TALLAHASSEE’S BLUEPRINT 2000 AND BEYOND…
AN ANALYSIS OF A CITIZEN-LED PLANNING EFFORT

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Tallahassee, Florida is a medium sized city located in the “Big Bend” region of Florida. This region comprises the counties in the northwest area of the state. Not dissimilar to many medium sized cities, Tallahassee is a city that has experiences substantial growth in the recent years; this growth is projected to continue into the future. Also, like many other growing cities, Tallahassee has had some difficulty in identifying a collective voice that could speak to how and where this expected growth should occur.

In July of 1990, Tallahassee and Leon County adopted a Comprehensive Plan that established rules and guidelines governing the future growth and development of the area. It has been said that this planning effort was quite inclusive and that stakeholders in the community actively contributed to the generation of ideas which were eventually included in the final plan. As the plan was adopted, spirits were high and cooperation had been considered relatively successful. This enthusiasm about the plan and satisfaction with the process did not endure. As the 1990s came to a close, citizen groups in the community realized that several of the very good ideas that had been adopted in the initial plan were largely being ignored.

In the late 1990s, the Comprehensive Plan was opened up to an amendment process. At the meetings during which amendments were proposed and discussed, citizen groups, each representing seemingly different perspectives, disagreed about whose proposal had the most merit. Several of the leading spokespeople for each of these groups recognized that they were continuously arguing with each other. As meeting after meeting took place and very little progress was made, frustration began to weigh heavily on some of these spokespeople. This case study will attempt to describe the processes which developed as a result of this frustration. This case study will examine the characteristics which enabled a group of citizens, who at one time
were rivals, to come together and produce a set of recommendations for the growth of their community. It is important to note that all of the proposals set forth by this group of diverse stakeholders were agreed to unanimously.

The information represented in this paper was largely gathered during interviews with three members of this group of citizens: Kathy Archibald, Mark Mustian and Rob Palmer. Without their assistance, this paper could certainly not have been written.

This case study represents a one-year timeline from April 1998 (when the citizen group was organized) to April 1999 (when the group’s Blueprint 2000 report was released). Though a tremendous amount of work has been done since the report was first released, this paper will be limited to the examination of the process by which the group was able to identify shared interests and develop mutually satisfactory solutions. As the effort of the citizen group has been recognized as successful by such planning and growth oriented groups as the 1000 Friends of Florida, I will examine this conflict and its subsequent resolution through the framework presented in Howard Raiffa’s book, The Art and Science of Negotiation. This framework outlines a series of questions which are useful in organizing one’s understanding of a dispute. The paper will conclude with a section that proposes strengths and weaknesses of this process which would either enable or hinder its ability to be transferred to other communities.

**DESIGNING THE “BLUEPRINT”**

*Conceptualization of the Economic and Environmental Consensus Committee (EECC)*

In planning the growth of cities, one of the most controversial issues that arises is the debate between “green” and “gray.” Recent efforts to manage growth in Tallahassee have
proven no different. Beginning in the early months of 1998, a process evolved in Tallahassee that focused on effectively planning for Tallahassee's future in a way that addressed the needs of pro-environment (green) interests and pro-business (gray) ones. In an effort to build a foundation of cooperation between these two groups a forum was created to facilitate an active and productive dialogue between these competing interests with the hopes of reaching a mutually satisfying consensus.

In April of 1998, Mark Mustian, then the president of the Tallahassee Area Chamber of Commerce, and Tom O’Steen, a special consultant to the Chamber, determined that the status quo was not generating satisfying results in the planning of Tallahassee’s growth. It was decided that some effort must be made to engage the other major stakeholders who had been participating in the debates regarding the amendments to the community’s Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Mustian and Mr. O’Steen began by identifying several key individuals who had been active in representing the different interest groups at public meetings. The initial group that was organized was composed of six individuals who represented both environmental and economic interests. While these were the issues with which they were typically associated, each of these individuals was also a long time resident of the Tallahassee community. These, and all subsequent, members of the group were chosen by virtue of their association with the Comprehensive Plan amendment process and as recognized civic leaders within each of their respective groups.

The simple purpose of the first meeting of what eventually became known as the EECC was to see if the representatives of these disparate groups could enter into a general discussion about the current challenges facing Tallahassee. One of the members perceived that the goal of
the initial meetings was to “identify specific problems associated with growth and Comp Plan amendments.” As might be expected, the mood of the early meetings was one of hesitation, distrust and a general lack of optimism. This skepticism about each other’s motives was heightened when, after only one meeting, one of the parties placed an advertisement in the Tallahassee Democrat which other members of this fledgling group perceived as inflammatory. They perceived from the add an intention to derail the entire process. There was also a sense that the members of the group each came with their own private agendas.

Despite this shaky start, the group met again. At the second meeting, however, it was determined that a set of ground rules would be necessary if the group’s meetings were to continue. The members adopted a strategy based on the principles of Total Quality Management. Standards of behavior were agreed to whereby the members were forbidden to repeat things that were said during the meetings to the press or other outside parties. It was also agreed that all of the members would treat each other with respect. The structure of the initial meetings was not developed any further.

While each of the members had been involved in professional meetings throughout their careers, none of them were specifically trained in technical facilitation or mediation. The sense that one gets from speaking with the group members is that the structure of the meetings naturally evolved from general common sense. The leadership of the EECC also developed fairly naturally. While no one person explicitly controlled the meeting process, it was generally recognized that Mark Mustian and Kathy Archibald served as co-chairs of the committee. Mr. Mustian was identified with the economic interests, and Ms. Archibald was considered to represent both the environmental and neighborhood interests. It is important to note, however,
that as the levels of trust increased within the group and as the problem solving strategies became more inclusive and creative, the members made efforts to break from their parochial interests and pursue a holistic strategy for Tallahassee’s growth.

**Early Stages of Organization**

During the first two months of meetings, the discussion was kept general to allow trust to develop between the members. Each member prepared an outline of their primary interests in the form of issue papers. During the early meetings, each member presented these issues to the other members of the group. Digression was welcomed as it was felt that this was a helpful way for each member to gain an understanding of the others. Throughout this early stage of meetings, the group expanded to include individuals who could offer needed perspectives. The group eventually grew to include 13 members representing a cross-section of economic, environmental and neighborhood groups within the community.

There was some concern expressed by other members of the Tallahassee community that the EECC was not as open and representative as it should have been. This tension between the desire to accommodate a large diverse group and the need to facilitate meetings is common to such endeavors as these. On the one hand, the organizing members of the group desired to have all of the key interests represented. Should this not have happened, the status quo would certainly have not been challenged so creatively. However, as a group’s size increases, so does the number of people who must be afforded a chance to speak. The organizing members desired to maintain a small group size in an effort to facilitate the participation of each of the members. As this was an entirely voluntary effort, the time spent in these meetings was very valuable, and
the members thought that the repetition of would not help identify constructive solutions to the challenges which the community faced. The group also felt that it was important to avoid the inclusion of elected officials to the membership. This was done to ensure that the work of this group could be held up as the voice of the citizenry and not a political agenda. It was suggested by one of the members interviewed that a citizen-led initiative only has the resources to do so much and include so many. His hope was that those who questioned the proposals of the EECC would organize their own group and offer constructive criticism to the community in the form of other proposals.

As the group grew together through the first several months of meetings, three major issues were identified which were felt to be of great importance to the Tallahassee community. The issues which were identified included economic development (specifically a focus on the Southern Strategy Area outlined in the 1990 Comprehensive Plan), natural resource protection (particularly water resources), and increased diversity in the distribution of low and high-income housing and different land uses. These issues were identified as being highly salient to each of the stakeholders as well as being fairly tractable. It was felt that while these were tremendous challenges facing the community, they were not unmanageable.

By virtue of their association with the Comprehensive Plan process, each member of the group had been involved in the technical aspects of these issues for quite some time. To further their understanding of these issues, however, EECC members would consult technical experts from outside of the group. Each member of the group would identify the technical expertise that would be necessary to understand their issues. They then met with this external expertise and reported their findings back to the group.
Dispute Resolution Mechanism

The nature of this particular conflict resolution process is best defined as consensus building. According to an undated document produced by the Policy Consensus Initiative\(^1\), consensus building is defined as a process whereby "all who have a stake in an issue or conflict work together toward a common understanding and an agreement that satisfies all their interests." The document then extends the definition by stating that "consensus is not compromise. Compromise involves resolution of differences in which each side makes concessions or agrees to settle for something in the middle." This definition effectively describes the process that took place to develop Tallahassee's Blueprint 2000 and Beyond.

For approximately two years, the EECC met twice a month after normal business hours. These meetings typically lasted several hours. The respectful tone and sense of cooperation that developed after the early meetings was maintained throughout the duration of the process. While there were no specific structures or procedures outlined to ensure a smooth functioning of this process, those interviewed expressed satisfaction in being able to have their interests addressed in a constructive manner. The early stages of discussion produced the primary issues of focus. After a few poorly planned meetings, it was determined that agendas would be prepared prior to each meeting. This ensured that the members were prepared for discussion and that valuable time was not wasted. While these meetings were closed to the public, outsiders were occasionally invited to provide technical assistance to the group. The group did consider past

work that had been done in the areas of interest. Past proposals by other community groups were considered in an effort to make this group one that represented the wishes of the entire community, not just the those of the group members.

In the development of the final report all proposals were agreed to unanimously. While there was no official voting, it was understood that proposals would not be made unless all of the members of the group agreed to the proposal. This understanding of consensus was shared by the group members from the earliest stages of the process. Instead of outlining a set of plans that addressed the issues separately, and then voting on each plan, the group’s work continuously built upon agreement. The group identified shared issues, and then worked on identifying shared visions of solutions.

When the Blueprint 2000 report was released, it included five initiatives that addressed the challenges facing Tallahassee in what the group termed a “holistic” manner. The group is currently working with agency staffs of Leon County and the City of Tallahassee to implement the suggested proposals.

**HOWARD RAIFFA’S FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT**

In an attempt to better understand the components of disputes, Howard Raiffa outlines a series of questions which can be asked to identify important characteristics of disputes. In the following section, I will examine the underlying conflict that was identified and “resolved” by the Blueprint 2000 process. This use of the word “resolved” is not entirely accurate as the proposals of the group have yet to be implemented, and therefore cannot truly be evaluated. If the conflict that existed is defined as the competitive struggle between economic, environmental
and neighborhood stakeholders in the Tallahassee area, however, then the ability of these groups to come together and forge a creative partnership suggests that the conflict has been resolved. Future events will determine if the bond that was formed was a lasting one.

The questions proposed by Raiffa’s framework address the characteristics of the conflict and of the parties involved in the conflict. It is hoped that by examining the Tallahassee situation through this framework, important understanding can be reached about the characteristics which may have contributed to the success of this process.

**Are there more than two parties?**

In this case, there were three major interests groups represented; economic, environmental and neighborhood. The framework suggests that as the number of parties in a conflict increase, so does the difficulty in resolving it. This group was able to be successful by being composed of clearly defined groups. After the issues were reframed, however, the members began to relinquish their identification with the three respective groups and adopted a *pro-community* mindset.

**Are the parties monolithic?**

Each party represented a distinct, but mostly consistent, interest. This was largely a result of the group limiting itself to a small number of highly salient issues from the outset of the discussions. Raiffa’s framework suggests that the more monolithic the parties, the easier it will be to reach agreement on the contested issues.
Is the game repetitive?

This group came together precisely because the organizing members realized that every time an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan was discussed, the same arguments occurred. In the interest of ending this repetitive cycle of futility, the EECC was formed. By removing the discussions of the group from the public eye, the group was able to speak to each other more freely. This process also made it easier for the members to listen to one another and reframe the issues in a way not possible during public meetings. As yet undetermined is whether the EECC will discuss different issues in the future. Raiffa’s framework suggests that as the possible future of interactions increases between members in the group, the more likely that bargaining strategies will be creative and mutually beneficial.

Are there linkage effects?

The coalition of interests that is the EECC is too new for there to be linkages between negotiations. By this it is meant that negotiations on the three issues of concern could not be linked to the negotiation of earlier issues. The issues that the group decided to consider were developed in a way that did not lend itself to the formation of strategic alliances within this particular negotiation process. The framework implies that linking the issues of the conflict to external ones can be useful in breaking impasses. In this case, it seems that identifying linkages was useful in reframing the issues in a way that all members of the group would claim ownership of them.

Is there more than one issue?

The EECC decided on three main issues. These were economic development, natural resource protection and increased diversity in the distribution of low- and high-income housing
and different land uses. The identification of these issues represented an agreement in principle for the group. Before solutions were proposed, the group reframed the issues in a way that enabled the group to coalesce around shared interests. The formation of this bond set the foundation for the trust which grew and promoted the creative atmosphere of the meetings. The clear identification of the issues, and the fact that the group did not stray from their three primary objectives, is seen as a positive factor contributing to the successful outcome of this situation when viewed by Raiffa’s framework.

**Is an agreement required?**

This group was formed voluntarily and had no requirement to reach agreement. In the early stages of the process, however, the members of the group expressed hope that their efforts would not be futile and that there would be some sort of proposal or suggestion which could be presented to the community as a whole to reflect their work. Raiffa’s framework suggests that the fact that an agreement was not required could have been problematic. This did not develop presumably because the group formed voluntarily.

**Is ratification required?**

The proposal agreed to by this group is only a suggestion. This has presented a challenge as the group has attempted to garner political support for their proposals. For any implementation to occur, the local political decision-makers must appropriate the necessary resources for the proposed projects. There was no explicit requirement for any of the parties to return to their respective interest groups and seek ratification. However, as leaders within their respective groups, the members perceived that they carried the support of those whom they represented. The primary voices of discontent arose from outside of any of the parties.
represented. According to Raiffa, the requirement of ratification can be used to either support or hinder a negotiation. In this situation, ratification did not seem to be a hindrance.

Are threats possible?

The levels of power between the group members were quite balanced. The only threat that could have been wielded by members of this group was to break off negotiation. Had this occurred, the result would simply have been a return to the status quo. Each member also developed a vested interest in a successful resolution as their personal investment to the process increased with the time spent at each meeting. The members built a commitment to each other and generated the expectation that they would produce something to make the effort worthwhile. Therefore, it is likely that the incentives represented by success kept the group intact.

Are there time constraints or time-related costs?

There was no explicit time limit imposed on these discussions. The only costs were in the time that each member of the group donated to this process. As the members were not being compensated in any way, the discussions would only last so long as it was felt that they were useful and necessary. Raiffa’s framework suggests that the open-ended time frame would have contributed to the success of this process.

Are the contracts binding?

The contracts are only binding inasmuch as the members all signed their names to the final document. Nothing to which the group agreed binds any of the members to responsibilities, monetary or otherwise. It could be argued, however, that it would not be a wise move for a
member who had initially signed the document to later disagree with the plan. The binding
nature of a final agreement is considered, by Raiffa, to be a factor that contributes to the success
of a conflict resolution process. While there were no explicit contracts involved in the group’s
proposal, the commitment to the community that each member demonstrated by participating in
the process could be seen as having the weight of contractual obligation.

**Are the negotiations private or public?**

These negotiations were private. The members interviewed expressed tremendous
satisfaction with negotiating outside of the public eye. In this situation, it was felt that by
holding the meetings in “private” the members were able to speak much more freely and were
able to be much more productive.

**What are the group's norms?**

Howard Raiffa would call the members of this group *fully cooperative partners*. The
members were expected to respect each other and be completely open and honest. This factor
may have been very important in contributing to the success of the process.

**Is third-party intervention possible?**

In this case, third-party intervention proved to be unnecessary. It is difficult to know
whether the group achieved its success because of the sense of cohesion that developed during
the period of self-discovery, or whether a trained facilitator could have helped the group to be
more productive in a shorter amount of time. Nevertheless, it seems clear that in this case, there were several facilitative participants.

CONCLUSIONS

This process has been held up by many as a success, and it has been suggested by such high profile figures as Steve Seibert, Secretary of the Florida Department of Community Affairs, that this citizen-led process should serve as a model for future efforts in counties across the State of Florida. In an effort to better understand the process, the members who were interviewed were asked what they felt the major strengths and weaknesses of this process were.

The members interviewed were generally very satisfied with the process. It was felt that since the group was composed of citizens interested in building a better community, and not individuals who had a monetary stake in any of the proposed projects, the group was able to be much more successful. These citizens had become frustrated with the fighting that took place and had grown weary of ineffectiveness. Another strength that was suggested was that all of the members were long-time residents of the community. This served two purposes. The first was that the residents had a strong sense of ownership in the need to develop a workable solution to the problems. The second purpose served was that the amount of time that these members had been involved in the community contributed to a much more comprehensive understanding of the challenges the community faced. The citizen-led nature of this process was translated into an equality of power among the members. This enabled the members to speak much more openly about the issues and not fear challenges from stronger members in the group. The fact that the meetings were held in private was also viewed as a factor which contributed to the success of the
process. One of the members suggested that the fact that Tallahassee has many medium and small businesses; as opposed to a few large, dominant businesses; contributed to the group’s success. These big businesses could dominate the political climate of the community and attempt to dictate terms of growth within the community and preclude a successful citizen-led effort.

The members interviewed had difficulty identifying weaknesses in the process that developed. Were the project to be done again, it was felt that a more thorough documentation of the process would have been helpful. Another member of the group expressed some concern that although this process was extremely successful in Tallahassee, replication in other communities may be somewhat problematic. The concern was that although Tallahassee is not similar to other communities of like size, it is still a community of complex interactions. It is a state capital, the location of two major universities, and a major urban center within the region. These factors cannot be ignored when considering the elements of the Blueprint 2000 process that enabled a successful consensus to be reached. The success of the process in Tallahassee may belie a context-sensitivity that would hinder replication in different cities.

These concerns, however, are not raised to suggest that attempts at replication are without merit, however. The process used by the EECC was successful in bringing opposing groups to consensus. It has also proven a useful tool in understanding several ingredients that can increase the possibility for a successful citizen-led planning effort. The members of the EECC demonstrated incredible effort and initiative in designing a creative solution to the challenges facing the city of Tallahassee and Leon County.
**References**


Policy Consensus Initiative. Undated. States Mediating Solutions to Environmental Disputes.