

IQ REPORT

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REGIONAL COMMUNITY BUILDING: THE KALAMAZOO, MICHIGAN, EXPERIENCE

Increasingly Americans live in expanding regional communities but still feel allegiance only to local communities. This report describes how to carry out a regional community-building process and uses Kalamazoo, Michigan, as a case study. If a regional government entity already has the authority to address an issue, the approach in this report is not the approach to use. But if the critical regional relationships are not yet in place, the process described here will help build them so that sustainable regional action can be taken in the future.

This report discusses techniques to involve community leaders as well as incorporate grassroots concerns, all with the goal of building a regional outlook. The authors of this report recount the specific steps they took to create cohesion, purpose, and action. This report details objectives at each stage, what needs to happen, how the participants made it happen, and how other communities have made it happen. Lists of dos and don'ts help apply lessons learned to local challenges.

Major sections:

- Why regional community building is necessary
- A brief description of Kalamazoo's project
- Preproject groundwork
- Building the leadership tier
- Building the grassroots tier
- Moving to action
- Lessons learned
- Appendices



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Regional Community Building: The Kalamazoo, Michigan, Experience

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WHY REGIONAL COMMUNITY BUILDING IS NECESSARY

Communities throughout the United States have changed radically in recent decades. Some have experienced population explosions; others have seen populations decline. Technological innovation has driven economic change as well. Many regional economies have expanded because of innovations in technology. We live in new regional communities, yet most of us still feel allegiance only to our old communities.

These new regional communities face many challenges. Central cities are deteriorating, tax bases are shifting, and suburbs are sprawling. But few regional communities have the governance structure or an innately authoritative institution capable of addressing or solving regional issues.

Few state or federal incentives exist that would lead local governments to act in the best interest of all in a region. The best regional policy is most likely not the best policy for any one local jurisdiction. If it were, regional policies would not be necessary. Each locality has its own set of land use concerns: some will want to preserve farmland; others will want to encourage economic development.

Without the political will to address issues on a regional scale, any attempt by a single government to do so will fail because of the presumption of self-interest. Power to act does not vest a jurisdiction with legitimate authority. Even if government officials could collaborate across jurisdictions, policies might not be sustainable without citizen input. Yet why would citizens participate in regional policy making if the region was not perceived as a political entity? Why would citizens support policies that might negatively affect their own jurisdictions? Before sustainable regional actions

can occur, citizens must perceive that they are part of an interdependent regional community.

Two elements are involved in regional community building:

- Creating and sustaining new relationships among leaders of all sorts of institutions within the region
- Creating at the grass roots a perception of regional issues and a willingness to act on the issues.

In regions where high levels of distrust and disconnect exist, locally based, collaborative initiatives will work best. Outside consultants can be very helpful in suggesting strategies for building regional community; however, their lack of local leadership legitimacy may hinder their ability to actually build that community. Moreover, people generally perceive that any entity that could fund a consultant is in charge and is following its own agenda.

In this kind of hostile atmosphere, regional community-building efforts must be run by a neutral party in partnership with a group of established leaders. Otherwise, the fear of power grabs will lead to the perception that the organizer is operating mainly out of self interest, whether it be a city that wants to annex a neighboring jurisdiction or a county government that wishes to extend its power.

This report describes one regional community-building process and uses Kalamazoo, Michigan, as a case study. If a regional government entity already has the authority to address an issue, the approach in this report is not the approach to use. But if the critical regional relationships are not yet in place, the process described here will help build them so that sustainable regional action can be taken in the future.

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A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF KALAMAZOO'S PROJECT

Kalamazoo suffers from many of the problems facing other urban regions across the country. In the mid-1990s, the Kalamazoo area was shaken by business mergers, plant closures, downsizing, and headquarters moves. Thousands of jobs were lost and the leadership structure in the community eroded. Kalamazoo County entered a pivotal period in which community groups and organizations struggled to identify and suggest proposals for solutions and change. Many talked about finding regional solutions, but we had never seen ourselves as one community.

Community leaders brought in outside consultants to help. The Consortium for Higher Education, comprising presidents of four colleges and universities, hired urban consultant David Rusk to analyze the region and suggest ways to make the area more prosperous. He developed a regional agenda filled with action steps similar to those he has proposed in other regions. Officials in Portage, Michigan—the region's suburban growth machine—responded by hiring Howard Husock, a consultant who has written widely on the need for core cities to become more self-reliant and competitive. The outlying townships hired yet another consultant, Samuel Staley, to report on the economics of growth and development in rural areas. The result was increased hostility among jurisdictions and few inklings of regional possibilities for action. See Appendix A for a summary of the consultants' findings.

No one knew where county residents stood on key issues facing Kalamazoo County. Moreover, we did not even know what the key issues were, much less have common definitions for them. Indeed, one person's urban sprawl was another's ideal development pattern. We needed common and clearly defined goals for the county. Without these, we lacked the means to create a common vision for our future.

Until the *CONVENING OUR COMMUNITY* project began, discussions about county goals were held mainly among leadership groups that struggled to come to consensus and compromise but lacked a mechanism to communicate effectively across institutional boundaries. Even if a regional agenda had emerged, most regional policy items would still be in jeopardy without clear political support from the county electorate.

Our project evolved in response to David Rusk's call for increased regional cooperation. Rusk's proposals for regional land use planning and other issues were going nowhere and other ongoing regional initiatives were also stalled.

The goal of the *CONVENING OUR COMMUNITY* project was to enable the community to see itself as a regional entity and take control of its destiny. By incorporating elements of participatory action research and taking a two-tier approach where one tier focused on leadership relationships and the other on grassroots involvement, we engaged community leaders and citizens from throughout the county in informed and thoughtful deliberation on regional issues. Although we en-

couraged wide-ranging discussion about regional issues, our overall goal throughout the process was to build the political will to move toward regional action around land use issues.

We began this project in January 1999 and completed the first phase in August 2000. Over the course of those 19 months, we held regular meetings with a diverse group of leaders from the private, public, and nonprofit sectors; conducted random and nonrandom surveys of county residents; held focus-group discussions with many interest groups; and held a variety of community meetings. We are now well into a second phase that focuses on land use that builds on the political will and regional identity created in the *CONVENING OUR COMMUNITY* project.

The following three sections describe the *CONVENING OUR COMMUNITY* process in more depth. We conclude with a discussion of lessons learned.

PREPROJECT GROUNDWORK

During the preproject groundwork phase, the project organizers gained legitimacy to work on regional issues.

What Needs To Be Done

- Secure participation of leaders and aim for the top
- Link with, rather than trample on, other regional initiatives
- Be strategic.

What Needs To Happen

You need a group of leaders who are willing to give the project a chance. If a project of this type is to begin on the right foot, it is imperative that key leaders be on board representing the public, private, and nonprofit sectors across the region. This will be the group that models the possibility of a regional community. Not only do you need the buy-in of the community leadership in order to implement policy actions down the road, but this group also adds crucial legitimacy to the project.

The leaders must feel ownership of a process that will help them identify the extent to which they live in a regional community. In addition to buying in to the project, the leaders need to see regional community building as an important process, and they need to feel enough ownership of the process to do it. Their participation in the process is not enough; one could easily participate in the process because of peer pressure but still harbor suspicion about who the process is really designed to benefit. Moving from simple participation to actual ownership implies a much higher degree of confidence in the project and a willingness to see the process through to its conclusion.

How We Made It Happen

We networked across sectors. Preproject planning began in the summer of 1998. At first we envisioned an academic research project focused on the need for farmland preservation in the county. But government leaders had received David Rusk's work with only mild interest, and we envisioned that they would treat our work in the same fashion. People have to be involved for ownership to develop, so we changed the project to emphasize networking.

Hannah McKinney took the lead on this part of the project, given her status in the community as vice mayor of the city of Kalamazoo and a respected leader countywide. Her position as a leader in the community was critical to the initial interest in the project; indeed, she was the first node in the network.

McKinney took the project idea to the farm bureau and asked for its involvement and blessing. Then she brainstormed with a few leaders from various sectors in the community, asking them who should be involved in a project like this. We used the following question as a criterion for involvement: Who needs to be involved because they can either make regional action happen or prevent it from occurring? Once a project-making or -breaking leader was identified, McKinney asked someone close to that individual to contact him or her about the project. She then followed up with a personal contact. At this point, we had two objectives: getting buy-in to the project idea, and doing the project without appearing to compete with other regional initiatives. We sent the invitation letter, which can be found in Appendix B, explaining that the project was designed to engage the community in a broad, participatory discussion and that the objective was to build action plans to address current regional issues.

Many community members were concerned at the beginning that this project would lead to yet another community organization. Past community-building efforts had led to the development of nonprofit groups that had flourished but had changed their missions and always seemed to face funding crises. Our community could not support another community-building nonprofit. We made it clear from the beginning that this was definitely not our intent, and we used a project timeline that showed a definite ending date for the project. This, coupled with our desire to share all information and to partner in all initiatives with any and all existing organizations, calmed this suspicion.

We reconceptualized the project to accommodate the ideas and concerns of the leaders without jeopardizing the integrity of the project. During the first months of preproject work, we met with leaders from every sector of the community that was spearheading other regional initiatives: an elected township supervisor, an urban mayor, a city manager, a newspaper columnist, the newspaper publisher, a college president, a foundation president, a university provost, and a business leader. We gave each a copy of the proposal,

described the project goals, and asked each leader to review the proposal. We then arranged to talk about any concerns each might have with the language, intent, or process used in the project. We changed the proposal numerous times after these meetings and followed up so that the individual knew of the changes we had made. This process helped us augment, not compete with, the other regional initiatives.

We used funding strategically. When this project began, three regional economic development initiatives were being proposed. Each of these initiatives was approaching local governments, businesses, and foundations for financial support. The regional council of governments was contemplating expanding its role with funding derived mainly from local governments. Given this political environment, we did not consider asking local governments to participate financially in the project. Preliminary discussions with community leaders reinforced our sense that this project needed to be funded from the private sector.

Early funding requests were kept small so as not to compete with other community needs and initiatives. We used these requests as a way to build ownership of and participation in the project by community leaders and foundations throughout the county. We especially targeted smaller donors who were not being approached by the other regional initiatives; this allowed us to broaden our base of support throughout the county. We had conversations with the larger philanthropic organizations, raising their awareness of the project, inviting their participation, and making it clear that we might ask for funding for a future phase of the project if this one was a success.

The networking component of our initial fundraising cannot be overstated. The director of one local foundation contacted another local foundation for us. Kalamazoo College and Western Michigan University gave major support, mostly in-kind. A local farmer contacted a rural community foundation for funding. A local business leader offered to take the leadership group to Portland, Oregon, to study growth management issues and policies there. We used his offer to cement the leadership group's participation in the project.

We designed the project in stages and asked for money for critical project elements first. As we received

Importance of leadership

Of central importance is project leadership that is collaborative and perceived to have the legitimacy to carry out this kind of project. In the case of *CONVENING OUR COMMUNITY*, the two organizers of the project are professors at a local college, an institution with a long history of civic involvement. One organizer is also the elected vice mayor of the city of Kalamazoo and has a well-publicized and long-term interest in regional land use issues.

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more money, the project became more involved. Each gift of money legitimized the project in the eyes of the leaders who were involved. Only after receiving funding from several local sources did we look to outside foundations for the bulk of the project funding. We never asked project participants to support the project financially; on the contrary, we designed the project to include significant perks, such as the trip to Portland, for those involved.

Kalamazoo College, a member of the consortium, was our fiduciary agent. This not only allowed for nonprofit status but also put financial control into the hands of a neutral institution.

We included leaders from many kinds of community institutions. Including leaders from as many community institutions as possible (see Appendix C) guarantees the broad range of perspectives needed for a true regional community dialogue to occur.

How Others Made It Happen

Bluegrass Tomorrow

- Leaders from nonprofit organizations in the Bluegrass area of Kentucky (seven central counties)
- Regional vision for planning and shaping growth balances growth with the preservation of the region's unique scenic qualities
- Promotes regional dialogue and collaborative goal setting, facilitates public and private sector cooperation, and develops innovative planning solutions for critical growth planning problems.

Contact Steve Austin, President, Bluegrass Tomorrow, 465 E. High St., Suite 208 Lexington, Ky. 40507-1941; 859/259-9829; e-mail, mail@bluegrasstomorrow.org.

Preproject groundwork—Dos and Don'ts

- DO take the time to do the preproject groundwork thoroughly.
- DO find respected leaders to do the initial networking for you.
- DO trust the networking process.
- DO use fundraising as a way of building commitment and legitimacy.
- DO include a broad array of leaders, and make sure that all of them are recognized leaders in their spheres of influence.
- DON'T let one entity, either public or private, set the agenda for this project.
- DON'T expect others to buy in immediately or to trust the process completely.
- DON'T expect one leader to be able to network in all sectors of the community.
- DON'T hide your own bias but do promise not to act on it.

National Community Building Network

- A national membership organization that serves as a hub for brokering information and connections among community builders
- Believes that coalitions of diverse leaders and grassroots citizens can rebuild communities
- Offers information, networking, and technical expertise to members
- Maintains file of community-building case studies and organizations
- Maintains standing committees on three topics: promoting equitable development, overcoming economic and social isolation, and protecting voting rights and power.

Contact National Community Building Network, 1624 Franklin St., Suite 1000, Oakland, Calif. 94612; 510/663-6226; fax, 510/663-6222; e-mail, network@ncbn.org.

BUILDING THE LEADERSHIP TIER

The first task of the two-tier approach to regional community building is to build the leadership coalition into a group whose members see themselves as part of a regional community facing common problems that need to be solved together.

What Needs To Be Done

- Build bonds among the leaders
- Sustain the leaders' interest
- Educate leaders on the issues.

What Needs To Happen

Build trust and respect among the different kinds of leaders. In an earlier era, community leaders would have known each other through social and volunteer activities, but today's leaders lives do not intersect as readily. Key to building trust and respect is building relationships rooted in common experience, creating that intersection in meaningful ways. Once this is done, trust and respect within the leadership group will begin to emerge.

Reduce intersectoral hostility. Those leaders who do know each other before a process begins are likely to come to the table with baggage left over from past and present conflicts with other entities represented at the table. For example, township and city officials in Kalamazoo County have a long history, including several lawsuits, of wrangling over wastewater policy. While it is unreasonable to assume that this or any project can make that baggage disappear, it is possible to create an environment in which the baggage is put aside.

Create commitment and willingness to work on regional issues together. One of the most significant effects of this project is having leaders from across the county come to see themselves as members of a regional community. Kalamazoo County, 24 miles by 24 miles in size, has 25 separate government jurisdictions. With the exception of occasional and often temporary coalitions, residents and community leaders tend to see themselves and their interests tied primarily to those of their local government or special interest group. In this context, moving from a local identity to a regional one can be a challenge. Key to success in this area is helping the leaders see the ways in which their interests are interconnected.

Move the group to a complex understanding of the issue. An effective way of helping leaders see the interconnected nature of their interests is to help them see the complexity of the issues. In our project, we constantly highlighted the way land use issues are intricately tied in with issues of poverty, school quality, environmental quality, farming, economic development, and a healthy urban core. Presenting information is not enough, however. The group must be encouraged to explore assumptions and attitudes on these issues, as individuals and as a group. Group members will then begin to see the very real ways in which their interests are interconnected.

How We Made It Happen

We created a sense of group identification for the leaders. The leaders coalesced into the CONVENING OUR COMMUNITY work group in May 1999, during a four-day trip to the Portland, Oregon, area. This trip was vital to the project's success because it took the leaders away from the Kalamazoo area and brought them into close contact with one another so that bonding could occur. The fact that this trip began with a cancelled flight, shuttles to another airport, and a late-night layover could have been disastrous. Instead, these events provided a natural team-building experience.

The local businessperson who sponsored the trip had a plant in Portland. Between his contacts and ours, we put together a first-rate miniconference on growth management in the Pacific Northwest. The speakers included state legislators who created the Washington state legislation, county commissioners, and academics. The food and side trips were also excellent. The message to group members was that they were important enough to be treated to such an event and that the project was important enough to merit the event.

Not knowing how much conflict would exist in the group, given the diversity of backgrounds and opinions represented, we waited until the third day of the miniconference to hold a real discussion of Kalamazoo growth management issues and to more fully explain our project and its goals. We hired consultants to facilitate this discussion. During the conversation, the members of the work group indicated that they wanted

to be more involved in the project than we had planned and yet could not set a clear goal for themselves other than meeting again in June. Moreover, they were suspicious of our motives, particularly given McKinney's vice mayoral position in the city. As a result, we appointed a small ad hoc committee during that Saturday session consisting of McKinney, Blaine Lam, a long-time community leader and the person with the most legitimacy in the eyes of the rest of the group, and two critics of the process orientation of the project. This committee was charged with setting the agenda for the next meeting as well as setting the goals for the work group in general. As a result of this committee's work, Blaine Lam was given the authority to lead all subsequent work group meetings.

We created a sense that the work group was the place to be. We never forgot that those involved in our project had many other competing commitments and responsibilities. We held our monthly meetings to a very tight agenda and never let them last more than one hour. Most of the meetings featured important community leaders whose brief presentations were followed by question-and-answer sessions. During a group bus tour of Kalamazoo County, work group leaders passed the microphone from one to another as we entered each jurisdiction or passed a particular farm. This trip gave participants a better sense of what was happening in the county and also helped them appreciate the responsibilities and knowledge of others in the work group.

At subsequent breakfast meetings—see the list of meetings in Appendix D—we gave the leaders the latest and best information available about unfolding current events such as farming legislation and land use studies. We also provided data on community attitudes and values as we collected it.

Toward the end of the project, we took the work group to Dane County, Wisconsin, for a three-day visit.

Building the leadership tier— Dos and Don'ts

- DO remember that the goal is community building, not sticking to a rigid project design.
- DO focus meetings and materials on up-to-the-minute issues.
- DO continually build buy-in.
- DO meet controversy head-on, but meet it strategically.
- DO remember that process is not enough; the project must have an outcome.
- DO have a project ending date.
- DO tell people up front how much of their time the project will take.
- DO treat the leaders well, but reserve the red-carpet treatment for special occasions.
- DON'T take suspicion personally.
- DON'T try to be the leader of the leaders.

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As with the Portland trip, we used our contacts and those of others in the community to put together a first-rate miniconference on smart growth initiatives in that county. Also like the Portland trip, the actual trip to and from Dane County—this time on a chartered bus—built bonds between the leaders.

We continued to bring leaders into the group. Over the year of regular work group meetings, the chamber of commerce gained a president, a new regional economic development corporation formed and hired a new executive director, and statewide land use issues were being studied in the state capital. With the work group's consent, we invited each new leader to speak to the group and join it. New faces kept the work group fresh and also illustrated that community leadership was constantly evolving.

We created a safe place for conversation. Although a couple of newspaper articles about the formation of the work group and the upcoming Portland trip appeared in the spring of 1999, we chose not to pursue media coverage of the actual trip. Because leaders of the local media were in the work group, it was clear that the group and its actions were not secret. However, our policy was that the work group could decide if, when, and how it wanted to speak to the media. The group quickly came to consensus that the work group meeting conversations were off the record. Consequently, many group members told us repeatedly that this was the only place where they felt free to have open and honest discussions with each other about significant county issues.

We addressed current community controversies. The work group was established shortly after the Rusk and Husock visits and the publication of their two very different takes on the state of affairs in Kalamazoo County. A prominent and contentious issue at the time was which government entity was to blame for the county's malaise. Work group members represented both the Rusk view that the county needed to move to a regional governance structure and the Husock view that the problems of the city of Kalamazoo were caused by its

own inefficient government structure.

We asked a small group of leaders, representing both views, to critically discuss the two reports. The guiding question for the group was "How do we use the Husock and Rusk reports to better understand Kalamazoo County concerns?" We prepared a list of more specific questions to focus their discussion. The answers were to form the basis for the discussion at the next work group meeting. The specific questions we used could be easily modified for any set of conclusions that represented opposing views on an issue (see the sidebar on this page). The purpose of this discussion was not to justify the conclusions of specific reports; instead, we wanted to begin to identify and promote action steps based on reactions to the reports.

Finding a way to directly address contentious issues in a respectful learning mode is critical to the success of a leadership group like this one. If allowed to fester, these unspoken but omnipresent assumptions and prejudices can prevent trust building and bonding.

How Others Made It Happen

New Detroit

- Broad-based coalition of area leadership, called trustees, that engages in candid dialogue about difficult issues
- Goal is to achieve economic and social equity
- The trustees are the leaders that could create economic and social equity
- Sets standards for trustee interaction on the basis of five core values: maintain a no-fault environment to promote open and honest conversation, commit to stay the course, advance the coalition's interest, participation and engagement, and inclusiveness
- Any actions taken by New Detroit have to be committed to by consensus.

Contact Sue Hamilton-Smith, Executive Vice President, 3011 W. Grand Boulevard, Suite 1200, Detroit, Mich. 48202; 313/664-2014; e-mail, suehamilton@newdetroit.org.

Questions that guided the discussion of consultants' reports

The following questions guided the critical discussion of conflicting recommendations offered by consultants who were hired by different groups.

- What is the ideological and/or philosophical basis of each report?
- What are the main issues raised in each report?
- What data are used to support these points?
- Which points do we agree with and why?
- On which points do we disagree and why?
- What additional information do we need?

BUILDING THE GRASSROOTS TIER

The second task of the two-tier approach is to engage the countywide community in the identification of the central issues facing the county.

What Needs To Be Done

- Identify public sentiment concerning the project issues
- Build community awareness about project
- Create an environment in which regional action can occur.

What Needs To Happen

Spur dialogue and conversation about regional issues. When citizens fail to realize that they live in a regional community, a dialogue must be created around regional issues before core community values and concerns can be identified and understood. The first step in the dialogue is to understand the varying attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives held by different sectors in the community. Then the information must be placed in its regional context. Dissemination of this information coupled with frequent public discussion will begin to illuminate regional issues.

Build a sense of the county as a community. All grassroots activity must acknowledge that participants see themselves as living in particular jurisdictions and having certain interests. At the same time, in a regional community-building project, awareness must also be continually built that the larger regional community also exists and that many issues cannot be addressed only at the local level. Drawing out participants' regional interests and experience reinforces that participants live in and have responsibilities to their regional community.

Build the political will for regional action. Regional action is difficult. Leaders will not risk acting if citizens do not appear to support it. This support must be demonstrated in ways that cannot be easily refuted or ignored. If political will is not demonstrated through grassroots project components, then more regional community-building activities must take place.

How We Made It Happen

We used an action research methodology. We used an action research (AR) framework, an acknowledged research technique in the social sciences designed to engage participants in issue identification and the development of action strategies (see the sidebar on this page). Through two sets of focus groups and countywide random and nonrandom surveys we identified the key regional concerns. Then, during facilitated discussions with community members and youth and a countywide convention, community members examined the information about these regional concerns and developed action strategies to address them. All these activities spurred conversations throughout the county about the directions people think we should be moving and how they think we should get there. Consistent with the AR framework, we always viewed community members, at both the leadership and the grassroots levels, as equal participants in the generation of knowledge and action strategies for our community.

We used both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques to get the most valid information and maximize participation. We decided to use both surveys and focus-group interviews to collect informa-

tion about core values and attitudes of county residents. First, using both gave us much richer information about what citizens across the county were thinking. Second, because the information-collecting process in a project like this is also a participation-building process, it is important that community members can get a sense of the values and concerns of others.

During the course of the project, we conducted two types of focus groups. The first type of focus group helped us construct a survey tailored to the issues and concerns of Kalamazoo County residents. The second type, conducted outside the core urban area, was focused more on visioning and problem identification. All told, we conducted 28 separate focus groups. Both types of focus groups provided an opportunity for participants to discuss issues of concern with other members of their community.

The surveys, too, provided an opportunity for community members to think about county issues. The surveys helped us understand the extent to which there seemed to be consensus across the county on problems and their possible solutions. The survey was administered both randomly and nonrandomly.

The nonrandom survey was published on the front page of the local section of the Sunday newspaper. Many people wrote to tell us how they and their families filled it out that morning over cups of coffee and learned so much about each other's opinions. We were amazed at the number of people who took the time to cut out the survey and mail it to us. Many included additional pages of comments. The survey was also distributed throughout the county in pamphlet form.

The same survey was administered as a large random survey. We divided the county into types of jurisdictions, which allowed us to draw scientific conclusions about county residents' values and opinions on land use-related issues according to the type of jurisdiction they lived in as well as for the county as a whole.

Core principles of action research

- Action research (AR) addresses real-life problems.
- AR uses the group's diversity in experience and capacities as an asset in the project.
- AR is a process during which all participants' contributions are considered equally valid and valuable, and participants' interpretations of the data collected are as important as those of the project staff.
- The AR process leads to social action.
- AR is seen as worthwhile and successful when the actions that arise from it solve problems and increase participants' control over their own situations.

Source: Davydd Greenwood and Morten Levin, *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1998).

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This combination of data-gathering techniques made it difficult for our information to be discounted. People in focus groups, those who returned the newspaper survey, and those who took the random survey all said essentially the same thing about the importance of land use issues in our regional community. After each type of information was collected, we presented it to the work group. Leaders discussed the results and debated their implications for the next phase of the project. This process gave them ownership of the data collected, making it difficult for any of them to ignore the emerging conclusions.

Another strategy we used to minimize the inherent controversial nature of the data collection process was to use college students as group facilitators and data collectors. Students were perceived as nonthreatening and unbiased. Indeed, participants often wanted to help the students succeed in their work.

We developed a process by which the community could come to consensus about the implications of the data collected. Critical to the success of the project was our practice of avoiding drawing conclusions ourselves from the data while making our biases clear. We wanted community members to be directly involved in interpreting the information we gathered. The focus group and survey data we had collected up to that point suggested four key areas of concern: land use, economic development, intergovernmental cooperation, and community excellence. We invited county residents to help us use this information to define county problems, needs, and solutions. We used a variety of means, including newspaper and radio advertisements, the mailing lists of other community organizations, and our own list of project participants, to issue an invitation to join one of four resource teams. With a specific charge to develop a consensus declaration of where we as a county stood on these issues and where we needed to go, these teams met three times.

The declarations developed by the teams were the starting point for the countywide convention held toward the end of this phase of the project. The goal of the convention was to brainstorm strategies for action that addressed the issues raised in the declarations. Because we had not had significant youth participation in the project, we added a youth convention. We invited high school students to envision their preferred future for the county.

We forged deliberate links with other organizations by hosting two large community events. The first, in partnership with Leadership Kalamazoo, was an evening keynote address by two community leadership experts on how communities move from planning to action. The second, in conjunction with area environmental groups, was a talk by James Kunstler, the author of *Geography of Nowhere*.

At all points of community engagement with project activities, we provided tokens of our appreciation such as pens, T-shirts, lollipops, and cookies. All were intended to indicate how much we valued the input of participants.

By the end of this phase of the project, CONVENING OUR COMMUNITY was a well-known initiative. Land use issues had come to the forefront as issues in many of the county's jurisdictions. A majority of those who participated in our project advocated some sort of countywide land use planning process.

How Others Made It Happen

South Florida Community Development Coalition

- Coalition of community development corporations with goal of creating a more supportive environment for community-based development in South Florida
- Provides a forum for community development coalitions to develop policies and positions, share experiences, and speak with a unified voice

Qualitative and quantitative techniques of data collection

Data Collection Technique	Number of People	Date
Presurvey interest-group focus groups	103 people in 15 groups	Jul.–Oct. 1999
Random survey	3,258	Nov. 1999
Gazette survey	703	Nov. 1999
Pamphlet survey	178	Nov.–Dec. 1999
Out-county focus groups	75 people in 13 groups	Sept.–Dec. 1999
Resource teams	74 people in 4 teams	Feb.–March 2000
Youth convention	25	April 2000
Countywide convention	75	April 2000

- Uses fax and e-mail to disseminate information about policy changes, advocacy efforts, available funding, resources and training, and other information to hundreds of people and organizations
- Does capacity building by working with community development coalitions to upgrade their technological infrastructure to better access community development resources electronically
- Maintains a Web site

Contact John Ise, Executive Director, South Florida Community Development Coalition, Suite 500, 3000 Biscayne Blvd. Miami, Fla. 33137; 305/576-0080, ext. 342; e-mail, johnise@floridacdc.org.

MOVING TO ACTION

This section addresses how to generate real outcomes that address issues identified by the wide range of people represented in the project.

What Needs To Be Done

- Choose an action with real outcomes
- Take advantage of the leadership coalition to partner with institutions across sectors
- Work with members of the whole range of interest groups to take joint actions.

What Needs To Happen

Develop actions that will address the entire range of interests. Successful actions need to include members of the whole array of interest groups. Remember that interest groups are often geographically based. When the issue of land use is considered, for example, not only do the perspectives of both builders and environmentalists need be taken into account; it is also crucial to consider the differences among urban, suburban and rural residents. When all interests are included in the process of coming to action, the action is much more likely to come about and be sustained.

Use the action to continue to solidify the sense of regional identity emerging in the community. If an action stems from or is perceived to stem from one set of interests, not only is it likely to fail, but it also goes against the larger goal of regional community building. The coming-to-action process is an excellent opportunity to further solidify the emerging sense of regional identity. Bringing together members of diverse interest groups of the region to work together creates and broadens the regional web of intersecting interests and relationships so important to regional identity.

Choose an important, yet doable, action. Many of the actions that are suggested by those involved in the com-

munity-building process will not yet be doable on a regional scale. Choose an action that is perceived as important by project participants and that can be undertaken in an environment without strong regional government bodies. Ideally, the actions you undertake will begin to demonstrate the need for such bodies.

How We Made It Happen

We accepted the challenge of taking regional actions in a context devoid of regional institutional infrastructure. Community convention participants brainstormed action strategies concerning such diverse issues as land use, educational policy, and infrastructure improvements. The leaders at the last work group meeting also defined action strategies. Although those at the community convention assumed that area leaders would carry out their suggestions, the leadership group struggled and failed to find a mechanism by which the actions could be achieved. A major problem plagued most of the strategies suggested by both groups. Most actions depended on other institutions taking action first, and no regional authority existed to force them to do so. For example, many talked about changing local tax structures, but only municipal governments have the authority to enact such a change.

In sum, the action steps suggested by project participants demanded institutional structures that did not exist.

A couple of community organizations were interested in springboarding some activities off the CONVENING OUR COMMUNITY project. Because we never envisioned our project becoming an ongoing entity, we encouraged them to do so. However, they encountered

Building the grassroots tier—Dos and Don'ts

- DO remember that the main goal is community building, not problem solving.
- DO find ways to make the project both fun and rewarding for participants.
- DO involve the community when putting together the survey.
- DO build a sense of excitement and ownership by all involved.
- DO make project documents and data freely available.
- DO keep feeding information collected back to the work group of leaders.
- DO keep the quality of each project phase high.
- DO remember to thank everyone who participates.
- DON'T give people a reason to discount your data; use scientific methods.
- DON'T promise too much.
- DON'T be afraid to change the process to involve more people.
- DON'T draw conclusions from the data yourself; put together a process by which community members do so.

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the same lack of regional institutional infrastructure, and their plans never materialized. We realized that we would have to incorporate an action phase into the project ourselves.

We took the time to figure out what is both doable and desired by the regional community. Once we decided to develop an action plan, we went back to our original land use focus. Throughout the project, participants had confirmed the need for better and more coordinated land use planning in the region. We used the land use declaration (Appendix E) as our starting point. To answer some of the issues listed in the land use declaration, the action phase creates a countywide voluntary land use planning procedure. Action outcomes include a land use advocacy group, a peer site review committee, a GIS-based booklet of unique sites in the county, and a guidebook to citizen participation in land use planning. We considered these actions doable because of the interest of other organizations in partnering with us to carry them out.

We became part of a larger statewide initiative. We are not the only emerging regional community in Michigan struggling with land use issues without effective governance tools. Because state legislative action would be necessary to create the infrastructure to undertake concerted regional action on a variety of issues, we decided our actions would have more weight and a higher likelihood of success if we were part of a statewide movement working to motivate our legislators to help address the needs of regional communities. We applied for and received funding under a foundation-sponsored statewide land use initiative called People and Land. One of the goals of this initiative is to create a statewide network of organizations working on regional land use issues.

We used the legitimacy gained through the project. When devising our action plans, we relied heavily on groups and individuals who participated in the community-building process. For example, several township supervisors indicated strong interest in identifying important historic and natural sites within the county, and they helped us develop this particular

action step. The chamber of commerce was very taken by the possibilities of a peer site review committee and became the lead partner in developing that initiative. Local environmental groups helped with the site selection process. Members of all these groups will sit on our various project committees.

How Others Made It Happen

Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development [BUILD]

- A faith-based, nonpartisan, multid denominational, ecumenical, citywide citizen organization of 50 religious congregations and other associations
- Has a 23-year history of acting to transform neighborhoods by training and developing neighborhood leaders to address community issues, public institutions, public life, and building power for families in the city of Baltimore
- Advocates change at the state level
- Members themselves lobby.

Contact BUILD, 2114-1 N. Charles St., Baltimore, Md. 21218-5765; 410/528-0305; fax, 410/528-0316; e-mail, buildiaf@erols.com.

Economic Equity Division of New Detroit

- Assists small-business development in downtown Detroit
- Created the Detroit Black Chamber of Commerce, which identified financial and political obstacles to locating a business downtown and assists black business owners in overcoming these obstacles
- Each action project is developed the same way: New Detroit trustees reach a consensus agreement action plan; create a task force, headed by a trustee, of leaders and grassroots citizens; identify individuals in the community who could make this action a success; and invite them to participate in doing so. New Detroit enjoys a response rate to invitations of almost 100 percent.

Contact Dalton Roberson, Assistant to the Director of Economic Equity Division, 3011 W. Grand Boulevard, Suite 1200, Detroit, Mich. 48202; 313/664-2000; e-mail, droberson@newdetroit.org.

Moving to action—Dos and Don'ts

- DO act; don't just vision.
- DO pick actions that can be accomplished within the existing institutional landscape.
- DO involve diverse interest groups.
- DO use actions as community-building tools.
- DO have a clear ending point.
- DON'T promise too much.
- DON'T rely on others to begin work on regional problems.
- DON'T define the action steps too soon; wait for members of the community to tell you what they want.

LESSONS LEARNED

Successful projects take time. Relationships and trust are not built overnight, and action outcomes need to be carefully thought through. It is best to view the project as the first step in a continuing community-building process.

Design projects with definite timelines and ending points for each phase. People need continual reassurance that they are not part of a never-ending process

with no clear outcomes. State how many times each group will meet and what the group is supposed to do, and celebrate ending points. Because outcomes are difficult to achieve, do not overpromise.

Project structure is not as important as community building. Adapt the process to changing circumstances and new understandings of community dynamics. For example, if a new regional group emerges while the project is under way, redesign the project to incorporate the group. If grassroots or leadership participation is not as widespread as initially intended, redesign project elements to increase participation.

Word of mouth is better than a media blitz. Community is built through relationships and conversations, not public relations campaigns. Use the media to generate participation, whether through a call-in radio show or a meeting announcement, but do not appear in the media too often. If possible, write your own description of the project and its hoped-for outcomes for media use. If relationships with the media are good, use the description as an editorial viewpoint; if they are not good, give it to the reporter to use as the basis for a story.

Legitimacy is more important than power or authority. People will always wonder why you want to build a regional community. If project leaders have too much power or authority, others who also have power and authority within their own segments of the community will work hard to block the project. This type of project needs to be undertaken by an institution that is respected in the region and that is seen to have a legitimate right to undertake such a project. In our case, this institution was Kalamazoo College, which has a long tradition of engagement in the regional community.

Legitimate and widely respected leaders need to be at the core of the project. These leaders must be trusted across different sectors of the community. In our project Hannah McKinney was one such leader and Blaine Lam was another. McKinney, a member of the Kalamazoo city commission, has been key in bringing feuding parties to consensus on a number of critical issues in the county. Lam, the convener of the leadership group, is a respected civic leader and is a member of several important boards in the region. He is respected by both the business and nonprofit sectors of the community. In addition to the esteem in which they were held, both were perceived to hold the necessary power and authority to accomplish project goals.

Accept that the project will always be viewed with suspicion. Always be aware of community perceptions of the project and its goals, and address any negative perceptions immediately. It may be possible to address these issues through personal contacts; alternatively, the situation may merit a restructuring of project elements. Accept the fact that project leaders will always be assumed to have a hidden agenda, whether it is to

write a book or to build a wider political power base. Because the CONVENING OUR COMMUNITY project had a nonthreatening structure and institutional base, people participated in it rather than blocked it.

Create a two-tier project structure that ensures genuine participation in the process by both the leadership and the grass roots. The project process has to genuinely engage both community leaders and the broader community. We found that leaders were more willing to think about an action once they saw the degree of regional community support, and that the broader community was more likely to participate in the process when they knew that those with the power to make decisions were interested in and listening to their concerns. The background and experience of our two project directors—one was connected to the region's leadership and the other had experience with grassroots community building—ensured that concerns of both tiers of citizens would be heeded.

ADDITIONAL READINGS AND RESOURCES

Cunningham, Kiran and Hannah McKinney. CONVENING OUR COMMUNITY: Kalamazoo County Speaks. www.kzoo.edu/convene.

Greenwood, Davydd and Morten Levin. *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1998.

Husock, Howard, Director of Case Studies, Harvard University. www.urbanfutures.org/husock.html.

Kunstler, James Howard. *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape*. New York: Touchstone, 1993.

Leadership Kalamazoo. <http://leadership.kazoochamber.com/>.

Rusk, David, author and consultant. www.citistates.com/assocspeakers/d_rusk.html.

Staley, Sam, Director, Urban Futures Program, Reason Public Policy Institute. www.rppi.org/staley.html.

Vision Council. See reports to Kalamazoo County by David Rusk and Howard Husock. www.visioncouncil.org/.

APPENDIX A
SUMMARY OF CONSULTANTS' FINDINGS

David Rusk's Analysis	Howard Husock's Analysis	Samuel Staley's Analysis
<p>Kalamazoo County's Problems:</p>	<p>Kalamazoo County:</p>	<p>Kalamazoo County and Michigan:</p>
<p>The county's minority population lives in the city of Kalamazoo</p>	<p>The diversity of local government structures in the county is contributing to the prosperity the region does enjoy</p>	<p>Sprawl is not a problem in Michigan; only 9.8 percent of state is urbanized</p>
<p>Poor and/or minority children are increasingly concentrated in Kalamazoo public schools</p>	<p>No proof exists that regional cooperation plays a positive role in spurring economic development</p>	<p>Urbanization does not threaten agricultural industry in Michigan; farmland losses are moderating, programs exist to protect farmland</p>
<p>Two-thirds of county's poor live in the city of Kalamazoo</p>	<p>Rusk's proposed compact would be politically divisive in the county and perhaps impossible to achieve</p>	<p>Negative effects of development on local infrastructure costs are exaggerated</p>
<p>Middle class residents are moving to the out county areas, creating suburban sprawl</p>	<p>Governments already have an impressive record of working together in areas of mutual benefit</p>	<p>People leave central cities because of crime, poor schools, and high taxes; cities need to solve these problems</p>
<p>The tax base of the city is eroding while other out county tax bases are increasing; fiscal disparity is growing</p>	<p>Competition for tax base and residents creates pressure for efficiency in public spending</p>	<p>Higher residential densities may increase pollution levels</p>
<p>Public service demands in the city are increasing instead of decreasing</p>	<p>The government of the city of Kalamazoo is inefficient, with costs at least 50 percent higher than other jurisdictions</p>	<p>Cities need to become more competitive, lower costs, become more efficient</p>
<p>The city of Kalamazoo will drag down the rest of the county eventually as businesses and high-skilled people choose to leave or not come to the region</p>	<p>County residents will not support mixed-use affordable housing</p>	
<p>The county's economy is growing very slowly and key companies are in declining industries</p>	<p>More class and/or racial integration at the schools will make little difference in academic performance of poor minority children</p>	
<p>Solutions Are County-Oriented:</p>	<p>Kalamazoo County Solutions Are City-Oriented:</p>	<p>Solutions to Land Use Issues:</p>
<p>Create and follow a countywide comprehensive land use plan that includes growth boundaries, agricultural protection areas, and infrastructure planning</p>	<p>The city of Kalamazoo needs to streamline operations, lower costs of providing services, and become cost effective</p>	<p>Full-cost pricing for public services so that local governments do not subsidize land development</p>
<p>Countywide agreement on fair share affordable housing requirements in all subdivisions</p>	<p>The city of Kalamazoo should privatize operations where possible, especially the wastewater treatment plant</p>	<p>City policies to reduce crime, increase educational quality, and lower taxes</p>

APPENDIX B

INVITATION LETTER

April 14, 1999

Dear _____:

“Will we be judged for what we refuse to become?” This question, posed by the Rev. Joel Brooks of the Christian Life Center, was quoted by David Rusk in the *Kalamazoo County Compact* as a challenge to our county to assess the potential implications that current growth and economic development policies could have upon our region and future. But how do we begin to identify a common vision and create action plans that implement that vision? Who will initiate the necessary regional dialogue?

I am inviting you to accept the challenge by joining other community leaders in participating as a member of the *Convening the Community* work group. *Convening the Community* is a project that is designed to engage the community in a broad, participatory discussion of the values, attitudes, goals, and visions held by county residents concerning their economic future and land use issues. The project’s ultimate purpose is to coalesce the necessary political will to enable community leaders to build action plans to address our current regional growth and economic development issues.

The work group will meet up to seven times during the course of the next year. The first meeting is actually a “mostly all expenses paid” trip to the Portland, Oregon, area. SignArt, a local business, is underwriting this Kalamazoo work group *exploration* and *laboratory* (the **K-exploratory-Northwest**), an adventure in the spirit of Rusk’s recommendation made in the *Kalamazoo Compact* to “organize civic delegations to visit model communities to study best comprehensive practices and publicize results.” Our group will leave for Portland on Wednesday afternoon, May 12th, and return on Sunday, May 16th. SignArt staff members are coordinating the logistics for the **K-exploratory-Northwest**. You will be receiving a packet of information from them by fax today.

I have included a project précis and work plan with this letter. Your time commitment, beyond the Portland trip, as a work group member would include five in-town meetings plus a three-day bus trip to Dane County, Wisconsin, for another in-depth study of another community. I will be the principal investigator on this project and will work on it full time from June 1999 through August of 2000. A college colleague, Kiran Cunningham, will serve as coinvestigator. Please call or e-mail to tell us if you will participate in this project or if you have any questions or comments. I can be reached at 616/337-7024 or at mckinney@kzoo.edu.

I close with one of my favorite quotes from Margaret Mead, who said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” Please join us.

Sincerely,

Hannah McKinney

Kurt D. Kaufman Associate Professor of Economics and Business

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APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANTS IN CONVENING OUR COMMUNITY

Community Institution Represented by Leader	Position Held by Leader
Governments	
Portage, major suburban city in the county	Mayor
	City manager
Kalamazoo, urban core city	Mayor
	City manager
	City commissioner
Kalamazoo County government	Chair of county commission
	County commissioner
	County administrator
	Economic and community development director
Urban township	Supervisor ¹
Rural township no. 1	Supervisor ¹
Rural township no. 2	Trustee
Suburban township no. 1	Supervisor ¹
Suburban township no. 2	Planner
Kalamazoo County's council of governments	Chair
Nonprofit organizations	
Neighborhood housing organization	Executive director
League of women voters	Board member
Environmental organization	Board member
Region's largest community foundation	President
Rural environmental interest group	Board member
Community-building organization no. 1 ²	Executive director
Community-building organization no. 2 ²	Executive director
Local think tank	Executive director
Businesses	
Accounting firm	Senior partner
Small business	Owner
Public relations firm	President
Board of realtors	Board member
Major bank	Regional president
Greenhouse company	Owner
Manufacturing firm no. 1	President
Manufacturing firm no. 2	President
Kalamazoo County farm bureau	Board members (2)
Farm	Farmers (3)
Media	
Local television station	President and general manager
Major radio station group	General manager
Local newspaper	Columnist
Economic development organizations	
Kalamazoo County Chamber of Commerce	Current chair
	Past chair
	Past president
	President
"Regional Edge," economic development group	Cluster chair
	Executive director
Small-business development institution	Executive director
Regional economic development organization	Executive director
Other community institutions	
Diocese of Kalamazoo	Director of Christian services
Kalamazoo public schools	Superintendent

¹ Township supervisors are the elected chief executive and legislative officials in townships.

² The largest past community-building initiatives generated these organizations.

NOTE: Project directors and staff are not included in this list.

APPENDIX D PARTICIPANTS IN CONVENING OUR COMMUNITY

Time	Meeting Topic	Speaker	Handouts
May 12-16, 1999	Trip to Portland, Oregon, area	Various government, academic, and special-interest speakers on growth management in Washington	1. Charlotte Channing, "Public Sector Slow to Address Economic Issues," <i>Kalamazoo Gazette</i> , May 9, 1999, B1; 2. Hannah McKinney, "Regional Collaboratives: Notes from the Web," May 1999.
June 22, 1999	Bus tour of Kalamazoo County; meeting at Sherman Lake YMCA Retreat Center	Work group members about their own jurisdictions; Hannah McKinney about project outcomes.	1. Notes from Portland meetings; 2. Project timeline; 3. Blaine Lam's mission statement; 4. Judith Innes and David Booker, "Metropolitan Development as a Complex System: A New Approach to Sustainability," <i>Economic Development Quarterly</i> 13, no. 3 (1999): 141-156.
August 8, 1999	Smart growth	Kenn Detloff, McKenna and Associates	1. "Living as One Coalition," Living as One, Archdiocese of Detroit, June 1999; 2. David Rusk, "The Kalamazoo County Compact: A Report by David Rusk," October 1998; 3. Howard Husock and Wendell Cox, "Keeping Kalamazoo Competitive: A Report Prepared by the City of Portage," June 1999.
Sept. 9, 1999	Rusk and Husock; pretest and review project survey instrument	Small group from work group (Rusk and Husock discussion group)	1. Draft of CONVENING OUR COMMUNITY survey
Oct. 11, 1999	Economic development; second review of survey instrument	Barry Broome, Southwest Michigan First	1. Lyle Sumek, "Regional Roundtable III Notes, County Commission papers," 1999; 2. George MacManus, "Report of the Michigan Senate Agricultural Preservation Taskforce," Lansing, Michigan, September 1999; 3. Michigan Association of Realtors, "Principles of Land Use Reform," May 1999.
Nov. 10, 1999	Smart growth in Maryland	John Long, chamber of commerce	
Dec. 2, 1999	Special meeting for student reports on out-county focus groups	Kalamazoo College students	"CONVENING OUR COMMUNITY: Out-County Focus Group Results," December 1999.
Dec. 13, 1999	Passing the Right to Farm Act in the legislature	Rep. Chuck Pericone, speaker of the Michigan House of Representatives	1. Enviro-Mich., SB-205 passes House with minor amendments, October 1999; 2. "Farm Bill Battle Lines Drawn," <i>Kalamazoo Gazette</i> , October 1999, B1; 3. Hannah McKinney, "Proposed Kalamazoo County Community Convention," December 1999.
Feb. 7, 2000	Discussion of <i>Kalamazoo Gazette</i> survey results		CONVENING OUR COMMUNITY Survey: <i>Gazette</i> Survey Results December 1999.
March 8, 2000	Discussion of random survey results; discussion of resources team declarations	Hannah McKinney, Kieran Cunningham	1. CONVENING OUR COMMUNITY Survey: Random Results, March 2000; 2. Declaration Concerning Land Use in Kalamazoo County; 3. Declaration Concerning Economic Development in Kalamazoo County; 4. Declaration Concerning Community Excellence in Kalamazoo County; 5. Declaration Concerning Intergovernmental Cooperation in Kalamazoo County.
April 6-8, 2000	Trip to Madison/Dane County, Wisconsin	Various speakers on regional land use strategies in Dane County	
May 10, 2000	Discussion of community-building initiatives under way in community	Work group	
May 20, 2000	Work group retreat at Sherman Lake YMCA	Work group	

APPENDIX E

DECLARATION CONCERNING LAND USE IN KALAMAZOO COUNTY

We are a group of Kalamazoo County citizens who have been meeting to discuss land use issues as part of the CONVENING OUR COMMUNITY project.

We stand for

- preserving the natural and historic features of our county community
- preserving key open spaces in our community
- revitalizing the urban core of our community
- more coordinated planning by all levels of government and all governmental agencies
- managing growth and planning for the reasonable development of our community
- the creation of as much consensus as possible within the county on land use issues.

We recognize that

- land is a limited resource and we need to use it wisely
- land is, to some extent, recyclable
- population growth is inevitable
- growth means different things to different people
- no consensus exists in our community about how much growth should occur
- household compositions are changing and the number of people in a typical household is growing smaller
- people's preferences about where to live and how to live differ widely and housing choices in our county need to accommodate these preferences
- agencies other than local governmental jurisdictions, for example, the county health department and down-town development authorities, make land use decisions
- land use decisions need to be predictable
- there is a legal division of rights at all levels of governments
- many people will be actively working to change the division of rights between and among local governments
- land use within the county is changing and many people fear or dislike these changes
- state and federal mandates may change (either positively or negatively) our ability to manage land use issues within the county
- land use issues have to be understood within a wider social, economic, and cultural context
- many of the issues underlying land use have to do with the perceptions about safety, school quality, and race and the interaction among these three elements.

We advocate

- the acquisition of key open spaces
- the creation of incentives for acquiring key open spaces by private ventures as well as public
- the availability and use of more coordinated planning in the county
- more imaginative, professional planning in local jurisdictions
- preserving open space and farmland
- the use of voluntary, incentive-driven programs in planning at all levels of government
- the creation of incentives to bring more residents, businesses, and visitors to the core urban areas of our county
- the use of market-based tools and incentives to encourage income diversity in new housing developments
- ensuring that the benefits of better land use planning accrue to all citizens.

We dedicate ourselves to

- creating a county that our children will find attractive and will be an economically viable place to them to live
- continuing informed discussion in a forum in which participants respect differing opinions.

We assert the following principles

- Growth is inevitable.
- Use of the Michigan Natural Features Inventory to identify unique natural features.
- Identification of the important viewsapes, natural, and public features of our community needs to be done.
- Starting with small successes can lead to larger achievements.
- We need to find a consensus balance between the common good and individual rights.
- Creating some sort of demonstration project involving cooperative and creative land use planning techniques can help produce a model for the future.
- Citizens need to be better informed about county and community affairs in general and land use practices in particular.
- Best practices such as cluster zoning, mixed-use zoning, agricultural use assessment should be used here.
- Private property rights need to be respected.
- Any new regulations need to be enforceable as well as enforced.
- We live in an economy driven by the profit motive.
- We need to create incentives that lead to good public policy.
- A variety of land use management strategies is needed.

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