of their own. Ultimately the Summit members were able to agree upon a set of core values for strengthening the Minneapolis citizen participation system.

The Summit Core Group felt that the Community Summit dialogue had surfaced important ideas for a new model that needed to be put forward for consideration and discussion by the broader community. The model creates a tiered system (block, neighborhood/community, region, and citywide), recognizing that people relate to community in different ways, and suggesting that different layers perform distinct roles and responsibilities or functions.

In addition, the proposed model puts an emphasis on accountability, collaboration, efficiencies of scale, and aligning with city service delivery systems to create meaningful connections between the city and community groups in support of community planning and development.

To reflect the views that composed the Community Summit report, I am pleased to present three of the task force members:

- David Rubedor of the Powderhorn Park Neighborhood Association
- Greg Luce of Project 504, and
- Ramon Leon of the Latino Business Development Center

The audience was invited to ask questions and offer feedback on the Community Summit and how to strengthen citizen participation in Minneapolis and St. Paul. The discussion was facilitated by George Latimer.

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2600 East Franklin Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55406
612-339-3480
www.center4neighborhoods.org



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The Center for Neighborhoods serves as a catalyst and a resource to promote and encourage ideas, alliances, policies, and actions that strengthen the livability and vitality of neighborhoods.

The Center's goal is to strengthen cities and the region by deepening civic dialogue at the neighborhood level, where shared goals can be set between public and private interests, and where people can actively participate in making their communities better.

In closing

The Center for Neighborhoods would like to invite you to participate in a series of four workshops to create a Compact for Citizen Participation.

Over the next few months a series of four workshops will be held to create a citizen participation compact for each city that brings city officials and neighborhood and community leaders together to:

- Establish principles that assert the goals of the citizen participation system,
- Define actions that describe how those principles can be accomplished,
- Identify the roles and responsibilities of each of the partners toward fulfilling those goals, and
- Suggest ways for holding partners accountable to the principles and actions outlined in the compact.

The goal is to develop an understanding of how each must contribute in supporting the system of citizen participation, to find ways to broaden involvement by diverse community interests, and to help one another improve our efforts to create a rich and vibrant forum for public engagement. Two parallel tracks will be conducted for Minneapolis and St. Paul. The first and last meetings will be held in a joint location to provide opportunities to share ideas between the two cities.

The Citizen Participation Compact process is sponsored by:

- Center for Neighborhoods
- Center for Policy, Planning and Performance
- Wilder Foundation—Center for Community
- Macalester College, Urban Studies Department
- University of Minnesota, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs

Elected officials, neighborhood and community leaders are invited to participate. The process will be open to the public. Participants are asked to register by August 15, 2003. It is also requested that participants do their utmost to attend all four sessions.

To register or to learn more about the Citizen Participation Compact, please contact the Center for Neighborhoods at 612-339-3480 or visit our web site at www.center4neighborhoods.org.