

7-10-1975

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Recommended Citation

Bateman, A. J., "Involving Citizens in Land Use Planning" (1975). *Economics Commentator*. Paper 71.
http://openprairie.sdstate.edu/econ_comm/71

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Economics Newsletter

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No. 72

July 10, 1975

INVOLVING CITIZENS IN LAND USE PLANNING

There is a specific role for the citizen in land use policy-making. While much of that role depends on the mechanism devised for participation, the citizen will be more effective if he or she remains reasonably informed about the issues and choices.

Since the passing of H.B. 662 by the 1974 South Dakota legislature, increased activity in land use planning at the county level has become apparent. Local government leaders are looking for ways to develop or update their comprehensive land use plan by July 1, 1976. Because of the limited amount of time available for completion of the above task, and the lack of appreciation for citizen participation in the planning process, citizen involvement at the grass-roots level is being overlooked in many instances.

Citizen involvement right from the start is most important in helping to avoid wasting the financial and human resources represented by an unacceptable and unimplemented comprehensive land use plan.

No group or groups of individuals should be excluded from participation, intentionally or unintentionally. The degree to which this does not occur will be the extent to which the believability gap is narrowed between decision-makers and those who are affected by their decisions. While everyone can not and will not actively participate, every group or organization can, at least, have its concerns expressed and considered.

There are many reasons why it is important for citizens of a community

(city, county, region, or state) to be involved in the development and implementation of the comprehensive land use plan. A comprehensive land use plan cannot effectively meet community goals unless it reflects the real desires, aspirations, wants, needs, and problems as well as opportunities of the community, and people who comprise it. Moreover, to have a land use plan that is the community's land use plan and not one that represents only the professional planner, other outside experts, elected officials, or just a handful of people requires that the citizens within the community be involved from the time the plan is conceived to the time it is completed and implemented.

Ultimately, before a land use plan can be officially adopted by a community, official approval by elected public officials is necessary. Once the plan is adopted, public funds are usually required to implement the plan and these funds must be appropriated by an elected body of public officials.

In the implementation stage the land use plan can be very controversial, especially in rural areas. Public officials may be reluctant to become involved, unless widespread public support is evident. This support can best be secured by actively involving the citizens of the planning area.

The involvement of a community's citizens must be real. That is, professional planners, consultants or elected officials should never try to use a group of citizens as a rubber stamp. The citizens involved must not only represent the whole community but must also keep the whole community in mind

when making or influencing development and implementation of the comprehensive land use plan. This concept is probably more pertinent in land use programs than in any other community development endeavor because of the implications of such programs and the potential for conflicts.

Listed below are some suggested educational methods that can be used to obtain citizen input in the planning process:

1. Publish planning newsletters for public distribution concerning the planning program and progress; planning board's business activities.
2. Use the daily and weekly newspapers, radio and television stations to report planning matters to the public. Better yet, invite them to attend the planning meetings.
3. Keep the discussion meetings open to the public and hold them with community leaders, professional planners and educators, so that they get the

maximum benefit from the feedback or discussions that develop.

4. Elected officials, planning commission members and others involved should appear before various organizations, groups, clubs, etc., to discuss community problems, planning goals and concepts, zoning ordinances, the zoning map, and other important items.
5. Mail questionnaires to a representative cross-section of citizens to obtain input on specific questions.
6. Encourage people from your community to visit areas that have present or potential land-use problems and areas that have effective land-use planning.

Since the general objective of the whole planning process is to provide, in every respect, a better environment for the people, the citizens of the planning area must be given the opportunity to take part in the planning process.

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