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Carmen Sirianni

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Neighborhood Planning as Collaborative Democratic Design

The Case of Seattle

Carmen Sirianni

Problem: Historically, neighborhood participation has lapsed into NIMBYism or has not been especially effective at long-term, inclusive, and integrative planning.

Purpose: I aim to describe and analyze an example of how local governments can function as civic enablers and capacity builders for collaborative and accountable planning among neighborhood stakeholders and city government.

Methods: This is a case study of Seattle's neighborhood planning approach in the 1990s based on semistructured interviews with 33 current and former planners, other officials, and neighborhood activists, and review of a broad selection of neighborhood plans and other planning documents and newspaper coverage of the planning process.

Results and conclusions: The city of Seattle developed a set of tools and resources to empower local citizens in the planning process while also holding them accountable for actions consistent with specified broad values and planning targets. This, together with the city's substantial investment in neighborhood planning staff, who served as relational organizers and intermediaries of trust, was critical to the success of neighborhood planning and to the emergence of a collaborative governance culture among highly diverse and often contentious community associations, business interests, city departments, and the city council.

Takeaway for practice: Diverse neighborhoods can find common ground and make positive progress on planning to address shared citywide concerns. However, they need staff assistance to do this. Neighborhood planners can play this role, but only if cities fund them to do this time-consuming work and provide institutional support and guidance.

Keywords: neighborhood planning, deliberative democracy, Seattle, collaboration, civic capacity

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About the author:
Carmen Sirianni (sirianni@brandeis.edu) is a professor of sociology and public policy at Brandeis University. He is an author, with Lewis Friedland, of *Civic Innovation in America* (University of California Press, 2001). He has served as senior advisor to the National Commission on Civic Renewal and as a consultant to many civic groups, federal agencies, and national initiatives.

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The neighborhood rights campaign that erupted when the City of Seattle's 1994 comprehensive plan was released could have validated criticisms of comprehensive planning once again (Altschuler, 1965). Instead, key actors utilized the conflict as an opportunity to rescue the comprehensive planning ideal through consensus building and civic innovation (Innes, 1996, 2004; Sirianni & Friedland, 2001). In this article, I argue that Seattle developed an especially ambitious and successful policy design for collaborative planning, although it has had its stresses and imperfections, especially as plans continue to be implemented and revised.

This design used three sets of concepts and practices that are now widely recognized. These arose in Seattle in the early 1990s as a result of especially creative local practice within a learning network (Light, 1998) of city neighborhood staff, community activists, elected officials, and planners. The first is *relational organizing,* adapted from independent faith-based community organizing networks (Warren, 2001; Wood, 2002), which builds relationships through systematic "one-on-ones," face-to-face conversations about values and interests in order to build trust among diverse stakeholders and transform thinking about power (from "power over" to "power with"). The second, *asset-based community development* (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993), emphasizes mapping and mobilizing underutilized community assets (skills, land, civic relationships, small businesses, local institutions) to solve problems, rather than depending primarily on outside interventions to correct perceived community

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deficits. The third is *accountable autonomy* (Fung, 2004), wherein neighborhood groups are empowered to develop their own plans deliberatively, but with clear procedures for accountability to the city.

Seattle's neighborhood planning has generated measurable successes. After years of open conflict over land use issues, the neighborhood planning process managed to produce a substantial amount of collaboration between the city and neighborhoods, as well as among contentious or passively co-existing groups within neighborhoods, resulting in technically feasible and well-integrated plans that, in the large majority of cases, were responsive to diverse interests around land use and other issues and could point to recognizable measures of broad consensus and fair process. The city council and departmental review process judged the plans to be well aligned with important targets set by the state and city for sustainable development (job growth, housing, transportation), thus, progressively strengthening political support for the plans. The planning process produced the kinds of policy feedbacks (Campbell, 2003; Mettler, 2005) that led to successful citywide initiatives to generate substantial funding (through bonds and levies) for plan implementation, as well as continued local stewardship during implementation. In addition, implementation has been generally responsive to the neighborhood plans or has led to appropriate revisions accepted by key stakeholders, and the democratic and trust-building policy design has helped to transform agency cultures, albeit selectively, toward decentralized collaboration with local citizens.

The paradox, however, is that the staff investments needed for the complex work of trust building were cut back amidst budget pressures at exactly the time when implementation began to generate new challenges in a changing economic and political environment. As this article goes to press, the city faces a critical decision to build further on this collaborative democratic design or to recentralize neighborhood planning. In the concluding section, I consider some implications of the Seattle experience for planners.

The first section of this article examines five components I found, through interviews with people central to the process, to be key to Seattle's neighborhood planning: the structure and philosophy of the newly established Neighborhood Planning Office (NPO); the inclusive visioning process required in each participating neighborhood; the tools the city provided to help neighborhood groups do good planning work; the formal review of plans by city government; and the project managers' work as relational organizers building trust. In the second section, I examine the funding and organizational decentralization that have proven critical to implementing 37 neighborhood plans, as well as how the neighborhood planning staff became the relational linchpin for moving plans forward and catalyzing change in the practices of various city departments. I present events largely in chronological order; the critical trust-building role of planning staff runs throughout all stages.

Background

In the early 1990s, the City of Seattle began its comprehensive planning to meet the requirements of the State of Washington's 1990 Growth Management Act, which required both urban growth boundaries and urban population growth targets. This act asked that localities plan for four types of nodes (called "urban villages" by the act). *Urban center* villages were dense nodes projected to experience growth in housing and employment and were envisioned as the backbone of the regional rapid transit system. *Residential* urban villages were areas developed in low to moderate density housing and projected to see little employment growth. *Hub* urban villages contained both housing and employment, and this category included commercial centers outside urban areas. *Manufacturing/industrial* centers were locations for industry. How particular areas were classified would be of serious consequence to the character and quality of neighborhood life because of the associated policies for increased housing density, commercial development, traffic, and open space, as well as the sense of control that local citizens would have in shaping specific changes.

In 1994, the city adopted a comprehensive plan, *Towards a Sustainable Seattle* (City of Seattle, 1994), to comply with the Growth Management Act. Prior to plan adoption, the nonprofit organization Sustainable Seattle convened a civic panel and several participatory workshops to help develop sustainability indicators and lend democratic legitimacy to the process (AtKisson, 1996; Sustainable Seattle, 1995). However, because intense neighborhood conflict and NIMBYism were perceived to have obstructed implementation of Seattle's 1985 downtown plan, the city council (including the member who was its leading advocate for neighborhoods) decided not to invite neighborhood participation on the front end of the planning process for the 1994 plan.

When activists responded with a neighborhood rights campaign to ensure greater participation, Mayor Norm Rice turned to the Department of Neighborhoods (DON) (initially the Office of Neighborhoods, created in 1988) for help. Under the visionary leadership of Jim Diers, DON had developed 12 (now 13) district councils, each convening representatives from independent community councils

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and other neighborhood groups clustered in their areas. A former community organizer with extensive local and national networks, Diers assigned each district council and its neighborhood service center a coordinator responsible simultaneously to elected neighborhood leadership and to the city, thereby making a substantial investment in building civic capacity for neighborhood problem solving (Berry, Portney, & Thomson, 1993; Stone, Henig, Jones, & Pierannunzi, 2001). Long-time Ballard district coordinator Rob Mattson described his role, which was quite typical, as follows:

> I am a convener. I get people to park different sets of boots under the same table. I am a mediator. I facilitate group dialogue. . . . I find people who are frustrated and are not plugged into the process and are just throwing rocks, and I meet with them and help them understand how they can work with their neighbors, or meet with the new principal to build a relationship with the school. . . . My goal is to build relationships and a system of problem solving around these. . . . But I'm not the architect, just the convener.

DON also funded various self-help and planning-related projects through Seattle's Neighborhood Matching Fund, which provides city funds to civic groups for a broad range of neighborhood improvement projects on a competitive basis. The fund, honored in 1991 with an Innovations in Government award by Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, requires groups to match the city's grant with in-kind contributions, cash, or labor, and as a result has catalyzed civic initiative on a broad scale.

When the confrontation over the 1994 plan erupted, Diers and Jim Street, the key champion of neighborhoods on the city council, were well positioned to convene a diverse network of neighborhood activists, planning practitioners, and others in business and city government to begin designing a neighborhood planning process that would build community and improve life within the neighborhoods while being accountable for meeting citywide goals established by the comprehensive plan's framework policies. Thus the city council established the Neighborhood Planning Program in late 1994 with its stated purpose to "enable the City and the community to work in partnership" (Seattle Planning Commission [SPC], 2001b, p. 10). The program was to protect core values of community, social equity, environmental stewardship, economic opportunity, and security, while accommodating predictions for new jobs and housing in the urban village strategy. The city council created a new Neighborhood Planning Office (NPO) that was independent of DON but built upon the foundation it put in place, and reported directly to the mayor. Since not all core components could be designed up front, NPO worked with an advisory committee of neighborhood leaders and agency staff to ensure network learning (Light, 1998) throughout the process. The Strategic Planning Office (SPO) committed itself to develop a "neighborhood planning toolbox" to "demystify the art and science of planning for citizen planners" (SPC, 2001b, p. 36). The city council approved $4.7 million to support the civic process.

Research Method

To understand the essential components of Seattle's collaborative design for empowering local citizens, while ensuring reciprocal accountability (Behn, 2001; Fung, 2004), I conducted 33 semistructured interviews with current and former planners from DON and NPO staff, other city department staff, neighborhood activists and planning group coordinators, consultants hired by neighborhood planning groups, and city councilors and staff overseeing neighborhoods and land use from 1985 to the present. Although my interview protocol contained general questions that I asked of all participants, I also asked interviewees about relationships and perspectives unique to their roles (e.g., head of the Seattle City Council's neighborhoods committee, downtown neighborhood planning manager, neighborhood planning group coordinator). Most interviews lasted from one to three hours, and some people were interviewed on multiple occasions or provided email feedback. While most of those I interviewed were invested in various ways in the success of neighborhood planning, my snowball method asked interviewees for names of those with perspectives different from their own, including people who would have pointed criticisms of how the city designed and implemented the process. Virtually everyone was surprisingly blunt about past and current shortfalls, conflicts, and differences. Unless otherwise noted, all direct quotations are from interviews I conducted in Seattle in June 2005 and November 2006, as well as telephone interviews before and after these dates. I kept detailed handwritten notes of all interviews. All interviewees spoke on the record, although some asked that a few specific comments remain off the record.

I also examined a broad selection of neighborhood plans, adoption and approval matrices, priority reports, plan updates, and planning toolkits, as well as reports of the SPC, reports by several city departments, and coverage of the planning process in city, neighborhood, and advocacy newspapers.

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Policy Design: Five Keys to Successful Collaborative Neighborhood Planning

In the following section I describe what I have concluded from these interviews to be the five components of Seattle's neighborhood planning most important to its success: the organization of the NPO itself; the inclusive process required of each participating neighborhood; the planning tools the city provided; the city's formal review of the neighborhood plans; and how the NPO project managers worked to build trust.

NPO: Design for Learning and Trust Building

NPO oversaw the neighborhood planning process and was the key institution involved in it. Underlying its work was a core philosophy, established most clearly by Karma Ruder, the NPO director hired when the office was created, who had previously supervised the network of district coordinators at DON. In Ruder's view, planning as a complex system could work only to the extent that the city developed "self-organizing" models and invested heavily in building relationships and trust. "It's all about relationships and building a very elaborate web of trust" among neighborhood groups that may have been battling each other for decades, as well as among businesses, local activists, and staff of numerous city departments. The latter typically have many reasons to distrust citizen participation (Yang, 2006). In Ruder's view, no rational or equitable plans, instigated from above or below, validated by professional expertise or by large turnout at neighborhood meetings, could ever substitute for the ongoing work of nurturing relationships and building trust on an ongoing basis. In the context of planning, such relational work would inevitably be, in her words, "very messy, organic, unpredictable, and nerve wracking."

Early in 1995, the NPO director hired a team of 10 project managers to work with the neighborhoods. Ruder chose a group of people with a diverse mix of professional skills (land use, housing, communications, finance, community organizing) as well as diversity in gender, age, and ethnicity. In selecting staff, she insisted on one common denominator: "All had to believe that the community had wisdom, and to be willing to trust and believe in it." The director coached project managers to learn continually from each other, as well as from networks of activists and other neighborhood stakeholders, to ensure that the program was "co-created." As John Eskelin, a project manager who had previously worked on the 1994 comprehensive plan, recalls, "The first six months we spent just on training. Karma did some herself. She brought in people from DON, from independent local groups, and others from around the country. This prepared us well to provide training to the neighborhood [planning] groups themselves." Thousands of citizens received training as result of these efforts (SPC, 2000, p. 27). This design for what Senge (1990) has called a learning team within NPO, and what Light (1998) calls a learning network extending beyond it, would pay dividends by sustaining innovation.

Inclusive Visioning

Neighborhoods were given a choice; they could participate in developing a local plan or defer to the comprehensive plan. All 37 neighborhoods targeted for growth chose to participate. Each neighborhood was free to identify its own scope of work and to proceed in holistic fashion, rather than developing recommendations for each city department separately. During the initial phase, each neighborhood was eligible for a $10,000 grant to involve the broad community and all major stakeholders in defining a neighborhood vision. To prevent well-organized, middle class, White homeowners from dominating the process, each neighborhood had to show NPO a detailed stakeholder analysis (Berke, Godschalk, & Kaiser, 2006, p. 275–276) and outreach plan for engaging the full diversity of its residents. Minorities were 27% of Seattle's population by 2000, and recent immigrants had increased by 40% in the 1990s (Living Cities, 2003). The outreach plans showed how minority groups, as well as people with disabilities, youth, renters and others would be brought into the process and whether affected businesses and other institutions were at the table. The planning office also supplied an "outreach tool kit" with ideas and resources (e.g., extra funds for language translation) to help engage those who might not otherwise participate. In the Delridge district, for instance, the planning group translated its survey and other materials into Spanish, Cambodian, and Vietnamese. In the Chinatown-International district, the neighborhood planning process faced a fundamental tension between Pan-Asian activists with modern, place-based interests and residents with a more traditional enclave mode of protecting ethnic interest and identity (Abramson, Manzo, & Hou, 2006).

NPO staff did not imagine they could overcome all the biases that lead members of particular groups to participate actively and others to avoid participating (Crenson, 1983; Skogan, 2006). Nor did they see the solution as simply packing meetings with those typically marginalized. The strategy was not quantitative, but qualitative. Each neighborhood was challenged to devise a way of finding out what those not at the table might want. If small business did not show up at meetings, then perhaps the neighborhood should design a survey just for small businesses.

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If homeless people did not come to officially sponsored events, then perhaps they should interview people at food banks. This "conceptual flip," as the NPO director characterized it, challenged each neighborhood planning entity to imagine and discover the diversity of stakeholder interests in its plan.

DON had worked with recent immigrants and communities of color through its matching fund, community gardens, and other programs, thereby sensitizing the department to different styles of public communication. Many of the traditional neighborhood activists also saw these programs, as well as neighborhood planning itself, as opportunities to become more inclusive and to create more bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000) in neighborhoods. In their stories, NPO and DON staff were quite sensitive to the kinds of problems with deliberative forums some political theorists of democracy and difference have identified (Young, 2000). As Rebecca Sadinsky, the first director of the matching fund, recalled,

> In the first month, I expanded it [the matching fund] to people of color and immigrants. I told city and neighborhood leaders that the program can't just be for people who vote. These other communities had to come to the table. . . . And Jim [Diers], of course, knew them from his organizing days.

Bernie Matsuno, director of DON's community building division and one of the original staff of the matching fund, saw the challenge thus:

> Building relationships and maintaining relationships truly happens when people work and do things side by side. . . . In neighborhoods, the way you build strong relationships and break down race and other barriers is to get them to work side by side, often on a physical project.

For new immigrant and refugee groups, who often seem averse to public meetings, deeply suspicious of government, and who may have brought with them old resentments and battle scars from their home countries, matching fund and community garden projects also provided the opportunity for DON staff to do "lots of one-on-ones" to build trust and establish respect, as Matsuno noted. Indeed, "in some cases, we would need to work six to eight months doing one-on-ones. . . . And we often served as the go-between for different factions" in various refugee communities. Anne Takekawa, who has worked on DON's race and social justice initiative, envisioned her role this way: "When I do outreach, I am 'reaching in' to a whole culture. . . . It takes longer, but you can't shortcut it. You can't turn down tea."

Each neighborhood planning group was warned that their plan would unravel if factions they had not engaged later opposed it. For instance, the Downtown Seattle Association (DSA), representing influential corporations as well as media and cultural institutions, was told by the downtown NPO project manager that unless it shared power with local residents, nonprofits, artists, and small shopkeepers its plan might fail like the 1985 downtown plan, which was obstructed by mobilized residents advocating their own alternative. The DSA president, a planner by background and a trust-builder by style, responded in a very collaborative fashion to the philosophy and design of the program.

Neighborhoods were also told that if they excluded any major group, their planning dollars, which would be more substantial in the next phase, could be withheld. This happened, for instance, in the Queen Anne neighborhood when residents of the top of the hill, represented by the Queen Anne Community Council, tried to monopolize the visioning process at the expense of those living at the bottom, who faced greater problems, were less organized, and already had greater housing density. NPO informed the neighborhood planning group that the city's planning dollars belonged to everyone, not just those already active. The ensuing battle was fierce, but ultimately NPO's approach succeeded, and the Queen Anne neighborhood planning group developed a more inclusive process and a plan that reflected broader interests. Today, several common board memberships help bridge the Queen Anne Community Council and the Uptown Alliance, which formed in part to claim its seat at the table during the neighborhood planning process described here.

Tools for Empowered Citizens

The third component of empowered neighborhood planning was the set of financial, data, programmatic, and process tools the city provided. In other words, the city required accountability but provided resources that enabled citizens to do good deliberative work (Fung, 2004). Once the city was assured that the initial outreach was broadly democratic and that the scope of proposed planning made sense, each neighborhood became eligible for $60,000 to $100,000 (with additional funds set aside for urban centers and distressed areas) to conduct the second phase of actual planning, which occurred variously between 1996 and 1999. SPO developed a GIS mapping and database tool called the Data Viewer using ESRI's ArcView software, which they made available on CD-ROM to enable citizen planners to access neighborhood-specific

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information on demographics, land use, transportation flow, system capacity, and environmental constraints, and to print maps and aerial photographs for reports and public presentations (Wagoner, 1999). When combined with the intensive relational and trust-building work of project managers described below, this planning support system exemplified what Klosterman (2001, p. 14) refers to as "collective design," facilitating information sharing, mutual learning, and community debate.

City departments, from housing and police to transportation and utilities, produced citizen toolkits to help residents understand their options within existing programs and regulations. The "neighborhood planning toolbox" I examined in the downtown neighborhood service center, for instance, consisted of a 24-×-12-×-12-inch crate packed full of guidebooks and materials on outreach, housing, land use, environmentally critical areas, historic preservation, block watches, open space, public school partnerships, human services, and pedestrian facilities. Another office in Pioneer Square posted emerging plan components on the walls to keep citizens, businesses, and various subcommittees up to date. Not all planning groups made use of all this material, to be sure. Indeed, not all found the tools as useful and timely as they might have been, recalled Chris Leman, former planning chair of the City Neighborhood Council, representing all the district councils. Nonetheless, most groups were able to develop sophisticated and workable proposals. As downtown project manager Eskelin noted, the very process of developing the toolkits compelled city departments to "begin thinking more like citizens."

Different neighborhoods chose to focus on different mixes of housing, open space, transportation, public safety, arts, human services, and business district revitalization, making up to 200 specific recommendations per plan. In addition to working closely with the NPO project managers, neighborhood planning committees hired their own consultants with the money allotted. Each committee presented options in visually rich and well documented formats at an alternatives fair to which the entire neighborhood was invited. Such events elicited fresh ideas and sometimes major modifications, and drew in additional people to help plan and do further outreach. When a draft was finally ready, it was included in a "validation mailer." This was formally required to register the degree of consensus and was sent to all households in the neighborhood, as well as to all businesses and property owners, who either voted for or against the plan on an enclosed ballot or at an open meeting. After such meetings, the plans were further revised (SPC, 2001b).

For instance, the Crown Hill/Ballard Neighborhood Planning Association (CH/B NPA), a nonprofit formed to facilitate collaboration between Crown Hill (a residential urban village) and Ballard (a hub urban village), led the planning process in these two contiguous neighborhoods. Another entity, Ballard-Interbay Northend, developed a separate plan for the nearby manufacturing/industrial urban village.

CH/B NPA hired GreenWoods Associates to help design a visioning process, which included Saturday morning "topical seminars." Between 20 and 50 participants turned out for each forum. There were six topical areas in all, each with an ongoing committee. As Jody Haug, longtime community and environmental activist who oversaw the process, recalled, "We feared that special interest folks would come out and dominate [each forum]. But except for one meeting, this didn't happen." The visioning process challenged them to think of how all the parts would fit together. A steering committee met monthly, and informal weekly breakfast meetings facilitated the exchange of information across committees and built trust in the quality of this information, a key ingredient in successful collaboration (Innes & Booher, 2004).

The Ballard residential development committee, for instance, engaged renters in its leadership. After the initial visioning was complete, the committee worked on a draft plan for multifamily and affordable housing. It then conducted a survey and held a community-wide town meeting with 200 participants. In addition to developing specific proposals for public arts, the Ballard arts and culture committee formed Arts Ballard to link the efforts of various organizations on an ongoing basis. The Ballard human services committee helped develop a network of 40 providers who met monthly, and also helped bring to fruition the Ballard Family Center that had been launched in 1995 with a small matching fund grant. The Ballard economic development committee anchored various proposals in the design of a new Ballard municipal center and elicited collaboration from the Ballard Chamber of Commerce and the Ballard Merchants Association, which had not spoken to each other in years. The Ballard open space and recreation committee developed an integrated set of proposals for specific parcels and "green links" connecting them. In April 1998, the *Ballard News Tribune,* which along with the CH/B NPA newsletter kept citizens informed of the planning process, mailed a validation issue to all households, businesses, and property owners in the area. Two public validation meetings followed, and after reviewing all comments, the CH/B NPA board made revisions and sent the plan to city council following approximately the same timeline as most other neighborhoods (see Table 1). Some 800 citizens in Ballard and Crown Hill were actively involved in the planning process.

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Formal Review of Plans

The fourth key component of neighborhood planning was the formal review process. All final plans were sent to SPO, which coordinated a Review and Response (R&R) team of representatives from all relevant city departments. This team determined whether the neighborhood plan was consistent with the citywide comprehensive plan and the urban villages rubric, whether it complied with all laws, and whether it prioritized its proposals and documented its participation process adequately. As a sub-cabinet fully supported (and often accompanied) by Mayor Rice and his successor, Paul Schell, the administrative team conducted tours of the neighborhoods and then advised city council, whose neighborhoods committee further reviewed each plan, conducted its own tours, and then held a formal public hearing in the neighborhood to determine whether the community did, in fact, have general consensus on the proposals. Between 20,000 and 30,000 residents (out of a Census 2000 population of approximately 563,000) participated in the various public meetings, land-use walks, planning workshops, door-knocking campaigns, surveys, and other events at one time or another.[1]

As a result of the iterative process based on broad outreach and continual revision, most plans yielded consensus among all actors. According to councilor Richard Conlin, the committee chair at the time, the city council had to "mediate two or three plans. In another four or five cases, there was pretty strong dissent." But narrow interest groups or neighborhood factions had not generally hijacked the process. All neighborhoods produced plans that accommodated growth as envisioned by state law, but under terms they felt they could control. The city council's investment of money and time in neighborhood planning, which included making every city council member a "council steward" for several neighborhoods, had clearly paid off.

Project Managers as Relational Organizers

An essential fifth component of the planning process was the work of NPO project managers as relational organizers weaving the "very elaborate web of trust" envisioned

Table 1. Timing of Seattle neighborhood planning.

Years	Planning Phase	Major Activities
1994	Comprehensive plan	• City council approval • Neighborhood protest • NPO and process designed
1995	Neighborhood visioning	• NP groups established • NPO project managers and NP groups trained • Stakeholder analyses • Topical dialogues (land use, housing, open space, etc.) • Consultants
1996–1997 (varies by neighborhood)	Draft plan components	• Topical committees • Public forums • Surveys • Consultants • Components integrated
1997–1999 (varies by neighborhood)	Validation and approval	• Alternatives fair • Validation mailer • Validation meeting(s) • City council and department tours, review, approval
Post-1999	Implementation and update	• Bonds, levies • Departmental decentralization • Interdepartmental sector teams (IDTs) • Stewardship groups • DON used neighborhood development managers until budget cut in 2003, when duties shifted to district/ neighborhood service center coordinators

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by the NPO director. Helping to build relationships among the wide array of actors in neighborhood associations, city departments, local chambers of commerce, and the city council itself, was an indispensable function of the project manager's job, though clearly one designed to leverage the ongoing relational organizing of many neighborhood activists themselves. Indeed, in the words of Sally Clark, who was neighborhood development manager during the implementation phase and had served as staff leader of the city council's neighborhood plan adoption work group, building relationships was "pretty much all of it."

Project managers engaged in relational organizing in various ways. First and foremost, they brokered one-on-ones among individuals with various perspectives on a given issue. They targeted those who had strong and often divergent views, expressed in private or at public meetings, and asked them to get together, often in one of the hundreds of coffee shops that sprinkle Seattle. The meetings could be simple get-to-know-you meetings, sharing some initial perspectives or common values and establishing the basis for further independent contact. Or they could focus on a tough issue and explore possible solutions and how to bring others into future conversations. In some cases, the meetings first had to clear the air of past conflicts or heal old battle scars. If, as the old saying goes, "all organizing is reorganizing," the project manager often helped competing neighborhood associations and leaders to reorganize around a broader neighborhood vision and planning projects that crossed antiquated boundaries or put to rest ancient skeletons.

The project manager also provided "translation services" between the vernacular understanding of neighborhood problems and solutions and agency cultures, whose bureaucratic and professional norms reflected their own understandings of equity, efficiency, technical elegance, regulatory mandate, and common good (Corburn, 2005; Fischer, 2000; Forester, 1989). The project manager might convene a "one-on-one-on-the-spot" while planning a light rail station area for instance, trying to get residents and a transportation engineer each to understand where the other was coming from. Indeed, helping each party see the perspective of the other, including values, interests, constraints, and accountability, was a central part of the project manager's job, and allowed individuals and groups she met with separately to trust her as an honest broker and reliable conduit of information. In short, project managers acted officially, systematically, and strategically on behalf of both citizens and the city as "intermediaries of trust," in Russell Hardin's (2002, pp. 140–142) felicitous phrase, and as the relational pivot of what Robert Behn calls "360-degree reciprocal accountability" (2001, pp. 198–217).

In addition, project managers communicated and negotiated regularly with city councilors and their staffs to resolve problems and conflicts. Mayor Rice encouraged the NPO director to help his agency officials understand how to build in relational self-organizing principles down the line. He even devoted a special retreat to teaching his cabinet how this approach could promote their departmental interests. And though it "drove agency staff crazy at first," in the NPO director's words, some agency heads got it quickly and all, "trying hard," got it to some degree. Such support from the top further helped project managers identify and build relationships with a selected number of mid- and street-level staff, who could be counted on to work creatively with citizens on the ground, preparing the way for even deeper collaboration when interdepartmental teams were established during the implementation phase, described below.

Relationship building did not always go smoothly, of course. Some people could not manage to work together, despite repeated attempts (Ruder & Dehlendorf, 1997). In some cases, the project manager could suggest another area of productive activity for one of them (e.g., a different subcommittee), but this was not always successful. Activists and business people did not always achieve agreement, or even agree to meet in a one-on-one. And, as NPO director Ruder noted, sometimes a representative from a neighborhood planning committee would "storm into my office and say, 'if we don't get a new project manager, we all quit!' . . . And some project managers came in and said, 'if I don't get a new community, I quit!'" Committee/manager divorces (the exit option within an overall design for voice, in Albert Hirschman's [1970] famous phraseology) were thus arranged for various reasons, including a committee having become too dependent on a specific project manager.

What prevented the neighborhood planning process from becoming just another complex bureaucratic maze of technical details, participatory process requirements, and multi-level accountability mechanisms were the relational skills and philosophy underlying the project manager's role. What might appear as straight lines on an organizational chart were, in reality, complex webs of relational exchanges of information, perspectives, and validation designed to produce trust, with authority and accountability clearly delimited. For downtown project manager Eskelin, who later served as neighborhood development manager during implementation, "Validation was not just the formal neighborhood event or publishing the proposed plan in the local newspaper for feedback. We did validation from day one, with continual check-ins with all kinds of folks every day." The project manager's role was to enable ongoing, pragmatic, democratic discourse among

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diverse actors according to a communicative ideal with optimal degrees of comprehensibility, sincerity, legitimacy, and truth (Forester, 1989, 1999; Habermas, 1984; Innes, 1995), and with multi-layered and reciprocal accountability among citizens and stakeholders (participatory democracy), city council and mayor (representative democracy), and city departments (public administration; see Table 2).

Implementing the Plans

When the new mayor, Paul Schell, took office in 1998 just as many draft plans were nearing completion, he had to face how to fund and implement them. Only a small fund ($1.5 million, or $50,000 per neighborhood) had been designated by the city council for early implementation, primarily to keep the civic energy flowing. Indeed, one reason that building trust was so important during the planning process was that it might help leverage actual dollars down the line. Schell, originally a businessman and developer, had become deeply committed to neighborhood engagement when he served as director of the department of community development. He had defeated the mayoral candidate whose backers opposed the growth mandates of the comprehensive plan, a victory helped along by the many neighborhood plan validation events that occurred during election season. This was yet another sign that well-designed participatory planning could restrain NIMBYism. The mayor, working closely with the chair of the city council's neighborhoods committee, decided to proceed to implementation with a dual strategy of dollars and decentralization.

Dollars for Implementation

The mayor first committed to expanding the neighborhood matching fund from $1.5 million to $4.5 million annually to enable neighborhood groups to begin to carry out projects envisioned in the plans (Diers, 2004). But since this was far too little money to implement the plans' 4,277 discrete recommendations by 2014 as targeted, the mayor placed on the ballot a series of bond and levy measures, seeking popular support for funding proposals common to many neighborhood plans. At first, many thought he was crazy to go to the taxpayers with large requests. But in 1998, citizens passed a nearly $200 million library bond measure (Libraries for All) to fund constructing a new downtown library and build, expand, or renovate 27 branch libraries, including in Seattle's least served areas. The following year taxpayers approved a similar measure to fund community centers, and the year after that a measure to fund parks and open space, with an overall total of $470 million, much of which was for specific recommendations in the neighborhood plans. They also voted to renew the

Table 2. Multi-layered and reciprocal accountability mechanisms in Seattle neighborhood planning.

Democratic actors	Accountability mechanisms
Neighborhood planning group (Made up of stakeholders including: individual citizens and representatives of community and district councils, nonprofits, businesses, landlords, and groups like open space coalitions, watershed associations, ethnic associations, and community development corporations)	• Stakeholder analysis (to determine representativeness) • Committee reports, presentations, updates • One-on-ones, informal group meetings • Neighborhood newspapers (report on alternatives, progress, and debates) • Validation mailer (sent to all residents, property owners and businesses) • Validation meetings (open and public)
NPO Neighborhood project manager	• Check-ins, one-on-ones (communicative generation of trust, comprehensibility, legitimacy, and truth among all stakeholders, including departments)
City council and mayor	• Check-ins with council stewards and neighborhood planning groups • Neighborhood walking tours • Public hearings • City council adoption and approval (following mediation where necessary to obtain consensus) • Mayoral oversight of NPO
City departments	• Review and response team (advisory to the city council's neighborhoods committee) • One-on-ones with stakeholders, project managers • Mayoral oversight

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low-income housing levy for $86 million in 2002 under the next mayor. Schell also pushed city departments to align their budgets with neighborhood plan priorities. Following the city's investment in the planning process, citizens demonstrated their willingness to invest tax money in realizing the neighborhood visions by electing and re-electing city councilors who supported this. Indeed, in the words of the chair of the city's planning commission (Wagoner, 1997), neighborhood planning catalyzed a "cadre" of thousands who would become "a compelling new political force" (City of Seattle, 2003b, p. 5). This democratic policy design further confirms the importance of policy feedback in creating active publics (Campbell, 2003; Mettler, 2005).

Departmental Decentralization and Culture Change

Mayor Schell also decentralized some city departments into six sectors of the city so their local units could work collaboratively with the citizen-led "stewardship groups" that succeeded the neighborhood planning committees in each area. An interdepartmental team (IDT) coordinated the work of the departments in each sector in order to respond to the integrative and holistic quality of the neighborhood visions and plans. After all the plans were finally approved in 1999, NPO was dismantled and DON became responsible for providing staff support for the stewardship groups and for coordinating their work with the IDTs (SPC, 2001a). This role was performed primarily by six "neighborhood development managers" (NDMs), sometimes referred to as sector managers, three of whom had previously been NPO project managers. The stewardship groups were to continue to clarify the vision, re-prioritize recommendations in the light of perceived constraints and new opportunities, and hold the city accountable for following through. They were also to continue to map and mobilize community assets. Together the stewardship group and IDT ensured that multiple plan components, available resources, and agency regulations were well aligned; if zoning and other changes were needed, proposals were brought to city council.

The NDMs were key. Among city staff, they had the best overall view of each plan in their sector, how all the components fit together, and how the process had evolved. Some had already established good working relationships with neighborhood leaders and committee chairs during the planning phase, and the new hires energetically set out to do likewise. In the words of Jody Haug, longtime community and environmental activist and chair of a stewardship group, the NDMs worked "very effectively with us and got us the information we needed. There was not much hierarchy here. We were all just part of a network." NDMs were responsible for convening the IDTs and pushed hard for city departments to work together. Though they said they were expected to "kick ass" in the city bureaucracies to keep them responsive to the stewardship groups, NDMs focused especially on "nurturing relationships" and "catalyzing networks" with departmental staff so that, over time, "shepherds" and "champions" of the neighborhood plans would voluntarily carry the work forward within each city department.

Such champions emerged especially at the project manager level within the departments, and they were often given official license to help align agencies' own 10-year plans with neighborhood plans. In some cases, city departments hired former DON and independent community organizing staff to help transform organizational culture and street-level practice towards collaborative work with citizens. Pamela Green, for instance, a long-time board member of the Seattle chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) who worked for six years as a DON district coordinator, was hired by the Seattle Department of Transportation, where she did continual one-on-ones with immigrant businesses, environmental justice and community groups, and street-level departmental staff to work through issues of light rail planning in Rainier Valley. These issues became especially contentious when 45 sites with contaminated soil were discovered in a 4½-mile stretch, causing delay and disruption, which threatened the trust previously established. Such trust can "absolutely be destroyed quickly in these kinds of projects," Green noted. She also served on the IDT to help transform culture across departments working in the sector and now serves as the mayor's citywide director of community outreach on his senior policy team.

NDMs also educated senior staff to ensure that long-term city planning and policy making continued to be responsive to neighborhood visions, as well as shifting priorities and new opportunities in a dynamic environment. NDMs met with the mayor four times a year to report on progress and to offer advice on how to maintain momentum within each department.

Finally, an important part of the NDMs' role was to leverage and pool resources from a variety of sources to help implement plan recommendations. In addition to the bonds and levies, such resources could come from private foundations, developers, the Seattle Arts Commission, mitigation funds, utilities, state and federal programs, and, of course, the neighborhood matching fund. Not all neighborhoods had equal, timely access to these, to be sure (Ceraso, 1999; League of Women Voters of Seattle, 2001). However, when combined with relational organizing and

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asset-based community development practices, this leveraging role of the NDMs was a powerfully integrative one that no individual department, neighborhood group, or district council could hope to perform on its own. In the words of Brent Crook, former public housing organizer and former director of DON's community building and leadership development program, whose views were echoed by neighborhood leaders and staff in various city agencies, as well as confirmed in a formal survey of stewardships groups (SPC, 2001a) and in a recent city audit plan of implementation (City of Seattle, 2007), the NDMs were "an amazing catalyst" in the system of planning.

Plan details are summarized in each neighborhood's "approval and adoption (A&A) matrix" showing each recommendation accompanied by its priority ranking, timeframe, and proposed implementers, including public agencies, civic groups, institutions, community development corporations, businesses, developers, and property owners. City departments also indicate on the matrix whether the project is feasible, whether resources are available for it, and where other resources might be found. While many items require only the attention of a single agency, the matrices are not primarily sets of citizen demands requiring agency action, and they are certainly not the typical spreadsheets found in top-down agency planning. Rather, they are summaries of proposals refined through extensive public deliberation and one-on-one communication. They tap numerous sources of local knowledge and departmental expertise. Each is part of a larger neighborhood vision that various stakeholders commit to work on together. The plan matrices list the visible work of public consequence (Boyte, 2005) expected from a range of government and nongovernmental partners (agency officials, local citizens, and organized stakeholders) collaborating in a variety of ways on specific components of the plan.

DON has put all narrative plans and matrices up on its website (www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/npi), with an overview of each local process and regular updates on priority setting and implementation to add a further degree of transparency within and across all neighborhoods. More than a dozen departments utilize these neighborhood priority reports to assign appropriate administrative responsibility and develop their own overall agency plans. Most neighborhoods did list nongovernmental partners in the A&A matrices wherever possible. But equally important to policy design as a "democratic teaching" of self-government (Landy, 1993) was the process of engaging neighborhoods in thinking about the costs of each proposal, though, for technical reasons, few included these in their final matrices. According to Sally Clark, the lead city council staffer who managed matrix approvals and is now a city councilor and chair of its Economic Development and Neighborhoods committee, "The neighborhoods were often surprised at the costs. But this [matrix process] was very educative for them. It gave them a sense of how much it costs to run a city! . . . But this gets us closer to honestly governing ourselves."

Implications for Planners

Seattle's system of neighborhood planning has been part of a larger set of efforts to generate not just episodes and processes of collaboration, but a more fundamental "collaborative governance culture" (Healey, 2006, pp. 324–336). Such a culture is based on deliberative democratic forums, reciprocal accountability, asset-based community development practices, and systematic relational organizing that extends across boundaries of diverse community councils, business associations, nonprofits, and public agencies and, indeed, to watershed associations, environmental justice groups, the Puget Sound Partnership, and various other sustainable city and sustainable neighborhood partnerships (City of Seattle, 2004; SPC, 2000; Sirianni, in press; Sustainable Seattle, 2006). Seattle's model represents but one of a variety of possible options for empowering neighborhoods in city planning (Berke et al., 2006, pp. 265–286; Burby, 2003; Fagotto & Fung, 2006; Kathi & Cooper, 2005; Ozawa, 2004; Punter, 2003; Sirianni & Schor, in press) under differing state mandates for citizen participation (Brody, Godschalk, & Burby, 2003). Comparative analysis of the larger political cultures and urban regimes where such neighborhood empowerment and community development strategies have so far emerged might indicate where else they could be successful (Weir, 1999).

Moving Beyond NIMBY

Because of experiences in the 1970s and 1980s, Seattle's neighborhood planning has been especially motivated to reign in NIMBYism while empowering citizens to engage with passion and vision in shaping the future development of their own neighborhoods. It was able to do this relatively well because it gave neighborhoods choice and resources to support independent visioning, deliberative planning, and technical analysis, in exchange for commitment and accountability to work within a larger framework where common interest could be continually vetted. Thus, a community council laying claim to a seat at the planning table had to commit to deliberate in good faith with other civic and business actors on an overall vision as well as on particular plan and project details. It had to be open to representing new and underrepresented groups according to principles of equity and diversity. It also had to work

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within an accountability framework with clear lines of formal oversight (city council and departmental response and review), and meet intensive, relational, trust-building expectations with help of city neighborhood planning staff following a demanding communicative ideal (Forester, 1989; Innes, 1995).

The Seattle model shares certain features with the accountable autonomy one finds in several community-based programs in Chicago (Fung, 2004), with the community visioning processes in an increasing number of communities (Gastil & Levine, 2005; Leighninger, 2006), and with the "beyond NIMBY" strategies of some participatory hazardous waste facility siting (Rabe, 1994). But Seattle's systematic investment in neighborhood project and development managers and associated staff as relational organizers and intermediaries of trust warrants special attention as "policy design for democracy" (Schneider & Ingram, 1997) and as a way of reframing citizen participation away from "the mechanistic imagery of citizens pushing on government [towards] . . . the complex systems imagery of a fluid network of interacting agents . . ." (Innes & Booher, 2004, p. 422). Seattle's practice corroborates quantitative findings on the importance of staff expertise and training in public participation (Brody et al., 2003, pp. 254–256), but also challenges deliberative democratic models to account more fully for the relational infrastructure and practices that move neighborhood groups beyond NIMBY and government beyond automatic suspicion of what citizens value.

Utilizing City Staff and/or Professional Facilitators

Seattle used independent professional consultants, facilitators, and mediators, building them into the planning grants in particular. Indeed, they were critical to allowing neighborhoods to shape their own deliberative processes and visions, tailor dialogue and collaboration to peculiar local configurations and conflicts, and utilize technical expertise of their own choosing. The use of independent professionals has a record of much success in community dispute resolution, visioning, and deliberative democracy (Gastil & Levine, 2005; Susskind, McKearnan, & Thomas-Larmer, 1999). But the fulcrum in Seattle remained city staff that could themselves be held accountable by relevant civic, business, political, and administrative actors over the longer run, rather than just on individual projects.

There is a lot to recommend this strategy if the goal is long-term culture change that spills over into other city departments, as has occurred at least selectively in Seattle. But the question warrants a more systematic analysis to compare cities that invest differentially in city staff and independent professional facilitators or, like San Antonio, contain very powerful community organizing networks that would emphasize independent organizing staff accountable first and foremost to neighborhood- or congregation-based coalitions, and are suspicious of community building efforts that emanate from city government, foundations, or planners (Berry et al., 1993; Warren, 2001). Each case, however, should compare professionals who are tasked with getting the civics right, even if they use different means. A locality's size seems to be an important variable affecting whether it will choose staff or consultants and the overall level of resources committed to participation (Brody et al., 2003, p. 256), but all cities should have some planning and other agency staff with integrative roles as relational organizers and deliberative facilitators. Indeed, a city that genuinely values civic democracy should have such staff within virtually all of its agencies.

Maintaining Civic Energy

While neighborhood visioning and planning can clearly generate civic energy, the challenge to maintain it during implementation remains serious. Implementation reveals further complexities and obstacles not always anticipated. Neighborhood priorities may shift as new opportunities arise and some activists turn to other issues. Some city departments drag their feet or openly resist in the face of limited resources, leadership and staff turnover, or the emergence of unforeseen technical obstacles. While Seattle could offer no guarantees that implementation would be quick and direct in any given neighborhood, its approach has tended both to honor distinct neighborhood visions and maintain a commitment to action. This is because DON, the city council, and successive mayors have signaled their trustworthiness by making it possible for neighborhoods to follow plan progress, and because most plan stewardship groups are based in community and district councils, unlike many community visioning and deliberative democracy designs. As a result, the city council continues to vote new funds for implementation, recently authorizing the purchase of closed schools in Phinney and University Heights, as recommended in the original plan, for example.

NDMs, critical to maintaining collaborative momentum, were partially cut back due to budgetary pressures under Mayor Schell and then fully eliminated in 2003 as the new mayor, Greg Nickels, moved to centralize control and concentrate planning resources on a few selected neighborhoods. The NDM role was delegated to the already overloaded district council coordinators, who do not have the time, authority, or staff support to do what NDMs did. Indeed, as the city auditor's (City of Seattle, 2007) recent report shows, Mayor Nickels has cut total staff support for neighborhood plan implementation across

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all city departments by approximately two-thirds since taking office. DON's leadership development program was also eliminated, diminishing the supply of grassroots activists with effective collaborative and asset-based community development skills and mindsets. Maintaining collaborative civic energy in implementation may well depend on restoring both the NDMs and the leadership program, or finding adequate substitutes, such as more robust staff support for the district coordinators. Chris Leman, chair of the City Neighborhood Council and former chair of its neighborhood planning committee at the height of local engagement in the process, believes that it is essential to include contractual funding for staffing the stewardship groups. Clark (2007) revived the city council's commitment to revisiting neighborhood plans and putting more into action, and (as this article goes to press) a serious debate is underway in the city council and mayor's office, as well as among neighborhood activists, that could either re-energize the program or recentralize it further. While all cities face periodic budget constraints, they need ways to measure whether staff like NDMs pay for themselves by leveraging community resources and increasing support for new taxes. And even in hard times, if cities do not maintain long-term investments in civic capacity building they risk incurring real costs if local groups revert to narrower visions, less inclusion, or NIMBYism, and city departments revert to technocratic mindsets.

Achieving Diversity in Deliberation

Seattle made determined efforts to enhance diversity and equity in neighborhood participation in the face of the many well known factors that tend to favor participation by groups that are older, White, better educated, have higher incomes, own homes, and are not recent immigrants (Berry et al., 1993; Crenson, 1983; Skogan, 2006). There exist, to my knowledge, no rich ethnographic studies of specific community meetings nor citywide quantitative studies to demonstrate how successful this was. Those interviewed indicated many episodes where previously marginalized groups, such as renters and racial minorities, were included relatively effectively in the deliberative process and had a clear impact on the outcome of plans within their neighborhoods. Poorer neighborhoods benefited in visible ways, especially when plans were linked to citywide bond and levy measures, but there exists no systematic study of the effects of neighborhood planning on resource flows. Neighborhoods eligible for neighborhood planning, with the exception of the core retail area, did tend to be those with the weakest voices in City Hall. Many were distressed and contained primarily multi-family housing, rather than being located on the waterfront and containing primarily single-family housing, which corrected some common biases in citywide participation. However, the general consensus among those interviewed, including those with a history of organizing in minority and poor communities, was that it was still very difficult to involve those traditionally disadvantaged, and that though this neighborhood planning was better than previous efforts, it did not offer any magic bullets.

Chicago's community policing and neighborhood beat meetings, which are the most evaluated system of city-sponsored neighborhood participation in the United States today, suggest that investments in training for citizen beat facilitation can enable some participatory biases to be corrected through "structured deliberation" (Fung, 2004, pp. 173–197) in neighborhoods with considerable race and class diversity, and that racial and class differences in participation levels and problem-solving effectiveness citywide can be substantially mitigated (Skogan, 2006). The major exception so far is in Latino neighborhoods, especially those with high proportions of immigrants, despite very active outreach efforts by the city, which is sobering given the rising proportion of new immigrants in many cities. Seattle's DON is working to address such issues through its neighborhood matching fund, race and social justice initiative, and community gardening partnership with the Seattle Housing Authority, as well as by aiming to include more diverse civic organizations, like ethnic associations, senior housing councils, and nonprofit human service agencies, in district councils. Yet, these efforts will likely take considerable time before they show substantial impacts and will almost certainly require increases in DON staffing and budget. Inclusive democracy (Young, 2000) for solving complex problems at the neighborhood, city, watershed, and metropolitan levels (Innes & Booher, 2003) cannot to be purchased on the cheap in ethnically dynamic regions.

Realigning Local Plans with Emergent Challenges

Seattle's experience suggests several lessons on neighborhood planning in a dynamic environment (City of Seattle, 2003a, 2005). First, elected officials should make clear commitments to the neighborhood plans as a starting point, be fully transparent about process and progress, and communicate their core neighborhood vision and values effectively when they propose changes. This also entails legitimating new civic actors who are claiming seats at a more inclusive planning table. Second, the mayor needs to show continued leadership with his cabinet and sub-cabinet so that staff in the departments understand the importance of working collaboratively with neighborhoods on an

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everyday basis and within neighborhood plan parameters, wherever possible, while engaging with them in joint learning and plan revision. Third, the local equivalent of a department of neighborhoods should have a budget adequate to support staff in their roles as relational organizers and intermediaries of trust. Generating and maintaining trust in a highly dynamic environment requires intensive, ongoing work of "relational coordination" (Gittell, 2003). The clearest message I heard from current and former staff and their partners in the neighborhood planning groups was that NDMs and the neighborhood leadership program should be restored, and that district councils will also need more relational organizing staff if they are to become more inclusive. Fourth, collective design and collaborative implementation in a dynamic environment needs state-of-the-art planning support systems (GIS, visualization, scenario-based tools) that enable professional planners to work effectively with citizen planners (Brail & Klosterman, 2001).

Finally, participatory planning offers no substitute for democratic politics, but rather depends on citizens electing effective city council coalitions as well as supportive mayors. This was true at the birth of DON, through the most expansive phases of neighborhood planning, and remains key to implementation that is true to the spirit of citizen empowerment. Seattle's leaders have not shied away from the big challenges of democracy. Richard Conlin, a founding member of Sustainable Seattle, chair of the city council's neighborhoods committee at the height of neighborhood planning, and current chair of its environment committee, puts it thus: "What we are doing is fundamental to the survival of democracy in the long run. . . . We have an opportunity to do some great modeling here, with impacts internationally as democracy spreads."

Notes

1. On a parallel track, based on legislation passed in 1993 and since expanded, design review boards began to provide multi-stakeholder forums for mutual deliberation and flexible adaptation of the design features of larger residential and commercial projects, with the intention of yielding better designs, reducing negative impacts on neighborhoods, and lowering the number of appeals that characterized the previous decade. These boards are made up of neighborhood and local business representatives, as well as design professionals and developer representatives, and serve in an advisory capacity to the planning department (City of Seattle, 2002).

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