

Chapter 2: Getting Started



To reach the goal of forming a United Growth Coalition, we found it is best to organize Urban and Rural Committees. Each Committee will work on land use issues that have the most interest to them. Rural residents and others interested in township and agricultural issues will come together around concerns that most directly affect them. The same is true for urban residents and others interested in neighborhood issues and city government. After the Rural Committee and the Urban Committee are functioning, they can begin the process of identifying the common ground between them. Before organizing committees, it is suggested the following steps be taken:

1. Develop a statistical/background piece for each committee.

For the Urban Committee, document the neighborhood disinvestment that has occurred, population loss, etc. For the Rural Committee, research how many acres have been developed in the last decade, the township investment in new infrastructure, etc. These informational pieces can help in committee member recruitment and framing the issues. It will also acquaint you with county land use patterns. This begins Phase 1 of the United Growth model – *Education*. Examples of some informational pieces are at the end of this chapter.

2. Begin compiling names of potential individuals and organizations who can be contacted to join the two committees.

Develop a list of organizations and individuals who might be interested. See Chapter 9 for a list of United Growth for Kent County members and look for partners in your region.

3. Outline a possible funding plan.

When committees undertake activities, start planning for how associated costs will be covered. Also consider staffing needs and how salaries will be funded. (See Chapter 8 for more information on funding.)

It might seem more natural to begin with the group you know the most about. However, start with the more difficult group first. You are apt to work a little harder at the beginning to get your first committee organized. With less energy as you tackle the second group, it should be the one you are more comfortable with. So, if you know more about farmland and your office has more contact with townships than city government, organize the Urban committee first. Or conversely, if your expertise is urban, organize the Rural Committee first. The following are suggestions on how to organize your first committee.

Organizing the Urban and Rural Committees

As stated previously, the United Growth model calls for the organization of rural stakeholders into the Rural Committee and the organization of urban stakeholders into the Urban Committee. Each committee will pursue the land use issues of most concern to them. Later we will begin to build the common ground between them so that the Coalition can be organized. For right now, however, the focus is on organizing the Urban Committee and the Rural Committee.

Organize the committee that you have less knowledge of first.

Identify Stakeholders for Each of the Committees

From day one, you need to compile a list of names of people who might be good candidates for these committees. Gather names from the following sources:

- your County Extension Director and Extension Educators
- special interest groups: Farm Bureau, neighborhood associations, environmental groups, etc.
- community-based organizations, chambers of commerce, realtor associations
- local government: townships, cities, both elected and appointed officials
- area colleges and universities
- religious organizations
- referrals from everyone with whom you talk

Begin asking people you've identified if they would be willing to serve on the committee. Explain the purpose of the project and committee member responsibilities (monthly 1.5 hour meetings, providing input for program development, function as a resource for the project, help publicize the project within your own contacts.) After you have 5 or 6 people who have expressed an interest in being on a committee, prepare to call the first meeting. Don't forget that the first committee organized should be the one in which you have the *lesser* experience.

Preparing for the First Committee Meeting

When talking with people about their interests/concerns regarding land use, begin identifying who you think might provide some leadership to the committee. It is always preferable to have someone else chair meetings - *not* the staff person. The following steps might help you flush out committee leadership early on:

1. Meet with 2 or 3 people who said they would serve on a committee. Discuss with them what should be on the agenda for the committee's first meeting:

- An educational piece, for example, a summary of the research on land use patterns in your county.
- An explanation of a new program operated by one of the committee's members. (This would also ensure that person's attendance at the meeting!)
- A brief review of the United Growth model.
- Initial brainstorming on what issues/events the committee would like to pursue.
- An assessment of who else should be invited to join the committee.
- Decision on a regular, monthly meeting date and time.

2. Whatever items were decided in #1 above, put into an agenda (see a sample agenda at the end of the chapter) and e-mail or snail mail it out to committee members about two weeks in advance of the meeting. A reminder e-mail or phone call a day or two before the meeting is always a good idea.



A United Growth meeting. Pictured are members representing the faith community, a developer, an urban community development specialist and an interested citizen.

3. Ask for a volunteer to help prepare the agenda and chair the next meeting. If no one volunteers, suggest a rotating chair for the next several months - each one taking a turn at chairing.

4. Your role as staff to the committee requires a balance between providing some guidance to the group - but making sure that *they* are the ones deciding the specific direction. Your role is more “behind the scene”, recruiting good committee members, developing leadership, providing educational resources, and building the capacity of the committee to decide their goals and what activities they would like to undertake.

“People support that which they help create.”

Author Unknown

Future Committee Meetings

It will be difficult for the committee to “gel” as a group at first. Here are some suggestions on how you can build an identity for the committee and its members:

- Develop an educational base around the land use issues of interest to committee members so that they share a common understanding. Make copies of pertinent articles and send them to committee members. Encourage research on issues that are raised.
- Continue to recruit committee members (12-20) so that the committee is broadly representative of the rural or urban area they represent.
- Develop leadership within the group - make sure chairs and co-chairs of sub-committees are designated.
- Undertake a committee activity as soon as possible (suggestions are included in Chapter 3.) An activity can be as simple as printing a brochure on a topic of interest to the committee, taking a tour as a group, or as complex as committee members undertaking a special project.
- Create a pleasant atmosphere at committee meetings: refreshments are always nice, give members an opportunity to network and get to know each other, demonstrate your appreciation for their involvement, etc.

Organizing the Other Committee

After your first committee has met several times, you will want to start organizing the second committee. Follow the same steps for establishing the first committee.

Outcomes: At the end of your first year, you should have an active Urban Committee and an active Rural Committee, both meeting monthly. Each committee should have 12 to 20 members. There should be a chair and co-chair for each, and they should have accomplished one or more activities/projects.

Supplemental Information

The rest of the chapter consists of examples for Kent County that can be used as templates for your program. Please note that a lot of the information will be different for your county/region, but the basic framework of the materials should be useful.

Kent County is Growing...Changing...Sprawling

Population and Urbanization

- ⇒ The population of Kent County increased 19% from 1978 to 1993.¹
- ⇒ The amount of land in Kent County that is urbanized increased 80% during that same period.²
- ⇒ The urbanized land of the Grand Rapids area grows 3 to 4 times faster than the population.³
- ⇒ The City of Grand Rapids *lost* 4.3% of its population from 1970 to 1990.⁴
- ⇒ The population density of the City of Grand Rapids is 29% greater than the national average; but the population density of Grand Rapids' suburbs is 35% less than the national average.⁵
- ⇒ The population of Kent County is projected to increase 35% from 1990 to 2020.⁶



Housing and Segregation

- ⇒ Grand Rapids' housing segregation by race index is 72, worse than Michigan's index of 70 which is worst in the nation.⁷
- ⇒ Grand Rapids' school segregation by race index is 77, worse than Michigan's 75 which is worst in the nation.⁸
- ⇒ The region does not provide enough housing that is affordable to its poorest residents. However, the City of Grand Rapids provides more affordable housing than other areas of Kent County, concentrating low-income households in the central city.

Crime

- ⇒ A recent study by Myron Orfield documents the social and economic disparities across Kent County. These patterns generally mean that those areas with the highest social needs will have the fewest resources with which to meet those needs. Rates of crime are clearly concentrated in the central city.
- ⇒ A study in *Social Forces* provides evidence that neighborhood disadvantage contributes to crime. The authors conclude that "...both the absence of positive [influences] [such as

¹ Government Information Sharing Project, Oregon State University, USA Counties: [Online], Available: <http://govinfo.library.orst.edu/cgi-bin/usaco.ist?24-081.mic>

² Michigan State University Institute of Water Research, [Online] Available: <http://www.iwr.msu.edu/farmbureau/fdupdate.htm>. See also Footnote 8.

³ Ibid. "In 1960, the Grand Rapids urbanized area (the central city and contiguous suburbs) contained 294,000 residents in 94 square miles of urbanized land. By 1990, the urbanized area contained 436,000 residents in 223 square miles of urbanized land. The population grew 48%; the amount of land used to accommodate the increased population grew by 137%" (David Rusk cited in Frey Foundation. (1997). *Today's Winners--Tomorrow's Losers*, Summary of Workshop, April 1997.)

⁴ State of the Cities Data System, [Online] Available: <http://io.aspensys.com/socds/scripts/>.

⁵ David Rusk. (1996). *Acting as One: Presentation for the 5th Annual Livable Communities Conference*. Lansing, MI.

⁶ Michigan Society of Planning Officials. (1995). *Patterns on the Land*, cited in Frey Foundation. (1997). *Today's Winners--Tomorrow's Losers*, Summary of Workshop, April 1997.

⁷ David Rusk, cited in Poulson, David. (199?). Poverty, race tied to use, abuse of Michigan's land, *Grand Rapids Press*. [Poulson also explains, "A score of 100 means census tracts are completely segregated by race. A score of 0 means total integration--every census tract has the same percentage of minorities as found in a city's entire metro area."]

⁸ Ibid.

persons with high status occupations] *and* the presence of negative influences [such as concentrated poverty and male joblessness] contributes to crime as a form of social dislocation.⁹ The study also provides evidence that "...the causes of crime are rooted in the structural differences among communities rather than in race/culture."

Abandonment and Disinvestment

- ⇒ Those able to move to and live in low-density areas are generally those with resources. Human and financial resources are abandoning the city.
- ⇒ This is suburban sprawl. The result is concentrated poverty in the central city with increased racial and economic segregation.

⁹ Lauren J. Krivo & Ruth D. Peterson. (1996). Extremely disadvantaged neighborhoods and urban crime. *Social Forces* 75 (2): 641.

Commerce in the Creston Neighborhood

A commercial district can be the beating heart of a vital neighborhood. It is a place for people to meet and interact, trading goods and services for the sustenance of life. A commercial district gives a neighborhood vibrancy and energy. However, suburban sprawl threatens the vitality of urban neighborhoods. Suburban sprawl is poorly planned, low-density development of the built environment at the urban fringe coupled with abandonment of existing infrastructure at the urban core. Resources of all types are leaving established central city neighborhoods and being invested on what once was farmland. Creston neighborhood, for example, is feeling the effects of suburban sprawl as its commercial district is forced to compete with nearby “big box” stores on Alpine and Plainfield. Michigan State University has been working with several Grand Rapids neighborhoods, including Creston, to address the effects of suburban sprawl on the neighborhood. Together, the neighborhood association and MSU are exploring several strategies for revitalizing the commercial district and the neighborhood. Some of these ideas include:

1. Follow the money and keep it circulating in the neighborhood.

A neighborhood acts like a “leaky bucket” when resources flow out of the neighborhood rather than circulating inside the neighborhood, says Dr. Rex LaMore, State Director of MSU’s Center for Urban Affairs. Circulating resources create a “multiplier effect” which can benefit both residents and businesses of the neighborhood. Residents can promote circulation by buying goods and services locally even if the prices are higher and the selection smaller than at the “big box” stores. Businesses can promote circulation by offering goods and services valued by the neighborhood residents. Over the past several decades businesses such as clothing and variety stores seem to have left the Plainfield commercial district. Market studies can help reveal which businesses are in demand locally. Businesses can also circulate resources within the neighborhood by employing local residents. These residents can then spend their income at other local stores.

2. Get people out of their cars.

Cars in a neighborhood produce traffic congestion and safety problems. People in a neighborhood are the source of vitality and life. According to retailing planner Robert Gibbs, commercial corridors need 20,000 “slow-moving” cars per day to remain viable. Plainfield has that volume of traffic. The key, however, is



compelling those drivers to stop and get out of their cars. Dan Burden suggests parking be allowed on the street to both slow traffic and facilitate quick shopping stops by commuters. Gibbs recommends parking be placed behind the store but that patrons be enticed to walk around the building (past other stores) to enter the business by the front (street) door. A walkable, vibrant commercial district also encourages neighborhood residents to discard their cars altogether and meet their needs for goods and services close to home.

3. Make the streetscape visually appealing.

Most of us value settings that are clean, tidy, orderly and interesting. Commercial districts only have a few seconds to present an attractive image to drivers. Signage and window displays are important. Robert Gibbs suggests that sidewalks be power washed two times per day. He also suggests that doors be washed every hour and windows every day. The ground-level face of commercial buildings should be 70% clear glass to be inviting to passers-by. Obviously, building owners will be concerned about broken windows and crime, but attracting pedestrians back onto the sidewalk throughout the day is a great crime prevention strategy.

Creston also has historic architectural assets on which it can capitalize. Historic preservationist Don Rypkema calls historic buildings “assets not yet returned to productive use”. According to the report *Emerging Trends in Real Estate 1998* traditional neighborhoods have great potential. People are rediscovering the value of living in a real neighborhood.

4. Cooperate for mutual gain.

Competition for markets is central to our economic system. However, commercial districts exist so that people can access several commercial opportunities in one place. This is one reason that malls have been so successful. Often similar businesses all benefit by locating near to one another. Wealthy Street here in Grand Rapids, for example, has been emerging as an antiques corridor. Plainfield has always hosted several furniture stores. The type of businesses that occupy a commercial district is not merely a matter of chance or abstract market forces. West Palm Beach provides an example, Steve Langerfeld says, of “us[ing] loans and other incentive to manipulate [a] ‘tenant mix’”. In other words, people and organizations, working together, can find ways to create neighborhood commercial districts that meet their needs. Businesses can also help each other by offering coupons redeemable at neighboring businesses. Businesses in Creston should continue to search for ways they can cooperate for mutual benefit. The creation of a vibrant commercial district not only will improve the neighborhood, but also will contribute to the development of an attractive city that will slow suburban sprawl.

By Tom Bulten, MSU Center for Urban Affairs

Smart Growth Strategies for Neighborhood Economic Development

Building a strong neighborhood economy is fundamental to creating a high quality of life in a central city neighborhood. A “smart neighborhood” attracts new economy jobs as it revitalizes its housing and other infrastructure components.

- Smart economic growth means maximizing the use of every possible asset, including brownfield sites.
- Infill projects that are mixed-use developments equal smart economic development.
- Smart economic growth entails the revitalization of neighborhoods while addressing the concern of gentrification.
- Smart growth utilizes existing infrastructure more efficiently, reducing the need to expand that infrastructure. Smart economic growth means developing effectively around existing infrastructure, which saves money, preserves the environment, and economically strengthens the current infrastructure.
- A key smart economic growth strategy is to support private development and create investment opportunities in distressed neighborhoods.
- Economic vitality and neighborhood stability generally go hand-in-hand.
- Smart neighborhoods are diverse in use and population.

Rural Committee Goals

A. Early in Year One – Four Goals

1. Ag Profitability
2. Taxation Policy
3. Smart Growth
4. Farmland Preservation/Urban Redevelopment

B Revised in Year One

1. Public Education
2. Public Dialogue
3. Legislative Policy to address:
 - a. Effective Land Use
 - (1) Regional Planning
 - Transportation
 - Utilities
 - Urban Redevelopment
 - (2) Smart Growth Model Communities
 - (3) State Advocacy
 - b. Agri-sustainability
 - (1) ID of prime and unique land
 - (2) Profitability
 - Taxes
 - Value-added products
 - Cost containment
 - Ag recreation and tourism

Ten Principles of Smart Growth

These principles or tenets were developed by Smart Growth Network. For more information and examples visit www.smartgrowth.org

1. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices
2. Create walkable neighborhoods
3. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration
4. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
5. Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost-effective
6. Mix land uses
7. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty and critical environmental areas
8. Provide a variety of transportation choices
9. Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities
10. Take advantage of compact development design

2001 Urban Committee Goals

The following goals/activities for the year 2001 were adopted by the Urban Committee on January 11, 2001:

- Organize a “summit” on an urban issue.
 - organize a planning committee (January)
 - select the issue(s) (January)
 - research the issue(s) both locally and nationally (January-June)
 - identify possible co-sponsors (February)
 - obtain a national expert as keynote speaker (February)
 - develop the action component (June)
 - convene the summit (October)

- More fully utilize the United Growth web site.
 - publicize address, including through e-mail messages (ongoing)
 - ask Partners to link their web sites to ours (February)
 - identify other papers, etc. that should be included on the site (ongoing)

- Assist in organizing the United Growth Coalition.
 - have representation on an organizing committee that will map out the Coalition’s formation (February)
 - participate in a facilitated meeting with the Rural Committee to identify common issues and goals (October)
 - help decide what organizational structure the Coalition should pursue (December)

- Monitor Grand Rapids’ Master Plan update process.
 - analyze its impact on abating sprawl (ongoing)
 - assure neighborhood voices are being heard (March, September, and December)

- Research Mixed Income Neighborhoods/Affordable Housing Issue
 - continue committee meetings (ongoing)
 - present to the Rural Committee (March)
 - research tools needed to create mixed income neighborhoods (October)
 - work toward holding a “summit” in 2002



**Rural Committee Meeting
July 17, 2001 Sparta Township Offices
8:30 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.**

Agenda

1. Welcome and Introduction of New Vice Chair, Cynthia Price
2. Approval of Minutes
3. Update from Coalition Formation Subcommittee – Andy, Cynthia, Sr. Lucille, Kendra
4. Update on Citizen Planner - Kendra
5. Update on Coordinate Planning Act Review Committee – Andy, Cynthia, Sr. Lucielle, Gene, Kendra
6. Formation of Joint Subcommittee: House Land Use & Environment Committee Presentation – Kendra
7. Discussion on Committee Goals and Objectives for the Upcoming Year
 - Rural Committee Goals for 2000-01
 - Rural Component Progress Report on Goals
 - Side-by-Side Comparison of Rural and Urban Committee Goals
 - Draft 2001-02 Goals
8. Announcements
9. Next Meeting – August 21, Location?
10. Adjournment



A G E N D A
URBAN COMMITTEE – United Growth for Kent County Project

March 1, 2001
MSU-West 8:30 am

- I. Call to Order -- Danielle Bult, Chair
- II. Welcome and Introductions
 - A. Overview of MSU-West – Carol Townsend
 - B. Overview of United Growth – Kendra Gunter
- III. Discussion with Representative Jerry Kooiman
- IV. Committee Reports
 - A. Mixed Income Neighborhoods – Mary Hartfield
 - B. Slum Landlord Summit – Linda Likely
 - C. Coalition Planning Committee
- V. Other Business
 - A. Approval of last meeting's minutes
 - B. Funding update – Kendra Gunter
 - C. Committee member announcements
 - D. Next Urban Committee meeting – April 5 – featuring Phil Schaafsma and the housing survey report
- VI. Adjournment

Chapter 3: Planning & Implementing Committee Activities



As discussed earlier, one of the unique features of the United Growth model is that it is citizen-based. In other words, United Growth works to improve urban neighborhoods and rural communities through civic engagement. Both rural and urban stakeholders must be involved in determining what activities will be undertaken and issues addressed as well as being actively involved in their implementation.

This grassroots or “bottom up” approach directly impacts the role of the staff person implementing the United Growth model. The staff role is not to be the “doer” as much as the “facilitator.” The committee members must be doing most of the activities. Staff must consistently encourage committee members to do the range of tasks that are needed to undertake any activity. Only when no one is willing or able to do a task, should the staff agree to do it.

The following is a list of ideas for committee projects related to land use and are based on United Growth for Kent County’s experiences:

- Land Use Education Project Models
- Projects to Attract Creative, Educated Entrepreneurs

Land Use Education Project Models:

1. Creating and printing a brochure.

Especially in the education phase of the project, committee members may want to know more about some aspect of urban sprawl and then publish their findings so that others can also become more aware.

2. Developing a survey.

Committee members might be interested in a subject where data is not readily available. The committee might then decide to conduct a survey to supply the missing data.

3. Self-education activities.

To become better acquainted with organizations within their scope of interest, committee members may want to devote their monthly meetings to visiting various places within the county or inviting guests with a certain expertise to their monthly meetings. For example, the Urban Committee might want to visit with neighborhood association representatives and the Rural Committee might want to visit with farmers or township officials.

4. Participate in current community activities.

The committee might want to identify an important community project being undertaken and decide how their participation could have an impact. For example, if the city or county is updating its master plan, the committee could assist with some aspect. Or if a neighborhood or township is tackling a new ordinance or other policy, the committee could develop a position paper to make sure Smart Growth principles are being followed.

Tell me, I forget.

Show me, I may remember.

Involve me, I will understand.

- Ancient Proverb

In all of the above examples, a sub-committee may be formed to do most of the work. This would just require a core group of interested members to proceed. A chair and co-chair should be selected. The sub-committee would lay out a plan of action at an early meeting, decide who will do what (including staff), and then report at the monthly committee meeting on progress. The successful undertaking of a number of such activities is needed to create buy-in and convince members that this is a worthwhile committee doing needed activities. Members must feel that the committee is addressing issues that are relevant and important to them; that their input matters to the success of the committee, and that the United Growth model will make a significant, positive impact on their county's land use patterns.

MSU Resources

There are two very good MSU resources that may be useful during the educational phase of the project. The Rural Committee may want to explore the Citizen Planner program and the Urban Committee may want to explore Building Great Neighborhoods. An explanation of both programs follows. Additional MSU Resources are listed in Chapter 13.

Citizen Planner – A Public Education Project

A good Phase 1 education project for a committee to consider is the Citizen Planner program. MSU Extension's Citizen Planner program is a seven to ten session series training program for elected officials, Planning Commissioners, Zoning Board of Appeals members or interested citizens. Cost for each participant is \$385 for all seven core sessions. Individual sessions are available at \$75 per participant per session. Local topics are \$55 per participant per session. Your office may have brochures on the Citizen Planner program or you may want to order some through the Citizen Planner office. Contact information is listed at the top of page 28.

Before your committee decides to host a program, you will want to determine that you will have at least 30 people register

Citizen Planner Program Sessions

Required Core Sessions

1. Introduction to Planning and Zoning: Smart Growth, Ethics and Planning Resources
2. Legal Foundation of Planning and Zoning: Cases, Statutes and Other Planning Authority
3. Roles and Responsibilities Part 1: The Planning Team and the Comprehensive Plan
4. Roles and Responsibilities Part 2: Zoning, Site Plans and the Zoning Board of Appeals Process
5. Plan Implementation and Development Controls: Subdividing Land, Zoning Controls and Non-regulatory Techniques
6. Best Practices for Innovative Planning and Zoning: Causes of Sprawl, Traditional Design and Conservation Design
7. Art of Community Planning: Participation, Effective Meetings and Managing Conflict

Local Topic Options (See www.citizenplanner.msu.edu for an updated list)

- Affordable Housing
- Community and Economic Development
- Conflict Management and Resolution
- Ethics and Conflict of Interest
- Farmland Preservation and Brownfield Redevelopment
- Farmland Preservation: Tools and Techniques
- GIS and Electronic Decision-Making Tools You Can Use
- Hazard Mitigation
- Low Impact Design
- Manufactured Housing
- Planning for Parks and Recreation
- Planning for Tourism
- Planning for Water Quality
- Principles of New Urbanism
- Property Rights and the Takings Issue
- Right to Farm Act and GAAMPS
- Riparian Rights
- Transportation Planning
- Urban Fringe Community Planning
- Wetlands: Science and Regulation
- Working Across Community Borders-Coordinated Planning
- And more!

as this is the number that is needed to financially support a program. Determining interest can be done a number of ways: written survey, phone survey, email, etc. The Rural Committee should also help determine interest.

For more information on the Citizen Planner Program visit the web site at <http://www.citizenplanner.msu.edu> or contact Wayne Beyea, Citizen Planner Program state coordinator or Gayle Thorne, assistant at (517) 432-7600.

You may also want the Rural Committee to consider hosting a Citizen Planner program which is outlined on the web site. If your committee decides to host a program, you will want to review the section on the web site, that outlines the process for setting up the program.

United Growth for Kent County's Rural Committee hosted Citizen Planner programs in 2001 and in 2003. Members of the Rural Committee served on the Advisory Committee to select dates, times, locations and evaluation plan for the program as well as additional "local topics" for the series. The Advisory Committee included some members who were not members of United Growth. The Advisory Committee met separately and was considered a sub-committee of the Rural Committee.

The Advisory Committee decided to seek grant support to offer scholarships for the first program in 2001. Grant funds were secured to offer full and partial scholarships to those who earned their certificate of completion. Today, most communities that secure scholarships only grant a portion of the registration fee (50% usually) for those earning a certificate.

The following outlines possible roles of the Rural Committee and Advisory Committee in development of a Citizen Planner program:

Rural Committee

- Determine interest in the Citizen Planner program through a survey, personal contacts and email.
- Form an Advisory Committee as a sub-committee to plan the program. Recruit additional members to serve on this sub-committee and appoint a chair and co-chair.
- Distribute brochures to recruit participants for the program.
- Assist the Advisory Committee in identifying some service project ideas for certificate earners.

Advisory Committee

- Set date, time and location for all sessions.
- Determine optional local topic sessions.
- Identify instructors.
- Set a goal for securing grants for scholarships and award scholarships.
- Distribute brochures and recruit participants. This may involve phone calls, mailings, presentations at local government meetings, emails, etc.)
- Identify service project ideas.

Zoning Ordinance Outreach

The City of Grand Rapids passed an award-winning master plan in 2003, which involved over 3,000 citizens. Then in November 2007, the city adopted a new zoning code that facilitated the

implementation of the master plan. The development of the zoning code: however, did not lend itself to high citizen involvement.

United Growth for Kent County entered a unique partnership with the Grand Rapids Planning Department. Its Revitalizing Neighborhoods Committee (RNC) agreed to assist the Planning Department in the development of educational pieces that explain various aspects of the zoning code. It is extremely important that citizens understand the zoning code since the ordinance is mostly enforced through complaints. So, people must know what is in the code in order to recognize any violations.

A grant was approved by a local foundation to support this project. The Joint Zoning Committee, consisting of Planning Department staff and RNC members, will develop three informational brochures and distribute to neighborhood and business associations and others interested. The Joint Committee will also develop a PowerPoint presentation that provides an overview of the code. RNC members have agreed to present the PowerPoint at 12 neighborhood-based meetings.

Since the number of City Planning staff has been reduced the past several years due to budget concerns, the Revitalizing Neighborhood Committee is able to supplement city staff's educational efforts. The RNC has encouraged citizen involvement in the master plan process, so it is natural for the Committee to continue citizen education and engagement efforts. While the Planning staff will assure the technical correctness of the materials that are produced, RNC members will make sure the materials are written in an easy-to-understand format. United Growth is hoping this collaborative approach with the city can be replicated in other projects they undertake as well as serve as a model for other cities and citizen groups.

Projects to Attract Creative, Educated Entrepreneurs

Building Great Neighborhoods - A Neighborhood Planning Project

An excellent project to undertake with a neighborhood association is the planning process outlined in the step-by-step manual, *Building Great Neighborhoods - A Citizens' Guide for Neighborhood Planning*. A staff person would help facilitate the process. The neighborhood association must be ready to create a vision for the redevelopment of their neighborhood. It is a capacity-building process. It is an open process where everyone's perspective is heard and respected.

The manual is particularly appropriate for central city neighborhoods experiencing revitalization. This planning process provides the opportunity for current residents and business owners to reclaim the redevelopment process in their neighborhood so that the area's character and uniqueness can be maintained. Neighborhood planning empowers residents and other neighborhood stakeholders in gaining some control over their future. Respecting the economic, racial, and cultural diversity of the neighborhood is also an important component of this planning process.

Although *Building Great Neighborhoods* describes a rather rudimentary planning process, it is a fundamental process that should be undertaken by every neighborhood. As neighborhood

stakeholders become more adept at planning, more complex planning activities can be undertaken. The goal is for neighborhoods to be equal partners with the city and developers in

determining the future of central cities. This manual provides a starting point for neighborhoods that have little experience in planning.

The planning process described in the manual is generally based on an actual planning project undertaken by the South West Area Neighbors in cooperation with Michigan State University Extension in Grand Rapids, Michigan. However, any neighborhood in any city can adapt this process to its own unique character and circumstances.

Each chapter was written to also stand alone, e.g. an organization doing a survey in their neighborhood could use Chapter 7 - Developing/Conducting a Neighborhood Survey - as a resource even if the survey is not part of a planning process.

A copy of the manual can be obtained by downloading it free through www.msue.msu.edu. On the left, click on “publications.” Under the “search” category, you can search by subject (community development) or by publication (W01024). It is called “Neighborhood Planning Manual.”

“Building Great Neighborhoods”

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Urban Planning Partnerships

To create an urban environment that attracts educated young people and supports neighborhood entrepreneurs, central city neighborhoods must be revitalized. At the same time, economic and cultural diversity in all of its forms must be encouraged and protected. Neighborhood planning efforts that have been undertaken in Grand Rapids, and assisted by United Growth, have attempted to incorporate all of these factors. Many of these planning projects could be replicated in other cities.

A valuable University resource that United Growth has utilized through the Kent/MSU Extension office to assist with neighborhood planning is Urban Planning Partnerships (UPP). This program is jointly sponsored by MSU Urban Collaborators and MSU Urban & Regional Planning. It allows for the assignment of a group of graduating students to work a full semester on a community planning project. This results in a win-win situation. The students receive “real life” experience, while providing near professional planning assistance in addressing a community issue. The following are brief summaries of several recent UPP projects in Grand Rapids:

Fulton Street Farmers Market Study, Spring 2006

The Midtown Neighborhood Association operates the oldest farmers market in the city, which is located in a section of their neighborhood they have targeted for redevelopment. MSU Urban Planning students researched the operations of 10 farmers markets and developed a list of best practices that they recommended to be implemented at the Fulton Street market. They also recommended physical improvements that could be made to increase walkability and the market's role as a neighborhood gathering place. Some of the student recommendations have already been implemented and others are being incorporated into the neighborhood's redevelopment plans.

GrandWalk Trail - Planning & Development Study, Spring 2007

The Indian Mill Creek traverses an area in northwest Grand Rapids and part of the City of Walker (GrandWalk). If a trail were built along the creek, it would provide a vital link in connecting the Macatawa Trail to the west and the White Pine Trail to the north. It would also provide a unique recreational opportunity for the people who live in GrandWalk. MSU Urban Planning students researched the various factors that would impact the development of a trail. They also recommended a proposed trail site. This study will continue to be the basis for trail development in GrandWalk.

Boston Square Planning & Design Project, Spring 2008

Oakdale Neighbors is leading a neighborhood planning effort that would revitalize the Kalamazoo Avenue corridor and create a neighborhood center in the Boston Square business area. MSU Urban Planning students were able to provide needed assistance for this planning initiative. They first conducted an existing conditions survey and analysis, which provided good baseline information on the existing structures. They made recommendations on how to improve walkability along Kalamazoo, how to develop Boston Square as a mixed-use center, and how to incorporate winter design standards into the plan. The students also developed a Visual Preference Survey, which was shown at a neighborhood meeting. It proved to be a very effective tool in gathering input from stakeholders on design preferences. This work by the students is being utilized by Oakdale Neighbors in the development of their Area Specific Plan that is being submitted to the City as an amendment to the City's Master Plan.

Virtually anyone in Michigan can apply for a student project. Applications are due in November of each year for students who begin projects in January. There is usually a \$2,500 fee required. For further information, contact Beata Ndovieb at ndovieb@msu.edu or at Urban Collaborators, (517) 432-9852.

Note: Other possible committee activities are located at the end of this chapter.

Determining Outcomes and Impacts of Committee Projects

Take some time now to evaluate the educational impact of your efforts to date.

- Do Urban Committee members understand why central city neighborhoods have experienced deterioration, disinvestment, and abandonment? If neighborhoods have transitioned to the stage of reinvestment, what changes in strategy are needed?

- Do Rural Committee members understand why farmland is being urbanized at a faster rate than the population is growing? Or if the agricultural use of farmland is increasing in value, what are the factors contributing to this?
- Do Rural and Urban Committee members understand the urban-rural connection?
- Are more people becoming familiar with the New Urbanist Principles and Smart Growth concepts in your county?
- Is United Growth providing a better understanding of land use issues to the broader community?

See Chapter 10, Evaluation, for a more in-depth explanation of how to develop outcomes and impacts for your project.

Supplemental Information

The rest of the chapter consists of examples for Kent County that can be used as templates for your program. Please note that a lot of the information will be different for your county/region, but the basic framework of the materials should be useful.

Possible Committee Activities

As soon as the Urban Committee and the Rural Committee are organized, it is important for the committee to undertake an activity of interest to its members. The successful achievement of an activity: builds the identity and credibility of the committee, begins the “buy-in” process for committee members, develops committee leadership, and demonstrates the relevance of your United Growth project. The following are examples of activities that can be undertaken; however, each committee in each county must decide for themselves what they want to do.

- Produce an informational/educational piece on some aspect of land use so that the general public’s awareness of the issue is raised.
- Have each committee member take turns at the monthly committee meeting giving a brief explanation of what their agency/organization does and their involvement with land use issues.
- Bring in outside speakers to the monthly meetings to educate/update members on the latest land use issues in their area.
- Meet with area legislators to discuss land use issues.
- Provide technical assistance to a constituent group (for example, neighborhood association if urban or farmers if rural) on a land use issue they are tackling.
- Gather pictures and descriptions of what committee members consider to be “positive land uses” so that a common understanding is developed.
- Survey stakeholder groups (for example, farmers if rural or neighborhoods if urban) to assess their knowledge of and interest in land use issues.
- Work with local government (for example, City Hall if urban or townships if rural) on a land use issue that the committee could help impact.

“Building Great Neighborhoods”

A Citizens’ Guide for Neighborhood Planning

A cool city must have cool neighborhoods. “Building Great Neighborhoods” is a step-by-step guide on how to conduct a neighborhood-based planning process that will assist a neighborhood in creating a Vision for its redevelopment. This planning process is geared toward community-based organizations, but its success depends upon the involvement of all neighborhood stakeholders. It is a capacity-building process. It is an open process where everyone’s perspective is heard and respected.

The manual is particularly appropriate for central city neighborhoods experiencing revitalization. This planning process provides the opportunity for current residents and business owners to reclaim the redevelopment process in their neighborhood so that the area’s character and uniqueness can be maintained. Neighborhood planning empowers residents and other neighborhood stakeholders by gaining some control over their future. Respecting the economic, racial, and cultural diversity of the neighborhood is also an important component of this planning process.

Although “Building Great Neighborhoods” describes a rather rudimentary planning process, it is a fundamental process that should be undertaken by every neighborhood. As neighborhood stakeholders become more adept at planning, more complex planning activities can be undertaken. The goal is for neighborhoods to be equal partners with the city and developers in determining the future of central cities. This manual provides a starting point for neighborhoods that have little experience in planning.

The planning process described in the manual is generally based on an actual planning project undertaken by the South West Area Neighbors in cooperation with Michigan State University Extension in Grand Rapids, Michigan. However, any neighborhood in any city can adapt this process to its own unique character and circumstances.

The ten chapters of “Building Great Neighborhoods” are summarized below. Each chapter was written to also stand alone, e.g. an organization doing a survey in their neighborhood could use Chapter 7 as a resource even if the survey is not part of a planning process.

Chapter 1 – What is Neighborhood Planning?

This chapter explains the basis for neighborhood planning, defines important concepts in neighborhood planning, and attempts to answer common questions about the process.

Chapter 2 – Getting Started.

This provides a self-assessment of the neighborhood’s readiness to plan and defines the role of staff in the process. A step-by-step plan for organizing the Leadership Team, an important capacity-building component, is explained.

Chapter 3 – Conducting a SWOT Analysis

The SWOT Analysis helps citizens build a solid profile of their neighborhood. The “how to” of planning, conducting, and analyzing the SWOT, or Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats to the neighborhood are explained.

Chapter 4 – Describing the Worst Case Scenario

Explains how to transform the Weaknesses and Threats of the SWOT Analysis into a Worst Case Scenario. This helps the neighborhood understand what will happen if they don’t stop the current negative trends.

Chapter 5 – Developing a Vision or Preferred Scenario

The journey through the Visioning process and instructions on how to record the Vision and create the Preferred Scenario is described. This should answer the “where do we want to go?” question for the neighborhood.

Chapter 6 – Developing/Conducting a Neighborhood Survey

The reasoning for surveying residents and businesses in a neighborhood is given, along with instructions for developing, conducting, tabulating, and analyzing the survey. The survey helps identify whether the neighborhood feels they are going in the right direction, and if not, what direction they would like to go.

Chapter 7 – The Neighborhood Summit

The Summit is the chance to authenticate the Leadership Team’s work. It gives the neighborhood the chance to provide input to the Vision/Preferred Scenario that has been developed. This chapter tells how to prepare for and conduct the Summit, and how to follow up after the Summit has been completed.

Chapter 8 – Organizing Action Teams and an Action Plan

The Action Teams will determine whether the neighborhood planning efforts remain “on the shelf” or are actualized. Chapter 8 details how to start up the Action Teams and how they develop specific Action Plans to achieve their part of the Vision.

Chapter 9 – Coordinating with the Master Plan

Once the neighborhood plan is in place, it can become the city’s plan. In Grand Rapids, the neighborhood plan can actually become part of the city’s Master Plan through an amendment process.

Chapter 10 – Conclusions

This chapter reaffirms the importance of neighborhood planning and provides a basis for evaluation. “We need to plan for our neighborhood’s future and thereby take some control over an important part of our lives.”

Appendices

Provides References, Terms, Sample Projects, Timelines, and a case study of real world application of the “Building Great Neighborhoods” manual.

~ Carol L. Townsend, Kent/MSU Extension
and Brian Anderson, MSU Urban Collaborators