



PM MAGAZINE

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Retooling Property Taxes

Managers—and most residents too—can be excused for not being aware of the property tax remedy because it has rarely been publicized; however, re-engineering the property tax can be successful. This article describes how local governments dug themselves out of a hole by reducing taxes on homes and other buildings and raising taxes on land.
Walter Rybeck, Silver Spring, Maryland.
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FEATURES

Show Them What You Mean*

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Julie Gieseke, San Francisco, California.
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Building Sustainability on a Healthy Foundation

Health issues and planning efforts are linking up.
Nadejda Mishkovsky, Coral Gables, Florida.
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MAPPING the Future in Mahomet

How one village used a nontraditional strategic planning approach to bring the community together to plan its future.
Mell Smigielski, Mahomet, Illinois, and Larry Maholland and Megan Pierce, Aurora, Illinois.
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From the Frying Pan to the Fryer: Practical Tips on Career Advancement from a Recent Graduate

Trying to find a job when nobody was hiring was frustrating for this assistant manager.
J. Scott Sellers, Montrose, Colorado.
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Origins and Principles of Parliamentary Procedure

In the background of all governing body meetings are the rules of parliamentary procedure.
Daniel Fitzpatrick, ICMA-CM, Englewood, New Jersey.
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Community Engagement Comes to Mean a Commitment

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Communities in Dilemma: Catastrophe or Opportunity?

Balancing Act

Fever: Can You Stay Home Tomorrow?

Retirement Strategies

Enhanced Legislation Promotes Saving

Management Minute*

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Short Story*

Smooth Transitions Are Still Possible

Does Your Local Government Use Solar PV Panels on Its Buildings (see Active Living department in the May issue)?

Yes

No

Don't Know

View Results

vote

In Cornelius, Oregon, the community engagement process was an excellent way of starting a process of identifying problems, but it required dedication and resources to follow through.

David Waffle and Dick Reynolds, Cornelius, Oregon, and Claudia María Vargas and Phillip Cooper, Portland, Oregon.

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PM MAGAZINE

COVER STORY

Retrofitting Property Taxes

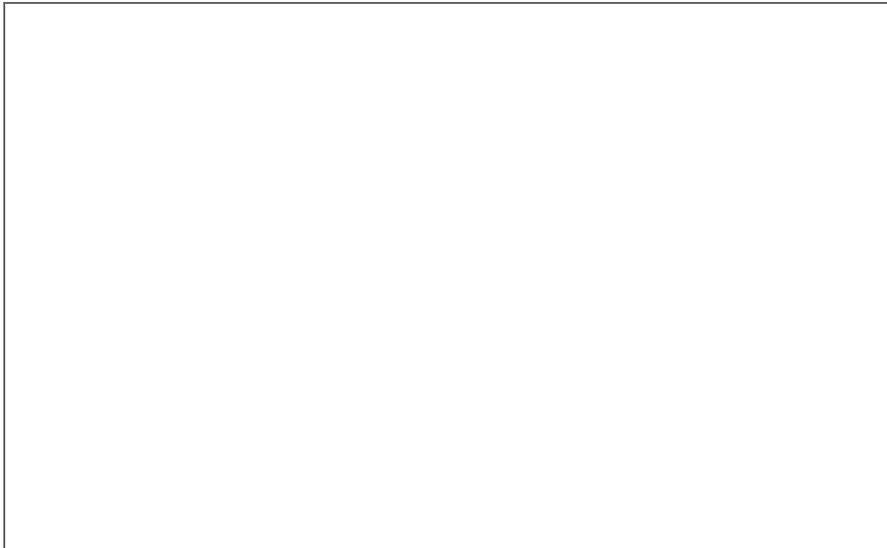
by **Walter Rybeck**

How Re-Engineering the Property Tax Can Be Successful

How did some local governments generate adequate revenue during a failing economy, reduce property taxes for most homeowners, entice new private development without subsidies, retard sprawl, and keep housing affordable? Certainly a timely question. During this prolonged recession, shrinking funds are forcing localities to cut back on services when they are most needed by people suffering from loss of homes and jobs.

Several dozen cities dug themselves out of a hole by re-engineering their property tax. They reduced taxes on homes and other buildings and raised taxes on land. Pennsylvania's capital city demonstrates the potency of this medicine.

In 1980, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, was cited by HUD as one of the nation's most distressed cities. It had lost 800 businesses and a third of its population in 20 years. Mayor Stephen Reed initiated the two-rate tax in



that era, reducing the tax rate on buildings to one-half the rate on land.

Reed, who continued as mayor until January 2010, credits the reform with playing a major part in reversing the city's downward slide. Most of the 5,200 stores and housing units that were boarded-up when he took office are replaced or back in use. Since then, new construction and rehabilitation of existing structures increased the city's taxable real estate from \$212 million to over \$1.6 billion. Businesses on the tax rolls rose from 1,908 to more than 9,100 by the start of 2009. Seeing these positive effects, Harrisburg reduced its tax rate on improvements to one-sixth the rate on land.

Tax hikes on idle sites induced owners to put them to use, discouraging sprawl. Reed said, "Unused urban land is what pushes development into open spaces. Many states try to save farmland by buying development rights. That's expensive. Without spending a dime, we achieved the same goal with our two-tier tax."

Upside-Down Property Tax. The conventional property tax combines two distinct taxes, one on land and one on improvements. Taxpayers dislike the tax on buildings—for good reason. The more they invest, the higher their tax. In contrast, owners who let structures deteriorate are rewarded with lower taxes. Taxing good buildings heavily and poor buildings lightly is like giving blight and slums an engraved invitation to invade a city.

That's only the half of it. The good part of the tax, on land values, generally is too low, especially on vacant sites. Assessors look at the non-existent income streams of bare lots and mistakenly assign low values to them, ignoring

their potential. This promotes land speculation, a prime cause of runaway housing prices, sprawl, and recessions.

How so? Speculators hold prime sites vacant, waiting for population growth and local government services to make these sites more valuable. Plots kept in cold storage create an artificial shortage of developable sites. This drives urban land prices up, drives growth to the outskirts, and fuels more speculation until a boom, based largely on thin air, goes bust.

Virtues of Taxing Land. Taxing land more and buildings less takes the profit out of speculation, putting land users rather than land holders in the driver's seat. Unlike taxes on most anything else, taxes on site values reduce land prices. Good things flow from this remarkable fact, as these examples show.

Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, not only lost jobs when LTV's steel mill closed 20 years ago, a court order reduced LTV's property tax from \$1 million to \$200,000. The city reduced tax rates on buildings, making the tax rate on land 16 times higher than on improvements. This enabled Aliquippa to collect \$450,000 from LTV's valuable site, and it nudged LTV to promptly find new occupants for its plant. Within a few years, the city treasury had a surplus. City Administrator Thomas Stoner says the two-rate tax "favors residences and puts more weight on industrial properties." This Rust Belt city still struggles economically but its housing costs remain affordable.

Peoria, Illinois, adopted tax reform under an enterprise zone law to revive a seven-mile strip of obsolete factories and blighted warehouses. This area along the Illinois River employed 2,000 people in 1980, down from 50,000 in its heyday. Taxes on new or renovated buildings were reduced 75 percent for five years, 50 percent for the next five. Reductions did not apply to land values. The city offered no subsidies to entice new firms. Building activity mushroomed, land values rose, and so did tax revenues. The dollar value of industrial and commercial building permits quickly rose from 8 percent to 29 percent of the citywide total. Tax incentives favoring instead of discouraging growth worked their magic.

Southfield, Michigan, attracted impressive growth after Mayor James Clarkson and assessor Ted Gwartney in the 1960s corrected the city's under-assessment of land. Land was assessed too low at 10 percent of value and buildings too high at more than 70 percent of value. Assessing both at market value touched off dramatic expansion. Average homeowners won a 22 percent tax reduction. Detroit, literally across the street, failed to follow Southfield's lead and was in decline long before the fall of its auto industry. Note that Southfield did not adopt a land tax. Its turnaround came from simply obeying the law of the conventional property tax and assessing both land and improvements at current value.

GETTING STARTED

Local governments can replicate these successes by taking these steps:

1. Get state legislators to permit taxing land and buildings at different rates, if not already allowed.
2. Keep land assessments at current market value to get maximum mileage from the tax. (Inequitable land assessments in 2000 scuttled the two-rate tax in Pittsburgh, which had been a shining example of urban revitalization via tax reform.)
3. Run a computer simulation of a two-rate tax—lower rates on improvements, higher rates on land—to identify who pays more or less, to determine the optimum shift, and to avoid surprises. Organizations like the Center for the Study of Economics in Philadelphia, which designed many of the Pennsylvania reforms, can provide guidance on this phase.
4. Start with a revenue-neutral reform. If the community generates the same tax receipts citywide as under the traditional system, opponents cannot mischaracterize the tax shift as a tax increase.
5. Set land value rates as high as politically feasible. Everybody loves lower taxes on homes. The initial rate on land, however, should not be set so high that owners of vacant sites, whose taxes will rise, might defeat the measure. Once in operation, rate differentials can gradually be widened. In 2009, for example, Altoona, Pennsylvania, expanded its land tax rate to 27 times higher than its tax on buildings; and DuBois, Pennsylvania, last year reduced its building tax rate to only 0.2 percent, so its land tax rate is 44 times higher, or 8.8 percent.

Incentives vs. Police Powers. New London, Connecticut,

Pocketbook Obstacles to Enactment

Landholders with little or no improvements on prime sites pay relatively minimal taxes under the conventional property tax. Shifting taxes off improvements and on to land values means their taxes go up. In Allentown, Pennsylvania, for example, the publisher of the local newspaper held acres of central city sites used for surface parking lots, and he managed for years to get the mayor to veto the two-rate tax approved by a majority of council persons, until council eventually won the day. In West Virginia, powerful coal interests, who pay low taxes on their assets, have consistently blocked the legislature's efforts to give cities and counties the option of using a two-rate tax in that state.

Here is a quick summary of the obstacles:

Obstacle 1: Advantages are not well known.

Remedy: Enable taxpayers to answer, "How will this affect me?" Run a computer simulation of the proposed change, showing who benefits and who pays more. Typically, after a large majority see they will pay less, they tend to favor enactment.

Obstacle 2: Political power of opposition. Real estate interests are among top contributors to political campaigns. Surface parking lot owners, slumlords, or others who pay more under the reform may use their political clout to block enactment.

Remedy: Fortunately, most land speculators in America also tend to be entrepreneurs. So it is important to show them how their tax reductions as business people, and as homeowners too, counteract the higher taxes on their unimproved or under-improved land holdings.

became notorious when the Supreme Court affirmed its right to condemn and replace good homes with commercial development. Widespread outcries arose against such aggressive use of condemnation powers. In July 2009, Governor Jodi Rell signed an act permitting New London to launch a land value tax pilot project that is now being designed. This use of tax reform to stimulate a local economy, as an alternative to manipulation of property rights, will be important to track.

Missing Tool. Harrisburg and the other cities cited used many measures in addition to tax reform to spur renewal, fiscal stability, and economic growth. Their land tax attacked the land speculation that often undermines the effectiveness of those other measures. Shifting taxes off buildings onto land is a vital but missing item in the tool kit of most local governments.

The reform changes urban dynamics. Lower taxes on improvements promote development instead of penalizing it. Higher land taxes return to the local government the site values that result directly from improved public services and facilities. Land taxes also spur in-city growth, opening the way to new enterprises and jobs. They keep housing prices from soaring into the stratosphere—and then tumbling. To save localities and prevent the next crash, the land tax has the earmarks of a reform whose time has come.

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FEATURE

Building Sustainability on a Healthy Foundation

by Nadejda Mishkovsky

Local governments across the United States are beginning to broaden their thinking about public health and to place it in the strategic context of sustainability. They are attacking health-related issues and challenges in a more comprehensive way by linking health with other planning efforts, rather than leaving it exclusively under the purview of health professionals and health departments.

Alarmed by a swift and steep increase in obesity and related chronic conditions including heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers and buoyed by research documenting the strong influence the built environment has on health, local governments are now using an arsenal of tools and policies from such diverse fields as transportation, social services, land use, community design, and energy to improve the public health.

Gaining a Strategic Advantage

Because local government policymakers shape so many aspects of the built environment, there is growing consensus that they should more intentionally use development decisions to achieve public health goals. During the past five to 10 years, planners and transportation professionals have been learning more about how their fields interact with public health through professional articles, conferences, and their own communities. Similarly, public health professionals have been educating themselves on "Land Use 101," transportation planning, and other public policies that influence health outcomes.

Bruce Dart, president of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), describes this kind of cross-fertilization as essential. "There is growing evidence about the health impact of community design decisions, which requires real collaboration among public health and planning practitioners," he said.

The tactics that local governments use to facilitate this collaboration are still evolving. One resource that local governments may find useful as they develop their approach is the Leadership for Healthy Communities Action Strategies Toolkit.

Leadership for Healthy Communities is a \$10 million national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation designed to support local and state government leaders in their efforts to reduce childhood obesity. Released in May 2009, the toolkit provides 10 evidence-based and promising action strategies, numerous policy and program options, tips for getting started, successful local and state examples, and key resources.

The document also provides definitions of key terms and focuses special attention on vulnerable communities. Finally, this resource provides "political cover" for policymakers who may face opposition to their initial efforts, because the toolkit was developed in collaboration with 11 of the nation's leading organizations representing state, local, and school district policymakers, including ICMA. The American Planning Association also has incorporated the first section of the toolkit, which focuses on ways to increase opportunities for active living, into its own resources.

Health Impact Assessment

One of the practices highlighted in the toolkit is the concept of a health impact assessment (HIA), which some communities are using to evaluate the potential public health impacts of new policies or projects. The HIA framework also can help identify long-term health impacts on socially excluded populations and support community engagement in the land use planning process, among other benefits. While HIAs are still an evolving tool, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has identified approximately 56 HIAs that have been completed

HIA Definition
The International Association for Impact Assessment in 1999 adapted from the World Health Organization a definition of a health impact assessment. IAIA defines an HIA as a combination of procedures, methods, and tools that systematically judges the

in the United States since their introduction here some 20 years ago.

San Francisco, California, has perhaps performed the largest number of HIAs in the United States. The city's flagship initiative is the Eastern Neighborhoods Community Health Impact Assessment (ENCHIA), which came about in response to community concerns about inequitable impacts of development. The city convened more than 20 diverse organizations and public agencies to "assess the health benefits and burdens of development" in several neighborhoods as part of the 18-month ENCHIA process.

Broad-based public participation is central to a successful HIA as a way to identify the health issues that are of greatest concern to the public. During the ENCHIA process, the city developed a vision, objectives, supporting policies, and the Healthy Development Measurement Tool (HDMT), which is used to assess progress and evaluate future projects and policies.

HIAs should be used judiciously. "HIAs are only a means to an end. . . . There are many situations where the decision-making process is closed [to health concerns]. We used HIA to open it up," said Rajiv Bhatia, M.D., M.P.H., who is environmental health director for the city of San Francisco. "Now the city's planning department is routinely communicating with the health department, asking for input on a variety of issues."

According to Bhatia, routine HIAs are not as critical in places that already have good design principles and strong communication among departments. However, he added, "where there is a new type of project that has not been done before, or something being done on a really large scale, then it's really important."

Because HIAs can involve extensive time and resources, smaller communities might find it challenging to commit to the same kind of extensive process that San Francisco used with ENCHIA. Smaller communities, however, often have the advantage of more routine and sustainable communication among public departments, allowing health concerns to be integrated into other reviews more easily.

Communities of all sizes also routinely conduct environmental impact assessments, which already include a health component that could be updated and expanded. This kind of approach would facilitate better collaboration between health and land use experts without adding another layer of administration.

Another option is rapid or "desktop" HIAs, which require minimal resources. These assessments involve a brief investigation of health impacts and incorporate a review of existing knowledge, expertise, and research. Decatur, Georgia, partnered with the Georgia Tech Center for Quality Growth and Regional Development to conduct a rapid HIA. The goal was to generate recommendations for improving the design of Decatur's community transportation plan.

The city's draft multimodal plan incorporated complete streets—an approach that broadens the focus of transportation investments and planning to serve pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transportation users as well as motorists—and supported a broader goal of downtown economic revitalization. (For more information, visit www.completestreets.org.) Decatur's rapid HIA process included a scientific literature review and a one-day intensive planning session focused on proposed transportation improvements. The city's labor costs for the effort were approximately \$16,000.

Amanda Thompson, Decatur's planning director, identified some clear lessons about how to present transportation options to the public. "Viewing changes to the transportation system through a public health perspective helps build consensus more effectively than focusing on one mode of travel," such as simply trying to encourage people to bicycle more, she said.

Overall, the biggest impact of the HIA was to build support for the plan's proposed changes. Specifically, the HIA recommended that the city build sidewalks and support safe routes to schools.

potential, and sometimes unintended, effects of a policy, plan, program, or project on the health of a population and the distribution of those effects within the population. An HIA identifies appropriate actions to manage those effects.

For more information on conducting HIAs, locating health data, or understanding the evidence base behind community health indicators, see the Human Impact Project at www.humanimpact.org.

Measuring Progress

Health indicators provide another way to support cross-sectoral collaboration about health concerns and quality of life. But to get a true picture of community health, it is necessary to look beyond such measures of health status as rates of infant mortality or heart disease. Community health indicators, as an alternative, reflect underlying conditions that influence human health.

Park accessibility, for example, has a strong relationship to public health. It is positively associated with increased physical activity as well as with healing; reduced stress and depression; neighborhood cohesion and support (which also improves health); and lower levels of noise, air, and water pollution.

Other issues related to the built environment—housing affordability, mixed land use, crime, and economic status, for example—also have proven relationships with public health outcomes. Community health indicators not only help provide a clearer picture

Bringing Health to Growth Planning
The Alachua County, Florida, Health Care Advisory Board recommended that a new health element be added to the county's comprehensive plan and that it include:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improved access and affordability to a comprehensive array of care, including primary medical care, specialty care, hospital care,

of a community's health status, but they can also encourage cross-departmental collaboration and raise awareness about the way public health and other fields interact to determine quality of life.

Some notable measurement tools incorporate community health indicators and build on the tradition of evidence-based work in the field of public health. These tools can assist local governments in their efforts to improve community well-being.

The ICMA Center for Performance Measurement (CPM) released a new obesity prevention data collection template in June 2009. CPM's templates, addressing everything from road maintenance and law enforcement to libraries and parks, assist local governments with setting targets and assessing their performance on a variety of local government services. ICMA developed the new obesity prevention template in close partnership with the CDC and with input from such ICMA members as Amanda Thompson of Decatur, Georgia, who are committed to community health.

The CPM template measures 24 activities that have been linked to lowering obesity rates. Local governments that are interested in implementing effective strategies to reduce obesity and in measuring their progress over time will find the CPM template to be a valuable resource. The CDC also published the list of measures separately as a report in its July 24, 2009, "[Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)."

San Francisco's ENCHIA process also yielded a grassroots evaluation tool as a by-product of the extensive public participation process. The HDMT uses 125 community-level indicators of health to assist local decisionmakers in evaluating new projects.

San Francisco environmental health director Bhatia notes that, although the HDMT is a local tool reflecting local priorities, "it is also global...The things that are important to healthy neighborhoods are the same around the world." The tool has been used directly or as a template for several other planning efforts in the San Francisco area, as well as by other communities outside the region, from Galveston, Texas, to Geneva, Switzerland.

The Denver Housing Authority has also sponsored a customization of the HDMT to reflect local conditions, data, initiatives, and coordination with other metrics like LEED-ND (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design for Neighborhood Development), a new rating system built around the principles of smart growth and green building, and SSI (the Sustainable Sites Initiative), with its guidelines for developing sustainable landscapes.

Comprehensive Plan Updates

Health impact analysis and metrics are just part of the story. Data from both types of efforts should be integrated with comprehensive planning and policy changes. Across the nation, a growing number of communities are incorporating health goals into their comprehensive plans, adding specific health elements or weaving health measurement objectives and action steps into other types of planning.

Alachua County, Florida, is one place that has been drafting new language for a health element that will be added to its comprehensive plan. In the urban core around the city of Gainesville, existing policies were already supporting activity centers, which were designated as higher-density land uses with mixed-use, compact, and pedestrian-friendly development connected to a multimodal transportation system.

The county received input from its Health Care Advisory Board and other community groups that encouraged planners to develop a health element as part of the county's seven-year plan review. The advisory board suggested that a health element would draw attention to health concerns and help prevent potentially unhealthy impacts of development while also managing growth responsibly.

The challenge will be to integrate it with other elements of the plan, like recreation, transportation, and policies in the future land use element related to such institutional uses as hospitals," said Ken Zeichner, principal planner in the county's growth management department. By addressing health holistically and as a fundamental element of local governance, rather than treating it as a separate and isolated concern, local governments can identify policy gaps and opportunities for collaboration—and cost savings—among departments.

Planning for healthy communities is similar to planning for sustainability. The practical approach to complex health challenges and runaway costs is to tackle the problems head-on, with a comprehensive, multidisciplinary, and prevention-oriented approach. As local governments of all sizes and types gain more experience with health impact assessment, health-oriented performance measurement, and strategic planning, they will help set the foundation for more sustainable communities overall.

dental care, and behavioral health care.<

2. Elimination of preventable chronic illness.
3. Reduced obesity among adults and children.
4. Coordination among local health systems and entities.
5. Enhanced school-based health promotion and activities.
6. Sensitivity to needs of special populations and those populations affected by health disparities; and integrate the issue as appropriate with other pertinent elements of the comprehensive plan.

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PM PLUS

MAPPING the Future in Mahomet

by Mell Smigielski and Larry Maholland and Megan Pierce

Governments are increasingly embracing the idea of strategic planning; however, the results and benefits often fall short of the initial expectation. Why? One reason could be that common strategic planning techniques are just that—too common! Although standard techniques usually adapt well to most situations, they may not always match a government's unique needs. The village of Mahomet, Illinois, was such a situation, and it used a nontraditional strategic planning approach to bring the community together so it could begin proactively planning its future.

Background

Mahomet is a historic community, located near the University of Illinois as well as major highways, rail, and air transport. The school district enjoys an excellent reputation, and the community is known as being family-friendly. As a result of these attributes and the national economic upturn during the mid-2000s, the village had been experiencing rapid growth for several years, and it needed to have a community conversation about what it wanted to become.

The need to engage in planning was not unusual, but an alliance of local leaders and organizations wanted to try a somewhat different approach. Unlike many organizational strategic planning efforts that are singularly focused, this alliance presented a unique opportunity to create a collaborative plan. Because this plan reached beyond village limits, strategies and actions would need to consider varied interests before all sectors in the community could meet on common ground.

Although the Chamber of Commerce spearheaded the initiative, the effort reached across multiple organizations and demographic segments. In fact, the event planning committee included representatives from the Mahomet Area Chamber of Commerce, the village of Mahomet, the University of Illinois, the Mahomet-Seymour Community Unit School District, the Champaign County Forest Preserve District, the Mahomet Public Library District, the Cornbelt Fire Protection District, and Parkland College.

Consequently, the approach to developing a strategic plan would have to engage the entire community. The alliance hired a consulting group that found Future Search to be an ideal method for Mahomet's situation.² Future Search is a highly integrated and interactive approach to planning based on an adaptation of the techniques described as "whole-scale change."³ Whole-scale change uses microcosms of an organization or community to mirror the thinking and operations of an entire group. It builds on the belief that the most effective change occurs when an organization or community includes representation from the diverse voices that contribute to what makes the whole system unique.

In their essence, these components of a Future Search event are simple:

- Convene the whole system.
- Build commitment for the future with the influence of history and global perspectives.
- Find common ground and avoid problem solving.
- Encourage self-management and personal responsibility for action.

January 24–26, 2008
<p>60 people: Seniors, students, residents, business owners, land developers, and elected as well as appointed government officials connecting in self-managed groups.</p> <p>Three days: Sixteen hours of meetings (January 24–26) in a large auditorium decorated with 13 flip-chart easels and walls covered with colored paper.</p> <p>The aim: Plan the future of Mahomet, Illinois.</p> <p>The result: Defined common ground and ownership of projects and actions. As of late 2009, the community continues to build on the results of the Mahomet Area Prosperity Planning 2008 (MAPP 2008) event.</p> <p>What didn't happen: No mention of SWOT, vision, mission, values . . . And they called this strategic planning?</p>

Implementing Future Search depended on the ability of the planning committee and the consulting group to act as the partners. Months of careful designing, planning, and recruiting resulted in a Future Search–based strategic planning event, which was marked by a sense of excitement as participants dedicated their time and resources to build a positive influence for the future of Mahomet.

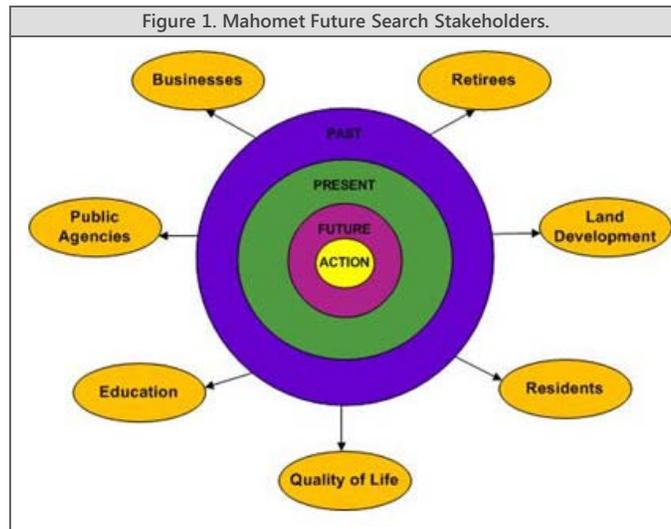
Preliminary Work

The first task was to create a microcosm of the whole system—determining the stakeholder groups that mirrored the composition of the community. Ideally, a Future Search event is conducted with participants working in seven to nine small groups, with approximately eight people in each group.⁴ Each small group is made up of people with similar interests—a stakeholder group (as shown in Figure 1).

The planning committee determined the stakeholder groups by brainstorming, and community members were segmented into several broad areas of interest: retirees, land development, quality of life, residents, businesses, public agencies, and education. Individuals who were willing and had the authority to act were then assigned to each group and subsequently invited to participate in MAPP 2008.

Future Search brings representation from the whole system, but to ensure as wide a range of influence as possible, the committee incorporated Mahomet's first community survey into the process. Response to the survey had been unexpectedly high, with more than 470 responses to the 1,500 surveys distributed.

The basic event format was then laid out to engage these groups so that they could listen to and learn from the concerns and interests of each stakeholder group and eventually arrive at areas of agreement, or common ground. Common ground creates a fertile foundation for developing actions to move the village forward in a positive and cooperative manner. A day-to-day description of the major activities demonstrates how MAPP was conceptually different.



Day 1

Finding the shared past. Approximately 60 people gathered in a room where the walls were covered with blank timelines from 1977 to present. As the past is the prelude to the future, participants were initially engaged to focus on the past by writing on the timelines their thoughts about personal histories, key world events, and milestones in the life of Mahomet.



Mahomet residents reflect on event timeline.

The personal event timeline was filled with such milestones as marriages, children, home construction, job changes, and business start-ups.

On the world event timeline, participant notes started to reflect common themes—political shifts, technology advancement, natural disasters, cultural changes, and communication evolutions.

The Mahomet event timeline plotted shared events, ranging from the first stoplight going up to the McDonald's opening; it even included descriptions of changes in community values. This timeline truly showed the flow of development that brought Mahomet to 2008 and the need for a strategic plan.

With a written, common history hanging before them, participants gathered in seven different stakeholder groups to

reflect on their creations and share stories. Small groups summarized their reflections and then returned to the large group to discuss what all had noticed and learned and where the shared past emerged.

Mahomet was frequently described as a rural community that had grown up to be a bedroom community—attracting people with its schools, a sense of community and safety, and recreational opportunities. Attendee Liz Jones stated, "Mahomet is a community of growth, hope, and great friendships."⁵

Clarifying the present. To clarify today's picture, participants ventured into a group brainstorming session using a technique called mind mapping.⁶ Mind maps are a tool for thinking and processing a huge amount of information, which can then be displayed to see patterns and interconnected ideas. Instead of simply making notes, participants tap into nonlinear thinking patterns, where they can better organize and analyze trends.

The words "Mahomet's Future" were placed at the center of a large piece of paper, and macro trends (social, economic, environment, demographics, housing, technology, and political) called out by participants formed the main lines and were supported by micro trends (connected by lines and arrows). Armed with sticky dots color coded according to stakeholder group, people took turns approaching the mind map to rank trends by their perceived impact on Mahomet in the future.

Day 2

At the beginning of the second day, participants contemplated the mind map. Participants identified those economic, political, and demographic trends that they believed had the most potential to divide, rather than unite, the community, and it was agreed the community should focus on influencing the trends where the majority of stakeholders could reach consensus. It was also noted that the trends with the most colored dots might be the areas where real progress could be made because those areas appeared to be where common ground existed.



Participants work on the mind map.

Dialogue about the temperature of the community at large (gauged from the results of the community survey) served as a backdrop for the second day's final activity, which focused on "prouds and sorries."

Participants accepted their feelings, both positive and negative, about the current state of the village. Groups made lists: one detailing what participants were proud of and a second presenting the issues or things they were sorry about. Converging again into a large group, participants commented about prouds they would carry forward as well as certain sorries they did not want to repeat.

Picturing the future. Participants started to focus forward by placing themselves 15 years into the future and imagining that their dream for Mahomet had come true in 2023. Groups were asked to brainstorm a list of the key accomplishments, such as notable programs, policies, relationships, and structures that would have occurred in Mahomet since MAPP 2008. A second brainstorm list was also requested; this one was supposed to outline the major barriers that would need to be overcome in those 15 years to reach the ideal future.

Instead of merely presenting a summary of this discussion and describing their future scenarios, groups were requested to develop a creative way to present their vision in order to describe a concrete image of 2023. In crafting their scenarios, groups were asked to make them feasible, desirable, and motivating, but they were not restricted by cost or difficulty associated with actual accomplishment.

One group set its scenario at a 2023 debate that was part of a mayoral election. The challenger was advocating a return to old ways, where change was frowned on and Mahomet was a sleepy bedroom community; the incumbent was describing all that had occurred during his tenure—including the construction of a hotel, a mixed-use commercial and residential development, new restaurants, a technology park, and even a water park.



One group's drawing of a scenario for the future.

Another group presented MAPP as the acorn that established a comprehensive vision that eventually grew into a beautiful and mature tree. The tree had a strong trunk of core values and branched out to provide the Mahomet area with commercial, industrial, and residential growth as well as a high quality of life, excellent educational opportunities, and government cooperation.

Energized with the possibilities, participants began to transform ideals into ideas by confirming common ground. They first listed the shared values that underlie what everyone wanted and, second, they drafted the projects that would allow them to make what they desired a reality. Because participants were working in their mixed groups, they were permitted to keep a third list of any guiding principles or specific projects where common ground was not yet possible.

Common ground grew as mixed groups combined and merged their lists. The resulting ideas were transferred onto cards and placed on the wall for all to see.

Day 3

Action planning. With a narrowed focus on the common themes presented by the neatly arranged colored cards, participants circled their chairs in stakeholder groups and started their action planning. Each person needed to identify short-term (six months) and long-term (up to three years) actions that they were personally willing to commit to at MAPP 2008. Stakeholders outlined their actions in the form of (1) what would be done, (2) what help or other input was required, and (3) the date by which the action would be complete.

After hearing group reports about projects that were being formulated, participants moved freely and collaborated with any other individual or group in a second round of action planning. Some found additional projects of interest and others joined those who were working on similar ideas to avoid duplicate efforts. People were free to commit to be part of a group's plan, outline their own path, or simply contribute to the other ideas being formulated. Action planning sheets were completed with a description of the initiative, action owner, time frame, and other committed participants.



One member of the community presents action plan to large group.

In the same big circle where MAPP 2008 had commenced two days before, participants listened intently as their peers stood individually and put a "stake in the ground" by committing to take action. The group heard of detailed plans for a youth center, concepts for a community marketing plan, steps to bring about more recreation opportunities and to extend the bike paths, among many others.

While the diverse group of 60 people could be seen moving in and out of groups, sketching, performing skits, writing on flip charts, observing, discussing, and reporting during three days, what they really had been immersed in was learning, dreaming, and planning with the other members of their community.

Even those who did not publicly announce a project or personal action plan could reflect on and appreciate the importance of MAPP 2008. They had come together and communicated openly about their future and found they shared common interests and values. These stakeholders had defined a common ground and started in a direction where their community ideals were being translated into actions and where they could plant seeds for the vibrant future to which Mahomet aspires.

Postscript

Although January 26, 2008, marked the conclusion of the MAPP event, the strength of the working relationships and commitment to move Mahomet forward have endured. As expected, some of the people, structures, and tactics to achieve those commitments have changed. Planning committee member Merle Giles noted, "If nothing else comes out of this effort except that people come together and begin talking about Mahomet's future, then this will have been a success," but it can safely be said that Mahomet has seen benefit beyond brainstorming.

The original core volunteer MAPP board, established to oversee all other groups, needed to be supported by a more formalized organizational structure and was eventually absorbed by the newly created economic development commission (EDC)—an initiative that grew from the MAPP event. The EDC is able to facilitate ongoing collaboration and support a diverse volunteer base because its director splits working hours between the village and the Chamber of Commerce.

The EDC has absorbed some projects that had lost traction. Some initial MAPP leaders have shifted roles, but others have picked up new responsibilities.

The construction of a new youth center was one of the most ambitious plans outlined at MAPP 2008. Like many development projects, it has been delayed by a change of location, but the center will still be built and offer area youth entirely new facilities—including a gymnasium—and a place to gather. Another group still active and working closely with the EDC is the Beautification Committee, which is securing property and funding to construct entrance signs at major village gateways as well as organizing a community cleanup to precede the annual Sangamon River Music Festival in August.

For the village, the event was an important milestone on the road to a new beginning. Staff made contacts with people in other agencies and, armed with the first area survey, also developed a common understanding of community priorities. Leaders sense a more united Mahomet, where participants and volunteers have broken down some historical barriers to collaboration.

For instance, MAPP created a greater understanding between new residents and those with deep roots. Deb Braunig, mayor of Mahomet, described the event this way: "I saw a transformation take place over these three days. We are definitely at the 'dream with no limits' stage, with a commonsense element applied to how to get there."⁷ Today, having developed a shared past and a common present, all can work toward a more focused and sustainable future.

¹ Eric Trist, a facilitator who has used the Future Search methodology.

² Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff, *Future Search: An Action Guide to Finding Common Ground in Organizations and Communities*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2000).

³ Dannemiller Tyson Associates, *Whole-Scale Change: Unleashing the Magic of Organizations* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2000).

⁴ Weisbord and Janoff, *Future Search*, 133.

⁵ Cailin Bundrick, "MAPP 2008 Spurs Groups into Action," Mahomet Citizen, February 4, 2008.

⁶ Tony Buzan, *The Mind Map Book: How to Use Radiant Thinking to Maximize Your Brain's Untapped Potential, with Barry Buzan* (New York: Dutton, 1994).

⁷ Bundrick, "MAPP 2008 Spurs Groups into Action."

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From the Frying Pan to the Fryer: Practical Tips on Career Advancement from a Recent Graduate

by J. Scott Sellers

Public sector . . . private sector . . . public sector? In March 2006, I was one month away from graduating with an MPA from Brigham Young University (BYU) and had no prospects for employment. I was currently interning in city management and hoped to find a permanent position soon. Every evening I would put the kids to bed, get online, and begin surfing all of the public sector job sites that I could think of. It seemed I was caught in the classical catch-22 of looking for an entry-level job that required at least three to five years of experience. I was ready to give up on the public sector and begin searching elsewhere for employment. Had I persevered this far just to regret my decision to get an MPA?

As I was about to retire from my virtual pavement pounding one night, my older sister signed into Instant Messenger from Chicago. I unloaded on her my frustrations of trying to find a job when nobody was hiring. I explained how I had even considered private sector positions but that the MPA did not translate well to the corporate world. How was I going to provide for my family after my internship ended? Stepping back into the role of Big Sister, she asked me, "Just what is an MPA, and why would you want to be a city manager?"

Choosing an MPA

My path into the public sector started in eighth grade although I did not know it at the time. I needed some volunteer hours in anticipation of my Eagle Scout advancement, so I volunteered to be the computer specialist on the Bountiful, Utah, City Youth Council. Although I contributed toward several great community projects, I finished the year without any idea of how the city was managed.

During my first two years of college I had no career prospects. I was newly married and needed a steady nine-to-five job that could provide enough income for a family. After six declared majors I finally settled on recreation management (not necessarily the quintessential day job, but it would get me through college!). To validate my decision, I interviewed several recreation directors in nearby communities. One director referred me to Ricky Horst, the city manager of South Jordan, Utah, who had begun his career as a recreation director.

As I walked into Mr. Horst's office I was immediately envious of the inviting atmosphere. The room was spacious and accentuated with oak furniture, comfortable leather chairs, and large sun-filled windows. Ricky explained how he had spent the first portion of his career mowing lawns (at times with his own mower), working late hours, and receiving little pay. Sure, he enjoyed it, but now he was working daytime hours, was better able to provide for his family, and made decisions that positively influenced the entire community! Incredibly, after this discussion, it still did not occur to me to pursue an advanced public administration degree.

After graduating, I took the rather non-recreational job of working as a financial adviser for the MONY Group. Although this job gave me the finance experience I would later appreciate, it was commission-based and provided me with only a paltry stipend that depleted after six months. I calculated that I was working for about 50 cents an hour. To make matters worse, the office was an hour's drive from my little apartment. My wife had recently given birth to our first child, and our financial and emotional reserves were exhausted.

In absolute desperation—and with a prayer in my heart—I sequestered myself in a room one evening and navigated to BYU's online graduate catalog. I began reading at the top of the list—accounting, anthropology, Arabic. I read each of the course descriptions and, one by one, concluded that I was not a candidate for any of these degrees. By the time I reached the letter P I knew I was destined to become an organ-grinder.

But suddenly I began reading about the most incredible program—public administration. All of the right buzzwords were in the course descriptions: altruism, service, community, family, stability, and so forth. I noticed that the program was part of the Marriott School of Management and required a strong quantitative background—something I had successfully avoided while pursuing my degree in recreation management.

Undaunted, the following day I picked up the phone and made an appointment to talk to the admission committee. A few days later I spoke with each faculty member on the committee, explaining why I would be a good fit for the program. Amazingly, they took me at my word and accepted me with a scholarship.

Gaining Practical Experience

When I began the MPA program in 2004, I still did not fully grasp what a local government manager was, but at least I had two years to find out. The program was brutal, requiring 18 credits per semester plus an internship. After the first semester, an opportunity arose for a group of students to conduct a build-out analysis for the city of Syracuse, Utah. I immediately volunteered along with five others. We combined this project with course projects that were due from such other classes as statistics, quantitative analysis, and budgeting. Through this hands-on experience, I began to understand the complexities of local government.

During the two years of my graduate program, I volunteered for everything I could think of. I began a year-long paid internship with the city of Lehi, Utah, which taught me the budgeting process and honed my newly acquired statistical skills. I was also able to work on a budget document that received the Government Finance Officers Association Distinguished Budget Presentation Award.

I worked with another team of graduate students analyzing the feasibility of a business improvement district for the city of Payson, Utah. For the city of Alpine, Utah, I wrote the parks and recreation element of its general plan (who says undergraduate degrees aren't worth much?). I was also elected by my peers to serve as the class president.

Finding Employment

During the last months of the MPA program, I networked with everybody I could think of in hopes of landing my first job. The golden contact turned out to be my older sister, which brings me back to our earlier conversation. As we continued chatting online that night, I told her about the incredible experiences I had enjoyed during the MPA program. I explained that being a city manager is an incredibly stressful—yet rewarding—responsibility but is driven by an intense desire to serve and enhance the quality of life for a community. I also told her that I did not want to abandon this career path but that things weren't panning out as planned. After a brief pause, she said that what I had just spoken about sounded similar to the job her coworker's brother-in-law had. She said that she would e-mail him and ask if he would offer me some career advice.

The next day, I received a phone call from the Centralia, Illinois, city manager, Grant Kleinhenz. He told me about receiving an e-mail from my sister and understood that I was searching for a job. He also informed me that he was actively recruiting an assistant city manager and that he would love to see my résumé (which I quickly e-mailed after I hung up). A month later I was in Centralia, Illinois, interviewing for the position, and a month after that I began my career in public administration.

A Variety of Projects and Responsibilities

With the experience I had gained during my internships, I immediately began work on the creation of a citizen survey. I also developed a budget document that won another GFOA Distinguished Budget Presentation Award. I created a capital improvements program, strategic plan, and a performance measurement system that won special recognition awards from GFOA for both capital improvements and performance measures. The performance measurement system also won the Certificate of Achievement from ICMA's Center for Performance Measurement.

The city had an untouched fund that was collecting revenues from a cable franchise agreement. I was able to use a portion of these funds to begin a city-operated cable network. The city began broadcasting its council meetings as well as community events and capital project updates. I also gained valuable experience in easement acquisition, property appraisals, annexations, website development, street and waterline projects, and department head supervision.

The most beneficial responsibility I had in Centralia was to work on various economic development initiatives. I attended courses and ultimately graduated from the University of Oklahoma Economic Development Institute. I also attended classes relating to economic development at the ICMA annual conferences.

Putting my education to practice, I worked closely with the city manager, community development director, and economic development director to create two tax increment financing districts and enterprise zone incentives. We bought, sold, and rehabilitated commercial and residential properties downtown, all while making needed streetscape improvements that enhanced the walkability and viability of the heart of the city.

Moving Up

After two wonderful years in Centralia, I heard the great Rocky Mountains calling my name. I found Montrose, a mid-sized city in the heart of Colorado that was hiring for an assistant city manager, and submitted my résumé. The city

was looking for economic development experience and on the strength of my tenure in Centralia I was selected from a pool of 104 candidates.

Now, after a year in Montrose, I have accomplished what I only dreamed about three years ago. We had our fourth child six months ago, and I am on a steady income with steady hours. I never dreamed how amazing the local government profession would be—and I love every minute of it. Sure, work can be stressful at times, but I don't know of another profession that offers the quality of life, the responsibility, and the rewards of local government management.

I reflect back on those difficult job-searching months, and I am grateful that I stuck with the public sector. Although every individual's path will be different, the journey is definitely worth it!

13 Tips for Upward Movement

1. Fill your plate, and then some. The practical experience you will gain from a wide variety of projects will set you apart from the rest. You must show that you are willing to go well above and beyond the norm to be noticed.
2. Request high-level projects. Managers want to know how many successful—and important—projects you have directly supervised. If you aren't gaining that experience now, find an unmet need that fits your abilities and talents and propose a project to the manager.
3. Education and training are indispensable. Although it might not fit the budget, extra credentials and certifications enhance a résumé. I highly recommend gaining as much economic development training as possible. An understanding of statistics is also a great asset to a community. Other credentials you might want to work toward would be the Certified Public Manager credential, the Certified Economic Developer credential, and the ICMA Credentialed Manager.
4. Learn Spanish. I interrupted my college education for two years to live in Peru. Speaking Spanish has helped me a great deal on the job, allows me to interact with most members of the community, and it looks great on a résumé.
5. Gain as much economic development and budgeting experience as possible. Did I already mention this? Typical local government managers spend a majority of their time on these two functions.
6. Strengthen your résumé with awards and recognition. Remember, you are trying to prove that you are management material.
7. Write a grant. A successful grant can more than make up the cost of your salary, which looks impressive to those deciding on your employment.
8. Be willing to relocate. My wife and I were adamant about living near family until the perfect job opened in the Midwest. This proved to be a great move for our little family, and we are now content to be five hours away from our families.
9. Select good references. Listing college professors and family friends on your résumé signals that you are inexperienced. If you don't know any managers, then introduce yourself to some and offer your assistance on a project.
10. Read, read, read! In addition to reading biographies and history, familiarize yourself with current events. Read the local newspaper and the newspaper where you have job interviews. Also read minutes of council meetings to become familiar with local issues.
11. Don't text message and chat online while at work. If you have time to burn then you are squandering an opportunity to impress senior management (and wasting taxpayer dollars). In the current market, those who are ambitious and eager for assignments will surpass those who wait to be asked. It is difficult to obtain a positive reference from a manager who thinks you are wasting time.
12. Don't give up! After months of searching without any luck, I was ready to defect to the private sector or to the state or federal sector. With persistence, you will be rewarded.
13. Relax. Don't expect to hop into the perfect job right out of college or to have the understanding of a seasoned manager. After three years, I am finally beginning to understand many of the complexities that a manager faces every day. Don't be afraid to ask questions and take risks, and don't be discouraged if you are completely baffled by certain issues. Experience will bring more confidence and ability, which in turn will open new opportunities to expand your experience.

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Origins and Principles of Parliamentary Procedure

by Daniel Fitzpatrick, ICMA-CM

Article 1 of the ICMA Code of Ethics tells us that we shall "Be dedicated to the concept of effective and democratic local government by responsible elected officials...." As local government managers, we work behind the scenes to provide stable administration and the information that policy makers need to be effective. How do we help them in the actual deliberative process? Are we doing all we can do to aid the governing body to be responsible elected officials?

As a city manager with more than 30 years of service I have strived to provide governing bodies with the best possible service. I have worked to create an atmosphere of professionalism, trust, and teamwork. I have provided information and been quick to follow through on policy decisions. Recently, I have added another tool to my arsenal. I have learned and effectively used parliamentary procedure to help governing bodies through their deliberative process.

In this profession, I know that council meetings are a way of life. In the background of all governing body meetings are the rules of parliamentary procedure. Until I began a formal study of parliamentary procedure, I was in the dark about its origins, fundamental principles, and overall benefits. This article will review the history of parliamentary procedure, its basic principles, and the benefits that both the governing body members and the public will receive if it is used correctly.

Development of Parliamentary Procedure

There is no record of parliamentary procedure before 750 B.C. Parliamentary law began with the idea of self-government instituted by the Greeks. The Athens general assembly held scheduled meetings, a quorum was necessary to conduct business, votes were taken by a show of hands or a type of ballot, and most decisions were by majority vote. Governing rules were further developed by the Romans around 450 B.C. for use in the Roman Forum. The first record of the delaying tactic of the filibuster was in the Roman Republic.

Two thousand years after the Greeks and Romans instituted the concept of parliamentary law and democratic processes, members of the British Parliament as early as the 13th century expanded and put to use the principles of parliamentary procedure. They developed principles such as considering only one subject at a time, alternating between pro and con during debate, and confining debate to the merits of pending questions.

When the young colonies in North America needed rules of democratic assembly, they imported the rules used by the British Parliament. The word parliamentary is a derivative of the French word parler—to speak, discuss, or deliberate.

The first parliamentarian of the young United States was Thomas Jefferson. Seeing that the British rules were not adequate for the new nation, he authored the nation's first rules of parliamentary procedure, called *A Manual of Parliamentary Practice for the Use of the Senate of the United States*.

Jefferson himself described his intentions for the manual: "I have begun a sketch, which those who come after me will successively correct and fill up, till a code of rules shall be formed for the use of the Senate, the effects of which may be accuracy, uniformity, and impartiality." The parliamentary rules used in Congress today are a result of Jefferson's first work. The original manual is still in print and is now called *Jefferson's Manual*.

As the new country grew, its social institutions began to develop. *Jefferson's Manual* was not applicable to the many charitable, political, social, religious, and professional organizations that were expanding rapidly throughout America. A first attempt to develop a more comprehensive manual was made by Luther Cushing, clerk of the Massachusetts House of Representatives.

It was during the Civil War that a young army officer was to make a decision that would have a profound impact on modern parliamentary law. Henry M. Robert, a West Point graduate, accepted an invitation to preside at a meeting.

The resulting chaos caused by misbehaving participants dedicated the young Robert to the study of parliamentary law.

In 1876, Robert self-published the *Pocket Manual of Rules of Order for Deliberative Assemblies*. This work was the beginning of the most widely used manual today, *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (RONR)*. *RONR* is used by more than 90 percent of all deliberative assemblies in the United States. *RONR* is updated every 10 years, with a new edition scheduled for 2011.

Other parliamentary authorities in use today are The *Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure* (also called simply *Standard Code*) by Alice Sturgis, now revised by the American Institute of Parliamentarians. When it was published in 1950, *Standard Code* was welcomed for its simplicity and streamlining compared with *RONR*. *Mason's Manual of Legislative Procedure* was developed for state legislatures and is used by many but not all state legislative bodies.

The basis of parliamentary law is to provide a guide for how to avoid the confusion and chaos that result when members of a group do as they please. General Robert said, "Where there is no law, but every man does what is right in his own eyes, there is the least real liberty." The goals are to protect both minority members by allowing debate on all issues and absent members by providing proper notice of fundamental changes, all while assuring the full expression of the will of the majority. The foundation of democracy and self-government calls for the minority, no matter how certain they are of their position, to consent to the rule of the majority.

Parliamentary Procedure

The theory and goals of parliamentary laws result in the underlying principles of parliamentary procedure. These 10 rules are common to all of the parliamentary procedure authorities.

The organization is paramount compared with the individual. The purpose of all parliamentary rules is to protect the organization. The process trumps the results. In parliamentary law, the end can never justify the means; in fact, the means are paramount.

All members are equal. There is a tendency of group dynamics that can lead to unfair treatment of certain participants. George Orwell noted in *Animal Farm*, "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others." Parliamentary procedure, properly applied, assures equal treatment to all participants.

A quorum must be present to conduct business legally. As a city manager, I have witnessed the difficulty of getting a quorum, sometimes on the very occasion you need it the most. This requirement prevents the agenda from being hijacked by a minority.

Only one main proposal may be considered at a time. Imagine the confusion if we debated or voted on more than one issue at a time. One main motion, with the appropriate secondary motions to assist the deliberative process, assures a focus and an efficient process.

Only one member may speak at a time. That is, there can be only one issue under discussion at a time and one speaker at a time. It may seem like common sense, but we have all witnessed discussions where the group descends into the chaos of many persons speaking at the same time. It is the duty of the presiding officer to assure that all members have the right to be heard.

Debate is allowed on all motions, unless forbidden. All main motions (that is, motions of policy) allow for debate. Secondary motions authorized in the adopted parliamentary authority may not allow debate. The motion to "call the question," for example, is not debatable because debate would defeat its purpose, which is to cut off debate; it requires an immediate vote and a two-thirds majority to pass. Debate would defeat the purpose of the secondary motions to adjourn, recess, or lay on the table.

Parliamentary law insists on dignity in debate. Members' names may not be used and personal criticism is out of order. No matter how hotly contested an issue may be, we still have to live with our colleagues after the issue is resolved.

A question, once decided, cannot come back for reconsideration during the same session. Imagine the confusion, frustration, and time wasted if motions contradicting recently passed motions (during the same meeting or session) were allowed. A minority with two votes could tie up a meeting indefinitely.

A majority vote decides, unless a greater percentage is called for. In nongovernmental organizations, majority votes decide most decisions unless the bylaws or the parliamentary authority provides otherwise. Local governments, because they are subject to state laws (Dillon's Rule) as well as their own charters and bylaws, are more restricted. General resolutions and ordinances usually require a majority vote, with two-thirds required for bonding.

Most organizations name a parliamentary authority in their bylaws. Many states require organizations to select a parliamentary authority. Local governments name a parliamentary authority in their bylaws or charters. The majority of local governments use *Robert's Rules of Order*. I have personal knowledge of one city that uses *Standard Code*. When people find out I am an accredited parliamentarian, they usually have a question about one rule or another. My first response is to always ask which parliamentary procedure their organization has adopted.

It is incumbent on all members of a representative body to understand the basic rules of their parliamentary authority. It is especially important for the presiding officer to have a working knowledge of the parliamentary rules. This enables the presiding officer to lead the group toward productive meetings.

Many people are intimidated by the 704 pages of *RONR*, with another 48 pages of charts. *RONR*'s size and complexity do not need to be a problem. Except for those who are professional parliamentarians, the shorter *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, In Brief (RONRIB)* should be sufficient. *RONRIB* addresses most situations that the average governing body encounters, all in 197 pages, graphs included.

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Community Engagement Comes to Mean a Commitment

by David Waffle and Dick Reynolds and Claudia María Vargas and Phillip Cooper

I was only one month into my new job as city manager of Cornelius, Oregon, when I accepted an invitation arranged earlier by the previous city manager. I bravely said yes, not really knowing what it was about. All I knew was that it involved faculty from Oregon Health Science University (OHSU), it had something to do with children with disabilities, Spanish-English translators were going to be provided, and it was going to be held at a Catholic church. At the least, it was a way to size up the community. I asked the planning manager to go along.

What a fascinating experience that day was then—and for the next three years. This invitation facilitated a commitment to parents and their children with disabilities who often have difficulties obtaining medical services and who have too often been ignored by the community. Along the way, we've breached some of the service gaps, developed community leaders, and even learned to eat Guatemalan chicken pepián.

We also created a process that generated more than 900 letters in support of pedestrian improvements on a busy state highway, found witnesses willing to support our case in discussions with political figures and funding agencies, and provided opportunities for about 50 clinical trainees to gain experience working directly with children with developmental, cognitive, behavioral, and physical disabilities in a community setting, where they usually have to overcome cultural and language barriers. And we have the video to prove it!

The Setting: A Community Challenged in Many Ways

Cornelius is a far western suburb of Portland, Oregon, with 11,000 residents. Initially an agricultural town, it has become a bedroom community that bears the burden of being below average on almost every socioeconomic health and wealth indicator. You name it, Cornelius has the challenging stats: a full 30 percent of the households have a disabled family member, low educational achievement, low per capita income, and large household size with extended families.

In two of the elementary schools, all of the students qualify for the free school lunch program. We are a diverse community with half or more Latino residents and a history of diversity issues. In addition to our diversity, one of the positive indicators is a very high degree of home ownership because housing has remained relatively affordable. Cornelius has a group of wonderful and talented people who needed to find ways to engage.

Community Engagement: A Positive Force

Community engagement is a participatory community process that reminds us that we can all learn from each other. It requires systematic probing, concentrated listening to the concerns of community members, and dialogue about possible solutions. It is an iterative process that brings together a diverse group of stakeholders to identify problems and generate strategies to meet them. Like so many community participation efforts, its success or failure depends on the commitment and perseverance of community members, government officials, service providers, and clinical trainees and faculty.

On the morning of March 9, 2006, at St. Alexander's Catholic Church, about 25 parents met with several OHSU faculty, a dozen clinical trainees from different specialties in the LEND (Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Other Related Disabilities) Program, other CDRC (Child Development and Rehabilitation Center) professionals, a half dozen service providers from transportation, education, and health agencies, two city employees, and the local priest. Coincidentally, the church had recently founded a group focused on families with children with disabilities.

The community engagement process began with families listing the positive aspects of living in Cornelius as well as identifying challenges their children with disabilities face. The first bit of good news was that these families, who might have criticized local conditions, had a host of good things to say about the strengths of their community. Then we went back and forth in English and Spanish, listening to parents talk about their frustrations in seeking medical attention and accessing local services for their children's varied disabilities.

I strained to comprehend with my limited Spanish language skills, although fresh from some community college classes. That morning, we became acquainted with the facilitator of the community engagement forum, Dr. Vargas, CDRC/OHSU faculty, and her colleague, Dr. Cooper, CDRC/OHSU and Portland State University (PSU).

After a morning of listening and watching the students fill flip charts with comments or concerns, we were treated to a lunch from the church's kitchen. During the lunch period, students sorted and prioritized the comments to arrive at several broad themes to be addressed by the service providers. The barriers to service identified by the parents were in seven areas: health care, education, employment, transportation, recreation, housing, and public places.

Planning Manager Dick Reynolds and I heard the responses of other service providers, and then it was time for us—the representatives of the city—to respond about how we might work to overcome barriers. Reynolds described how the city was in the midst of designing a project on Oregon Highway 8, a road that bisects the town and that carries more than 40,000 vehicles per day, that is not accessible, and that lacks pedestrian improvements. We noted an intermittent network of sidewalks that stopped and started at inopportune locations, leaving gaps and making travel on foot, via a wheelchair, or on a bicycle treacherous.

Highway 8 (OR 8) serves as the main street of Cornelius and connects Centro Cultural (a community center), the Virginia García Memorial Health Center (a community health center that has its origins in the migrant agricultural camps), Oregon's largest Latino-themed grocery store, along with an elementary school, library, city hall, many small businesses, and one of the region's most popular bus lines. It is worth noting that the clinic was founded by community members and families outraged over the death of Virginia García, a six-year-old girl, daughter of migrant workers, who died from lack of health care in 1983.

An Obligation to Follow Up

Reynolds and I felt a need to follow up on our pledge to work with these families at least as far as obtaining their input for the sidewalk improvements. I saw it as a way for a new city manager to instantly engage with the community. But could we make something happen? The city agreed to host an initial meeting of a steering committee that consisted of parents, providers, LEND trainees, Vargas, and Cooper. We've continued to meet almost every month—on weekends to accommodate partners and parents—since the initial event in 2006. The steering committee adopted the name: The Cornelius Committee: A Vision of an Accessible Community/Comité de Cornelius: Una Visión para una Comunidad Accesible.

That sense of obligation has become an enlightened commitment. City staff has served as facilitators and hosts. Together, we have brought forth project ideas and in return have enjoyed collaboration and problem solving. I use the term "enlightened" because all of the participants have gotten something back for their investment of time and other resources. There is "value" gained from the participation and sharing.

Illustrative Projects

To illustrate the value that the parties have gained from the community engagement process, we offer five examples.

1. Día del Niño/Day of the Child Celebration: An opportunity to build inclusion and community. The Day of the Child, held annually on the last Saturday of April, is an international tradition that began in Mexico in 1925. Locally, it has been hosted by Centro Cultural and the Cornelius Public Library for more than a decade.

One of the purposes for the event in Cornelius was to build community and cross barriers, so it came as a bit of a surprise when parents on our steering committee noted that it was difficult for the children with disabilities to participate in the activities and also that they did not feel welcome. Working with a new library director, parents, LEND trainees and faculty, the leaders at Centro Cultural and the Day of the Child planning committee were persuaded to accommodate new activities for all children. The theme of the event became "Equal Rights, Different Abilities/Diferentes Habilidades, Iguales Derechos."



Photo credit: Ana Brouwer, 2008 AmeriCorps Volunteer..

The 2008 event drew a record crowd of some 3,000 children and adults for a parade, games, food, and other activities. Cooperative efforts were launched to ensure that the venue was accessible and that there were activities specifically aimed at engaging children with disabilities. The surprise was that, because those activities were fun and interactive, many typically developing children were attracted to those events.

In 2009, the event again went well, with an emphasis on the children of the area who experience homelessness. The event has become more multicultural and has benefited from the larger venue at a local park.

2. Baseline Street Improvements: Not participation to force city action but mutual cooperation for important city efforts. Cornelius applied for a \$3.2 million grant for improving a 10-block section on the eastbound, one-way portion of Oregon Highway 8, which is the portion that serves as "Main Street." We asked the parents if they could assist us with a few letters of support for the project to demonstrate community support and specifically underline the need for pedestrian improvements.

We were overwhelmed by the response—more than 900 letters of support in two languages! In one of those moments of happenstance, a leadership group at the local Catholic Church was looking for a community project to demonstrate its skills, and church members gathered letters of support for the street project. During a three-week period, a dozen volunteers generated a form letter and distributed it at several churches, a local clinic, Centro Cultural, and other locations.

City staff gathered up the letters and proudly presented the large stack at the public hearing for the Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program grants. It was an impressive display. Still more impressive was the testimony Consuelo Arauza, a committee member, provided in advocating for her community.

Through an interpreter, she testified how difficult it was for her teenage son, Juan, to travel on a wheelchair over the streets and sidewalks of Cornelius. She ended her testimony with an invitation to Metro councilmembers to tour her community in a wheelchair, and one councilmember publicly accepted her invitation. At the end of his wheelchair tour, the councilor observed: "I guess what's good for Juan, is good for all."

The support for city grants was impressive, and the city will use the grant in 2011 to rebuild the street with sidewalks, street trees, and underground utilities to implement main-street design standards. Another collaborative effort was the support of families and the committee for four other grants. Committee members, for example, drafted and signed a letter to support funding of a proposal to build sidewalks on four cross streets that intersect OR 8.



Juan and Metro Councilor Robert Liberty explore the sidewalks of Cornelius in wheelchairs.

3. Community Video: "A Vision for an Accessible Future." With donated production services, the steering committee created an 18-minute video about the mobility problems experienced by the residents of Cornelius. It features Juan and Consuelo Arauza attempting to travel along a route of intermittent sidewalks and the unpaved shoulders of streets. One scene shows their frustration because of their inability to maneuver Juan's wheelchair from the family's van into a park that lacks connecting sidewalks. Another scene features a couple pushing a baby stroller, but then the couple is forced into the street when the sidewalk ends at a clump of bushes.

The video provided contextual statistics about the community and region. The narrative describes how Cornelius depends on decisionmakers in other communities and regional agencies for cooperation in implementing solutions to problems like the fractured mobility system of the sidewalks. That phrase came from a feature article in a Portland newspaper, *The Oregonian*, about the experiences of some of the disabled population of Cornelius.¹

The video ends with Juan and Consuelo safely crossing a reconstructed portion of North Adair Street from one new sidewalk to another. It has been shown to regional and local agencies and at community events to demonstrate the need for mobility improvements for all people.

4. Park Planning: Toward an accessible parks master plan. Cornelius has nine city parks that vary in development and size from 0.75 to 10 acres. During the past 10 years, Cornelius has worked to improve its parks by adding play equipment, sports courts, drinking fountains, picnic shelters, and restrooms. The one area of only incremental improvement is in American with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility. The city has not completed either an ADA accessibility assessment, nor does it have an approved ADA transition plan that would provide guidance for accessibility improvements and compliance in city parks. These documents would also help the city qualify for state and federal grants to fund park and recreation development.

One member of the steering committee helped Dick Reynolds find a private consultant certified to perform ADA accessibility assessments who was willing to work within Cornelius's budget constraints. Reynolds worked with the consultant, and in May 2008 they completed the first "Site Evaluation for Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 for Harleman Park." It is the largest and most developed park in the city. Using this as a springboard, the city has embarked on a new parks master plan process that will include an ADA assessment for all parks and a transition plan for ADA compliance. The parks master plan was adopted in October 2009.

5. Resource Book: Accessible information for families. Parents clearly identified as a primary barrier the lack of Spanish-language information about the disabilities experienced by their children. The inability to self-educate hampers discussions between parents and children and their health care providers. The LEND trainees have assembled nontechnical information in Spanish about a variety of cognitive, behavioral, and physical disabilities. Copies of the notebook were distributed to schools, the health clinic, family resource center, library, and cultural center.

The information is also available on the OHSU/CDRC website, with additional links to other sources of information, at www.ohsu.edu/oidd/LEND/multilingual_resources/index.html. Hard-copy resources are important, however, because not everyone has easy access to and knowledge about the use of the Internet. Also, access to public computers is sometimes limited.

What Have We Learned So Far?

All these experiences have takeaways, and the steering committee has discussed the benefits for all of its members and stakeholders. We all agree that we have learned how to listen to each other discuss problems and also find solutions. For the city, it has been a relatively low-profile activity that has not consumed many resources. In fact, we came to learn that the parents of children with disabilities were not going to be one more demanding interest group but that they were, instead, a resource to support community improvement efforts.

We have been able to improve the quality of life and the image of an impoverished city fraught with political turmoil that had not accomplished much in recent years. Our image had been either negative or nonexistent as a wide place on the road between two larger cities on the outskirts of the metropolitan area. More important, our community had not been accessible for those with mobility challenges.

We've had the opportunity to meet or exceed relatively low expectations of the parents that anything good would come of their participation in the process. Some of the achievements are coincidental—portions of the OR 8 highway project were already funded and just needed final design details, but other elements of our projects needed support. There is now a group of parents who know they can approach city officials (who have names and friendly faces) with questions and concerns. One mother became confident enough to discuss with the chief of police a problem of speeding cars in her neighborhood. Even though this official is known as being bicultural/ bilingual and active in Latino affairs, to this mother city officials had previously been distant and inaccessible.

Parents have seen a community event allow for the "mainstreaming" of activities for their children who live with disabilities. They saw the changes that come from their participation in the planning of the Día del Niño celebration as well as other activities. They also saw that the clinical trainees would return to the community year after year to assist them in meeting their children's needs, giving them skills to assist with parenting and providing them with more knowledge and techniques to help their children and their families.

From that initial day at St. Alexander's Church, we have also seen the development of a solid partnership among the institutional anchors of Cornelius: church, medical clinic, school, city, and cultural center. Along with more than \$6 million dollars in public street and utility improvements, St. Alexander's Church is designing an expansion, and Virginia García Memorial Health Clinic has announced plans for a clinic expansion and the relocation of its corporate offices back to Cornelius. These improvements and investments will set the tone and standard for implementing the long-range plan the city has for its town center. We have also connected more effectively with area universities like the Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) and Portland State University (PSU), institutions that seemed before this community engagement process to be distant and inaccessible from our community.

We have also reinforced our belief in the value of effective citizen participation. The community engagement process is an excellent way of starting a process of identifying problems, but it requires dedication and resources to follow through.

ENDNOTES

¹ Jill Smith, "Fractured Mobility: Broken or Non-Existent Sidewalks Make the Going Tough for Walkers in Cornelius," The Oregonian (Portland, Oregon), March 15, 2007.

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Ethics

March is National Ethics Awareness Month

MAKE ETHICS YOUR PERSONAL CAUSE

As we celebrate the 85th anniversary of the ICMA Code of Ethics this year, ICMA members can take pride in our personal commitment to ethical conduct and public service values. But are we equally proud of the ethical climate in the organizations in which we carry out our everyday work? Have we demonstrated real leadership in promoting ethical behaviors and practices in our organizations?

With March designated as National Ethics Awareness month, there is no better time to either craft a thoughtful strategy for strengthening the ethical culture of the organization you lead or assess whether your efforts to date are working. Consider these factors that are critical to building an ethical culture:

1. THE STANDARD IS SET AT THE TOP: YOU CAN'T LEAD FROM THE REAR ON THIS ISSUE.

In the mundane everyday activities as well as in the challenging moments, you set the ethical standard or tone. If you want to inspire your staff to the highest standard of conduct, you must model the conduct you want to see in others. And when errors or missteps happen, you must demonstrate true accountability by taking personal responsibility and correcting the deficiencies.

2. DEFINE YOUR CORE VALUES AND THE BEHAVIORS THAT SUPPORT THOSE VALUES.

ICMA members can look to the ICMA Code of Ethics for values-based guidance on the right course of action. Staff members who belong to other professional associations with a code of ethics get similar assistance. But employees who are not members of a professional association with a code of ethics are left without any guidance if their place of employment fails to define its core values and the behaviors that support those values.

Work to develop organizational values that will reduce ambiguity and provide individuals with some essential guidance on what's expected and what's right. As you develop your group's values, use a process that engages elected officials and staff to achieve greater commitment to the values. If your organization already has a code of ethics, is it still viable and does it influence conduct? Is there still clarity and agreement on the core values that drive critical decisions? Remember that organizations or teams with shared values produce the best results.

3. ASSESS THE ORGANIZATION'S CULTURE: WOULDN'T SOME BASELINE INFORMATION ABOUT ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS IN THE ORGANIZATION BE HELPFUL IN CRAFTING YOUR STRATEGY?

Does your culture expect staff to report questionable ethical behavior of others? Are staff members clear about where to go for advice about ethical issues? Assess your own conduct: do you think that members of your staff would say that you show appreciation when they bring forward bad news, or do you "shoot the messenger" if they do so? These questions are part of a short but useful assessment tool developed by ICMA and the California Institute for Local Government.

4. SELECT THE RIGHT WHO.

Recruit the most talented, ethical employees and link good conduct with incentive structures. Warren Buffett once noted, "In looking for people to hire, look for three qualities: integrity, intelligence, and energy. And if they don't have the first, the other two will kill you." Celebrate exemplary conduct, whether it's the ordinary everyday ethical conduct or the single courageous act.

5. CHALLENGE BAD BEHAVIOR.

It's an old but true adage that what we allow, we approve. Don't walk by something that is wrong.

6. COMMIT TO ETHICS TRAINING.

Regular training builds awareness of common ethical issues, provides tools and strategies for effective problem solving, and, yes, can even inspire people to do the right thing when they are faced with a difficult ethical dilemma. Remember that it is a myth that good people always make wise choices.

7. INOCULATE AGAINST THE "E-VIRUS" BY PROVIDING ADVICE, COUNSELING, AND WHISTLE-BLOWING.

Make sure that staff members have informal and formal opportunities to raise any ethical concerns they may have about conduct or decisions in the organization. Create a safe and responsive environment outside the chain of command for those seeking advice or reporting an issue. Effectively providing for advice and counseling may actually decrease the need for someone to blow the whistle by giving leadership advance warning and the opportunity to address ethically troubling activities.

8. PROMOTE YOUR VALUES.

Publicly and consistently communicate the values that guide you and the organization in your exchanges with the public, media, business, and other stakeholders. It is not about making a cavalier statement that your organization is better than others. It is demonstrating that you do have standards and are willing to be held accountable to them.

As leaders, let's revisit the sage advice of Peter Drucker: "The proof of the sincerity and seriousness of a management is uncompromising emphasis on integrity of character. . . . For it is character through which leadership is exercised; it is character that sets the example and is imitated . . . the spirit of an organization is created from the top. If an organization is great in spirit, it is because the spirit of its top people is great. If it decays, it does so because the top rots."

—Martha Perego
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Ethics advice is a popular service provided to ICMA members. The ICMA Executive Board members who serve on the Committee on Professional Conduct review the inquiries and advice published in PM magazine. ICMA members who have questions about their obligations under the ICMA Code of Ethics are encouraged to call Martha Perego at 202/962-3668 or Elizabeth Kellar at 202/962-3611.

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FREE ADS WHERE APPLICANTS ABOUND

Placement of job ads for any position below department head is free in the ICMA JobCenter! Advertise an open position in a local government, in a related local government or nonprofit organization, or in a university, and you will reach the more than 8,500 unique visitors who browse the site each week.

- jobs.icma.org

LOW-COST LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Many talent development strategies require intent and action of organizational leaders rather than heavy financial investment. Low-cost approaches for cash-strapped local governments include using internal trainers, adding the assistant manager to the executive team, and training aspiring employees according to a formal succession plan.

- icma.org/talentplan

BOOK CLUB FOR JUVENILE OFFENDERS

In Fairfax County, Virginia, juvenile offenders can choose to attend group discussions of literature instead of entering the formal detention system. These discussions—with the accompanying self-reflection and dialogue about citizenship—are effective, proven tools for reducing relapses at minimum costs. Fairfax County's program is funded by one of nine ICMA Public Library Innovation Grants.

- icma.org/fairfaxcountylibrary

EXPANDING OUR REACH

ICMA International has implemented programs in more than 70 developing and transitioning countries—and new funding supports the organization's continuing presence on three continents. New programs focus on such diverse issues as community-based violence prevention and recovery of methane gas from landfills.

- icma.org/internationalpresence

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ICMA

Balancing Act

"Fever": Can You Stay Home Tomorrow?

If life were predictable, it would be much easier to manage and probably pretty boring, too. There are inevitable disruptions in our pursuit of work and family balance. There are disruptions caused by weather, professional needs (continuing education, conferences), car troubles, home repairs, technology failures, and illness. In this column, we attempt to uncover the conflicts between work and family that are caused by disruptions—specifically, illness—and the work done in the family to keep in balance.

Imagine Jack, his wife Kathleen, and their daughter, Jennifer. Jack is the village manager of a mid-sized community. His wife is an experienced financial officer in a manufacturing company in the next town. It is Sunday night, and Jennifer, who is seven years old, has been sleepy, extremely fussy, and sniffing all day.

At dinnertime, Jennifer's fever of 103.2 prompts a call to the pediatrician, who suspects the flu and calls in a prescription for an antiviral. The doctor also advises strongly that Jennifer stay home from school and schedules an early Monday morning appointment.

Later in the evening, the fever drops, Jennifer falls into a deep sleep, and Jack and Kathleen find themselves in the kitchen together, using their laptops. Monday weighs heavy on the room.

Kathleen: What ideas do you have for tomorrow?

Jack: I know you are closing the books Tuesday. But this is a tough week for me, too. (sighs)

Kathleen: I remember you had something important, what was it?

Jack: I have my review with the council.

Kathleen (firmly): You need to be there. I'll take Jennifer to the doctor.

Jack (looking down): Thanks, Honey. I owe you one.

Jack (pauses then, looking up at her): You know this fever thing really scared me.

Kathleen (softly): It still scares me. You know, another girl just like Jenny died outside Houston.

Jack: I know. This epidemic is frightening and must be especially scary for you. Maybe your fear of possibly losing Jenny is like how you felt losing your sister to leukemia.

Kathleen (gets tears in her eyes): I'm sorry. It doesn't help if I get emotional now, does it?

Jack (squeezing her hand): Katie, I didn't mean to hurt you.

Kathleen (voice cracking): No, no . . . that's okay. Actually it feels good to get the feelings out. I still miss her.

(Pause) Jack is silent and hands her a tissue.

Kathleen (smiles): I'm glad you're here with me now.

Feelings Around Illness Are Like Old Ghosts

Ancient feelings about illness make sickness a challenging disruption to balance. For all of us, like Jack and Kathleen, illness can rapidly upset balance at home and at work. Everyone understands how illness in a family results in longer hours and more demands at work, as it does at home.

Kathleen and Jack have worked hard to become two working professionals and they have also worked hard at being a couple. Professionals who study couples have many unanswered questions, but in this case, we do know at least some of the important parts of what healthy couples do.

This is the work Jack and Kathleen have done:

- Listened to understand the other.
- Allowed all emotions to be expressed.
- Competently tackled complex problems together.
- Kept conflict from becoming chronic.
- Shared power equally.

In addition to the above, if couples set aside regular protected times to share without interruption, the marriage stays strong. As an obstetrician prescribes prenatal vitamins, regular meetings between couples is a recommendation I make to all the local government leaders our company works with.

¹ J. M. Lewis, *The Birth of the Family: An Empirical Inquiry* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1989). For more on errors in listening, see *PM*, November 2009, for what to do to provide support, and *PM*, December 2009, for how support can become undermined.

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DEPARTMENTS

Retirement Strategies

ENHANCED LEGISLATION PROMOTES SAVING

President Obama's fiscal year 2010 budget includes a proposal to expand the Saver's Credit and further encourage lower-wage workers to make contributions to an employer-sponsored retirement plan or individual retirement arrangement (IRA).

The new proposal would make the Saver's Credit fully refundable up to \$500 per individual and require the credit to be deposited into an individual's retirement plan or IRA. Government officials suggest this change would make the credit similar to an employer contribution matching program and increase the likelihood that the credit would be saved for use in retirement.

Currently, the Saver's Credit is a nonrefundable tax credit, meaning it can be used only to reduce taxes owed. If an individual has used deductions, exemptions, or other nonrefundable credits and thus does not have a tax liability, that person would not receive the Saver's Credit.

The administration also plans to increase the adjusted gross income (AGI) limits for married couples jointly filing from \$55,000 to \$65,000; for singles from \$27,750 to \$32,500; and for head of households from \$41,625 to \$48,750.

These adjustments are expected to make the underused tax benefit more functional for eligible workers and increase participation in the program. The changes would go into effect on December 31, 2010. To download an informational flyer about the Saver's Credit to share with your employees, visit the Learn tab on www.retirementweek.org.

For more information on choosing a target-date or risk-based portfolio, use ICMA-RC's online investing guides at www.icmarc.org, located in the planning and tools section.

What Is the Saver's Credit?

The Saver's Credit is a tax benefit that provides a credit of up to \$1,000 (up to \$2,000 if filing jointly) to eligible workers. The credit amount varies according to the taxpayer's adjusted gross income (AGI), with the highest amount offered to taxpayers with the least income. To be eligible for the credit a worker must be at least age 18, not a full-time student, cannot be claimed as a dependent on another person's tax return, and must earn less than the AGI limits.

Joan McCallen
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