

Conclusions

There is no doubt that neighborhood planning is an important activity. How you do it depends on your particular neighborhood's needs and resources. We have explained one approach and hope it may serve as a guide in your neighborhood planning efforts. It is a way to involve neighbors and focus their efforts on positive future change.

- 1) Neighborhood planning is a capacity-building activity for your neighborhood association. At the conclusion of your planning process, your association should be stronger and able to handle more complex issues and projects.
- 2) The planning process should have helped to identify and engage new leaders and increased the leadership skills of current volunteers. (This is a major contributor to the increased capacity of your neighborhood association, as explained above.)
- 3) All neighborhood stakeholders should have been brought together to identify their common ground and how they can work together to make an impact. This process will not solve all disagreements, but it will focus everyone on the positive and show how each one can contribute to the improvement of the neighborhood in a constructive manner. *This partnership with all stakeholder groups within a neighborhood is a powerful strategy.*
- 4) A successful neighborhood planning process should have helped develop a better working relationship with the city. Working with your city planning department may make it possible to institutionalize your Neighborhood Plan as an amendment to your city's Master Plan. This would then illustrate how the city and neighborhoods can work in partnership toward the same mutually beneficial goals.

Just as the future of any individual is uncertain, your neighborhood's future may be uncertain. This uncertainty does not prevent us as individuals from preparing for our future. The same should be true for our neighborhoods. **We need to plan proactively for our neighborhood's future and thereby take some control over an important part of our lives.**

“...There are basic tenets that might be of value in framing both individual and collective responses to our turbulent times. They amount to two maxims: acknowledge reality and accept our interdependence....In turbulent times, only communities that manage to ‘pull together’ will not be pulled apart.”*

When you have pulled your neighborhood together by completing this planning process, you will have thought of many ways it could have been done differently – and better. This is natural! Remember that planning is like any skill. For example, the first time you played tennis or the violin, you weren't very good. But if you kept practicing, you got better. Planning is a continual process. We expect that you will keep getting better and better at it over time.

Feedback

We would be interested in any feedback you can give us on this manual. We intend to periodically to update the information in the manual, so any ideas on how we can change and clarify information would be very helpful. Any suggestions for improvements or any other recommendations or comments can be sent to:

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Resources/References

*Faron Supanich-Goldner, "Turbulence Rising?", Community News & Views.



Coordinating with the Master Plan 9-4



APPENDIX A

References

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APPENDIX B

Glossary of Neighborhood Terms

[The following terms used in *Building Great Neighborhoods* are defined below. Other definitions in other publications are also possible.]

Action Plan: The specific activities that the Action Teams have decided to undertake to achieve the Vision for their neighborhood's redevelopment.

Affordable Housing: Decent and safe housing that costs no more than 30 percent of a household's income.

Business District: An area within a neighborhood that contains structures built for commercial entities, which originally offered goods and services needed by area residents.

Capacity Building: Increasing an individual's or organization's ability to effectively handle increasingly difficult neighborhood issues and operational tasks.

Community Economic Development: Programs or activities that increase the economic viability of a neighborhood through resident implementation.

Consensus: General agreement within the neighborhood on how to proceed.

Demographic Data: Specific information and statistics about your neighborhood, such as median household income, racial composition, number of homeowners, etc. Much of this information can be obtained through the U.S. census, taken every 10 years.

Easement: The right of a person, government agency or public utility company to use public or private land owned by another for a specific purpose. A grant of one or more of the property rights by the owner to or for use by the public, a corporation, or another person or entity (telephone lines, sidewalks, shared driveways, etc.).

Empowerment: When an individual and group feel that they can exercise some control over the circumstances in their lives. It cannot be given - it must be developed from within.

Form follows Function: Know what you want to accomplish or what your purpose is (function), and then decide on what organizational structure or program (form) would be best to achieve this. Too often people come up with a "good" activity or a "nice" committee first and then try to make it fit an issue or neighborhood concern. A more effective approach is to identify clearly what needs to be done and then figure out how to do it.

Historic Preservation: The protection of structures and places from demolition because they are deemed to be important parts of our past.

Infill Housing: Housing that is built in an established residential area (usually on a vacant lot where a house has been demolished).

Infrastructure: This generally refers to the physical parts of a community provided by government, such as streets, sewer lines, etc. Sometimes the definition is expanded to include telephone, cable, and electric lines.

Land Use: Usually a designation of how certain property can be used. In a neighborhood, some land is used for residential purposes; other land is used for commercial purposes, etc. It is important that properties within an area have compatible uses.

Land Use Planning: Deciding how property should be used - residential, commercial, industrial, farmland, etc., and what the density should be - single-family, multifamily, etc. Citizens have become more involved recently in helping to make these decisions.

Master Plan: A document that outlines the land uses within an area or governmental jurisdiction and includes a framework for new development and/or redevelopment. It generally requires the authorization of a governmental unit.

Mixed-Income Neighborhood: An area that has a variety of housing types so that households with various incomes can afford to live there. This is usually defined as a neighborhood with a mix of middle-income and lower income households.

Mixed-Use: An area or building that offers two or more kinds of activity or uses: commercial, industrial, residential, etc. This is a land use designation increasingly seen in urban neighborhoods as they are redeveloped.

Neighborhood Plan: A framework of agreed upon goals, strategies and activities that leads to the implementation of the Vision of how the neighborhood should look after it has been revitalized. Supplemental information in the Neighborhood Plan can include a SWOT Analysis, Neighborhood Survey, etc. The land use parts of the Plan should be incorporated into the city's Master Plan. A Neighborhood Plan generally is initiated by a community-based organization.

New Urbanism: A design movement that burst onto the scene in the late 1980s and early 1990s. New Urbanists aim to reform all aspects of real estate development. New Urbanist neighborhoods are walkable and contain a diverse range of housing and jobs. New Urbanists support regional planning for open space, appropriate architecture and planning, and the balanced development of jobs and housing. They believe these strategies are the best way to reduce the time that people spend in traffic, to increase the supply of affordable housing, and to rein in urban sprawl.



Setback: The required minimum horizontal distance between the lot or property line and the nearest front, side or rear line of a building.

Stakeholder: Any individual or group with a direct tie to a neighborhood. Stakeholders generally include residents, business owners, faith-based and non-profit organizations located within the neighborhood, local schools, etc.

Strategic Plan: A set of goals, objectives, activities and/or strategies that the neighborhood association wants to accomplish in the next 5 to 10 years. It usually does not focus on land use but instead includes specific neighborhood programs and actions as well as what the organization wants to accomplish administratively. Unlike the Neighborhood Plan, it also usually does not require broad neighborhood approval.

Traditional Business District: A type of design for a neighborhood business area that resembles business districts from the 1950s and earlier. Characteristics include stores close to the streets, wide sidewalks, parking in the back, slowed traffic through the area, commercial/retail space on the ground floors, and office or living space on the second or third floors.

Traffic Calming: A technique that seeks to slow traffic through the design of a street while making walking a safer alternative. This can include bulb-outs, parking on both sides of the street, traffic circles, etc. Traffic-calming measures have proven not to reduce the volume of traffic.

Transitional Use: A permitted use or structure that by nature or level and scale of activity acts as a transition or buffer between two or more incompatible uses.

Vision: The desired state that stakeholders would like to see their neighborhood develop into. This shared idea guides neighborhood redevelopment activities.

Zero-lot Line: The location of a building on a lot in such a manner that one or more of the building's sides rests directly on a lot line.

Zoning: The designation of how land can be used - e.g., R-1 designates an area as residential and for single-family houses.

References

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APPENDIX C

Sample Project Timeline

To ensure that the neighborhood planning process progresses in a timely and efficient manner, a timeline for completing needed activities should be established. The Leadership Team should decide on a timeline for the planning project and then check it at least monthly to make sure it is on schedule.

November – Neighborhood association Board of Directors approves initiative to undertake a neighborhood planning process.

December – First meeting of the Leadership Team is held.

- Demographic and other data are compiled for the neighborhood.

January – Leadership Team conducts a SWOT Analysis.

- Research is done to see if other SWOT analyses for the neighborhood have been done before.
- Research is done to find out what the city's Master Plan outlines for your neighborhood.

February – A Worst-case Scenario is developed and discussed.

- A date for the Neighborhood Summit is set.

March – Team decides whether to hire a professional facilitator for the Summit.

- Subcommittees for the Summit are formed and members recruited.
- A neighborhood survey is drafted.
- Leadership Team does a visioning exercise.

April – Surveys are conducted throughout the neighborhood.

- A Preferred Scenario is developed on the basis of the visioning exercise.
- An agenda for the Neighborhood Summit is approved.

May – Survey results are tabulated.

- Materials to be included in Summit participants' folders are collected.
- Strategies that will make up the Action Plan are identified.
- All planning for the Summit is completed.

June – Neighborhood Summit is held!!!!!!

- A vision for the neighborhood's redevelopment is agreed upon.
- Action Teams are organized.
- Leadership Team holds an evaluation meeting and celebrates!

July – Action Teams begin meeting.



APPENDIX D

Leadership Team Subcommittees

Some work of the Leadership Team can best be handled through subcommittees. The subcommittees should be chaired or co-chaired by Leadership Team members, but additional members can be recruited from the neighborhood at large (this is one way to broaden participation). Subcommittee reports should be made at each monthly Leadership Team meeting. Suggested subcommittees and their duties are:

Publicity/Public Relations Subcommittee

- Publicizes Neighborhood Summit throughout the neighborhood (flyers, posters, etc.).
- Publicizes the Summit through external media (newspaper, TV, etc.).
- Communicates planning progress to neighborhood stakeholders (writes newsletter articles, gives updates to Business Association, etc.).
- Assists in raising funds to cover Summit expenses.

Summit Food and Beverage Subcommittee

- Plans menu for lunch at Summit.
- Decides whether to hire a caterer or to do lunch internally.
- Decides if breakfast and morning and afternoon breaks should be served with food/beverages.
- Seeks food donations from local merchants.

Summit Set-up and Registration Subcommittee

- Obtains a place to hold the Summit.
- Decides if daycare will be provided; if yes, makes appropriate arrangements.
- Puts together packets for Summit participants.
- Solicits folders, pens and other items for the packets from local businesses.
- Sets up room(s) the day before the Summit.
- Staffs the registration table.

Clean-up Subcommittee

This consists of all Leadership Team members and anyone else you can talk into helping!

The subcommittee structure should work for you and your particular set of circumstances. This structure can be as simple or as complex as you want.

APPENDIX E

Rules for Brainstorming

The rules for brainstorming should be stated and understood before any brainstorming session begins. These rules lay the groundwork for a productive session that includes a high level of participation from the group members.

1. **Everyone participates:** No one is allowed merely to observe, although you can pass if you do not have an idea to contribute at the moment.
2. **No criticism/debate is allowed:** Every idea is a valuable idea. Discussion may take place later but not right now. Lots of ideas are generated during this brainstorming process but not debated or commented upon.
3. **Build and “piggyback”:** Hearing another person’s idea might ignite a new idea for you. In turn, others may add or expand on your idea. The group process allows participants to build upon one another’s ideas so that the final product is usually a mixture of many ideas combined.
4. **Dream the impossible:** What may seem far-fetched may turn out to be the most constructive ideas. Do not hesitate to offer an idea, even though you think it may be silly or unachievable.
5. **Take turns:** It is best to go around the table and ask each person for one idea at a time. This allows everyone to participate and no one to dominate. Keep going around the table until everyone has run out of ideas or time runs out.

Above all, **Respect** all participants and their ideas. This process is a time to hear from everyone and to gather a variety of ideas on a topic.

(Note: adapted from MSU Center for Urban Affairs-Grand Rapids, January 1998, and MSU practicum students’ report, “Planning Charrette,” February 26, 2000.)



BUILDING GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS



APPENDIX F

Dot Voting

Dot voting is a good way to begin to build consensus on an issue. It can be used with a small number of people or with a large group, and it quickly defines the important issues without creating needless debate. The process helps to identify what people have in common instead of focusing on the differences within a group.

For dot voting, the strategies or issues that the group is considering should be written on newsprint large enough to accommodate all the dots that will be voted. Usually the items to be voted on have been generated through a brainstorming session.

Each person should receive a set number of dots. (Dots of various colors can be purchased at any office supply store. Generally, the various colors carry no significance.) Instructions for dot voting should be clearly given. The general rule for dot voting is that group members can place their dots (usually three to five dots) on whatever ideas they feel best represent their opinions or priorities. This means that all dots can be placed on one idea; two on one issue, and one on another; or in whatever combination the participant desires. (An alternative is for everyone to place only one dot per idea.)

Once everyone is done voting, the dots are tallied. Those ideas receiving the most dots (votes) become the group's priorities. You have now established what issues/concerns the majority of group members share. This is the common ground from which you build.

Brainstorming allows everyone an opportunity to get his/her opinions considered by the entire group without unnecessary conflict and debate. *Dot voting* eliminates those ideas/opinions not shared by the majority because they will not receive the needed votes to be included in any further discussion. This process also effectively prevents a few people from dominating a whole group.

Giving people the opportunity to express how strongly they feel about specific issues is very empowering.



BUILDING GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS



APPENDIX G

Web Sites

www.brookings.edu (The Brookings Institution)

www.cedam.info (Community Economic Development Association of Michigan)

***www.cnu.org** (Congress for New Urbanism – click on “Image Bank”)

www.communitychange.org (Center for Community Change)

www.communityplanning.net (The Community Planning Website)

www.ncced.org (National Congress for Community Economic Development)

www.plannersweb.com (Planning Commissioners Journal, Planners Web, City and Regional Planning Resources)

www.policylink.org (Policy Link)

***www.pps.org** (Project for Public Spaces)

www.walkablecommunities.org (Walkable Communities, Inc.)

*Good pictures of revitalized neighborhoods.

APPENDIX H

SWAN Resident Survey

Housing

To start, I would like to ask your opinions about the housing in the neighborhood.

1. How would you rate the housing in SWAN? (Circle one)
 - a. very adequate
 - b. adequate
 - c. inadequate
 - d. very inadequate

2. How could the housing be improved?

3. Do you own or rent? (Circle one)

- a. own
 - b. rent

4. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about future housing improvements in this neighborhood? (Circle one)

- a. Most of the housing is well built and should be preserved.
 - b. Most of the housing is run down and should be bull dozed.
 - c. Some new housing would be nice in addition to fixing up current houses.

5. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about the kind of housing that should be available in the neighborhood? (Circle one)

- a. There should be more apartments for people to rent.
 - b. There should be more single family homes.
 - c. There should be both single family homes and apartments so that lower income as well as higher income people can live here.

The Neighborhood

Now I would like to ask you some questions about the neighborhood in general.

1. What are the 2 things that you like best about living in this neighborhood?

- a. _____
 - b. _____

2. What are the 2 things that you like the least about living in this neighborhood?

- a. _____
 - b. _____



West Fulton Business District

Here are a few questions about the West Fulton Business District.

1. Do you shop at neighborhood stores? (Circle one)
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

2. What would encourage you to do more of your shopping in the neighborhood?

3. Would you use a bank if one moved to Fulton Street? (Circle one)
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

4. Do you support slowing down the traffic on Fulton Street? (Circle one)
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

5. Which one of the following statements best describes how you would like to see future business improvements on Fulton Street:
 - a. Tear down all the old business buildings and start over with new ones.
 - b. Rehab as many of the current buildings as possible so that the business district will look like it did in the 1950's.

Neighborhood Facilities and Services

Now some general questions about the neighborhood.

1. What one major improvement would you like to see made at Sibley School next year?

2. How important are each of the following neighborhood concerns to you?

	<u>very important</u>	<u>somewhat important</u>	<u>not important</u>
a. downzoning the neighborhood from multi-family (R2 & R3) to single family (R1-A)	1	2	3
b. keeping the zoo from expanding into the green area of John Ball Park	1	2	3
c. making Butterworth dump into a park	1	2	3
d. stopping GVSU from expanding further into the neighborhood	1	2	3
e. stopping downtown from expanding further into the neighborhood	1	2	3

Neighborhood Planning

Lastly, your opinion on the following questions will help SWAN in their planning.

1. Ten years from now, how would you *most* like to hear neighbors describe the SWAN neighborhood? (Circle one)
 - a. the neighborhood hasn't changed a bit in the last 10 years
 - b. the neighborhood is totally changed since downtown and GVSU have expanded
 - c. the neighborhood has a nice mix between the old and the new

2. Do you know that the City of Grand Rapids is in the process of updating its Master Plan? (Circle one)
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Not Sure

If you answered "yes", have you attended any Master Plan meetings?

- a. Yes
- b. No

3. What one recreation program or facility would you like to see in the neighborhood?

4. Are you in favor of building a new YMCA where the Adobe Restaurant used to be?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Why? _____

5. What do you think should be done with the old Lexington School?

6. Which of the following best describes your feelings? (Circle one)
 - a. Drinking outside and youth access to alcohol should not be tolerated.
 - b. Alcohol use only concerns the individual and no one else.

7. Would you like to help work on a neighborhood issue or volunteer at SWAN on neighborhood activities? (Circle one)
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

If yes, please write your name, address, and phone number on a sheet of paper.

APPENDIX I

Neighborhood Summit Agenda

June 1, 2002

Neighborhood Church

- I. Welcome – Neighborhood Association President
 - thank everyone for coming
 - a few words about Association and its activities
 - introduce next speaker
- II. Announcements – Leadership Team Member
 - logistics: bathrooms, refreshments, packets, etc.
 - introduce facilitator
- III. Purpose of Neighborhood Summit – Facilitator
 - explain Summit purposes
 - review agenda – stress individual concerns handled at 11:45 a.m.
 - explain role of Leadership Team and role of participants today
 - introduce next speaker
- IV. Summit Planning Background
 - A. SWOT Analysis – Leadership Team member
 - B. Probable Scenario – Leadership Team member
 - C. Neighborhood Survey – Leadership Team member
 - D. Preferred Scenario/Vision
 1. a variety of housing types – Leadership Team member
 2. traditional business district – Neighborhood Association staff
 3. quality of life – Leadership Team member
- V. Discussion and Building Consensus on the Neighborhood's Future
 - A. Discussion
 - B. Vote on goals for the Action Teams
- VI. Meeting with City Representatives on Individual Issues
- VII. Lunch
- VIII. Action Teams
 - A. Meet and develop a One Year Plan of Action
 - B. Action Teams report back to full group
- IX. Door Prize Drawing and Adjournment

TO INFLUENCE, RATHER THAN BE INFLUENCED



APPENDIX J

Instructions for Facilitators

Facilitators work at guiding a group in a given direction. Facilitators perform many important tasks, and they must be prepared to be successful in achieving the purpose for the group.

1. Be clear on what is expected of you as a facilitator. Prepare by becoming familiar with the information to be discussed. Know what format will be followed during your small-group (Action Team) discussion.
2. To begin your small group, first introduce yourself. Then ask everyone in the group to introduce him/herself.
3. Review what your group is expected to accomplish and how long it has to do it. Review any ground rules. Appoint a recorder or arrange for any other assistance that is needed.
4. Keep the group focused on the discussion at hand. It can become very difficult to focus a group once members have lost their direction. It is up to you to keep the group on task.
5. Ensure that all members are participating and that no one is monopolizing the group's time. If a member has not contributed, specifically ask her for her opinions (in a non-threatening manner).
6. Keep the group on time. If the group has a time limit, make sure your group will be finished by that time. Otherwise, your group's input might not be considered.
7. Develop personal relationships. You will be the person other people will remember. Ensure that you will be worth remembering by being courteous and helpful.
8. Facilitators should not express their opinions on the issues at hand. If you feel a need to have your voice heard, then the facilitator role right now is not for you. Respect the process and ask for someone else to do this job.

GOAL:

Objectives	Tasks/Activities	Team Members/ Stakeholders	Resources	Completed by:

N. Radtke, 1998



APPENDIX L

Sample Evaluation Form

It is important to receive feedback from participants at an event so that you know what was well received and what needs improvement for the next time. An evaluation can be as simple or as complex as you desire. The following is a very simple example.

EVALUATION OF NEIGHBORHOOD SUMMIT

1. The thing I liked best about the Summit is _____

2. The thing I liked least about the Summit is _____

3. I wish _____



APPENDIX M

Case Study

SWAN Neighborhood Planning Process

This neighborhood planning manual, *Building Great Neighborhoods*, is based on the planning effort undertaken by the South West Area Neighbors (SWAN), a neighborhood association representing a central city neighborhood in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Facilitation and technical assistance were provided by Carol L. Townsend, Michigan State University. The following summary of SWAN's planning process from December 2001 through June 2003 is meant to serve as a real-life example of how this planning process can work. Every neighborhood is different and each situation is unique, so things that worked well in SWAN may not work at all in your neighborhood, and vice versa. So this case study of SWAN is provided as an illustration of one way to do neighborhood planning.

1. Getting Started

The Crime Prevention Organizer at SWAN, Lori Stanton, played a key role throughout the planning process. She initiated discussion among SWAN volunteers about the neighborhood's need for planning. Several SWAN Board members had been participating in Master Plan meetings held by the city, so their interest in planning had already been tweaked. The neighborhood, located along West Fulton in Grand Rapids, Michigan, was also feeling the pressure of new development from Grand Valley State University and downtown, and people were unsure of how to deal with it. This interest in planning coupled with the new development that was occurring provided the impetus for SWAN to undertake a neighborhood planning process.

SWAN asked Carol Townsend, director of the MSU Center for Urban Affairs in Grand Rapids and an Extension community development agent, for assistance in conducting a neighborhood planning process. Carol served on the Citizens Advisory Committee, which oversaw the development of the city's Master Plan, and has been interested in connecting neighborhoods to planning. With funding from the Steelcase Foundation, MSU was in the process of developing a neighborhood planning model under the auspices of its United Growth for Kent County project. It was decided that the planning model would be developed as SWAN went through the planning process.

2. Organizing the Leadership Team

Through a special grant from the Dyer-Ives Foundation, Lori had been working on leadership development with SWAN residents. The Leadership Team was a natural outgrowth of this work. Lori identified several neighbors for the Leadership Team. More than a dozen people attended at least one Leadership Team meeting, but a core group of six carried the process. (We knew that people would drop off as time went on.)



One of the most important things considered in the recruitment of Leadership Team members was how well they were connected to the neighborhood. Many Team members were block captains and a couple were SWAN Board members. All of the Team members were involved in the neighborhood and knew the area well.

Another important criterion in recruiting Leadership Team members was diversity. Team members represented various geographic areas of the neighborhood. There was a good range of ages and lifestyles represented. However, our efforts to involve people of color were not successful, nor were efforts to involve business owners from the neighborhood. It was not until later that we realized that we had no renters on the Team, either. Despite these shortcomings, Leadership Team members were able to adequately reflect the hopes and the fears of a majority of the residents.

Leadership development continued to be an important aspect throughout this planning process. Matching interests and talents of Team members to tasks to be done is a skill that Lori possesses. Leadership Team members were always encouraged to “stretch” and learn new skills.

Members spent the first meeting of the Leadership Team getting acquainted with one another, discussing the responsibilities of the Team and reviewing materials on neighborhood planning.

SWAN Case Study

The Leadership Team identified four “core values” at the beginning of the planning process. These basic values would guide them throughout the planning process. These values are:

Neighborhood Empowerment: The future of the SWAN neighborhood must be decided by SWAN neighborhood stakeholders and not outsiders. To do this, a clear vision on how the neighborhood should be redeveloped must be agreed upon and then implemented. A neighborhood becomes increasingly empowered as it practices using its own voice. The history of disenfranchisement in the neighborhood must be reversed.

Trust Building: An important consideration for successful visioning and implementation in the SWAN neighborhood was developing trust between SWAN neighbors, the City and other institutions. The neighborhood planning process allowed SWAN to maximize trust-building opportunities.

Respect and Inclusion: Specific efforts should be made to communicate effectively with and involve all people in the neighborhood. Everyone’s opinion should be given due consideration.

Capacity-Building and Leadership Development: The Leadership Team itself is the first step in laying a good foundation for grassroots leadership to develop in the neighborhood.

SWOT Analysis

The second Leadership Team meeting was spent doing a SWOT Analysis. The rules of brainstorming were distributed and discussed. Although only one or two people had done brainstorming before, the Team caught on very quickly to this process. They were soon “piggybacking” on others’ ideas.

The Team members listed so many neighborhood strengths that we had to finally stop listing them and go on to weaknesses. Team members also came up with quite a few weaknesses, which demonstrated a good grasp of the current state of the neighborhood.

Team members had a little more difficulty identifying opportunities and threats. It had been easier for them to describe current conditions than to perceive trends and less tangible effects. The meeting was running late and insufficient time was spent on this section. So this part of the SWOT needed improvement.

A subcommittee was formed to consolidate similar ideas that had been brainstormed by other groups. Members met before the next Team meeting and then reported on their work at the third Leadership Team meeting. This subcommittee also looked at the SWOT Analysis that had been done by the West Fulton Business District and compared ideas to make sure the two were not too far apart. A comparison was also done with the SWOT Analysis conducted as part of the Master Plan.

At the third meeting, Team members reviewed how the subcommittee categorized the brainstormed ideas. They then used dots to vote for those ideas that they felt to be most important. The items with the most dots became our priorities and what we focused on during the planning process. The dot voting method eliminates arguing and quickly identifies the priority concerns of the group as a whole.

NOTE: Conducting the SWOT Analysis was an important part of the neighborhood planning process. It was a good way to get everyone participating right away. Almost all concerns about the neighborhood’s future surfaced at this time. The SWOT Analysis provided a solid basis for the rest of the planning process.

Other Decisions

The Leadership Team decided early on to have a Neighborhood Summit to culminate their planning efforts. The date of the Summit was chosen – June 1, 2002. A timeline was then developed, working back from the Summit date. The Team felt that the Summit could not be held any later in the summer – too many conflicts. So that left only a 6-month planning period. The Team was committed to meeting weekly if necessary (and it was!). The Team members also felt that too much momentum would be lost over the summer if we tried to have the Summit in the fall. They made their decision and then stuck with it.

The commitment of the Leadership Team members was awesome. They attended Team and subcommittee meetings as well as doing extra work between meetings. Having the deadline of the Summit helped to keep commitment high. We also tried to make the meetings productive by SWAN and MSU staff members being prepared and having a well thought out agenda each time. (The pizza and other snacks served at the meetings did not hurt!)

The Leadership Team carefully considered whether to hire a professional facilitator for the Neighborhood Summit. Hiring a consultant would significantly increase the costs of the Summit, but this negative was outweighed by the following positives:

- None of us felt comfortable facilitating the whole Summit.
- An outsider would be better able to handle any controversy that might occur at the Summit.
- We wanted to do the Summit correctly, and a professional would help assure that.
- None of us had ever done a Summit before, and a professional would provide additional advice, technical assistance, etc.

A subcommittee structure was also decided upon early in the planning process. The Leadership Team divided into three subcommittees in preparation for the Summit: Public Relations/Publicity, Food and Beverage, and Set-up/Clean-up. We were not very successful in recruiting additional members for the subcommittees, which would have been a good strategic move. The subcommittees carried out their work while the planning process continued. There were subcommittee updates at each Team meeting.

For no particular reason, the Leadership Team adopted a motto that captured the reason for their doing neighborhood planning. “To influence rather than be influenced.” This motto was used on flyers and throughout the Neighborhood Summit.

Developing a Worst-case Scenario

The weaknesses and threats identified in the SWOT Analysis formed the basis of the worst-case scenario. The purpose of this exercise was to articulate what probably would happen to the neighborhood if no planning or positive action were taken. We did not spend much time on this because all Team members shared the same concern about new development destroying their neighborhood.

Although some Leadership Team members did not like this part of the planning, it was a useful exercise. It provided a good contrast to the preferred scenario that was developed later.

Developing a Preferred Scenario/Vision

This scenario was based on the strengths and opportunities the Leadership Team identified in the SWOT Analysis. This was a positive exercise - it involved dreaming of what Team members would like to see in the future.

First, Team members developed a Vision of how they would like to see their neighborhood redeveloped. They focused first on housing – what should the housing look like in 20 years? Then they envisioned the business district and then quality of life. All wrote their dreams/visions down, and then we went around the table with each one giving his/her top three ideas for each of the categories. This then became the Preferred Scenario or Vision for the neighborhood.

The visioning process was difficult for most of the Leadership Team members. It would have been helpful to have pictures or slides of options that could be available for their neighborhood. Then they could have chosen what they wanted or at least have had a better idea of what is possible.

Developing a Neighborhood Survey

Like the SWOT, this was a very successful planning activity. We spent several meetings developing the survey. Staff members presented draft questions and the Leadership Team reacted. Team members were extremely helpful in choosing the specific wording to be used. The Team knew what words would not be understood in the area and how descriptions of various situations should be phrased. It was well worth the time we spent in developing the survey instrument.

The survey was used as a test to see if a broad sampling of residents agreed with the Vision that the Leadership Team had developed. As we developed the survey, we kept

asking ourselves what information did we need to obtain from neighbors, what kind of feedback did we need from them to feel comfortable that we were on the right track, and what did the neighborhood association need input on from the neighborhood? What did we really want to know? This provided the needed direction in formulating the survey questions.

Of 160 surveys distributed, 77 were completed. This excellent return rate was due to the Leadership Team members, who handed them out on their blocks and to others they knew in the neighborhood. SWAN and MSU staff members conducted door-to-door surveys in parts of the neighborhood underrepresented on the Team. The percentage of people who completed the survey and rent (43 percent) is approximately the same ratio as the percentage who rent in the neighborhood, so the Leadership Team did a good job of getting the survey out to a representative group.

Because the survey respondents were quite representative of the neighborhood, it was important to compare their responses to those of the Leadership Team. Fortunately, there were no major discrepancies between the two. Again, the Leadership Team members proved themselves to be very knowledgeable about and representative of the neighborhood.

Day of Reckoning – The Neighborhood Summit

Early on, the Leadership Team decided to have the Summit professionally facilitated. SWAN had never had a meeting of this type before, and no one knew what to expect. Additionally, there was much work to be done in the short period of time covered by the Summit. Dave Medema, from Medema Consulting, had worked with SWAN previously and had been well received. Dave had also done a fair amount of work with neighborhood associations in Grand Rapids and had developed a project planning model. He was the unanimous selection.

Each of the Leadership Team core members volunteered to take part at the Summit in explaining the neighborhood planning process. This was a continuation of the leadership development that was emphasized throughout this process. Several of the members had never spoken before an audience, so those who wanted it received extra assistance in preparing their speeches. A dress rehearsal the day before the Summit proved to be very beneficial by helping everyone to feel more comfortable and working out last minute “bugs.”

A PowerPoint presentation was developed that contained major points to cover for each of the speakers. It added a touch of professionalism and seemed to help the presenters stay focused.

After the presentations that explained the planning process, the facilitator reviewed the three components of the Vision and asked for comments, additions, etc. There was

good general agreement with what was presented, and this provided an opportunity for “buy-in” from the larger group.

The afternoon break-out groups around the three components of the Vision provided some good ideas of what should be in the Action Plans. It was also important to obtain input from Summit participants on what they would like to see accomplished in their neighborhood.

Overall, the Leadership Team viewed the Summit as a success. More than 50 people attended. It was a positive event for the SWAN neighborhood. Most importantly, a shared Vision for the redevelopment of the neighborhood was agreed upon, and ways the Vision could be achieved were brainstormed.

Organizing Action Teams

From the beginning of the planning process, we knew we wanted to develop an Action Plan that would start to achieve the Vision, and that this would be accomplished through organizing Action Teams. The Neighborhood Summit was the starting point for developing the Action Plans, and Summit participants were encouraged to sign up for Action Teams. The real impact of the neighborhood planning process would be felt in the accomplishments of the Action Teams in the years to come.

SWAN organized three Action Teams: Housing Action Team, Business Action Team and Quality of Life Action Team. Leadership Team members co-chaired each Team, and additional stakeholders were recruited for each Team so that up to 20 people were on one of the Teams. Staff assistance to the Teams was essential in guiding them through the activities that they undertook.

Postscript

SWAN held its second Neighborhood Summit on April 26, 2003. More than 75 people attended – a 50 percent increase over the first one. The Action Teams reported on their activities (a way to add accountability to this process). Many of the activities listed in their Action Plans had been achieved. The Grand Rapids Planning Department has agreed to look at the land use parts of SWAN’s Neighborhood Plan to see if they can be incorporated into the city’s Master Plan. There is still much more to do to achieve SWAN’s Vision – and this is the continuing challenge that SWAN faces.

Remember that it is the neighborhood’s responsibility to make sure its plan is implemented. The neighborhood must initiate action. Do not wait for City Hall or anyone else to realize your neighborhood goals.