

Over My Dead Body!

A Workbook for Community Involvement

Lance Decker
Lindworth Press



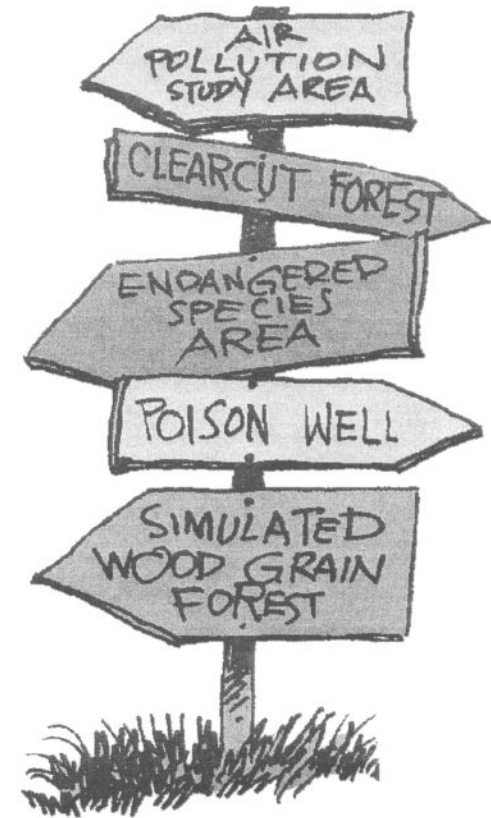
Introduction

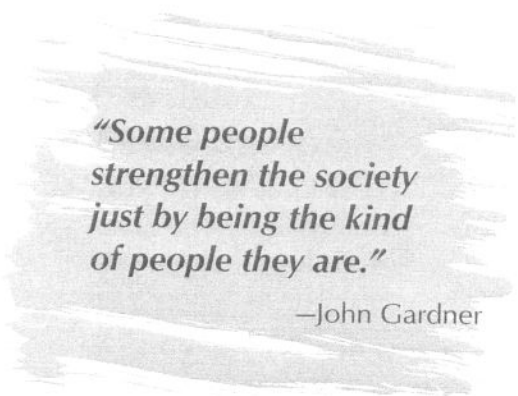
Civic collaboration is a process of shared decision making in which all the parties with a stake in a problem constructively explore their differences and develop a joint strategy for action. The ethic of collaboration is premised on the belief that politics does not have to be a zero-sum game where one party wins and one party loses, or where both sides settle for a compromise. If the right people are brought together in constructive ways and with the appropriate information they can not only create authentic visions and strategies for addressing their joint problems but also, in many cases, overcome their limited perspectives of what is possible.

—Scott London, “Collaboration and Community”, November, 1995,
Pew Partnership for Civic Change

Orientation to Public Involvement

Shared responsibility and civic collaboration are the foundation of community-directed planning and involvement. Public officials and managers cannot provide all the services that a community might want, need or expect, and it is a disservice to that community for those persons to think they can. This book highlights the errors that occur when public officials and managers try to do everything for everyone, and illustrates the benefits of involving communities in the planning, research, decision making, and implementing process.





***“Some people
strengthen the society
just by being the kind
of people they are.”***

—John Gardner

What’s driving this movement toward community-based, collaborative decision making? It appears that pressure is coming from at least two directions.

First, government is being asked to provide more services, reduce taxes, increase fee-based revenue and become more efficient. To meet such a challenge, government must gain the support and cooperation of citizens for finding service alternatives and establishing priorities for limited resources. In addition, many government leaders believe that community members can provide personal energy and intellectual capital to their organizations. These are bright, energetic people who are often willing to contribute their treasury of great ideas to the public service if they are given a meaningful role.

Second, community members are demanding a meaningful role in the process of governance. They want to take control of their communities, participate in democratic processes, and find resolution to their own unique problems. By giving them the power to discuss, plan and decide their own futures, citizens acquire ownership of the decision, are more likely to abide by that decision and will find ways to make the decision work smoothly.

In most communities citizen participation is no longer an option...it’s the law! Involving citizens in decisions that affect them is also the right thing to do.

What You Need to Know about this Book

Purpose and Objectives of the Book

This book shows public officials, administrators and citizens how community involvement processes can benefit their jurisdictions, and how community members and public leaders can work together as allies and not enemies. Above all else, the book is a practical aid to understanding how community-based planning works. It answers the questions, “What can we gain from engaging in structured civic dialogue?” and “How might we proceed with such discussions?” It provides useful tools and techniques to determine the appropriate levels of community involvement necessary for a project or controversy, and illustrates the step-by-step methods for implementing community involvement. In the end, this book should be a starting point for building community capacity, solving community problems, and creating community partnerships.

The processes described in this book are currently being used broadly in North America, and the public involvement techniques described and illustrated in this book can make a difference in any town, city, county or state willing to use them consistently over the long term.

Organization of the Book

There are eight chapters, an introduction and four appendices in this book. Each chapter addresses a basic concept of community-based planning and involvement. Each chapter begins with an episode of the story of Chicken Grove. The appendices contains snapshots of forms used within the chapters to illustrate and support key



concepts. Full-sized, downloadable copies of these forms can be obtained from the Institute for Community Involvement website at www.communityinvolvement.org.

- Chapter 1 is a basic orientation to the history, philosophy, and theory of community involvement.
- Chapter 2 introduces a five-stage step-by-step model for community involvement.
- Chapter 3 focuses on community-directed planning and intervention research.
- Chapter 4 highlights community involvement strategy and program design.
- Chapter 5 examines the community involvement deployment process showing how community-directed planning and involvement is implemented.
- Chapter 6 discusses meetings and how they enter into the community involvement process, highlights methods for managing meetings and public events, and provides detailed tools and techniques for communicating with and engaging stakeholders.
- Chapter 7 develops a series of techniques for managing personal conflicts within institutional settings, outlines methods for identifying and dealing with “snipers,” and poses fundamental methods for mediating disputes.
- Chapter 8 is a guide to local capacity-building and self sufficiency for community involvement.

The Story of Chicken Grove

Chicken Grove's tale focuses on a group of people involved in collective decision making for a public purpose. It's the story of a fire station, a neighborhood, and a city. The characters in the story are people just like you. They have hopes and dreams, unique perspectives on change, fears, angers, and strongly held beliefs. It's the story of community-based, collaborative planning. Chicken Grove is the story of every city, town, county and state that values the democratic process and wants to honor their citizens, but doesn't know exactly how to do it.

The story of Chicken Grove involves many communities...a variety of stakeholders...opposing interests...and the fundamental changes that intrude on our lives. It concerns you, the socio-political environment in which you live, and the people you engage.

A new segment of Chicken Grove's struggle to build a fire station introduces each chapter of this workbook. The substantive topic developed in each chapter is highlighted in the story, and "driving questions" are posed about the story to put the story in context.

