

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 Land Policy Educator. The LPE is not the “doer” as much as the “facilitator.” The committee members must be doing most of the activities. The LPE 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 LPE agree to do it.

Examples of Committee Activities:

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.

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 the LPE), and then report at the monthly committee meeting on progress.

Tell me, I forget.

Show me, I may remember.

Involve me, I will understand.

- Ancient Proverb

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 input matters to the success of the committee, and that the United Growth model will make a significant, positive impact.

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 Appendix C.

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 \$45 per participant per session. Prices for the Citizen Planner program have recently changed. These are the most recent as of November 2005. 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 on page 29. A brochure is at the end of this chapter.

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

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

- 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

For more information on the Citizen Planner Program visit the web site at www.msue.msu.edu/cplanner or contact Wayne Beyea, Citizen Planner Program state coordinator or Jodi Chambers, assistant at (517) 432-7600.

You may also want the Rural Committee to consider hosting a new On-Line Citizen Planner program which is outlined on the web site. If your committee decides to host a Citizen Planner program, you will want to review the section under “Delivery” tab and the “Start Ups” menu option on the web site, which outlines the process for applying for a program and steps for setting up the program.

United Growth for Kent County’s Rural Committee hosted a Citizen Planner program 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.

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”. The Land Policy Educator 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 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.

Each chapter was written to also stand alone, e.g. an organization doing a survey in their neighborhood could use Chapter 6 - 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 from Urban Collaborators. Call Nancy Forton, Administrative Assistant, Urban Collaborators at (517) 432-9852 or e-mail her at: fortonn@msu.edu.

Other possible committee activities are located in Appendix D.

"Building Great Neighborhoods"

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Determining Outcomes and Impacts

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?
- Do Rural Committee members understand why farmland is being urbanized at a faster rate than the population is growing?
- 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 9, 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.

Chapter 4: Building the Common Ground – Making the Urban-Rural Connection



Now that you have launched a Rural Committee and an Urban Committee, it is time to start thinking about bringing the two groups together to begin building the common ground between them. This should also be the time where you begin the second phase of the model – *Capacity-Building*.

Capacity-building involves increasing the ability of an organization to effectively handle more complicated issues and projects. The Urban Committee will be concerned with looking at ways to build the capacity of neighborhood associations and other community-based groups. The Rural Committee will want to assist townships and agricultural groups in building their capacity. Each committee's activities will still consist of educational efforts, but the emphasis should now be on capacity-building activities. Committee members will have to specifically look for ways to increase the skills of the organizations that they consider to be important to their land use work.

Capacity-building also refers to the United Growth project. Building the common ground between the Rural and Urban Committees is a critical point. It involves a process that results in committee members understanding that urban and rural land use issues are two sides of the same coin. It involves a process that requires the building of the United Growth organization.

A joint activity that unites rural and urban members should probably first occur six months to a year after the committees start meeting - to make sure that each have a good understanding of the land use issues in their own area (urban or rural) before bringing them together to understand the other's perspective.

Introduction of a Joint Meeting

At a leadership meeting with the chair and co-chair of each committee as you prepare the next meeting's agenda, ask them what they think about starting to plan a joint meeting with the other committee. If they are agreeable, have them introduce the idea at the next committee meeting. If committee members are not interested or not yet ready, wait a while longer for this. If there is interest, continue with the following steps.



Appoint a Joint Planning Committee

Brainstorm at both the Rural and Urban Committee meetings what format would be good for a first joint meeting. Then 2 or 3 members from each committee should be selected/elected to form the planning group - the Joint Planning Committee.

At the first meeting of the Joint Planning Committee, the ideas brainstormed by each committee should be presented and discussed. Do members have other ideas? The following is a list of items that the Planning Committee should consider for a first meeting:

- Do an ice breaker that gets Urban and Rural Committee members meeting and talking with each other.
- Each committee reports on their activities for the past year.
- Brainstorming/discussion on what the next joint activity will be.
- Decide on whether a speaker who would be of interest to both urban and rural perspectives would be invited.
- Luncheon versus just a meeting (food attracts, but is costly).
- Date, time, and place.
- Involvement of as many committee members as possible in facilitating/leading the meeting.
- Review United Growth Coalition models. (Models are explained on page 46 at the back of Chapter 5.)

First Joint Meeting

Just having this meeting is an achievement! However, there are several success indicators you can use to measure how well the meeting went:

- *Attendance.* At least half the members of each committee attended. (If one committee did not have many members attending, this would be a clue that further analysis needs to be done to determine the reason. It could mean that re-organization efforts must be undertaken to bring this group up to speed.)
- *Productivity.* The agenda was followed and completed. Plans have begun for the next joint activity/meeting.
- *Quality.* There was good interaction among rural and urban members. There was a feeling that this was a worthwhile meeting - time well spent. Most felt good about the meeting and indicated their interest in continuing with the project.
- *Commitment.* Several people volunteered to plan the next event.

An evaluation form should be completed by the participants. Questions should relate to the above four points.

Additional Coalition-Building Activities

In the year following the first joint meeting, the Urban and Rural Committees should decide to pursue other joint activities. These activities should both address land use concerns in your county, but also be laying the foundation for the United Growth Coalition. Possible coalition-building activities include:

- Tour de Sprawl – a bus tour that shows both urban abandonment and new rural and suburban development
- Mini-grant Program – a small grant program administered by Urban and Rural Committee members
- Newsletter – a quarterly publication written by United Growth participants (See the back of Chapter 10 for an example.)

- Workshop – organized by United Growth committee around a land use issue of interest to the broader community

A Balancing Act

You have now both moved into the capacity-building phase of the project and started bringing the Rural and Urban Committees together to begin building the common ground. Of course, educational efforts are also continuing. This is a very tricky part and requires the LPE to do a balancing act.

In this phase, the LPE must staff both committees as they undertake capacity-building activities with the organizations that are important to the success of the rural and urban components of this project. At the same time, the LPE must be building the connection between the two committees, which will entail additional meetings and activities. It would be natural for the LPE to feel at this point that s/he is being pulled in many different directions at the same time.

Here are a few suggestions to help you successfully maneuver through this difficult period of the project:

- This is a leadership development opportunity. One person (LPE) just cannot perform all the leadership tasks required, and this is not desirable anyway. Encourage and facilitate the involvement of more committee members into leadership roles within the project. If they have not already, participants must take responsibility for making sure activities are undertaken.
- Explore partnership opportunities with other land use related organizations. It is always desirable to collaborate with other groups on an activity if there are shared goals to be achieved. Although developing a partnership requires time, the partner organization will also have time and resources to devote to the activity.
- Brush up on good time management techniques. Your time is limited, so you must be sure that you are using it wisely and effectively.
- Make sure that your priorities and the priorities of the Urban and Rural Committees match. If you are not undertaking the activities of most interest to participants, you will not obtain much assistance from them.
- Explore the possibility of hiring a consultant to assist with a specific activity or program if you have funding available. See “Using a Consultant” in Chapter 10 for additional information on this.

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.

Proposed Goal Definitions

At the January 2004 Search Conference, the task of defining terms in one of the goals that was developed was given to the Project Management Team. The following definitions are proposed to the Coalition for consideration at their February 17 meeting.

***Goal:** To assist and empower communities in implementing positive land use projects and practices.*

Community

A geographical area that is recognized/identified by its residents.
(For example: neighborhood, township, county, region. etc.)

Positive Land Use

Using land so that a community's vision is achieved while its benefits are balanced among all members of society.

Empowerment

Providing the opportunity for residents to participate in making decisions that affect them and helping provide the resources needed to achieve their community's vision for positive land use.

Tour de Sprawl Itinerary

Itinerary	Route	Message/Material
<p>1:45 pm Board Bus, Amway Grand Plaza Hotel</p> <p>① 2:00 pm Bus Departs</p> <p>Introduction to the Tour and the issue of urban sprawl</p>	<p>① Pearl</p> <p>① Front</p> <p>① Bridge</p>	<p>I. Introduction to the Tour – Carol Townsend, Director of the MSU Center of Urban Affairs – Grand Rapids</p> <p>A. Story of where resources are and where they are not being invested</p> <p>B. Goal is to stimulate thinking about where on the regional landscape we (individuals, businesses, government, foundations) should be applying our resources</p>
<p>② West Grand Neighborhood</p>	<p>② Broadway</p>	<p>II. Abandoning the City: Industrial/Residential</p> <p>A. Negative: Life space threatened by economic space</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Few residents employed locally—industry disregard for neighborhood quality of life 2. Corporate welfare to keep industry from leaving 3. Destruction of historic structures 4. Concentrated poverty/Socio-economic isolation and segregation <p>B. Positive: Neighborhood/business dialogue partnerships</p>
<p>③ Alpine Avenue Commercial Strip</p>	<p>③ Alpine Ave.</p>	<p>III. Sprawling into the Countryside: Unplanned Commercial Development</p> <p>A. Negative: Everywhere USA Commercial Strip Development</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Unplanned 2. Unwalkable 3. Auto-dependent (limited transit) <p>B. Positive: Diverse Housing Opportunities</p>
<p>④ The Fruit Ridge – Alpine Township</p>	<p>④ Alpine Ave.</p> <p>④ 7 Mile</p> <p>④ Fruit Ridge Ave.</p> <p>④ 10 Mile</p>	<p>IV. Sprawling into the Countryside: Threatened Farmland</p> <p>A. Negative: Unique agriculture/fruit-growing ecosystem lost</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Regional losses 2. Global losses <p>B. Positive: Purchase/Transfer of Development Rights and Value—Added Agricultural Initiatives</p>
<p>⑤ The City of Rockford Rockford Schools and Boulder Creek</p>	<p>⑤ 10 Mile</p> <p>⑤ Main St.</p> <p>⑤ Ogden</p> <p>⑤ Northland</p> <p>⑤ Brewer</p> <p>⑤ Cannonsberg Rd.</p> <p>⑤ East Beltline</p>	<p>V. Sprawling into the Countryside: Inefficient School Development II</p> <p>A. Negative: School building in the suburbs and abandonment in the urban core</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Urban education underachievement <p>B. Positive: Boulder Creek Development: revitalization of what once was an eyesore to the community (gravel pit)</p>

<p>Ⓒ Plainfield Ave./Creston Neighborhood</p> <p>Ⓓ REACH Neighborhood</p> <p>Debriefing Session REACH Headquarters</p> <p>Return to Amway Grand Plaza Hotel</p>	<p>Ⓒ Plainfield</p> <p>Ⓒ Leonard</p> <p>Ⓒ Laffayette</p> <p>Ⓓ Wealthy</p> <p>Ⓓ James</p>	<p>VI. Abandoning the City: Plainfield Avenue/Creston Neighborhood</p> <p>A. <i>Negative: Commercial District as “canyon”</i></p> <p>B. <i>Positive: Traditional neighborhood development and potential streetscaping initiatives</i></p> <p>VII. Abandoning the City: Vacant Housing/Concentrated Poverty</p> <p>A. <i>Negative: Vacant and boarded-up housing</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Little private market value 2. Lost property tax base 3. Concentrated poverty/Socioeconomic isolation and segregation 4. Social needs 5. Racial isolation and segregation 6. Defacto policy for the provision of affordable housing [gettoized] <p>B. <i>Positive: Non-profit efforts to rehabilitate housing</i></p> <p>Questions, Comments, and Refreshments</p> <p>VIII. Abandoning the City: Demise of the Central Business District</p> <p>A. <i>Negative: underutilized commercial and industrial property</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Relocation of furniture and other manufacturers 2. Lost commercial tax base 3. Urban expressways 4. Gentrification <p>B. <i>Positive: Downtown revitalization/“Back to the city” movement</i></p>
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Mini-grant Program

Summary of Proposals & Funding Sources

Rural and Urban Committee members implemented a mini-grant program that funded six community land use projects from October 2000-July 2001. Eight proposals were received requesting \$18,110. A total of \$11,200 is available for the Mini-grant Program. Most organizations did not receive the amount of funding they requested, and two did not receive an award. The average grant was \$1,860.00. The following is a brief summary of the proposed projects and the approved funding level.

Funding Sources:

- Frey Foundation
- Grand Rapids Community Foundation
- LISC
- Standard Federal Bank
- Steelcase Foundation

Aquinas College Community Leadership Institute \$2,200

The proposed “Student Transit Initiative” will seek to promote college student use of transit services through campus surveys on barriers to transit use and then work to eliminate those barriers. (The Mini-grant is a match for other funding for this project.)

Garfield Park Neighborhoods Association & Garfield Development Corp \$3,500

This joint project will prepare part of the Garfield area for a neighborhood-based planning process that will assist the two community-based organizations in moving forward on their revitalization efforts.

Faith in Motion \$1,050

This project addresses land use in the suburbs by reaching out to suburban citizens through the religious communities of the area.

Ada Township \$1,400

This project includes the development of a brochure on the recently adopted Open Space Protection Plan and will be distributed to all Township households.

Grand Rapids Center for Independent Living \$1,550

This project will address the transportation and livability of our region and the importance of walkable/rollable communities. (The Mini-grant is a match toward other funding for this project.)

Land Conservancy of West MI \$1,500

This project will identify 15 to 20 priority conservation areas important to Kent County and launch an intensive land owner contact program. (The Mini-grant is a match for other funding for this project.)

Community Foundation of Grand Rapids Township - 0 -

This \$2 million project is to purchase a 118 acre farm for the use of a nature preserve and park. Fund raising will continue until 12/31/01.

Gaines Charter Township - 0 -

This is a project to purchase 80 acres. The first phase is to develop a non-motorized trail, which will begin in the spring 2001.