



**Comprehensive Planning: Is There a Relationship
between Committee Design and Subsequent
Outcome: A Baseline Survey**

By

Russell Kashian and Heather Kohls

Working Paper 06 - 04

University of Wisconsin – Whitewater

Department of Economics

4th Floor Carlson Hall

800 W. Main Street

Whitewater, WI 53538

Tel: (262) 472 -1361

Draft Copy—Please do not Cite without Authors Permission

Comprehensive Planning: Is There a Relationship between Committee Design and Subsequent
Outcome: A Baseline Survey
October 10, 2006

Russ Kashian, Ph.D.
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater
kashianr@uww.edu

Heather Kohls, Ph.D.
Marquette University
heather.kohls@marquette.edu

The design, structure and participants in the comprehensive planning process may be material to determining a plan's success. Recognition of a relationship between process and outcome prompted the development of a state-wide online survey of Wisconsin planning professionals. This survey, provided to a group of Wisconsin planners who recently completed comprehensive plans, seeks to link the creation of committees with the subsequent support for the plan. The survey investigated structural aspects of the community plan, including committee composition, funding, consultants role, time frame, and history, as well as the perceptions of community input and cohesiveness. The survey continues with a look at implementation and change. As is common in the literature, "buy-in" is crucial to the success of any plan. The model then attempts to link this concept of "buy-in" with outcome.

Draft Copy—Please do not Cite without Authors Permission

Introduction

Comprehensive planning, whether used for economic advancement or for curbing urban sprawl, is best developed in consideration of the communities needs. It should not be the product of the community's inner sanctum. Nor should it be the product of a cookie cutter consultant process. Planning today is responsive, at least theoretically, to community demands and drawn up in detail by schooled, professional planners. It is then executed by elected and/or appointed government officials. As a result, this process can reflect a community's unique profile.

Efforts in comprehensive planning begin at the committee level. At the process core is committee design. While the selection and education of members appear to be straightforward, the successful process is also dependent upon implementation. Questions of committee size and homogeneity dominate the process. This paper is based on the hypothesis that committee design aids in community "buy-in" and ultimately its success.

Central to collective decision making is information production and aggregation. Organizational models focus on conditions where parties strive to make optimal decisions, but may have different assessments about which is the best decision. Committee design can generate potential information, engage committee members, and be consistent with community interests.

While the comprehensive planning process is ripe for criticism, mandated planning lead to plans in communities that otherwise would not develop plans (Berke and Roenigk, 1996). This paper looks at the development of comprehensive plans and how design reflects the goals presented in the historic literature. The first part of this paper looks to issues in composing the comprehensive planning committees. The second part of this paper looks at the models of committee design and how they may ultimately lead to successful planning. Finally, the paper concludes with a survey of

Draft Copy—Please do not Cite without Authors Permission

Wisconsin communities that have completed their plans and the perceived success it created. The goal of this survey is to test the hypothesis that committee design leads to planning success.

Recognition of process and outcome relationships prompted the development of a state-wide online survey of Wisconsin planning professionals. The survey focuses on comprehensive planning process design, structure and participation. It focuses on their materiality to the plan's success. This survey, completed by a group of planners who recently completed state mandated comprehensive plans, seeks to link the creation of committees with the subsequent support for the plan.

The Composition of Comprehensive Planning Committees

In many respects comprehensive planning is a community product; committee members are often community leaders whose input is crucial to the process. However, without diverse participation community support is difficult to obtain. Further, involved individuals may serve self-interest instead of community welfare. They may consider issues according to how each proposal will affect them (Altshuler, 1965).

Citizens often focus on neighborhood issues and view community problems as technical issues best addressed by trained staff (Godschalk, Brody and Burby, 2003). While planners may wish to engage citizens by portraying the problems as important, this strategy has limitations. Having an enthusiastic and energetic committee is certainly an asset, but it is more critical to have a balanced committee with true diversity of viewpoints and interests. Committee design has been clearly affiliated with the ultimate decision making process (Kessler, 1995).

Different teams make decisions in distinct fashions. In the team or committee format, individuals formulate decisions based on either their own personal information or on group discussions. The exclusive use of personal information can lead to command decision-making is

Draft Copy—Please do not Cite without Authors Permission

which risks losing community buy-in. Alternatively, a second option is a simple majority rule process. A third option referred to as consensus building. This involves working together to support a common team decision. Consensus decisions may be structured to require unanimity which can lengthen the time needed to reach the decision. Ultimately, the closer the committee gets to unanimity though, the more likely members are to support the decision. In addition, the closer the committee gets to unanimity the greater likelihood of a technically correct decision (Innes, 1996). As a result, a large committee requiring consensus (or unanimity) is preferred.

The final issue to be considered regarding composition is the use of the planning commission as the comprehensive planning group. While this allows for the application of institutional knowledge, it could overwhelm the existing (and often volunteer) commission. In addition, the inclusion of additional voices allow for an additional element of diversity.

Optimal Committee Design

Potential committee members can be divided into two classifications: those endowed exogenously with private information and those in which information is endogenous. The members of the first group bestow their private information to the committee. The second group of endogenously informed members participates in the communal act of information gathering. It is hypothesized that, in the case of exogenously informed members, large committees are helpful because each member contributes private information. In the second case, due to the information gathering process, members need to be active to avoid missing details. Since information gathering is an arduous procedure, large groups may encourage the existence of free riders.

The design proposes two extreme cases: first, a large group of informed citizens; second, a small group of curious, yet uninformed citizens. Given these two extremes, it is important to link

Draft Copy—Please do not Cite without Authors Permission

the member information design with the earlier mentioned voting rules. The ultimate question is: should committees use a majority rule voting rule or a consensus voting rule. It is contended that consensus is the superior design due to community buy-in. However, consensus is best served with a large committee of informed members. This is difficult, especially in small communities with homogeneous citizens. Large communities may have a vast pool of potential members who bring acquired knowledge to the table (Persico, 2004). However, this possibility is limited in small towns where volunteers may be less readily available.

As a result, the model needs to allow a variable for committee size and an increase in the incentives of committee members to acquire information. If, as mentioned earlier, buy-in is best served by large, representative committees, then it appears that the use of professional consultants serves the needs of small towns by allowing lesser informed participants into the process. It substitutes for the advantage developed in larger communities from a vast pool of expertise by purchasing this input. As a result, it would appear that in smaller communities, large committees with consensus and consultants would be superior to small committees with majority rule and no consultant's expertise. This is limited by the argument, when considering the ultimate decision, that the optimal committee size is bounded in size (Gerardi and Yarov, 2003). The use of consultants has been determined to be positive and significant in the influencing how well plans account for indigenous people (Berke, et al, 2002).

However, before addressing the question of optimal committee size and voting style, the relevance of committee size must be established. Does it matter if a small community has a large committee establishing their comprehensive plan? Further, the prevalence of consultants in the process of comprehensive planning is also at issue. Thus this paper hopes to begin this research line

Draft Copy—Please do not Cite without Authors Permission

by investigating the relationship between committee and community size as well as the identifying the influence of consultants on the comprehensive planning process.

Data

The Department of Administration (DOA) for the State of Wisconsin assisted in this analysis by providing a list of communities who had completed their comprehensive plan in accordance with the recent laws passed by the state. This DOA's initial list of 140 communities (cities, villages, and towns) was pared down to those planners with published email addresses. Since the survey was to be filled out on line, 124 communities remained in the sample between June and August 2004.

The survey is comprised of three parts. The first section includes a general cost overview. It also contains a summary of consultant usage and relationships with surrounding communities. The second part investigates the planning process, including the length of time taken to reach consensus, the members of the planning committee, and subjective questions on the cohesiveness of the decision making group (including consultants, if any). The final section dealt with survey implementation. While for many of communities these questions were a bit premature, this baseline study creates an opportunity to ask the same implementation questions again in the future to observe the changing impact of the comprehensive plans.

Emails were sent to all 124 communities providing a link to the website. Communities had the option to request a hard copy of the survey to fill out, of which five communities took advantage. The final block of data was comprised of surveys from 37 communities, representing urban (14%), suburban (17%), and rural (69%) areas of the state. There were a total of 212 questions posed on the survey, although 32 were open ended and received no responses. The average total budget for

Draft Copy—Please do not Cite without Authors Permission

the plans was \$457,793 of which an average 92% was paid for locally, ranging from 31% to 100%.

The plans took an average of 1.58 years to complete with a mean of 17.89 members participating.

The Model

In the linear regression the dependent variable (“SuccessScore”) is the sum of the responses for five different variables. They used a 0-7 likert scale and analyzed the success of implementation to date, the congruence of policies since implementation with the spirit of the comprehensive plan, the degree of changes to various aspects of the community resulting from the plan, the extent to which new initiatives were spurred via the planning process, and finally the strength of the impact the community plan has had on their community. The independent variables and their definitions can be found in Table #1.

Table #1
Success = f(Total Cost, Local Cost, Length of time, Committee size, Consultant Understanding of Community needs, Consultant and planning group cohesiveness)

Variable	Definition
Adjtotcost	Total dollars spent on project including grant money divided by 1,000
Adjlocalcost2	Actual dollar amount spent locally divided by 1,000
Length2	Amount of time spent creating the plan squared
Quantityofmembers	Size of the committee
Commsize	Size of the committee squared
Cohesive2	Squared results of 2 Likert ratings of committee cohesiveness
Consunderstand	Likert rating of how well consultants understood community
Conscohes	Likert rating of how cohesive the consultant’s ideas were with the planning group

Results

This survey hoped to identify a relationship between community expense and committee size to determine the merit of further research. The full sample OLS estimation (Table #2) confirms that perceptions of success and local community financial contribution are inversely related. It is possible spending local dollars creates higher expectations for the plan. On the other hand, grant dollars can be spent freely to increase the perceived successfulness of the plan. Of our respondents

Draft Copy—Please do not Cite without Authors Permission

only five communities received no grant monies at all; however for the remainder that did receive grants, on average only 8.7% of the total cost of the plan was funded by this money. Previous literature offers an aggregated message regarding budget size as an insignificant variable in explaining plan quality (Berke and Roenigk, 1996). Intuitively this suggests that there is a disadvantage to funding comprehensive plans through grant money; the lack of sweat equity diminishes the community “buy-in”. In fact, the average total budget for communities hiring a consultant was \$311,465 compared to an average of \$166,264 for those not employing a consultant.

Table #2
Survey Linear Regression—All Communities

Dependent Variable = SuccessScore
Number of Observations =36
R-Squared=0.5210

	Coefficient	Std. Err.	T
Adjtotcost	3.89E-05	8.66E-06	4.50*
Adjlocalcost2	-3.88E-07	8.65E-08	-4.49*
Length2	-0.62527	0.193201	-3.24*
Quantityofmembers	-0.48113	0.257237	-1.87***
Commsize	0.009168	0.003549	2.58*
Cohesive2	-0.0035	0.002005	-1.75***
Consunderstand	3.789576	0.699336	5.42*
Conscohes	-4.32533	1.170896	-3.69*
Constant	25.53727	6.106384	4.18*

Length spent on preparing the comprehensive plan had a negative impact on success. This is an area that merits further review. This could suggest that the communities had problems agreeing on the plan and prolonged its development. Finally the relationship between the consultant and the committee was significant. When the respondents felt that the consultant understood the community, the success of the plan increased. When there was discord between the consultant and the community, the plan was not perceived as being successful. This supports arguments for long term relationship building between consultants and communities.

Draft Copy—Please do not Cite without Authors Permission

When the OLS was limited to villages and towns (Table #3), the results were slightly different. The notable change is the local cost coefficient sign. In this subsample it is now positive and significant suggesting that these communities are more concerned with local costs. Consultants familiar with these communities continue to have a positive and significant contribution to the plans success. However, issues of committee structure, cohesion and size are no longer significant. This may be due to the homogeneous nature of villages and town.

Table #3
Survey Linear Regression—Villages and Towns
Dependent Variable = SuccessScore
Number of Observations =25
R-Squared=0.4404

	Coef.	Std. Err.	T
Adjlocalcost2	8.34E-10	1.58E-10	5.29*
Length2	-0.03222	0.623064	-0.05
Quantityofmembers	-0.22469	0.339327	-0.66
Commsize	0.006174	0.004741	1.30
Cohesive2	-0.00231	0.00251	-0.92
Consunderstand	3.544385	0.946504	3.74*
Conscohes	-3.54846	1.450673	-2.45*
Constant	17.9529	8.899209	2.02**

Conclusions and Future Directions

The conclusions drawn from this preliminary look indicate that there is definitely merit to investigate the relationship between committee size, cohesiveness, and plan success. This research is of importance to both the community conducting the plan and the granting agencies. These conclusions could lead to more accurate financial allocation and committee design. Follow up studies can provide insight into the stability of these indicators and their long term importance.

Future aspirations for this research would entail an additional survey to our respondents investigating the style of voting that they chose for their process. This could reconfirm the

Draft Copy—Please do not Cite without Authors Permission

implications of information and knowledge base on the same indicators of success that have been constructed. Furthermore, there is more analysis to be done on the importance of cohesion in group decision making. While consultants offer valuable contributions, it is advisable that communities avoid cookie cutter consultant plans when the consultant is unfamiliar with the community.

References

Altshuler, A., 1965, “The Goals of Comprehensive Planning”, Journal of the American Institute of Planning, 31: 186-197.

Berke, P. R., and D. J. Roenigk, 1996. “Enhancing Plan Quality: Evaluating The Role of State Planning Mandates for Natural Hazard Mitigation”, Journal of Environmental Planning & Management, 39: 79-96.

Berke, P. R., et al, 2002. “Planning and Indigenous People: Human Rights and Environmental Protection in New Zealand”. 22: 115-134.

Gerardi, D. and L. Yariv, 2003, “Committee Design in the Presence of Communication.” Cowles Foundation Discussion Papers 1411, Cowles Foundation, Yale University.

Godschalk, D. R., S. Brody, and R. Burby, 2003. “Public Participation in Natural Hazard Mitigation Policy Formation: Challenges for Comprehensive Planning”, Journal of Environmental Planning and Management, 46: 733-754.

Innes, J. E., 1996, “Planning Through Consensus Building”, Journal of the American Planning Association, 62: 460-472.

Kessler, F., 1995, “Team Decision Making: Pitfalls and Procedures”, Management Development Review, 8: 38-40.

Persico, N., 2004, “Committee Design with Endogenous Information”, Review of Economic Studies, 71: 165-192.