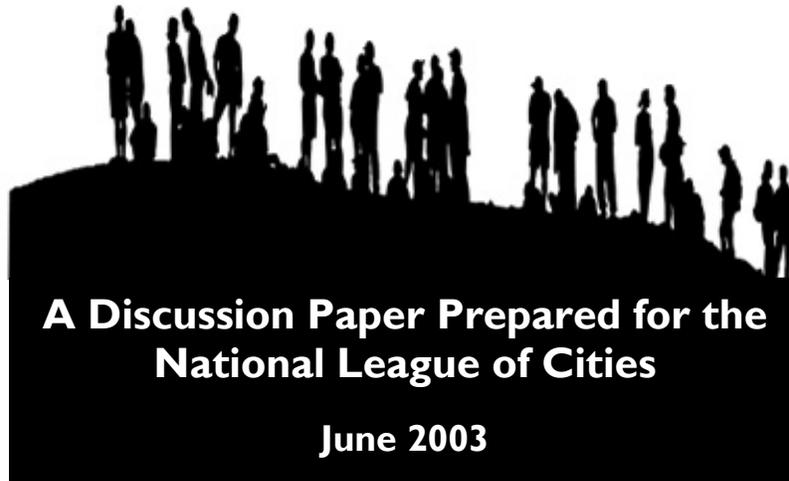


Fostering Social Equity and Economic Opportunity Through Citizen Participation

An Innovative Approach to Municipal Service Delivery

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Abstract

This paper outlines an alternative approach to framing issues of social and economic equity in the context of local government administration and responsibilities. Reluctantly or not, cities are the front line of government jurisdictions in handling these issues. If cities fail to address inequities they risk continued deterioration of the urban environment, decreased citizen support for government, and diminished quality of life.

Based on a recent case study of citizen engagement in Rochester, New York, the authors argue that cities can build an agenda that incorporates social and economic equity as part of an **interdependent** model of municipal service-delivery. Rochester's leaders improved social equity across all groups of city residents in their pursuit of a participative governance process.

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Introduction

Cities can address poverty and social inequities by transforming their approach to municipal service delivery. This paper presents the case of Rochester, New York, a city that developed meaningful citizen participation in municipal planning processes by creating a dynamic environment of exchange between residents and city professionals. In designing a participative governance process, the city hoped to enhance social equity and in turn create the conditions that support economic development. Rochester leaders found that the community planning process transformed the role and practices of government, bred greater civic responsibility, fostered more community-based leadership, and cascaded leadership and administration skills to residents. Moreover, Rochester's efforts demonstrated that a participative governance process could challenge long-held citizen perceptions of government because it 1) provides improved points of access for citizens to governance processes, 2) reframes the discourse between residents and government, and 3) contributes to alternative problem definitions that more adequately incorporate the core needs and capacities of the community.

Cities and Social Agendas

The once prevalent view that issues of poverty and social inequities are the domains of state and federal government has been tempered during the last decade. This shift in view is partially attributable to 1) the gradual transfer of responsibility for certain public services from the federal government to the state and local levels, 2) the national economic downturn that helped produce fiscal crises within the states, and 3) the decline in federal commitments to fund entitlements, such as Welfare and Medicaid. In effect, these changes suggest that social and economic inequities are mostly dormant issues on state and national agendas.

This trend puts local government, especially cities, front and center in coping with the adverse effects of economic and social issues. While the core mandate of cities is to provide municipal infrastructure services rather than major social services, cities confront the issue of social inequity every day in the provision of essential goods. As such, they must be the stewards of these issues or bear the accumulating costs and deterioration that accrue from continued neglect of poverty.

There are hurdles that test this stewardship. One hurdle results from systemic factors. Most cities are dealing with interrelated fiscal issues tied to social and demographic trends, the sluggish economy and new costs for homeland security. In addition, cities are disproportionately affected by the growing costs of services they provide and constraints on their ability to raise revenues. State legislatures have encroached on the traditional tax revenue sources of cities and disrupted city-based control over local revenues through

legislative actions.¹ Given these fiscal stresses and the perception that poverty centered policies and programs are costly and difficult to assess, it is increasingly problematic to steer significant revenues toward strategies to ameliorate social and economic inequities.

Another hurdle in addressing social and economic inequity pertains to function. It is not the traditional role of cities to redistribute income. However, cities do perform the unique role of providing services to citizens in ways that “closely reflect the preferences and tastes of the residents.”² Within their mandate to provide municipal services, then, cities can improve the physical and social conditions of low-income populations.

Connecting Service Delivery Approaches and Governance

No matter what other agendas cities develop, they are clearly responsible for the delivery of core infrastructure services. However, within this arena of responsibility there are a variety of possible governance structures. The service provision models employed within cities determine the role of government and citizens in service decisions and the manner in which each is held accountable.³

One of three models generally captures the accountability balance guiding the delivery of services. The first is a *dependent*, or government-centric model, in which citizens view service provision as exclusively the city’s job. Under this model, citizens relinquish control of financing, resource allocation, and decision making to the city. At the other extreme is an *independent* model in which the city declines to provide certain services, shifting the responsibility to citizens and businesses to act as they see fit. A third system is based on an *interdependent* model, wherein the city and its citizens jointly determine and provide services.⁴

Each model exerts substantial influence on process, perceptions, and outcomes. In the dependent model, the city has full responsibility for services and an accumulating burden on government resources. Citizens stand outside the process, free to complain but not well positioned to demand fine-grained responsiveness from government. In the independent model, the city declines to provide some subset of services, presumably shrinking the size of government while shifting the cost and responsibility to the community and individuals. Here, the ability to pay determines the services that will exist, aggravating discrepancies between the rich and poor with respect to safety, health, prosperity, education, or opportunity.

¹ Howard Chernick and Andrew Reschovsky, *Lost in the Balance: How State Policies Affect the Fiscal Health of Cities*. (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, 2001).

² Chernick and Reschovsky, 2001.

³ The role played by government is fluid, not fixed. Throughout history the functions performed by government were driven by the necessities of circumstance first and foremost, not normative governance conceptions. In a democratic society, citizens and their elected representatives negotiate the proper role of government.

⁴ Sydney Cresswell, Jordan Wishy and Terrence Maxwell, *Avenues for Change: Paving the Way for Citizen Participation in Governance*. (Albany, NY: Intergovernmental Solutions Program, Forthcoming June 2003).

In the interdependent model, the city and the citizens are mutually responsible for determining services. This latter collaborative model portends a different sort of government practice. Cities that seek citizen engagement in governance have to be willing to change the way government conducts business. As the Rochester case demonstrates, citizens need to be encouraged and supported in learning new ways to interact with government.

Aligning Governance and Planning

Implementation of a participative governance model for delivering services requires a different planning strategy. There are two primary approaches to combating urban problems through community planning: problem-based (also known as needs or deficiency-based) and asset-based. By far the more commonly pursued approach is problem-based planning.⁵

A problem-based planning approach begins by charting a map of the community identifying all its problems, needs, or deficiencies. This approach assumes that the mapping process will drive government resource allocation decisions and provide a vehicle for solving municipal problems. An unintended consequence of this planning strategy is that over time community residents come to believe others know better than they what constitutes their best interests and how to best achieve them. As a result, they become victims who are systemically disempowered from solving their own problems. In problem-based planning, community residents become dependent on government services to keep them afloat.

In contrast, asset-based community planning emphasizes the identification of neighborhood resources that communities can tap to solve problems on their own, avoiding rumination on community deficiencies and problems. Its “inside-the-neighborhood” focus encourages a more complete coordination of local assets so that external resources, when sought, can be used more efficiently. As an alternative problem solving approach, asset-based planning transforms residents into self-reliant entrepreneurs.

The interdependent service delivery model shares this perspective. If the community is challenged in the course of solving its problems, it follows that there must be a breakdown somewhere in the governance system such that it interferes with residents using their collective problem-solving potential. Success comes from empowering residents by providing them with opportunities to develop problem-solving skills. When internal assets aren’t enough to get the job done, it is community residents who make the decision to collectively pursue resources from outside the community. Residents still need the city, but as partners rather than as paternalistic providers. The city needs community residents

⁵ John Kretzmann and John McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community’s Assets* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, 1993).

because they have the most accurate understanding of what their community needs and the greatest long-term incentive to truly improve their situation and that of those around them. In this way, the city and community residents are interdependent with one another in achieving their mutual goal of building sustainable communities that are desirable places to live.

Addressing Social Equity and Economic Opportunity Through Governance

At the intersection of the participative governance approach and interdependent service delivery model is a common view of social equity and a set of assumptions about the way equity is enhanced. Both approaches treat social equity as a form of justice that accumulates through greater citizen access to structures of government and community development. Both approaches hold that social equity accrues through lively dialogue with public officials where parties share ideas, concerns, and expertise in order to develop a common understanding of issues and a vision of what can be done.

Equity builds by 'skilling people up' so that they acquire an understanding of government operations and processes, gain insight into systems of production, participate interactively with public officials, and get things accomplished using their own assets and resources. Success in building social equity contributes to greater capacity among citizens and affects their ability to recognize and seize opportunities. In this way, as the Rochester model illustrates, enhanced social equity helps generate the conditions under which community-based economic development can emerge.

The Rochester Model

The development of the “Neighbors Building Neighborhoods” (NBN) program in Rochester, New York, provides lessons about moving toward participatory governance and the impact that process can have on equity issues. As an outgrowth of the city’s interdependent service delivery model, residents learned skills and methods of planning so that they could participate in the redevelopment of their communities.

Rochester did not escape the trend toward urban decline that afflicted many U.S. cities. In the early 90s, the city suffered from high crime rates, out-migration of segments of the population, poor race relations, too many abandoned and dilapidated housing units, increased poverty, and a declining tax base. Citizens’ trust and support for government in Rochester was very low. Newly elected Mayor William A. Johnson Jr. explained that the city did not have the responsibility or the resources to tackle all these problems. In his first State of the City address, Mayor Johnson stated: “The damage that has been done through economic restructuring, the concentration of poverty and disinvestments is deeply serious and ongoing. We cannot fix it alone, and we should not have to.” Instead, the city would facilitate citizen participation by employing a novel set of principles, processes, and

institutional arrangements to include citizens in planning. This strategy would permit citizens to establish and then assist in the implementation of a set of neighborhood priorities by which they would help solve their own problems. In a publication authored by Mayor Johnson, *Living Within Our Means: A Blueprint for Change*, he wrote: “A centerpiece of my revitalization plan is the coordination of neighborhood organizations, community agencies, churches, business interests and city staff to work cooperatively to develop action plans that centralize resources to attack the structural problems that exist in each neighborhood.”⁶

NBN Background

In 1993, the new mayor and his staff developed a detailed proposal for NBN. The city government, backed by the unanimous support of the city council, envisioned a number of potential changes that could flow from fostering participative governance. Citizens would determine what needed to be fixed, contribute to the solutions, and in the process, shape their community’s future. Citizen efforts could improve the quality of life for residents and become the catalyst for greater economic changes. Leaders believed that if government changed the way it worked with citizens, and carefully and wisely supported the emergent process, trust between the city and the citizens could be restored. Finally, NBN could be the foundation for developing a citywide planning process to give the city a collective new focus.⁷

NBN was designed to be an ongoing planning process, and there have been three cycles to date, NBN1, NBN2, and NBN3. The first cycle spanned from mid-1994 to June 1999, the second cycle from July 1999 to June 2001, and the third cycle from July 2001 to June 2003. In the NBN model, the city was divided into 10 planning sectors that incorporated a mixture of neighborhoods and organizations. The process called for each sector, using volunteers and members of neighborhood associations, to create a plan for developing the community according to the collective wishes of citizens. All sectors followed the same pre-approved guidelines and fashioned an organizational structure that suited their needs. Sectors were responsible for having an open and inclusive process that would yield a detailed statement of goals and action steps to be completed during the implementation phase. The sectors also needed to locate and identify implementation partners and necessary resources. The NBN sector participants were responsible for planning and for partnership in implementation along with neighborhood associations, community groups, volunteers, and applicable city staff. Beyond the straightforward guidelines provided, and advice or assistance rendered, the city left the sectors free to build their business processes independently. Every effort was made to allow the process to emerge without intervention, with adjustments made only when necessary to support healthy outcomes.

⁶ *The New York Times*, “Candor Helps Turn Tide in Uphill Mayoral Battle,” September 19, 1993, Section 1, Pg. 50.

⁷ For some time prior to Mayor Johnson’s election, Rochester functioned without a useful comprehensive city plan to provide the city a clear direction. Its previous comprehensive plan, adopted in 1964, lost its utility as an urban planning tool by the 1980s.

Rochester Structures a Participative Governance Process

Rochester laid the foundation for participative governance on which it based its hopes of restoring citizen confidence in government through resident empowerment. The city embraced the view that citizens were capable of solving problems, able to envision an appropriate future, in possession of key resources that were needed, and knowledgeable about their communities in ways that city officials were not. These views and beliefs were the underpinning of the city's interdependent service model and the impetus for forming participative governance structures. In anticipation of the process that would ensue, the city specifically sought to do four things to help meet this objective: 1) use more community resources to solve community problems, 2) facilitate active resident participation despite the changes increased participation might bring, 3) deliberately redesign the existing networks of power through which things got done in the city, and 4) encourage the development of those skills citizens need to meaningfully participate in community planning.

Gathering New Community Resources

Officials understood that the city did not have the resources or the obligation to provide everything residents wanted. This limitation did not mean citizens could not acquire the things they wanted for their neighborhoods. In place of the city, some of the resources would need to come from within the community. Identified among community-based resources were artisans, design professionals, amateur gardeners, businesses, religious organizations and their facilities, and educational institutions.

City leaders believed that by identifying and describing—in effect mapping—these neighborhood assets their unrealized potential could be unleashed and used to tackle many of the community's problems and promote the neighborhood's vision of what it wanted to become. These assets existed in the community, but were either invisible or underused. Residents would have to transform these invisible or idle assets into lively assets through their efforts, thereby promoting increased resident participation.

The stock of resources available to solve city problems increased. In addition to the community-based expertise and the assets that were catalogued, citizens contributed thousands of hours identifying community issues and priorities, developing strategies and recommendations for neighborhood improvement, and finding partners to implement action steps. Many of these same citizens contributed labor when the community was ready to take action. The city also benefited from the emergence of a new cadre of community leaders who, with greater understanding of effective engagement and the process of building a common vision, had the ability to get things done.

Encouraging Active Citizen Participants

In the NBN approach to city planning, residents had the opportunity to directly identify and act upon issues they felt needed attention in their neighborhoods. In every sector there were projects that involved the city in some manner. Although most negotiations were straightforward, at times this process meant that residents pushed the city to approach problems and solutions in novel ways. Those guiding the NBN process were gratified to

see citizens learn to act on behalf of their community and the city learn to treat them as partners in the process. It was particularly reassuring to observe that those sectors containing the poorest sections of the city were as effective in developing citizen advocacy and negotiation skills as their more affluent counterparts.

For example, one low-income sector placed a high priority on dealing with persistent crime. Police presence proved insufficient to stop the criminal activity (e.g. drugs and prostitution) that posed a safety threat to neighborhood residents. Residents focused on changing conditions that supported crime within the sector planning process. After considerable brainstorming they approached the city with a plan to deal with one contributing factor—vacant and dilapidated properties. The residents coordinated with city code enforcement officers to close buildings attracting unlawful activities on grounds that they violated city building codes. With each closure, the number of locations attracting criminal activity diminished, as did the nuisance and risks for the community. Vacant properties were properly boarded, monitored, or in certain cases demolished. In later planning stages, residents sought to eliminate vacant properties and at the same time increase home ownership, affordable housing, and business activity by rehabilitating these properties.

In another sector, residents and city officials negotiated the details of redesigning a roadway, University Avenue, that was at once a neighborhood street and city arterial. At first the city only wanted to widen and repave the road. Residents—on behalf of elderly citizens, shoppers, and school children who crossed the road repeatedly during their daily activities—wanted to cut the number of driving lanes, narrow the road, and beautify the area with grassy medians and colorful, stamped sidewalks. The initial city perception of the road was as a valuable corridor through which traffic moves to and from suburbia to downtown Rochester during rush hour. The residents, on the other hand, felt that the road could be safer to cross, and could transform the neighborhood into a regional tourist attraction, given its position along a corridor of important Rochester cultural and artistic institutions and organizations.⁸ Negotiations continued for months and the city postponed work on the road in order to reach a mutually satisfactory settlement. The final road redesign decision emerged after city officials and engineers spent a day on the avenue moving and doing business alongside residents. The city determined that the roadway warranted traffic calming treatments, parking arrangements that encouraged tourists and shoppers, and attention to aesthetics. The transportation planners realized that experiencing the road as a neighborhood resident changed the way they perceived the road's linkage to the community and the problems and opportunities it introduced.

The negotiation processes that grew commonplace in sector planning became a learning activity for both city planners and residents. It created greater insight on the part of residents whose understanding of the city's operations grew. For their part, city planners became more aware of the value of community-based expertise. Out of this fluid, emergent process, plans were tweaked and became more likely to be effectively implemented. By the

⁸ The roadway became an “outdoor” art museum with road bump-outs, artistic benches, sidewalks with embedded colorful designs, and artistically painted streetlamps connecting the cultural and artistic organizations along the avenue.

end of NBN1, city leaders recognized that the planning process would be smoother if negotiation between residents and city departments occurred earlier in the process. In NBN2 (the second round of planning and implementation) the city formed the Priority Council made up of representatives from each city department and the school district. The role of the Priority Council would be to meet with each sector while new action plans were in development, discuss the emerging ideas and explore any procedural or fiscal ramifications. Consultation with the Priority Council helped avoid problems experienced in NBN1 where action plans needed to be implemented over longer periods of time for technical or fiscal reasons or required more extensive preparation with respect to legal or procedural clearance.

Creating Conditions for Different Planning Practices

City leaders had to create the conditions necessary for nurturing a new way of doing business around Rochester. An important concern in achieving this goal was the extent to which stakeholders in the existing service-delivery arrangement might block changes. To check this potential, the city bypassed existing territorial distributions of power, whether defined by political or neighborhood association district, and carved 10 sectors out of Rochester's 36 neighborhoods. These sectors, controlled by citizen-residents, identified goals, strategies, and actions, and mapped their assets or resources while looking for implementation partners—agencies, merchants and businesses, religious and cultural institutions, school districts, or other levels of government. Because NBN began as a citizen-driven planning process, sectors were self-organizing. This arrangement permitted a great deal of latitude in developing sector business processes.

For elected leaders, including members of the city council, inviting citizens into city hall held risks. Adopting a participative governance model involved some faith that citizen participation would lead to better outcomes and confidence that in “letting the genie out of the bottle”, as one Rochester official described it, the coherently designed process guidelines would filter out extreme input and unreasonable demands. The NBN planning process incorporated three steps to help build system resilience and produce manageable results. First, training led the new sector participants to value an inclusive and reasonable process and provided them with tools to develop good processes in their sector. Second, in requiring that discussions of priorities and plans be open and public, the process tended to weed out unproductive ideas and strident voices over time. Third, consultation between the sectors and the Priority Council as plans were refined helped give innovative ideas a chance to succeed and tempered unwieldy ones. These steps were found to breed reasonable input and foster more mature community-based political leadership.

Building the Skills of Citizens

To ensure sector committee members were equipped with the skills necessary to build viable organizations and adequately develop their sector action plans, the city developed the NBN “Institute” to train sector volunteers. Workshops within the NBN Institute included sessions on meeting management, working with volunteers, writing a business plan, building budgets, zoning ordinances, self-reliance, and database training. The Institute topics change each year to reflect new skills needed by citizen planners. City

leaders hoped that skills acquired by sector volunteers through the Institute and planning experience would cascade to other citizens subsequently involved in sector activities.

Because process facilitation was a key skill in NBN, the city contracted with consultant organizations to develop the facilitation skills of sector volunteers and city planners. The role of city planners in the NBN model intentionally shifted from planning on behalf of citizens to facilitating a process through which the community members conducted planning.

Emergent Outcomes

When the city structured NBN it created a process in which outcomes were expected to be dynamic and emerge over time. Across several years of history, three broad effects grew apparent: the NBN process fostered citizen participation, secured new resources for city initiatives, and transformed the attitudes of city staff. Cumulatively, these developments provided equitable access to structures of government and community development, producing greater social equity and leveraging economic opportunity across sectors.

From Passive Residents to Active Citizen-Participants

A primary focus of the NBN planning process was to transform residents from passive and dependent clients to active and interdependent citizens. Residents would demonstrate the success of this shift by establishing sector planning priorities emphasizing the needs of the sector's neighborhoods.

Active resident participation led to the development of a neighborhood-based food production and exchange enterprise, which also beautified a low-income community and facilitated new entrepreneurial opportunities for residents.⁹ Sector 10 residents, with the support of foundations and government agencies, facilitated the expansion of an existing gardening project to create a series of small urban farms linked to distribution markets.¹⁰ Project partners secured by the sector included the Northeast Neighborhood Alliance, United Way, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the City of Rochester. At this time, the Northeast Neighborhood Alliance owns these urban farm properties on behalf of the community.

The goals of the urban farm project, known by the acronym GRUB, or Greater Rochester Urban Bounty, are to “create self-sufficient commercial ventures for urban farms and to transform the northeast section of the city into prosperous neighborhoods.”¹¹ Sector residents used skills they acquired throughout their experience with the NBN process, such as how to use Geographic Information System software, to determine the best locations for expansion. In order to reach its goal of promoting self-sufficiency, GRUB also “distributes

⁹ According to the 1990 census, Sector 10's racial and ethnic distribution was approximately 65 percent African-American and 26 percent Hispanic.

¹⁰ *Community Based Learning at RIT Achievements Page*, 2003, <<http://www.rit.edu/~684www/achievements.html>> (17 June 2003).

¹¹ The median income for the area is approximately \$13,000.

products made by small-scale food processors in the 15-County Genesee/Finger lakes region.”¹²

In 2002, GRUB harvested over 12,000 pounds of organic produce on approximately three acres of land.¹³ The food is sold to neighborhood residents who buy “shares” in the farm, residents throughout Rochester who shop at GRUB’s farm stand at the city’s Public Market, and area restaurants and institutions.¹⁴ Given its focus, all profits from GRUB are reinvested in the community.

GRUB provides work for several full-time employees including a farmer and crew, a youth supervisor, and a sales and marketing manager.¹⁵ In addition, a dozen area teens work in farming and farming related activities for 30 hours a week during the summer and 8 hours a week during the school year.¹⁶ These teens learn agricultural, entrepreneurial, leadership, marketing, and communication skills necessary to participate in all aspects of the farming enterprise.¹⁷ The urban farms drew over 200 volunteers, organized by the United Way of Greater Rochester’s Annual Day of Caring, to clear and seed the sites during the 2000 and 2001 seasons.¹⁸ Individuals from not-for-profit programs and local colleges also volunteered their labor.

As a result of Sector 10 efforts, the Kellogg Foundation provided a \$1,000,000 grant to the urban farm initiative. According to a press release issued by the Northeast Neighborhood Alliance, which operates in Sector 10, “The grant is the result of empowering people to make their own decisions to change the economic status of their own communities. We appreciate the vision of Mayor Johnson for empowering people through the Neighbors Building Neighborhoods process.”¹⁹

Fusing New Resources

The NBN process turned out to be a powerful enterprise for tapping new resource streams from foundations and investors. Increased citizen involvement fostered by NBN opened new doors for community-based economic development opportunities. In addition to the new grant from the Kellogg Foundation, other major foundations and private sector firms are investing resources in Rochester.

Low-income sectors identified housing issues as a top priority, and designed sector action plans to increase their communities’ availability of quality, affordable housing. In pursuit

¹² Maya Tauber and Andy Fisher, *A Guide to Community Food Projects*, 2001, <http://www.foodsecurity.org/cfsc_case_studies.pdf> (16 June 2003).

¹³ Lindsay Isaacs, “Urban Farms Transform City’s Landscape,” 118 *American City and County* (January 2003): 42-44.

¹⁴ *Greater Rochester Urban Bounty What We Do Page*, 2003, <<http://dev.grubrochester.com/org/about/weDo.php>> (16 June 2003).

¹⁵ Isaacs, 2003.

¹⁶ Tauber and Fisher, 2001.

¹⁷ *Greater Rochester Urban Bounty Who We Are Page*, 2003, <<http://dev.grubrochester.com/org/about/index.php>> (16 June 2003).

¹⁸ *Cornell University Community Food Security Projects Page*, <http://www.cals.cornell.edu/agfoodcommunity/afs_temp3.cfm?topicID=252> (16 June 2003).

¹⁹ Northeast Neighborhood Alliance, “GRUB Receives \$1 Million Kellogg Foundation Grant,” 26 June 2002.

of the common goals they outlined, these sectors worked with local community development organizations to improve the quality of housing for their neighborhoods. The success of these endeavors helped lead to the establishment of the Rochester Community Development Collaborative (RCDC). Initiated in July 2000, it is a partnership between the Enterprise Foundation, the City of Rochester, United Way of Greater Rochester, Daisy Marquis Jones Foundation, community development organizations, and several banks to provide approximately \$4.5 million over several years to economic development groups in low-income sectors. At least three of the four community development organizations listed as receiving funds from the RCDC were cited as partners in the sector action plans in NBN2.

The Collaborative provides these community development organizations with \$75,000-a-year for four years. These funds provide technical assistance, operating support, and project financing. One goal is “to convert 350 abandoned homes into new single-family homes. One hundred and fifty houses will be sold at market rate and 200 will be set aside for purchase by low-income families.”²⁰ Technical assistance supports self-assessment and the development of business plans. It is believed that by providing four years of focused assistance the RCDC can play a crucial role in implementing housing and economic development projects throughout the city.

According to the Enterprise Foundation website, “The basic tenet of the collaborative is that bringing outside resources—both human and capital—to a self-propelled community-based development organization can dramatically increase that organization’s potential to fulfill its mission.”²¹ The community development organizations grew out of successive levels of NBN sector action and the significant level of resident involvement in lower income neighborhoods. The RCDC furthered the likelihood that community development organizations and sectors would achieve their goals by infusing additional resources into the process. Investors are now demonstrating interest in the completed business plans and the RCDC progress.

From Civil Servants to Civil Facilitators

NBN brought change for city officers and department professionals and led to a new way of doing things for city government. Naturally, city officials and their staff needed time to adjust to developing insights about their role in the participative governance process. One perception that changed was that process, not just results, was important, perhaps even critical. In a similar vein, staff developed a sense that agency professional roles should be community centered rather than job focused.

²⁰ Don Chen, “Greetings from Smart Growth America,” <http://dnrweb.dnr.state.md.us/smartgrowth/LESSON6/SG_CHAP3.PDF> (17 June 2003).

²¹ Rafael Cestero, “Mayor William A. Johnson, Jr. on Hand as The Enterprise Foundation Launches the Rochester Community Development Collaborative \$4.5 Million Partnership Committed to Energizing Rochester’s Neighborhoods,” *The Enterprise Foundation Website*, 24 July 2000 <<http://www.enterprisefoundation.org/infofor/media/archives/pressarch.asp?ID=202>> (16 June 2003).

As an example, it was through the NBN planning process, during the struggle over the redesign of University Avenue, that the perception of the value of process came full circle. A key officer in Rochester's Department of Environmental Service's (DES) concluded that agencies—their leaders and professional staff—should not assume they know what communities want and that receiving community interest in, and favor for, a project are tools for success. Moreover, public officials and staff should not assume that silence on an issue or proposed project equals approval. These lessons were taken to heart a little more than a year ago when DES selected South Plymouth Avenue as its prototype street project under the new way of doing business. With approximately three years left until any reconstruction took place, DES convened an interdepartmental city-agency team, went out to the neighborhood and announced the project's three-year commencement time frame, and engaged in dialogue with residents to absorb and incorporate their interests. Instead of the old way of doing business—where the agency would consult with outside engineers, develop a plan, and then contact and inform residents—residents were consulted upfront.

The new manner of conducting business had broad effects, but bore particular implications for professional planners whose role changed visibly. In fact, the Rochester case may invite speculation that in participative governance structures, professional planners are redundant. While it is true that planners ceased to independently conduct planning activities on behalf of citizens, rather than circumscribe the role of professional planners the process more broadly integrates planning into government operations. The new planner-facilitators must skillfully incorporate knowledge of planning tools and government operations, an understanding of group structures and processes, and implementation politics and policy. These changes suggest that the professional planner has a broadened and increasingly interdependent role in government services.

Conclusions

Rochester's bold and innovative use of asset-based community planning and an **interdependent** service delivery model yields several important and transferable lessons to cities confronting issues of social and economic equity. These insights, summarized below, encompass not only the day-to-day concerns of government administration, but also a fundamental shift in the perception of governance and the respective roles of government employees and city residents. To succeed, they require patience, and the active, committed, and sustained leadership of mayors and city managers, city council members, and other senior government managers. The Rochester experience shows that while cities cannot definitively overcome problems of social and economic inequality, they can build participative governance practices that make a significant difference. A well designed and executed participative governance model helps equalize access to government and allocate services in a more equitable manner, drawing on the assets of community residents and the city government to leverage new economic opportunities.

Lessons in the Emergence of Interdependence

City Residents (Reactive Consumers to Proactive Citizens)

The transformation of thousands of city residents into active participants in change was a key outcome of the Rochester experiment. In addition to energizing citizen efforts, it returned the concept of citizen participation in governance to a condition closer to that envisioned in the formation of the American federalist system by gradually removing inequities in access to government stemming from social or economic circumstances.

City Staff (Professional Experts to Knowledge Facilitators)

Shifts in perception and role became apparent among city government employees. Prior to NBN, city staff viewed themselves as professional experts responsible for provision of services, including planning and implementation. As NBN processes were woven into the fabric of government practice, these same professionals came to view themselves as staff responsible for integrating widely distributed expertise with deep citizen knowledge of community needs and possibilities.

Governmental Processes (Task Orientation to Task/Process Integration)

As a result of NBN, city workers balance the demands of task completion and process activities differently. Making decisions to integrate the concerns and capacities of all parties is now the central performance objective of public sector professionals. City staff adjusted to the idea that although collaborative processes were more time-consuming, they tended to lead to better decisions and less 're-work' during project implementation.

City Departments (Dusty Stovepipes to Active Pipelines)

Decentralization of planning required greater coordination across city agencies. The focus by community members on geographically based solutions meant that functional areas of government service had to be reorganized across city departments to respond efficiently to community partnership requests.

Resource Allocation (Confrontation to Negotiation)

Rochester's reliance on asset-based planning and interdependence changed the debate about the allocation of scarce city resources. City leaders and citizens moved from *confrontations* about perceived inequities in service delivery to *negotiations* about responsibility and capacity. This led to more cooperative problem solving and better exploitation of underused resources.

Neighborhood Organizations (Moated Castles to Asset Markets)

The conscious decision by city leaders to organize the asset-based planning effort around city-defined sectors, rather than existing organizations with entrenched priorities, rearranged old patterns of association. This change allowed better communication flow and resource sharing across groups within sectors, leading to greater equality among groups. In addition, the decision to let sectors define their own development themes and focus, coupled with opportunities to share ideas across sectors, allowed both for cross-sector idea sharing and friendly competition among planning sectors.

City Leaders (Beleaguered Managers to Process Owners)

Mayor Johnson and the city council redefined the relationship between the city and its residents. To break out of the cycle of distrust, disillusionment, and complaint, the mayor challenged his managers and the citizens to develop systems to make the vision work, and supported them in their efforts. Groups were sent ‘back to the drawing board’ if they took too narrow a view of their responsibilities and concerns.

City Costs (Government Expenditures to Shared Assets)

The Rochester experience in asset-based planning was not cost-free. However, more parties shared the expense of participation. While it required the city to invest funds and staff time to support the development and planning process, the effort also generated commitments from within the community in the form of fiscal and human resources from businesses and citizens. In addition, the effort has attracted interest and support from outside the Rochester region, allowing the community access to further public and private funds to support the revitalization effort.