

# Stewarding the Future of Our Communities

Case Studies in Sustaining Community Engagement and Planning  
in America's Small Cities and Towns



Building the 2050 Plan, Newton County, Georgia.  
The Center for Community Preservation and Planning.

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Prepared for the Craig Byrne Fellows Program  
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# Executive Summary

“Stewarding the Future of Our Communities” presents the results of a major research project conducted for the Craig Byrne Fellows Program of the Orton Family Foundation. It addresses the challenges of stewarding local community engagement and planning—that is, building greater sustainability into citizen-driven, values-based community engagement and planning—in order to ensure its ongoing success and impact.

The paper presents case studies of five exemplary community engagement and planning experiences in small towns and cities around the country, highlighting specific stewardship approaches they have used to carry the success of their efforts far into the future. In a framework developed specially for this study, it examines five discrete elements of community stewardship:

1. Honoring local values
2. Sustaining citizen engagement
3. Achieving visions and plans
4. Holding leaders accountable
5. Responding to a changing world

The five communities highlighted in this report represent the diversity of small-town America, reflecting a range of populations (generally smaller cities and towns), community types (rural towns, suburban cities, and even urban neighborhoods), political jurisdictions (counties, cities, towns, neighborhoods, districts, and unincorporated areas), and geographic regions (New England, the Southeast, the Great Lakes, the Upper Midwest, the Pacific Northwest). The communities are:

1. Covington and Oxford, Newton County, Georgia
2. Hastings, Barry County, Michigan
3. Hillsboro, Oregon
4. Portsmouth, New Hampshire
5. West Duluth neighborhood, Duluth, Minnesota

Over the past two decades, each of these places has faced challenges to its core values and local identity, quality of life, viability as a community, and long-term sustainability. Each of these places has succeeded in developing and implementing different types of foundational community engagement and planning efforts to address such challenges, including the use of comprehensive land use planning, community and economic development strategies,

healthy-community planning models, community-based visioning, deliberative dialogue, and neighborhood-revitalization strategies. And each has developed a distinct array of stewardship approaches and tools to sustain the continued success of those efforts.

These stewardship initiatives have involved or engaged city and county governments, community foundations, nonprofit community organizations, grassroots and community-based advocacy groups, local media, elected officials, informal community leaders, and, in every case, local residents. While these initiatives are place-specific expressions of the communities in which they have evolved, elements of them are universal, and they are highly transferable.

Scores of possible stewardship methods in these five case studies have been condensed to a list of 25 core stewardship approaches (see page 84). While not a complete catalogue of approaches, this list should help all communities consider the array of options available to achieve similar successes.

The overarching theme that arises from this study and its culling of stewardship approaches is collaboration: Successful stewardship ultimately depends on the cultivation and promotion of community-wide, cross-sector collaboration to achieve its goals.

In an era of major economic restructuring, reduced local budgets, increasing challenges to the integrity and viability of small towns everywhere, and the ascendancy of flexible new tools for sharing information and ideas, it is community collaboration—residents working together to articulate and achieve their community's core values and long-range visions—that offers the greatest hope for stewarding community engagement and planning over time.

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
The Challenge of Stewarding Community Engagement and Planning	2
<b>Community Stewardship That Works</b>	<b>4</b>
Five Diverse Places	5
Case Study Community Engagement and Planning Projects	6
Case Study Stewardship Approaches	7
Honoring local values	8
Sustaining citizen engagement	10
Achieving visions and plans	12
Holding leaders accountable	14
Responding to a changing world	16
<b>Case Studies in the Stewardship of Community Engagement and Planning</b>	<b>19</b>
Covington and Oxford, Newton County, Georgia Collaboration Promotes Sustainable Growth for Small Towns in the Rural South	20
Hastings, Barry County, Michigan A Community Foundation Builds Partnerships Promoting a Sustainable Small-town Economy	34
Hillsboro, Oregon A Booming Small City Blends Values and Vision into Canvas of Rapid Growth and Change	46
Portsmouth, New Hampshire Deliberative Dialogue Sets New Standards for Informed Local Democracy	56
West Duluth Neighborhood, Duluth, Minnesota An Urban Neighborhood Revitalizes and Reinvents Itself	70

<b>Stewarding Community in the 21st Century: Top Approaches</b>	<b>83</b>
Emerging Challenges and Responses	83
Top 25 Case Study Approaches to Stewardship	84
Stewardship for All: The Foundations of Sustained Community Vitality	89
<b>Appendices</b>	
Appendix 1: Study Purpose, Approach, and Methodology	93
Purpose	93
Approach and Key Research Elements	95
Organization and Key Elements	97
Perspectives and Caveats	98
Appendix 2: Case Study Nomination and Selection Tools	101
Community Nomination Form	102
Selection Criteria for Nominated Communities	103
Questionnaire for Nominated Case Study Communities	104
Appendix 3: Case Study Publications and Resources	107
Covington and Oxford, Newton County, Georgia	107
Hastings, Barry County, Michigan	108
Hillsboro, Oregon	109
Portsmouth, New Hampshire	110
West Duluth Neighborhood, Duluth, Minnesota	111
Appendix 4: Case Study Community Contact Information	113
Appendix 5: General Interview Participants	115
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>About the Author</b>	<b>121</b>

# Introduction

This paper presents the results of the Community Planning Stewardship Study, a research project developed through the Craig Byrne Fellows Program of the Orton Family Foundation. In 2011 the Foundation determined that the next iteration of its fellows program should focus on the stewardship of community engagement and planning, defined as “building greater sustainability into values-based, visionary community engagement and planning initiatives in order to ensure their ongoing success and long-term impact.” The initiatives and outcomes described in this paper are closely aligned with the Foundation’s Heart & Soul Community Planning approach, now in its fourth year of development in demonstration towns in New England and the Rocky Mountain West.

The goal is to help communities engaged in this type of planning to better realize their core values and visions, not only through implementation of specific plans or actions but also through continued engagement of community residents, cultivation of new leadership, promotion of collaborative decision making, and similar forms of local capacity building.

The study focuses on case studies of five exemplary community engagement and planning projects in small towns and cities around the country, including how the communities have used specific stewardship approaches to further the success of their efforts. While every attempt was made to select broadly representative case study towns, no sample of this size could touch on all key aspects of stewardship. For example, none of the participating communities has developed a true community indicators system, even though this can be a very valuable tool in the pursuit of community stewardship.

*Once a community's initial planning activities have been completed—how does it sustain the capacity to realize its values?*

## **The Challenge of Stewarding Community Engagement and Planning**

The Orton Family Foundation is in the formative stages of its Heart & Soul Community Planning initiative, a comprehensive framework and model intended to guide and inform small towns and cities everywhere in advancing their community engagement and values-based planning efforts.

The first round of the Heart & Soul initiative was conducted in four towns in New England and the Rocky Mountain West between 2008 and 2011. The second round was launched early in 2012. Participating communities in the second round are: Cortez, Colorado; Essex Town and Essex Junction, Vermont; Gardiner, Maine; North Fork Valley (the towns of Paonia, Hotchkiss, and Crawford), Colorado; and Polson, Montana.

Since the launch of its Heart & Soul initiative, the challenge of stewardship has become more evident to the Foundation and its extended network of communities and planning practitioners. The challenge is this: Once a community's initial planning activities have been completed—that is, once its core values have been articulated, its vision charted, or its new plan adopted—how does it sustain the capacity to realize its values, actively accomplish its vision, or implement its plan over time?

Without organized efforts, community-based planning and engagement initiatives often lose their impact—foundering, fading away, or even ceasing to exist. The concern is that all the time and energy invested by citizens in articulating their values or shaping a visionary plan will not be fulfilled, and the process will be perceived as a failure. There is an additional concern that other lasting benefits of involving the community in such efforts—ongoing citizen participation programs, more open and accountable local governance, increased collaboration among local stakeholder groups, and cultivation of new community leadership—will also suffer.

Whether the ultimate decline of a community-based planning initiative is the result of unstable or insufficient funding, changing demographics, a change in political leadership, loss of community memory, or any number of related causes, the net effect is usually the same: failure to achieve long-term visions; disempowerment of local citizens; and, perhaps most serious, a hesitancy of residents to engage in similar processes in the future. The challenge of stewarding community-based engagement and planning begs a host of more detailed challenges and questions, some of which are addressed below.

The challenge of stewardship is not exclusive to communities that have received or relied on outside funding or technical assistance for their planning endeavors. Indeed, virtually every city and town that has engaged in any form of community-based planning or engagement will face a similar set of challenges. If the good work of community-based, citizen-driven planning is to remain vital, it must be consciously and continually renewed and sustained over time.

This is a topic worthy of continued research, deep conversation, open sharing and exchange of ideas, innovative approaches, and further exploration. The hope is that this paper and its study of five exemplary community engagement and planning projects and their ongoing stewardship efforts will benefit communities everywhere by stimulating and contributing to the discovery process.



### Citizens Educate the Candidates

At a Portsmouth Listens Candidate Forum, candidates for local office rotate among groups of citizens, responding to any question they choose to ask.

# Community Stewardship That Works

## Five Diverse Places

As the result of an extensive research and selection process (see appendix 1, “Study Purpose, Approach, and Methodology”), the study author and project team selected five towns as case studies for the Community Planning Stewardship Study. They are:

1. Covington and Oxford, Newton County, Georgia
2. Hastings, Barry County, Michigan
3. Hillsboro, Oregon
4. Portsmouth, New Hampshire
5. West Duluth neighborhood, Duluth, Minnesota

The diversity of these five (technically six) communities is quite pronounced, including in their locations, populations, histories, and backgrounds, and in the challenges they have faced and the types of community planning and engagement activities they have undertaken, not to mention their approaches to stewardship.

Together, these towns represent five distinct regions of the country, including New England, the Southeast, the Great Lakes, the Upper Midwest, and the Pacific Northwest. They include four small or medium-size towns, one smaller city, and an urban neighborhood that was once an independent small town itself. They range in population from approximately 2,550 to 91,300. The average population of the six communities is 24,000; absent the largest community, the average population is 10,600. Three of the communities have fewer than 7,500 residents.

The five case study towns face distinct and contrasting challenges, making this study a microcosm of the challenges faced by small communities, both urban and rural, across America.

## Case Study Community Engagement and Planning Projects

Reflecting the diversity of these communities and the challenges they faced, the community planning and engagement projects and corresponding stewardship initiatives undertaken by them—as well as the organizations, projects, and partnerships formed to promote those efforts—were also remarkably diverse:

- **Covington and Oxford, Georgia**, have been key participants in The 2050 Plan, a collaborative, countywide initiative to develop sustainable small-town growth alternatives to urban sprawl in Newton County, Georgia. The Center for Community Preservation and Planning, a local nonprofit, and the Newton County Leadership Collaborative, comprised of key elected officials and other stakeholders from across Newton County, jointly helped shape the plan, secured its adoption by all local jurisdictions, and are stewarding its rollout countywide.
- **Hastings, Michigan**, and the surrounding small towns in Barry County, Michigan, are the focal point of the HomeTown Partnership, an initiative created to foster a more entrepreneurial, sustainable economy and community. Working through this partnership, the Barry Community Foundation has spearheaded a collaborative, community-based endeavor engaging key local organizations and institutions; it has adapted a leadership development model and Healthy Community framework, which was pioneered by other community foundations, to fit the local community and its unique challenges.
- **Hillsboro, Oregon**, is more than a decade into its Hillsboro 2020 Vision and Action Plan, which was developed through a visioning process and seeks to preserve the community's hometown feel, cohesiveness, and core values in the face of rapid growth, development, and change. The City of Hillsboro has guided development and ongoing updates of the community-based vision and plan, and is working through a Vision Implementation Committee—representing 23 partner organizations from the public, private, civic, and nonprofit sectors—to implement its plan.

- **Portsmouth, New Hampshire**, is changing the nature of public dialogue and local democracy, forging new ways to deliberate and decide on issues and policies of critical importance to the community. Portsmouth Listens, a community nonprofit group, has worked with a cadre of trained volunteer facilitators and in collaboration with the City of Portsmouth and the local newspaper, the *Portsmouth Herald*, to foster ongoing, deliberative public dialogues to inform and support better planning, policy, and public decisions.
- **West Duluth, Minnesota**, is using its West Duluth Neighborhood Revitalization Plan to rebuild its economy, sense of community, and local pride, while addressing critical social needs such as housing, jobs, and education. The At Home in Duluth collaborative is a partnership of 26 community organizations facilitated by the Duluth Local Initiatives Support Corporation (Duluth LISC). Based on a sustainable-communities model developed by the national LISC organization, the collaborative has helped spur and guide the renewal of five Duluth neighborhoods, including large, history-rich West Duluth.

## Case Study Stewardship Approaches

From these diverse communities and their planning and engagement experiences, this study has gleaned an equally broad range of stewardship approaches. These approaches are organized to reflect the key challenges to the stewardship of community planning and engagement:

1. Honoring local values
2. Sustaining citizen engagement
3. Achieving visions and plans
4. Holding leaders accountable
5. Responding to a changing world

These five areas of stewardship are where efforts can trip up. Below is a summary of them and a sampling of the actions undertaken by the case study communities in response to these challenges, along with the perspectives and comments of a number of community planning and engagement experts interviewed for this study. First the challenge is summarized, and this is followed by the successful efforts the case study towns used to address it.

## **1. Honoring local values**

*How does a community remain connected to its core values, those widely shared beliefs and ideals that define the community, who it is, and what is important to its residents? How does it ensure that important future decisions and directions are aligned with its values?*

Core values provide the touchstone and foundation for any community's planning and engagement effort, because, in the language of the Orton Family Foundation, they connect to the community's heart and soul.

According to Doug Zenn, a public participation specialist affiliated with the International Association for Public Participation: "Values are essential in finding common ground upon which further conversations can be built. The outcomes of any planning process always work best when they are aligned with core values. The more contentious a public involvement process, the more we rely on up-front identification of values."

At first glance, local values seem to be the least emphasized stewardship approach in the case study communities, perhaps because there are relatively few developed and tangible tools for discerning and connecting values to a community's planning efforts. (This is a reason why the Foundation's work with community storytelling is of such critical importance.)

Still, some of the case study communities have done important values clarification work—for example, Portsmouth Listens uses commonality and dialogue-framing questions in its deliberative dialogues—and all of the communities are quick to acknowledge just how important local values really are in connecting to their local residents.

Before it commenced the Hillsboro 2020 visioning process, Hillsboro, Oregon, found that rapid growth and change threatened many of its historic values—not only its traditional small-town feel but also how local leaders work together to accomplish things. The planning process not only confirmed such values, it shaped how Hillsboro's vision and action plan was developed and structured, and how it is now being implemented.

Christopher Hartye, the City of Hillsboro's project manager for Hillsboro 2020, explains: "Hillsboro has values that reflect its heritage, including positivity, forward thinking, collaboration, respect for others, and—very important—getting the job done. We have always prided ourselves on our practical approach to achieving things, and this is reflected in our tangible vision implementation efforts. Hillsboro 2020 built its action plan on these community values, and as a result, is pushing them into new territory."

*If you can imprint  
your values and vision  
on your goals,  
you will have  
a positive impact.*

Kay B. Lee, director of the Center for Community Preservation and Planning, in Covington, Georgia, affirms the importance of understanding local values in the face of intensive growth: "We found, from years of public input, the common values in Newton County of small-town feel and rural character. Beyond that, values mean different things to different people—from affordable housing to attracting the 'creative class' to creating healthier mobility choices. Our approach has been to take basic values defined in the community's landscape and try to make them 'large and expansive' enough that citizens felt included and comfortable enough to define their own particular quality of life—no matter the specifics. That way, we capture as many members of the community as possible."

Lee Stuart, of the At Home in Duluth collaborative, adds that connecting to local values means everything in a neighborhood with strong traditions. "West Duluth is absolutely steeped in tradition," she says. "It seems every major project we have undertaken there is connected to local values. Take the development of new housing for homeless veterans in West Duluth: At first there was some resistance to building that kind of housing in this lower-middle-income community. At the same time, local support for our veterans was very strong. When the connection to the community's core values became clear, the project moved forward quickly."

Jim Nocas, co-founder of Portsmouth Listens (and more recently of New Hampshire Listens), makes the case for values in the simplest terms: "The best input we can give is at the higher-altitude level: If you can imprint your values and vision on your goals, you will have a positive impact." One of the most effective tools used by Portsmouth Listens for discovering shared values is its commonality question. Virtually every Portsmouth Listens dialogue begins with a simple question based on personal experiences totally unrelated to the topic under discussion, which is used to elicit shared values and experiences, reinforcing the idea that people's common experiences can outweigh their divergent opinions.

## 2. Sustaining citizen engagement

*How do a community's residents stay continually engaged over time, remaining involved in important local issues, civic conversations, and policy decisions that are vital to the community and its future?*

*What keeps residents involved and active? What keeps engagement vital, fresh, and even fun?*

The ongoing engagement of a community's residents is the lifeline of its community plan and is essential to its successful future. No vision or plan, however eloquently stated or thoughtfully constructed, will endure long enough to be realized if the townspeople are not continually engaged in its achievement. All of the professional experts interviewed for this study emphasized the centrality of engagement to the overall success of community-based planning.

Yet true engagement is not a simple achievement. University of Georgia planning professor Ron Thomas notes: "Real engagement has become all too rare. Too often, the process simply means taking a plan to the public *after* it has been 'pre-formed.' Very seldom are citizens engaged to mutually plan a community's future based on their values or visions. Innovation in public engagement is *still* not the norm, and token public participation activities (the ubiquitous open house event, for example) are the all-too-common route used to meet legal participation requirements."

Steve Faust, a consultant who specializes in designing and managing public engagement programs, says innovation in engagement begins by placing the emphasis firmly on community outreach: "A community-based process has to be citizen driven. It may start with a citizen committee that guides the process and is representative of the wider community. But there has to be substantial outreach through which the process goes directly out and *into* the community, rather than expecting the community to come to the process."

To steward a community's vision or plan over time, citizens must be continually engaged. Once their core work is completed, local planning processes may be paused to recharge or shift emphasis, but engagement can never fully cease. In this regard, the five case study communities have demonstrated great success. Here is a sampling of their ongoing post-planning engagement efforts:

- **The Center for Community Preservation and Planning**, in Covington, Georgia, is rolling out Newton County’s new 2050 Plan through its Celebrate Our Home public engagement process, with 30 traveling displays, along with “fun, food, and facts.” The deeper goal is to target and engage the estimated 61 percent of the county’s population who are considered newcomers—residents who moved to the county during the 2000s as part of a population boom.
- **HomeTown Partnership**, in Hastings, Michigan, sponsors 101 Conversations, at which would-be local entrepreneurs who are graduates of its business boot camp training series meet and interview experienced local business owners. Participants develop and conduct their own interviews, focusing on real-world opportunities and barriers for establishing their businesses and start-up companies.
- **Hillsboro 2020** takes its vision outreach directly into the community, working the local farmers’ market, community fairs, and other community events. It also sponsors the annual Hillsboro 2020 Vision Town Hall meeting to report on vision achievements and reengage local residents in their vision. The Hillsboro 2020 Vision and Action Plan’s lead partner organizations also participate, highlighting their progress with interactive displays and identifying opportunities for citizens to get involved.
- **Portsmouth Listens** facilitates ongoing four-week deliberative study circles and one-day community conversations, based on the same principles as study circles but adapted for intensive conversations and focusing on singular issues or more discrete discussion topics. They also host forums at which candidates running for local office meet with small groups of citizens in the same deliberative style.
- **Duluth Local Initiatives Support Corporation** (Duluth LISC) sponsors the Connecting the Dots and Spirit Valley Days community celebrations in West Duluth, with information, activities, and food. Local public servants are encouraged to “wear their role” by coming in their work uniforms. The Duluth LISC and its At Home in Duluth collaborative also sponsor annual Building Sustainable Communities awards and Neighborhood Heroes awards.

*Without an organized, deliberate implementation effort, the most dynamic community vision or plan probably will not be achieved.*

### **3. Achieving visions and plans**

*How does a community ensure that its plans, strategies, and actions are achieved, steadily moving the community in the direction of a larger vision or overarching goal? What keeps a community's prescribed strategy for change rolling out over time?*

It probably goes without saying that a vision or plan that is filed on a shelf and not achieved can easily negate all of the energy and effort that went into its creation. Similarly, without an organized, deliberate implementation effort, the most dynamic community vision or plan probably will not be achieved. The implementation that follows on the heels of a community visioning or planning initiative is often less visible or exciting than the community's initial engagement, but it is when the rubber hits the road. And more people will be involved in implementation if they continue to see the fingerprints of their earlier values identification or visioning activities.

Ellen Frisch, a consultant who has worked with many rural communities over the years, advocates community visions and plans that incorporate a concrete implementation strategy. "There should be a detailed action plan with activities assigned to specific groups or individuals over a given timeline," she says. "And, of course, the people and organizations that are charged with carrying out actions should be involved in its formulation." While this approach may sound too rigorous or demanding for some communities, Frisch bases her observation on her study of top-performing visioning projects worldwide.

Hillsboro 2020 is a case in point: The Hillsboro 2020 action plan clearly charts the prescribed implementation of the community's 20-year vision by its 23 lead partner organizations. Most recently updated in 2010 and now in its third iteration, the Hillsboro action plan currently contains 180 actions, 35 of them created during its last update. By the end of 2011, fully 85 percent of those actions were already under way or implemented. In the case of Hillsboro, such an approach to implementation closely fits one of the community's core values: getting the job done.

Planner Steve Faust would add that the key to such success lies in partnerships. "It really makes sense to go the route of a community-owned plan where more than one organization is charged with implementation, because these days *no* city can achieve the goals set out in its land use plan alone, or any plan for that matter," he says. "Everybody needs to participate if these goals are to be achieved. This does mean that a city must, to some degree, let go of its control of

the plan and its final outcomes. But it's smart business to engage the public in doing the work of the community.”

Here are some of the ways the five case study communities have worked to achieve their visions and plans:

- **The Center for Community Preservation and Planning** solicits grants to conduct ongoing research supporting the implementation of the 2050 Plan of Newton County, Georgia. It provides the information and data it develops as a resource to the cities of Covington and Oxford, and other local governments as they participate in the rollout of the plan. Otherwise, these local governments might not be able to afford such kinds of analysis.
- **HomeTown Partnership**, in Hastings, Michigan, has developed a healthy-community assets tool, which is the same template it used to frame the community's vision; and it has aligned its programs and activities with the local Barry Community Foundation's grant-giving protocols, thus ensuring that funds invested in the community synchronize with the community's overall strategic directions.
- **Hillsboro 2020** conducts an annual lead partner survey to monitor and track how its 23 lead partner organizations are progressing with the implementation of their designated actions. The project also has used the Lead Partner Assistance Subcommittee (LPAS), part of its Vision Implementation Committee (VIC), to provide one-on-one assistance to lead partner organizations, discussing their implementation challenges and assisting in their success.
- **Portsmouth Listens**, in collaboration with the *Portsmouth Herald*, publishes tabloid inserts on the outcomes of its deliberative dialogues, including deliberations on the City of Portsmouth's master planning and sustainability planning processes. These publications have brought the public voice to bear on the implementation of key city plans and policies.
- **Duluth LISC** has developed the Quarterly Accomplishments Report to monitor and measure progress on successful implementation of the West Duluth Neighborhood Revitalization Plan and its parallel neighborhood revitalization efforts. Working through neighborhood meetings, the group developed community-specific benchmarks, which are tracked and mapped in geographic information system (GIS) form, with resulting data worked back into the plan.

*So often we assume the public is our only ally in this kind of work, but local elected officials and government staff are equally important.*

#### **4. Holding leaders accountable**

*How does a community hold its elected officials and public servants accountable to its values, vision, or plan, helping ensure that policies and decisions are attuned to these public mandates? Especially when local leadership changes, what keeps new public officials committed to a community's agreed-on values, vision, or plan?*

Ultimately, if a town is to secure the achievement of community-based visions and plans, it must have the continued support of local elected and appointed officials, government staff, and other key community and business leaders. In effect, it must insert the process of developing community-based visions and plans into more-formal governmental and related decision-making processes. Given that local governments, in particular, often have a poor record of responding proactively to citizen input, this can be a daunting task. At the same time, the continued evolution of the Internet and recent open-government initiatives at the national and local level are creating new pathways for forging stronger relationships between citizen- and community-based initiatives and local government.

As William R. Klein, chief of research for the American Planning Association, says, the challenges in bringing local leadership along are considerable. The turnover of elected and appointed leadership, alone, is a big barrier to good planning. “Just when you think you have a good group of people with whom you can make substantial forward progress,” he says, “you find yourself back on the ground floor. It’s the same with governing bodies or planning directors. That’s what happens when good people move on. On the other hand, turnover can be good, and can bring fresh blood and new ideas. So there are two sides of the coin.”

Public participation authority Doug Zenn puts an interesting spin on the challenge, talking about the concept of “inreach.” “The notion of inreach-outreach and the relationship between them is critical,” he says. “So often we assume the public is our only ally in this kind of work, but local elected officials and government staff are equally important. There are always *internal* as well as external stakeholders. By definition, this is a tough audience, but there’s an opportunity to help internal staff see how their participation in the process and follow-on efforts can be a tool and benefit in doing their own jobs.”

The case study towns have excelled in bringing local political, business, and community leaders into the fold. The diversity and successes of their “inreach” efforts are impressive:

- **The Newton County Leadership Collaborative**, a group of local community leaders who advocated and supported an alternative approach to growth, built on a local tradition of intergovernmental collaboration. This group was instrumental in securing adoption of the 2050 Plan by nine local governments and key stakeholder groups. The Center for Community Preservation and Planning supports and promotes the collaborative's crucial role through hosting annual meetings that offer the group the opportunity to discuss current planning issues, report on its ongoing work, and shape upcoming activities.
- **HomeTown Partnership**, through its Public Service Series, has taken a proactive grassroots approach to helping improve the quality of candidates for local elected office, and ultimately of the elected officials who serve in Hastings and Barry County, Michigan. During a series of workshops, citizens who are considering political careers are led through an intensive training process on running for and serving in an elected office. Follow-up programs include interviews with current elected officials and the provision of a handbook describing all local elected positions. Several course graduates have gone on to run, and win, local elections.
- **The Hillsboro 2020 VIC** connects key local community and political leadership directly with the implementation of Hillsboro's vision and action plan. The 23 VIC members—who include representatives of local governments, nonprofits, and community organizations, as well as citizens at large—regularly monitor implementation of the plan, report on its progress to the public and city council, and propose ongoing refinements. Most VIC members represent lead partner organizations that are responsible for implementing specific actions in the plan, so commitment to implementation is hard wired into the process.
- **Portsmouth Listens** has increased its involvement with local elected officials significantly over time. It began by sponsoring public deliberations on major issues confronting the community. This led to conversations on public policies and plans under development by the City of Portsmouth. Today, Portsmouth Listens is bringing deliberative dialogue into the city's budgeting process. It also holds regular deliberative candidate forums, where candidates for local office meet in small-group settings with local citizens for direct and unrestricted dialogue.

- **Duluth LISC and its At Home in Duluth collaborative** promote a number of leadership training programs, including that of a new citywide leadership team, which will create new ways for residents to plug into the larger process in an ongoing way. Between 10 and 20 citizens who are long-time activists and emerging community leaders from the five local neighborhoods, including West Duluth, will be part of a citywide group that will advocate for, and shepherd the success of, local plans over time. Participation will include leadership training to improve skills.

## **5. Responding to a changing world**

*How does a community better prepare itself for, and respond to, the dizzying number of trends and issues on the “problem horizon” that reflect a changing world: for example, growing, declining, or diversifying population; an economy undergoing restructuring; or threats to the environment or local livability? And how does a community plan and prepare for things that cannot easily be predicted, including natural and industrial disasters, and other community emergencies? In other words, how does a community build greater resilience?*

Even as communities focus on planning and engagement initiatives to improve their quality of life, the world is not standing still. With a deluge of larger trends and issues, the impacts at the local level can be sudden and painful: an influx of new residents, a spate of foreclosures, a large loss of jobs, or a spike in the price of gasoline. Even an unanticipated community emergency can quickly change everything.

This raises the question of how community planning and engagement can encompass and address such larger or unanticipated issues without losing touch with local residents and their needs. While the big picture may be the most difficult contingency to address in a local plan, it is possible to do so. The future-oriented community visioning process, for example, is an attempt to bring larger forces and strategic thinking into a local plan. Many communities are also beginning to develop sustainability plans for the same reasons. And the Transition Towns movement and others are engaging with and helping plan the future of local communities through a distinctly global, trend-driven context and a focus on building community resilience.

There are more specific ways to build the big picture into local planning and engagement: For example, Ellen Frisch stresses the importance of bringing larger perspectives not only into local plans but also into

the organizations charged with implementing them. She advocates steps such as viewing the community through a sustainability lens and teaching change management. “Planning for organizational change and training in change management at the local level are important,” Frisch says. “Local governments need to learn about change and how to incorporate community visions into their own organizations, because they will need to change themselves. This can help sustain a community’s vision.”

*Even as communities focus on planning and engagement initiatives to improve their quality of life, the world is not standing still.*

Despite the challenges of incorporating the bigger picture and a changing world into local plans, the five case study communities have embraced that perspective in their work:

- **The 2050 Plan**, in itself, is an attempt to address a flood of external change that has inundated Newton County, Georgia, including Covington and Oxford. Over the past decade, the county population has grown by more than 60 percent; the county has been rated as the seventh-fastest-growing county and one of the most stressed in the United States. The impacts on local infrastructure and the quality of life have been major. The 2050 Plan has shaped an entirely new alternative scenario for sustainable county growth, and local governments are now in the process of implementing it.
- **The HomeTown Partnership**, in Hastings, Michigan, through its Public Service Series, sponsors annual intergovernmental workshops on major new policy issues on the horizon. They interview local elected officials to discover which emerging issues they would like to learn more about, and then they build expert presentations and bring officials together for training around those topics. Recent workshops have focused on subjects as diverse as land banking and medical marijuana.
- **The Hillsboro 2020 Vision and Action Plan** is continually renewed to incorporate new information and strategies for change. The plan’s actions are reviewed and updated annually, and every five years the entire community engages in a major strategy review. As a result of the most recent strategy review, in 2010, the plan greatly expanded its emphasis on long-term community sustainability; and the City of Hillsboro and other organizations are working on implementing a number of new sustainability-related actions.

- **Portsmouth Listens** is well adapted to a changing world. When emerging issues rise to the top of the community's radar screen, Portsmouth Listens is ready to address them in facilitated dialogues. In recent years, this readiness has enabled them to engage the public in helping develop a sustainability plan for the City of Portsmouth, as well as a five-year community-based sustainability plan in partnership with a new community organization, Sustainable Portsmouth. The Portsmouth Listens process is also adept at addressing highly controversial issues that other communities typically avoid.
- **The At Home in Duluth collaborative** also rolls with a changing world. For its five local neighborhood plans, including West Duluth's, it has adopted a sustainable communities framework developed by the national LISC organization, focusing on housing, income, economy, education, and health. The group is beginning to discuss issues such as food security and disaster preparedness, and is taking some steps in that direction by promoting urban agriculture citywide. But Duluth LISC staff admit that in terms of the bigger picture, there is much work to be done.

In the following section, this study delves more deeply into the background and experiences of the five case study communities in stewarding their successful community engagement and planning, and addresses the stewardship themes identified above. Each case study offers a compelling story of citizens who have confronted the challenge of change head-on, strengthening their local communities and the lives of residents in the process.

# Case Studies in the Stewardship of Community Engagement and Planning

## **Covington and Oxford, Newton County, Georgia**

Collaboration Supports Sustainable Growth for Small Towns in the Rural South

20



## **Hastings, Barry County, Michigan**

A Community Foundation Builds Partnerships Promoting a Sustainable Small Town Economy

34



## **Hillsboro, Oregon**

Booming Small City Blends Values and Vision into Canvas of Rapid Growth and Change

46



## **Portsmouth, New Hampshire**

Deliberative Dialogue Sets New Standards for Informed Local Democracy

56



## **West Duluth Neighborhood, Minnesota**

An Urban Neighborhood Revitalizes and Reinvents

70





### Rolling out the Plan

Citizens of Newton County literally roll out the ten-year timeline that resulted in the 2050 Plan.

# COVINGTON AND OXFORD, NEWTON COUNTY, GEORGIA

## *Collaboration Promotes Sustainable Growth for Small Towns in the Rural South*

### **Overview**

Covington and Oxford, in Newton County, Georgia, are small towns in a rural county that lies directly in the path of urban sprawl from greater Atlanta. In recent years the two towns have been flooded with new growth that conflicts with historical patterns of development and places huge demands on local infrastructure and services. Working through the Center for Community Preservation and Planning, a local nonprofit community organization, and the Newton County Leadership Collaborative, which represents local governments and key stakeholders, the county and its jurisdictions have moved from fragmentation to collaborative action for a smarter approach to growth. Together, they have developed the 2050 Plan, a framework for sustainable growth designed to align local plans, ordinances, land use decisions, and capital investments across the county. The result is a visionary approach to small-town growth and development in the rural South and beyond.

### **Background**

Covington and Oxford are adjacent small cities located off Interstate 20 in Newton County, Georgia, about 40 miles southeast of Atlanta. Overall, about 55 percent of Newton County is white and 45 percent is African American, with only a small number of other racial and ethnic groups. Around 10 percent of county residents live below the official poverty line. While Covington and Oxford border each other, the two cities' history and demographics are quite distinct.

Covington, the larger of the two, has grown and developed over the years in a manner similar to many small rural American cities. It is the county seat and largest urban center in Newton County, and home to most of the county's retail, industrial, and commercial development. Covington has had strong leadership over the years. It has also been known for its good planning, resulting in a vibrant town center with

#### **Project:**

The 2050 Plan

#### **Community:**

Covington and Oxford  
Newton County, Georgia

#### **Population:**

Covington (circa 15,300);  
Oxford (circa 2,550);  
Newton County (circa 99,950)

#### **Organization:**

The Center for Community  
Preservation and Planning

#### **Website:**

[www.thecenter-newton.org](http://www.thecenter-newton.org)

#### **Principal Contact:**

Kay B. Lee, Director  
The Center for Community  
Preservation and Planning

#### **Nominator:**

Ron Thomas, AICP  
College of Environment & Design  
University of Georgia  
Athens, Georgia

a traditional grid street pattern and beautiful town square. In the past two decades, however, new development has rapidly expanded outward from the city's historic urban core.

With one-sixth of Covington's population and a smaller geographical area, Oxford is proud of the signs of its rich history, including significant Civil War-era historical sites, the local United Methodist Church, and a long-standing affiliation with Emory University. Today, Oxford College is a feeder institution for Emory; it has 900 students and a diverse student population representing many foreign countries. Oxford residents cherish their reputation as an activist community over the years, and this culture has forged a strong local identity.

With a rural land base and agricultural economy, Newton County falls below state averages for per capita income and education levels. At the same time, it has achieved a number of firsts over the years. Local elected officials in the county have a tradition of working together to address issues of mutual concern, such as planning for local water supplies. Other local governments across Georgia have studied the county's collaborative successes.

Over the past two decades, Newton County's proximity to Atlanta has been a major factor in its growth and development. Greater Atlanta's accelerated growth in the 1990s pushed sprawling development in the direction of the county. More recently, Newton County was ranked the seventh-fastest-growing county in the nation, as well as one of the counties most stressed by growth. Between 2000 and 2010, its population grew from 62,000 to nearly 100,000, an increase of more than 60 percent. This rapid growth has had major impacts countywide, and especially on Covington and Oxford.

### **Engagement and Planning Process**

Back in the 1990s, residents of Covington and Oxford began to notice that something was not right about the growth coming to the county. Greater Atlanta's rapid expansion was bringing urban sprawl and strip commercial development that did not complement local community character. As the population grew and sprawl placed new demands on land use, infrastructure, transportation, agriculture, water supplies, and air quality, alarm bells started to sound.

“If you build it...”

The Center for Community Preservation and Planning, a re-purposed storefront in Covington, Georgia, provides a place for the community's ongoing dialogue on good planning.



Around this time, architect and planner Andrés Duany, a smart growth advocate and leader in the emerging New Urbanism movement, was invited to Covington to conduct a series of design workshops addressing the challenges of suburban growth. Duany's workshops sparked the most far-reaching conversation on planning ever held in the county and established a new standard of public inquiry. They changed the way local citizens and community leaders thought about growth, including their ability to have a positive impact through good planning and design.

Soon after, a smart growth planning group formed to continue this dialogue and encourage community leaders to rethink planning. The county already had assets on which to build, including a tradition of collaborative leadership, as evidenced in planning for local water resources. There was also evidence of good town planning. The City of Covington, for example, had formed a protection zone around its historic town center, established a historic preservation commission, and developed a framework for new industrial development.

Inspired by these events and acting on the input of planning advocates, a local family foundation purchased an old storefront building in Covington to provide a physical place for the conversations to continue. The vision was to create a place where citizens could gather in a neutral environment to discuss ideas on how to better plan and manage growth.



The Center for Community  
Preservation and Planning in  
Covington, Georgia

The Center for Community Preservation and Planning, a nonprofit community organization, was established in 2002 and lodged itself in the newly renovated building. In time, both the building and organization came to be known simply as “The Center.”

In its early days, the Center’s role was straightforward: essentially bringing citizens together to talk. Beginning in the mid-2000s, it started inviting planners and other professionals to Covington to discuss their work and share innovative ideas. It also sponsored a series of lunches at which community leaders could listen, learn, and ask one another questions. In time, the Center’s outreach and trust building began to pay off, capturing the attention of local decision makers.

As a result, key local government bodies (including the City of Covington; the Newton County Board of Commissioners; the local school board; the water and sewerage authority; the cities of Oxford, Porterdale, Mansfield, and Newborn; and the chamber of commerce) formed the Newton County Leadership Collaborative, a multi-jurisdictional alliance of community leaders focused on planning.

At its first formal meeting in 2005, the Center brought in a team of urban planners and educators from the Urban Land Institute, University of Georgia, Georgia Tech, and the Georgia Conservancy. This team helped members of the leadership collaborative begin to educate themselves on land use and growth management issues.

The leadership collaborative agreed that a more organized response to the growth management issues confronting the county was critical. They resolved to meet regularly, develop a common set of baseline data for use in planning discussions, and, ultimately, jointly develop a framework to guide local planning countywide.

Under the guidance of the Center, in 2007 the leadership collaborative took part in a hands-on planning exercise, developed by a retired professor from Georgia Tech, investigating population growth and open space allocations for the county. Simultaneously, the Center engaged an MIT planning student (and longtime local resident) to assess the county’s carrying capacity as permitted by existing local ordinances.

The Oxford Trail built by volunteers from the city and Newton County.



The findings of these two concurrent exercises were revealing: Local ordinances in Newton County were effectively tuned to *promote* urban sprawl; and the impacts of such sprawl on Covington, Oxford, and neighboring small communities were profound. The leadership collaborative concluded that the more density they could design into local plans, the more land, water, and other resources they would conserve countywide.

As a result, the Center and the leadership collaborative resolved to launch a comprehensive, multi-jurisdictional planning process that would investigate alternative approaches to growth management and planning countywide. They called it the 2050 Plan.

With an ambitious scope and an emphasis on broad strategies, the 2050 planning process focused on gathering data and input from local opinion leaders, key stakeholders, and other contributors with specific knowledge or expertise. It included a series of workshops on such topics as economic development, housing, schools, and social issues. Community-based stakeholder advisory groups were engaged to help develop the strategies.

Through this initiative, the Center developed an alternative growth scenario for the county. It revealed a startling fact: The county could accommodate upward of 400,000 people (more than four times its current population) on just 30 percent of its land base if growth in the county was accommodated through a network of interconnected, compact, walkable communities. Additionally, the remainder of the county's land base could be preserved to accommodate agriculture and protect natural resources, along with tourism, recreation, and green enterprises.

In short, this analysis confirmed that Newton County could continue to grow, sustain a larger population, and build its economy with far fewer negative impacts on its land base, all while preserving its core values and small-town way of life. (A subsequent financial analysis sponsored by the Center estimated that the county could save an estimated \$3.3 billion by using this approach as opposed to the current sprawl approach.)

Based on this analysis, the planning process produced a final report, “The 2050 Plan: Building a Sustainable Community,” which presented a build-out strategy for the county and its local communities to the year 2050. The plan was built on the alternative growth scenario, incorporating four guiding principles and accompanying strategies:

1. **Protect clean water.** Protect rivers and water sources. Provide up to 50 percent of land for agriculture and conservation.
2. **Create communities.** Create walkable town centers and compact communities in urban services zones.
3. **Create interconnected corridors.** Create scenic and historic resource corridors, quality development corridors, and smart street grids.
4. **Coordinate public investment.** Coordinate investments in infrastructure, schools, libraries, and public safety.

The plan also included a countywide zoning strategy in conformance with these principles. The zoning strategy identified three overarching land use zones countywide:

1. **Compact communities zone**, accommodating 88 percent of county population on 30 percent of its land area
2. **Rural zone**, accommodating 6 percent of the county’s population on 35 percent of its area
3. **Conservation zone**, accommodating 6 percent of the population on 35 percent of its area

In a fittingly bold conclusion to the process, in 2010, members of the leadership collaborative presented the 2050 Plan to their respective organizations and agencies, along with a recommendation for its adoption. In a joint resolution, all nine bodies signed on in support of the plan. Subsequently, a goal was established that ordinances covering the three zones identified in the 2050 Plan would be developed by 2012 and that incorporation of the plan by local governments would begin thereafter.



### A Master Plan for Growth.

Unlike past sprawl-oriented development, Newton County’s 2050 Plan will accommodate 88 percent of the county’s future population on 30 percent of its land area.

*If we can set a more sustainable growth pattern and save millions of dollars in the process, would it not be reasonable to assume that any community, anywhere, can replicate what we have done?*

Since the adoption of this resolution, the Center has launched a number of more detailed technical studies to validate the plan's findings and support its implementation. Using formulas developed by a professional economist, for example, each local jurisdiction soon will be able to input its own numbers to determine costs of specific development decisions.

Today, local governments are busy implementing 2050 Plan initiatives. The City of Covington and Newton County have jointly revised their ordinances for a designated growth corridor in the Covington area, in compliance with the new plan. Covington has also adopted a form-based code promoting mixed-use development for greater densities and decreased auto dependency as the basis of all planning in the city. Following the local tradition of collaboration, Covington's new codes are intended to serve as a model for new ordinances in all urbanizing areas of the county. And, with the help of students working through the University of Georgia's Metropolitan Design Studio, hosted in Covington each spring semester, the City of Oxford is updating its master plan.

Kay B. Lee, one of the founders of the Center and its current director, emphasizes the significance of these accomplishments: "All of these things happening locally is a kind of miracle in itself, given the lack of resources in this community. If we can set a more sustainable growth pattern and save millions of dollars in the process, would it not be reasonable to assume that any community, anywhere, can replicate what we have done?"

## **Stewardship Description**

Since the formation of the Center in 2002, an integral part of its mission has been stewardship of community planning and engagement, furthering the capacity of the county and its local jurisdictions to realize their values and visions over time.

One revealing set of statistics underscores this fact: Since its inception, the Center has hosted more than 2,000 events, forums, meetings, and planning sessions involving approximately 20,000 participants, including citizens, planning advocates and experts, local government representatives, and community stakeholder groups. In aggregate terms, this means that nearly one in every five county residents has been a participant—a staggering community engagement accomplishment that builds a strong foundation for sustained, hands-on stewardship.



The 2050 Plan calls for identifying and protecting community assets, ensuring they remain intact for generations to come. Newton County is rich with historical assets, and Old Church, built in 1841, is one of them. Today it is used for community gatherings.

Given that the development of the 2050 Plan was closely tied to the technical work of developing a comprehensive growth framework, much of the stewardship during that period was oriented to the involvement of local decision makers, key stakeholders, and technical experts. As a result, community outreach was very targeted and focused.

Now that there is an overall growth framework and decision makers are on board, the Center is turning its attention to broadening the base of community involvement and support for this new approach to growth. Given the county's dramatic population increase in recent years, and consequently the large number of residents who are new to the county (and likely unaware of the 2050 Plan), this will be a major undertaking.

The Center, working in partnership with the leadership collaborative, will launch a new engagement process called Celebrate Our Home in 2012. The 2050 Plan will be rolled out across the county, with 30 large traveling exhibits that showcase the community's land, culture, and people. In Southern style, the process will emphasize "fun, food, and facts." In short, the process will be as much about community building as it is about introducing the 2050 Plan.

The Center's goal is to reach out to all of the county's residents, emphasizing the 61 percent of the local population who could be considered newcomers to the area.

## Food, Fun & Facts

An eye-catching graphic designed to launch Celebrate Our Home's "100,000 Newtonians, 5 Events, 1 Goal."

FOOD FUN & FACTS  
100,000 NEWTONIANS  
5 EVENTS  
1 GOAL

Have you ever wondered what gives Newton County its character? Come find out at all Celebrate Our Home! Come enjoy food, activities, and entertainment for all ages. The kids will beg to stay! A showcase exhibit will remind you why Newton County is a great place to live! So stop by, meet your neighbors and make new friends, and HAVE FUN!!

learn more about  
CELEBRATE OUR HOME   [www.centernewton.org/coh](http://www.centernewton.org/coh)

LOCAL government + human services  
EDU LAND and history  
CAT NATURAL resources  
FAITH-BASED CIVIC & NON-PROFIT organizations  
economic engines  
ARTS & culture  
cities AND towns

CELEBRATE OUR HOME

“Many of these residents are relatively unaware or uninformed of local issues in the county; some residents actually don’t know what community they live in,” the Center’s director, Kay B. Lee, points out. “What we are testing is whether the masses can care about one broader subject: the overall development of our communities and the land and culture that make up the county as a whole.”

## **Stewardship Approaches**

The Center’s work and its use of specific stewardship approaches in the community are guided by a framework that has come to be known as the Newton Model, which focuses on a Place, a Process, and a Plan.

### **The Place**

The building known as The Center provides a neutral space for the process to occur. Renovated from a former single-story storefront and turned into a community facility, the building is the physical manifestation of the Center’s mission. At this building, the Center hosts, facilitates, documents, and supports collaborative planning in Newton County, based on the principles of “Think, Plan, Act.” It includes a large meeting room, up-to-date data projector and AV technology, wall space for large drawings and displays, and the capacity to stage everything from workshops and lectures to receptions for up to 200 people.

Among the tools employed at the Center facility are: community meetings, forums, and lectures; displays on the ongoing work of the Center and leadership collaborative; offices for the Center and related research and planning projects; and a general facility for other community events and gatherings.

### **The Process**

The Center’s process, which has evolved over the years, incorporates elements of public education and deliberative dialogue, stakeholder involvement, technical planning activities, outreach and community engagement, and ongoing research and advocacy.

In recent years, the Center has focused on stakeholder involvement and technical planning through the leadership collaborative and development of the 2050 Plan. That emphasis will soon shift to outreach and community engagement, along with more-focused ongoing research and advocacy projects. The tools employed during this new phase will be all about stewardship: media outreach; electronic outreach, including e-mail blasts and updates on Twitter and Facebook; traveling displays; and, important in the rural South, outreach in the form of face-to-face contact.

Historic Seney Hall on the Campus of Oxford College of Emory University.



### **The Plan**

The newly adopted 2050 Plan was developed to guide both future planning of local governments and the ongoing work of the Center. As an overarching framework, the 2050 Plan now must be vetted fiscally, integrated into local plans, and translated in local codes and ordinances. This process is already well under way, led by the research of the Center and planning initiatives of the City of Covington, City of Oxford, and the other members of the leadership collaborative. Tools employed by the Center to facilitate this process include: continued grant-funded research and advocacy, ongoing meetings and education of the leadership collaborative, and their serving as a resource to local governments as they begin to implement the new strategy for growth.

Despite the phenomenal success of the Center, director Kay B. Lee emphasizes the big challenges the county continues to face: ongoing growth; the continued influx of new residents who require education and outreach; incomplete geographical coverage of the county by local print media; and a corresponding need to upgrade the use of electronic and social media. She recognizes the vital importance of stewardship to long-term success. It's a big job, indeed, but given what the Center and the leadership collaborative have already accomplished, it is one that can be achieved.

## Stewardship Bottom Line

Newton County, Georgia, and the adjacent cities of Covington and Oxford, could be seen as a ground zero in the unfolding saga of urban sprawl in America. They lie directly in the path of the urban sprawl of greater Atlanta, often ranked among the top five most sprawling metropolitan areas in the United States.

Until recently, local planning practices in the county actually promoted the kind of development that was disrupting the quality of life: low-density residential development along with a lack of mixed use, local centers, or street connectivity. With the inception of the Center for Community Preservation and Planning, the Newton County Leadership Collaborative, and the 2050 Plan, local leadership and citizens have begun to reverse this situation.

“Newton County and its small towns are an example of the battle over sprawl taking place across the U.S.,” says Ron Thomas, of the University of Georgia’s College of Environment and Design. “The Newton community has done more, committed more, and achieved more in the way of collaborative planning than any other such small-scale community we know of in the US. This has occurred during the worst economic downturn in modern times.”

Building on local collaboration and lining up the support of key decision makers, Newton County and its local jurisdictions have begun a transformation of their community that, if sustained, will not only preserve a valued small-town way of life but also provide a model for other towns that seek to do the same. Their ever-widening community planning and engagement efforts demonstrate that they are in it for the long haul.

*The Newton community  
has done more,  
committed more, and  
achieved more  
in the way of  
collaborative planning  
than any other such  
small-scale community  
we know of in the U.S.*



TGIF Hastings Style

Friday's at the Fountain, summer concert series on Courthouse Square.

# HASTINGS, BARRY COUNTY, MICHIGAN

## *A Community Foundation Builds Partnerships Promoting a Sustainable Small-town Economy*

### **Overview**

Over the decades, the City of Hastings and surrounding communities in Barry County, Michigan, have faced challenges familiar to many small American towns, including the loss of residents and economic activity to nearby bigger cities. With the launch of the HomeTown Partnership program, the Barry Community Foundation has focused the community on reversing that trend by creating more entrepreneurial opportunities and, in the process, generating economic revitalization and new local wealth. This initiative has resulted in a vital network of organizations, people, and projects that is stewarding the longer-term sustainability of the Hastings area, helping it survive—and even thrive—in an era of major economic challenges. In the process, the Barry Community Foundation itself has reframed and refocused its own mission, programs, and activities.

### **Background**

Hastings, Michigan, is a small town of 7,000 people located in the south-central part of the state, not far from the shores of Lake Michigan. The county seat and only incorporated city of Barry County, Hastings is surrounded by, and equidistant from, four much bigger cities, all less than an hour away: Grand Rapids, Lansing, Battle Creek, and Kalamazoo. Over the years, this unique geographical relationship has presented many challenges for the community, as well as some distinct opportunities.

While Hastings and its surrounding smaller communities have retained their appealing rural character, they have also experienced little, if any, real growth in decades. County population figures have remained essentially flat, and a significant amount of the area's economic activity has gravitated to its larger urban neighbors. Increasingly, residents have migrated out of the county for employment, and the community has had a particularly difficult time hanging on to its younger residents, many of whom leave town for jobs or college and then don't return.

#### **Project:**

HomeTown Partnership

#### **Community:**

Hastings, Barry County  
Michigan

#### **Population:**

Circa 7,000

#### **Organization:**

Barry Community Foundation

#### **Website:**

[www.barrycf.org/htp](http://www.barrycf.org/htp)

#### **Principal Contact:**

Bonnie Hildreth, President  
Barry Community Foundation  
Hastings, Michigan

#### **Nominator:**

Milan Wall, Heartland Center  
for Leadership Development  
Lincoln, Nebraska

## A Home for Partnerships

The new Community Enrichment Center in Hastings, MI, a re-purposed former church, provides a physical space for the HomeTown Partnership and its activities.



At the same time, many residents of Hastings and surrounds, including newcomers, have deliberately chosen the community as a place to sink roots and raise a family, even if they have to commute longer distances to work. This choice is a reflection of the area's small-town environment, slower pace of life, and friendliness. A beautiful rural setting, historic buildings such as the Barry County Courthouse, and established local institutions such as the *Hastings Banner* and Hastings Public Library, have all helped the area survive as a functioning, livable community.

Hastings itself is a full-service city, with police, fire, public works, and community development departments, several public parks, and up-to-date library services. It also boasts its own hospital, airport, chamber of commerce, and the nonprofit Barry Community Foundation, a major force in the development of the community. Along with other community agencies and organizations, the foundation has been a central player, mobilizing local assets to help create a vital new future for the county.

## Engagement and Planning Process

As in most of Michigan, the global financial crisis of 2008 and a faltering American economy hit Hastings and environs hard. On the other hand, it was probably better prepared than most small towns. That's because the Barry Community Foundation, established more than a decade earlier, was very active in the area, with a significant community endowment fund, grants to support charitable and educational programs and services, and an identified role as community convener and problem solver.

In 2005, the foundation made a strategic decision that, in retrospect, dramatically boosted the county's capacity to address the challenges it faced, and other challenges that were waiting in the wings. It all began when local community leaders from Hastings attended a rural development conference. That's where they learned about the Heartland Center for Leadership Development, an independent nonprofit organization that is based in Nebraska and focuses on developing successful leadership in small towns.

The Heartland Center works with a local planning model called HomeTown Competitiveness, which was jointly developed by the Nebraska Community Foundation and the RUPRI (Rural Policy Research Institute) Center for Rural Entrepreneurship. The model is organized around four key community development themes: community endowments, youth, entrepreneurship, and leadership. The Hastings leaders were struck by the similarities between their community and Nebraska towns that were using this model, and were impressed with their achievements.

Not long after, the Barry Community Foundation sent an entire delegation of county residents for Heartland Center training to study the HomeTown Competitiveness model in more detail. Then they invited a representative of the Nebraska Community Foundation to visit Hastings and speak about its successful community development efforts.

What occurred that evening, with more than 100 area residents in attendance, became a signature event for Hastings and surrounding towns. Many people in the audience were galvanized by the presentation, and more than half indicated that they wanted to become directly involved in a similar program for Barry County.

As a result, the Barry Community Foundation began mobilizing its own HomeTown Competitiveness-style initiative, adapting the Nebraska model to fit the local community's needs and resources. Wisely, it recognized that there were ways in which the Hastings area was probably ahead of the development curve—an existing community endowment fund, for example—as well as ways in which it lagged behind.

Soon, a variety of projects were being identified and launched, each promoting a particular aspect of a more entrepreneurial community. These efforts were organized around Four Pillars, which were variations on the Nebraska themes:

1. **Community assets.** A Healthy Community assets tool (see appendix 3, “Case Study Publications and Resources”) was developed and incorporated in the foundation's grant-making criteria, ensuring that future dollars invested in the community were aligned with this new direction.
2. **Youth.** A local College Access Network was formed to address the issue of youth out-migration and promote local post-secondary opportunities.
3. **Entrepreneurship.** A small business assistance center was developed and lodged within the Hastings Public Library to provide information and assistance to aspiring entrepreneurs.
4. **Leadership.** A training course for aspiring local politicians was developed to encourage new leadership for local elected offices.

## Recognizing the Power of Partnership

HomeTown Partnership colleagues attend WOOD TV8's “Connecting with Community” award presentation.



The foundation also had a more ambitious goal in mind: to turn these efforts into a more cohesive partnership, a “way of business” that would energize the entire community, build on its assets, and strengthen its economic outlook. Over the next year and a half, with the guidance and financial support of the foundation, and other local and state organizations, this partnership began to take shape.

As part of this effort, the foundation worked to develop a stable organizational setting for the partnership. Initially, it had functioned as a loose network of interests and projects, but many stakeholders found that it lacked coherence and structure. Next, it was lodged at the Barry County Chamber of Commerce, but that approach didn’t seem to work either. In a small community, many single-purpose organizations do not have the wherewithal to take on such an ambitious effort.

Ultimately, the entire initiative was brought inside the foundation itself. Its board members were fully engaged and supportive, and foundation staff members were already involved in projects under all four pillars. By early 2007, the enterprise was formally branded the HomeTown Partnership, reflecting its collaborative approach and the other organizations partnering with the foundation in its delivery: the Barry County United Way, Barry County Economic Development Alliance, Barry County Chamber of Commerce, and the Michigan State University Extension Agency.

Most recently, in a sign that the community is in it for the long haul, the foundation secured and converted a former church building in downtown Hastings as a permanent home for the partnership and itself, with offices, space for other community-based organizations, and a facility to host meetings, events, and, ultimately, a business incubator.

Today the HomeTown Partnership has become a kind of juggernaut in the economic life of the community and beyond. All along, the foundation’s basic tenet of “servant leadership” has served as a guiding principle to advance its efforts. As President Bonnie Hildreth likes to say, “It doesn’t matter who gets credit . . . as long as the community gets the benefit.”

*Today the HomeTown  
Partnership has become  
a kind of juggernaut  
in the economic life  
of the community  
and beyond.*



### Courthouse Square

Adopt-a-corner landscaping and the way finding sign project make streets welcoming and comfortable.

## Stewardship Description

As a grassroots community engagement process, the HomeTown Partnership grew quickly and organically: First came a development model that fit the community. This was followed by active engagement of community members and full-speed-ahead implementation of a variety of strategies. In time, these efforts led to a more formal organizational structure, institutional backing, and even a permanent home.

While the partnership's evolution may not fit the more structured, linear path of other approaches to community planning, all the pieces eventually came together. More important, the notion of community stewardship was incorporated into its efforts from the beginning, sustaining the capacity of the community to realize its values and vision over time. In fact, the partnership was always focused on changing the ways in which the community acknowledges and embraces change. That was reflected in its initial slate of activities. These projects immediately catalyzed residents but also took a longer-term view of the community, building capacity and promoting local self-reliance.

Eventually, the partnership developed what might have been seen as its only missing link: a long-term vision for the community. Based on the same Healthy Community framework used by the foundation to rationalize its grant making, the partnership adopted a vision and set of strategies framed by seven focus areas:

1. **Basic needs**—meeting the basic needs of residents
2. **Health and wellness**—promoting health and wellness
3. **Education**—creating quality education and learning opportunities for all ages
4. **Economy**—ensuring a vibrant and diversified economy
5. **Arts and culture**—providing broad access to arts and culture
6. **Neighborhoods and communities**—fostering strong, connected neighborhoods and communities
7. **Environment**—protecting and stewarding the natural environment

This template broadened the partnership's perspective from a primarily economic focus to one of longer-term sustainability, linking the various initiatives already under way in the community to a larger goal. It became an overarching framework for stewarding the community's progress and achievements over time, bringing together qualitative

*This is a progressive community with a well-devised strategy for community engagement to keep the wheels rolling in the right direction.*

and quantitative information on the community's well-being, as well as the experience of partnership organizations and local volunteers. It also helped lay out a strategy for long-term improvement and a guide for working toward it through local investment and philanthropy.

Last year the partnership began actively using its vision framework to track and report on its progress to the wider community and to help people understand where they can go to volunteer or become active in a project, find useful information or training for their entrepreneurial efforts, or simply locate advice or assistance.

Today the HomeTown Partnership is having a lasting impact on the future of Hastings and Barry County. Says Milan Wall, co-director of the Heartland Center, whose organization helped inspire the partnership: "This is a progressive community with a strong values-base, creative vision for the future, and a well-devised strategy for community engagement to keep the wheels rolling in the right direction."

## **Stewardship Approaches**

The Four Pillars of the HomeTown Partnership, and the projects that have been initiated under them, best capture the key approaches being used to steward the community's progress over time.

### **1. Community assets**

Basing it on the Healthy Community model of the Seattle Foundation—a community foundation serving the city of Seattle, Washington—the partnership developed a Healthy Community assets tool to align its grant-giving protocols with partnership programs and activities, ensuring that decisions to invest funds in the community aligned with its overall strategic direction. (This model was also used to guide development of an overarching vision for the community.) In retrospect, this tool has changed and strengthened the foundation itself.

### **2. Youth**

The College Access Network, formed to promote more postsecondary-school opportunities in Barry County, has become the epicenter of the partnership's youth pillar. To further its goal of stemming youth out-migration while promoting more opportunities, the College Access Network has developed two complementary tools:

- **College Advising Corps.** Working with the National College Advising Corps program and its Michigan State University affiliate, the partnership put up the money to place a college advising corps member in the county's less affluent schools, working in collaboration with school counselors, teachers, and administrators. The goal is to increase the number of low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented students from Barry County entering college and completing an undergraduate degree.
- **4-H and Generation E.** A local teacher with expertise in developing core curricula observed that local schools were not creative in teaching entrepreneurship. She began developing curricula that connected math and reading skills with entrepreneurship. The partnership, working with the local 4-H chapter, developed Generation E curricula for all local middle schools. Students now receive instruction and hands-on business experience; they write business plans, apply for loans, and go through certification for real business ventures. One group of students, for example, created a community garden that sells produce at the local farmers' market and to restaurants.



Fountain at the Courthouse Square.

### 3. Entrepreneurship

The Biz, a community-based small-business-development center in the Hastings Public Library, has been working with the state's Small Business Administration program and securing grants to advance local entrepreneurship. Two programs organized by The Biz are already generating significant results in the community:

- **Boot camp for entrepreneurs.** Creating Entrepreneurial Communities is the formal name of a new course more popularly known as Business Boot Camp, an intensive training series for community members who are starting up their own local businesses or aspire to do so. Students undergo a rough-and-tumble education in entrepreneurship, learning the ropes (and how to dodge the bullets) of business planning, start-up, finance, marketing, and expansion.
- **101 Conversations.** Graduates of boot camp take their knowledge to the next level through this program, which promotes direct contact with experienced local businesspeople and entrepreneurs. Students conduct their own interviews with local experts, identifying real-world business opportunities and barriers, such as land use laws and tax structures.

## Local Food Security.

Volunteers unload foodstuffs and other supplies for food banks, helping make Barry County more food secure.



### 4. Leadership

The Public Service Series was an intensive program of workshops, training, and publications designed to help create a new generation of educated, informed, and inspired community leaders, both those who aspire to public office as well as those who currently serve. The program comprised:

- **Training course for aspiring politicians.** The partnership staged workshops for aspiring local elected officials, taking 35 local citizens who were thinking about pursuing political careers through an intensive training process on running for, and serving in, elected office. Some participants dropped out as a result of learning they were not truly interested in, or cut out for, public office. In itself, that was a valuable education. Others not only completed the course but also went on to run for, and win, local office.

- **Interviews with local elected officials.** The next step in the Public Service Series was arranging for aspiring politicians to interview existing public servants to develop a better understanding of their offices, legal requirements, required skill sets, and so on.
- **Publications on local elected office.** Flowing from the above, the Public Service Series developed and published booklets on local public offices and how to run for them. The former publication covers key local city, county, and judicial offices; their requirements, functions, and responsibilities; and recommended skills and competencies for those wishing to serve in those offices.
- **Intergovernmental workshops.** The Public Service Series also interviewed local elected officials to identify which major current affairs subjects they would like to learn more about. This has resulted in an annual intergovernmental workshop for local officials on topics such as medical marijuana and land banks.

*Such an endeavor may not only change a community for the better but also be the agent of change itself.*

## **Stewardship Bottom Line**

A community foundation can offer a powerful platform for engaging and organizing a community in effecting positive change over time. Typically, such organizations not only have the objective perspective of a nonprofit organization and a comprehensive focus, but also the financial capacity to target strategic investments in a community's vision. At the same time, such an ambitious undertaking can stretch a foundation beyond the bounds of its traditional mission.

Encouragingly, the HomeTown Partnership experience demonstrates that a local community foundation in collaboration with key community organizations, institutions, and individuals can create enormous dividends for the community, its economy, and the long-term sustainability of both.

There is another lesson to be learned: Such an endeavor may not only change a community for the better but also be the agent of change itself. As foundation president Bonnie Hildreth observes, "When we stopped focusing on what we were taking in, in terms of grants and funding, and started focusing on where and how to reinvest in our community, there was even more interest and attention in the foundation. It has truly been a win-win situation."



### Glen and Viola Walters Cultural Arts Center

A creative, adaptive reuse of a former church building, the Center is a beehive of community activity.

# HILLSBORO, OREGON

## *A Booming Small City Blends Values and Vision into Canvas of Rapid Growth and Change*

### Overview

The Hillsboro 2020 Vision and Action Plan is widely regarded as the most successful visioning effort in a state known for visionary community planning. While rapid growth and continuous change have been part of Hillsboro's landscape for more than a quarter century, its efforts to maintain its small-town character and strengthen its cohesiveness have gotten only stronger over time, providing a valuable example for American cities affected by ongoing growth and urbanization. Hillsboro 2020's rigorous approach to visioning, including the creation of a vision and action plan with 180 specific actions, reflects the city's strong predisposition for tangible outcomes; and the results have been impressive. Twenty-three lead partner organizations work collaboratively with the City of Hillsboro to ensure that the community's plan is realized. Just as important, Hillsboro has used its award-winning vision and action plan to steward and sustain its values, even as it implements actions anticipating a dynamic future. In the process, the community is forging an identity that embraces both the old and new.<sup>1</sup>

### Background

Hillsboro, Oregon, is a city of 91,000 located in the heart of the fertile Tualatin Valley, at the far western edge of the Portland metropolitan area. The seat of government for Washington County, Hillsboro has long served as the political, cultural, and economic hub of the surrounding farming communities. Its downtown has a classic small-town ambience, characterized by a main street with small businesses, a historic county courthouse with majestic giant sequoias, and surrounding older neighborhoods.

#### **Project:**

Hillsboro 2020 Vision and Action Plan

#### **Community:**

Hillsboro, Oregon

#### **Population:**

Circa 91,000

#### **Organization:**

City of Hillsboro, Oregon  
Hillsboro 2020 Vision  
Implementation Committee

#### **Website:**

[www.hillsboro2020.org](http://www.hillsboro2020.org)

#### **Principal Contact:**

Christopher Hartye  
Project Manager  
City of Hillsboro  
Hillsboro, Oregon

#### **Project Nominator:**

Ellen Frisch, Principal  
Ellen Frisch & Associates  
Victoria, British Columbia,  
Canada

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<sup>1</sup> The author of this study served as a consultant to Hillsboro 2020 during its original visioning and planning phases (1998–2000) and continued to advise its Vision Implementation Committee through 2005.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, Hillsboro entered a period of sustained economic growth, driven by a burgeoning high-tech economy known locally as the Silicon Forest. For two decades running, its population grew 8 percent annually, expanding from 28,000 in 1980 to 70,000 in 2000. The city's land area more than doubled through annexation, while new "fabs" (electronics plants) were constructed and new workers arrived. A light-rail line went into service in 1998, connecting the city to Portland and encouraging further development and urbanization. Hillsboro's ethnic mix also changed, with Latinos increasing from fewer than 5 percent of the local population to more than 20 percent.

Despite the recent recession, Hillsboro's growth continues apace. The city is widely viewed as the economic engine of the entire state. Intel Corporation alone employs more than 15,000 workers in Hillsboro, and newer green-tech companies, such as SolarWorld, are expanding the local economic base. Workers from around the world and new residents of transit-oriented developments continue to diversify Hillsboro's changing profile.

Hillsboro 2020, a comprehensive community visioning process guided by the City of Hillsboro and stewarded by the community-based Vision Implementation Committee (VIC), has evolved as an integral part of the city's growth and change, helping to maintain and even strengthen the community's core values while implementing its vision for a dynamic future.

## **Engagement and Planning Process**

By the mid-1990s, it was clear that Hillsboro was being challenged in integrating the many communities and cultures that were growing and evolving within its borders. Physical and social connectivity were suffering; new residents, especially Latinos, were not well integrated into civic life; and many people felt that the community's historic small-town identity and character were disappearing.

Stirred by the prospect of fraying community cohesion, the City of Hillsboro began discussing a community-based visioning process to augment the regular update of its comprehensive plan. The thought was to look at the broader, longer-term future of the community and determine how it might be encouraged to be more proactive. In 1997, city staff conducted a research project to support such an undertaking; it included a scientific survey, focus groups with community leaders, and development of a community profile compiling key data and trends.

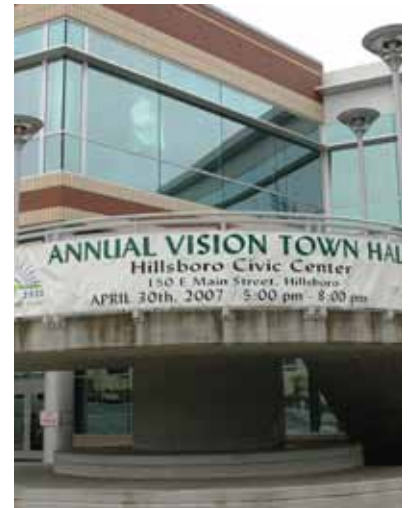
From 1998 to 2000, the city engaged the wider community in Hillsboro 2020, a comprehensive visioning process. The goal was to create a 20-year vision for the city and a near-term, community-based action plan to guide the vision's achievement. A whole-of-community approach addressed seven broad themes that transcended traditional land use planning: community, economy, environment, education, arts and culture, health and safety, and neighborhoods and districts.

Hillsboro 2020 was the largest public engagement process in the city's history, directly involving some 1,500 citizens in meetings, workshops, and community events over nearly two years. Special efforts were made to engage newer residents, especially Latinos; it was the first fully bilingual visioning process in the state. During the initial visioning phase, the community articulated its core values and priority vision ideas. Then, a citizen-based vision task force refined this input into an overarching vision statement subtitled "Hillsboro—Hometown for the Future."

Subsequently, six vision action teams comprised of citizens, local experts, and city staff developed a vision and action plan, to be jointly implemented by the city and 20 lead partner organizations, including governmental agencies, nonprofits, and community groups. The final vision and action plan was unanimously adopted by the city council in the spring of 2000, and the plan was implemented that fall.

Since 2000, the Hillsboro 2020 Vision and Action Plan has been methodically integrated into the life of the community. The ongoing VIC promotes implementation of the plan, supporting lead partner activities, monitoring their progress, and reporting back to the community. The annual 2020 Vision Town Hall has grown in attendance and stature, and a five-year strategy review process periodically reengages citizens in updating the plan. A complete renewal of the community's overarching vision is now proposed for 2015, five years ahead of schedule.

Hillsboro's success in implementing its plan has been impressive, with scores of actions completed over the decade. The physical impact on the community is visible in a major downtown public square; the first city hall in the nation to receive gold LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification; the Glenn and Viola Walters Cultural Arts Center; an adaptive reuse of a former church building, which is heavily used by the community; the Venetian, a renovated movie theater in downtown; a community art gallery; community gardens; bicycle and pedestrian amenities; and dog parks.



Thanks in part to the community's vision, Hillsboro Civic Center is the first city hall in the nation to receive Gold LEED certification.

## Building Leadership

Hillsboro recognizes outstanding citizens who have helped to advance its vision—developing new community leadership in the process.



Other less tangible projects add a human dimension to Hillsboro’s visionary successes: after-school programs for youth, the Essential Health Clinic for the medically uninsured, an international reading hour through the local library system targeting the city’s newest overseas arrivals, community emergency response team training, and many similar projects.

By far, Hillsboro 2020’s biggest achievement has been keeping its promise to help create a renewed sense of community identity and cohesion, even as the city continues to grow. Its ongoing presence has had a positive influence on everyday life, reinforcing a community norm for visionary thinking and establishing a reputation that extends far beyond Hillsboro’s boundaries.

## Stewardship Description

Twelve years into its vision and action plan, Hillsboro 2020 has established an impressive record in achieving its vision. In fact, the very structure of Hillsboro's vision implementation approach has created a system that helps steward its vision, sustaining the community's capacity to realize its values and visions over time.

Things did not start out quite so smoothly, however. In 2000, Hillsboro 2020 was searching for the right formula to engage the community in implementing its plan.

The VIC had been formed, but its members—many of them the lead partners charged with implementing specific actions—were sometimes unclear about their relationship with the committee or how to report on their progress. City directors, on learning that a good part of the responsibility for implementing the action plan fell on their departments, were unsure how to incorporate the actions into their existing work programs and budgets. The city did not have a clear branding strategy to publicize vision achievements, and the public did not see a lot of immediate results.

Within a year or two, however, the bugs largely had been worked out. This refinement reflected a number of factors, including continued strong support from Hillsboro's city manager, the total commitment of a detail-oriented city project manager, continued efforts to work with the VIC in refining and improving the plan implementation process, and a realization that visibly branding the community's vision-driven achievements would increase Hillsboro 2020's visibility and amplify its success over time.

What resulted were a well-oiled machine, as well as a program of activities and events that have established a regular cycle—or community rhythm—for implementing, reporting on, and refining Hillsboro's vision and action plan. Today, while the VIC's efforts are supported by city funds, staffing, and targeted consulting expertise, the entire effort is clearly community driven; and the collaboration between the city, key stakeholders, and volunteers is impressive.

Every autumn, the VIC convenes and surveys are sent to lead partners to track their implementation successes and challenges for every action in the action plan. The VIC then meets with the lead partners to support or assist their implementation efforts. In the spring of the

*Internet and social media are indispensable parts of sustaining citizen engagement.*

following year, a progress report is prepared and the annual vision town hall is staged for the public, with lead partners in attendance. By summer, a final report is submitted to the city, and annual vision awards are presented to vision champions in the community. The process begins anew the next fall.

On top of this platform, Hillsboro 2020 has developed a decade's worth of subtle refinements that provide a human face to the project and places for citizens to connect, share their aspirations, and celebrate the community's accomplishments. The VIC has become more ambitious in taking the vision out to the community, and, aptly for its location in the Silicon Forest, it has become more skilled in using electronic communications, the Internet, and social media to spread its message.

Along with its record of achievement, it is Hillsboro 2020's thoroughness that most impresses. In a place once settled by Dutch farmers and today full of engineers, one might not find Hillsboro's rigorous, methodological approach so unusual. As Hillsboro 2020 project manager Christopher Hartye acknowledges, "It takes a lot of time and attention to detail to implement and track the various actions in the plan—but ultimately, it is those actions, and the community collaboration needed to accomplish them, that bring the vision the most meaning."

## **Stewardship Approaches**

Working through the structure of its vision implementation process, Hillsboro 2020 has developed an overall approach and variety of specific tools to steward achievement of the community's vision over time. Its overall approach is essentially driven by ongoing plan implementation—a yearly and five-yearly cycle of repeated activities that are constantly renewed and refined to improve their effectiveness. Hillsboro's stewardship tools are organized below by the five overarching stewardship themes described in the introduction to this report:

### **1. Honoring local values**

Hillsboro 2020 reflects commonly held community values, including notions such as being positive, thinking forward, collaborating, getting things done, and respecting one another in the process. This is how things have always happened in Hillsboro. In essence, the 2020 program has embodied such values, linking the community's historic core values to its future vision.

## 2. Sustaining citizen engagement

**The Hillsboro 2020 Vision Town Hall** is held every year, usually in May, to celebrate progress in implementing the community's vision. Town hall attendance has increased steadily over the decade, and each year it attracts hundreds of people. Entertainment and food are provided, the VIC reports on implementation successes from the past year, lead partner organizations have interactive displays, and the public is invited to submit new ideas and volunteer to become more involved. Most recently, the town hall event has been co-branded with other popular community events to build awareness, reach a broader audience, and generate more coverage by local news media.

**The Hillsboro 2020 Vision Awards** are presented to the individual citizen and organization that have done the most to advance the community's vision over the past year. Recently the awards were coupled with Hillsboro 2020's Annual Progress Report to city council, giving them greater cachet and generating more media recognition.

**Community Conversations** are now employed regularly to keep the 2020 brand in front of local service clubs and organizations throughout the year. These conversations often happen in public spaces, such as outdoor markets and fairs, and make use of interactive tools. Residents are always asked about their aspirations for the city as a way to touch base with new ideas that may be starting to take hold.

**The VIC's Education and Outreach Committee** is dedicated to exploring, refining, and delivering better community education and outreach over time. The members design and refine the annual 2020 Vision Town Hall program; mobilize as needed to see that Hillsboro 2020 is represented at community events; communicate with stakeholders; and strategize about public outreach, including the use of the Internet and social media.

**The Latino Outreach Advisory Committee (LOAC)** is an outgrowth of the original visioning process that continues to articulate the interest and opinions of Hillsboro's growing Latino community for input into the vision and other city activities and projects. The LOAC has also become a significant way for young Latinos to step up to leadership roles.

**Internet and Social Media** are indispensable parts of sustaining citizen engagement. Hillsboro 2020 regularly posts news, information, updated reports, and downloadable videos to its website



**Concrete Results:** Children delight in the Magnolia Park fountain—one of many new “third places” where neighbors can gather and connect—called for in the Hillsboro 2020 vision.

([www.hillsboro2020.org](http://www.hillsboro2020.org)); and it uses Facebook to share important news and events and to appeal to a younger, more tech-savvy demographic. Reflecting Hillsboro's large high-tech community, its use of social media is strategic (Facebook is preferred over Twitter, for example), sophisticated, and highly effective.

### **3. Achieving visions and plans**

**The Lead Partner Survey** is the basic tool used to catalogue and track achievement of the community's vision and action plan. A simple form completed by the lead partners for every action in the Hillsboro 2020 Vision and Action Plan, it provides the foundational information for monitoring and measuring the community's success in achieving its vision.

### **4. Holding leaders accountable**

**The VIC** is the primary tool for keeping community leadership aware and responsive to the vision. Comprised of lead partner organizations, each with more than one action in the action plan, as well as representatives of general interest groups and the public at large, the 23-member VIC brings together key community organizations in one group charged with ensuring the implementation success of the community's vision. The VIC is chaired by a committee member and supported by city staff; it also receives technical support from the city's consultant.

**The VIC's Lead Partner Assistance Subcommittee (LPAS)** works directly with lead partners to assist in their implementation of action items in the 2020 vision and action plan. Small teams of lead partner peers discuss their challenges and make suggestions to assist in their success. (The LPAS team has recently been integrated into the VIC's steering committee.)

**The Annual Progress Report** is the culmination of every year's implementation activities. Based on lead partner feedback and additional ideas suggested by citizens at the annual town hall, the progress report tracks key activities, catalogues community progress in implementing actions, and proposes minor refinements to the plan. In recent years, the report has been shortened and made more graphic to broaden its appeal.

## 5. Responding to a changing world

**The Hillsboro 2020 Strategy Review**, conducted every five years, is a major reengagement of the public that involves residents in a high-level review of the vision and action plan. It keeps the plan alive, helps identify emerging community issues, and generates new strategies in response. During the 2010 Strategy Review, at the suggestion of the public, the larger notion of sustainability was worked into Hillsboro's action plan in a much more thorough way.

### **Stewardship Bottom Line**

Hillsboro 2020 is an example of community-based visioning that has been conducted under the guidance of a progressive city government with remarkable success in effecting positive community change. These attributes alone make Hillsboro 2020 noteworthy. Add the fact that the project is focused on an already well-planned city, where the local economy is a regional powerhouse and local politics are impressively collaborative, and the uniqueness of Hillsboro 2020 is apparent.

Looking at such attributes, the standard set by Hillsboro might seem daunting—if not unattainable—to other cities. But that would miss the finer print of this story: Hillsboro is also a city that has faced major challenges in accommodating breakneck growth and incorporating numerous emergent communities and cultures into a traditional small-town setting where a significant percentage of the population is economically disadvantaged or speaks English as a second language. This brings the real success of Hillsboro 2020 into sharper focus.

At the end of the day, what makes Hillsboro 2020 so successful goes beyond the city's considerable advantages. Rather, Hillsboro's success over time has been ensured by a well-honed program of ongoing engagement and stewardship activities, and the community rhythm this program has created. This dedicated, community-based approach has elevated Hillsboro's community values and vision to a place of prominence where they are truly part of the fabric of the community and its civic life. This meets the test of true stewardship.

*This approach has elevated Hillsboro's community values and vision to a place of prominence where they are truly part of the fabric of the community and its civic life. This meets the test of true stewardship.*



### Students Shape City Budgets

High school students dialogue with a Portsmouth City Councilor as part of a City budget dialogue, suggesting ideas to save money while boosting education.

# PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

## *Deliberative Dialogue Sets New Standards for Informed Local Democracy*

### **Overview**

Portsmouth Listens is a compelling example of deliberative democracy in action at the local level. First launched more than a decade ago as a citizen-initiated response to the need for an informed public dialogue on a controversial issue in a Portsmouth, New Hampshire, school, Portsmouth Listens has grown into a community-based nonprofit that promotes deliberative community dialogue on all manner of topics—for example, public policy, planning, and citywide budgeting—in a variety of formats, such as study circles, one-day community conversations, and candidate forums. Its approach—based on principles that foster open, informed civil dialogue—have proved to be effective alternatives to more traditional and, at times, contentious or polarizing formats. The City of Portsmouth’s planning and sustainability initiatives, in particular, have benefited from the Portsmouth Listens approach—as could local governance, planning, and community engagement efforts everywhere.

### **Background**

Portsmouth, New Hampshire, is a city of approximately 21,000 located one hour north of Boston. The city’s population has dropped slightly from its peak in the 20th century but has been relatively stable since 2000. Not nearly as diverse ethnically as New England’s larger cities, Portsmouth does have significant socioeconomic diversity.

The city was first settled in 1623 and is acknowledged to be one of the oldest permanently inhabited cities in the United States. A shipbuilding center for more than three centuries, the city today enjoys significant historical and architectural heritage, including a compact, walkable downtown with restaurants, galleries, arts and cultural events, and other attractions. It has earned numerous designations for its livability and quality of life.

#### **Project:**

Portsmouth Listens

#### **Community:**

Portsmouth, New Hampshire

#### **Population:**

Circa 21,000

#### **Organization:**

Portsmouth Listens

#### **Website:**

[www.portsmouthlistens.org](http://www.portsmouthlistens.org)

#### **Principal Contact:**

Jim Noucas  
Noucas Law Office  
Portsmouth, New Hampshire

#### **Project Nominator:**

Martha McCoy  
Executive Director  
Everyday Democracy  
East Hartford, Connecticut

*Portsmouth Listens represents an entire series of ongoing engagements that have been implemented in Portsmouth for more than a decade.*

Given its location, history, and urban amenities, Portsmouth has long been a popular destination for vacationers, attracting tens of thousands of visitors. It is also an employment hub for the region. As such, the city's population typically swells to twice its size on any given week-day, and by more than 50,000 additional visitors during the summer months. This creates major challenges for the community, including traffic, congestion, and increased demands on services.

While several of Portsmouth's traditional industries have declined over the centuries, elements of its earlier economy—most notably the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, whose future is again under review as of this writing—continue to figure prominently in the area. The city's economy has also become much more diversified. In addition to ship repair and tourism, major business sectors include health care, government, and the insurance and finance industries, as well as several science- and technology-based companies. The University of New Hampshire, with an enrollment of nearly 15,000 students, is located just 8 miles away, in the town of Durham, and is a significant regional employer.

In recent decades, Portsmouth has addressed many of the same issues confronting other American cities: urban development, city planning, police–community relations, schools, sustainability, city finance and budgeting, and more. It is on this stage that Portsmouth Listens has emerged as a significant and positive force in the local democratic process.

### **Engagement and Planning Process**

Portsmouth Listens represents not just one community planning and engagement process but an entire series of ongoing engagements that have been implemented in Portsmouth for more than a decade. These deliberative dialogues have addressed a number of issues of strategic importance to the city and have resulted in significant outcomes, including changes to local government policies, revised or new community plans, major public decisions on specific issues, and actions undertaken to implement solutions for local problems.

Portsmouth Listens first emerged as a grassroots coalition of community leaders in the late 1990s, when the group mobilized a public engagement process about an issue of great concern to the community: parental distress over the perceived problem of violence at Portsmouth Middle School.



## Portsmouth Listens!

This pamphlet was hand delivered to over 5,000 houses by volunteers. It was prepared free by a local graphics and marketing firm.

At the time, school administrators had asked the Greater Portsmouth Education Partnership Council (GPEPC) to find a better way for schools to communicate with the community on issues critical to excellence in education. The GPEPC—chaired by Jim Noucas, a local attorney and father of three school-aged children—recognized this as a chance to help Portsmouth address its concerns in a different manner than the usual public hearing or city council session, which often had proved to be ineffective, or, worse, divisive.

Partnering with several key allies—including Portsmouth Middle School administrators and parents, and Bruce Mallory, a professor of education at the University of New Hampshire—Noucas set about investigating new approaches to discussing and resolving Portsmouth Middle School's perceived violence issue. He came upon a nonprofit organization called Everyday Democracy, based in East Hartford, Connecticut, which had been working with the Swedish method of study circles. This seemed to be exactly the tool Noucas was looking for.

In the study circles method, small groups of citizens use a facilitated process to educate themselves on important issues, develop solutions, and make informed decisions. A compelling spokesman, Noucas helped convince local school officials and the City of Portsmouth to try the study circle method to investigate the problem. All parties agreed, and a process was launched in 1999. Tragically, the Columbine High School shootings in Colorado occurred during the middle of the Portsmouth initiative. This added a heightened sense of urgency to the issue.

*These conversations helped develop better communication and understanding among students, parents, and educators, opening the community's eyes to the power of deliberative dialogue.*

Through the ensuing dialogue, parents, educators, and more than 200 middle school students came together in a series of intensive conversations. As a result, the community reframed its understanding of the issue, moving from the *perceived* problem (school violence) to the *root* problem (physical and verbal bullying) to appropriate solutions (the establishment of “respectful schools” reforms). The reforms included, at students’ request, more adult supervision where bullying was most common.

Their findings and recommendations on respectful schools were presented to the school board and Portsmouth City Council, resulting in new school policies and actions to address bullying. (In 1999, bullying was not on the public radar screen the way it is today.) Just as important, these conversations helped develop better communication and understanding among students, parents, and educators, opening the community’s eyes to the power of deliberative dialogue.

The following year, a local school board member picked up on the positive momentum generated by the respectful schools effort, in which she had taken part. She proposed a similar process be used to address the highly emotional issue of school redistricting and related community concerns, including school enrollments and overcrowding. Despite a history of impassioned public debate and contentious hearings before the city council, this issue had defied clear resolution.

Again, the study circle technique helped residents consider a hot topic in a new, more civil, and respectful manner. Citizens were able to come to agreement on a carefully considered set of solutions. The final report of the process, “Rethinking Rather than Redistricting,” resulted in a number of actions, including strategic investments to upgrade local schools and a minor relocation of some students. Moreover, it was widely supported by the public, including individuals holding opposing perspectives who probably would not have been able to come to an agreement under any other circumstances. Once again, the changes in community perceptions were at least as powerful as the resulting solutions.

Over the decade of the 2000s, Portsmouth Listens pursued its mission of deliberative community dialogue with a heightened sense of purpose, expanding and refining its approaches and tools, and developing a core of citizen facilitators with deliberative dialogue training and skills. The organization became widely respected for its role in promoting dialogue on public issues of critical importance at strategic junctures in the community’s life.

There was no shortage of community issues to which the approaches of Portsmouth Listens might be applied. The group was emboldened by its continuing success to take them on:

- **Strategic community planning.** From 2002 to 2004, Portsmouth Listens used a deliberative dialogue to help develop input into, and build public support for, a city master plan to guide land use decisions and, by implication, the city's overall quality of life.
- **Deliberative candidate forums.** Beginning in 2005 and continuing since then, prior to local elections, Portsmouth Listens has involved local candidates for public office in deliberations with citizens on key community issues.
- **Middle school construction versus renovation.** Between 2007 and 2009, Portsmouth Listens engaged the public in a controversial decision whether to renovate an existing middle school facility or build a new one in an environmentally sensitive area.
- **Sustainability.** From 2009 to 2010, Portsmouth Listens used deliberative dialogue to help in the development of a sustainability plan for the City of Portsmouth.
- **Participatory budgeting.** In 2011–12, as part of the current City of Portsmouth budgeting process, Portsmouth Listens is promoting dialogue between citizens and city councillors, who have been sitting down to have conversations with local groups.

By the end of the decade, Portsmouth Listens had directly involved some 1,200 residents in more than 10,000 hours of public dialogue, not to mention countless hours of informal conversations, ongoing education of participants, and related community activities.

In addition, key civic institutions—including the *Portsmouth Herald*, the Portsmouth School Department, and the City of Portsmouth—became strategic partners with Portsmouth Listens in these engagements, disseminating the content of community-based dialogues in the local news and integrating the resulting determinations into the public decision-making process. John Tabor, publisher of the *Herald*, has shown a particularly strong commitment to the community by making the dialogues run by Portsmouth Listens a regular part of the public forum it provides.



### Dialoguing for Sustainability

Citizens poll in creating a vision for a community-based Sustainability Plan. Sustainable Portsmouth, a new community group, grew out of these dialogues.

Portsmouth Listens formally incorporated as a New Hampshire nonprofit, voluntary corporation in 2004, operating on a small budget with financial support for specific dialogues it undertook. The group has diligently protected and maintained its political neutrality, which is essential to its credibility as a neutral convener and to its creation of forums in which people representing all perspectives feel welcome to participate with equal standing.

Building on established New Hampshire traditions of individual rights and collective power, including the traditional New England town meeting, Portsmouth Listens today has moved beyond its initial involvement to become a civic model for creating good decisions—stronger communities, and more informed local democracy.

Portsmouth Listens also has provided information and assistance to other New Hampshire cities and towns; indeed, it has worked with other partners to create New Hampshire Listens, a new statewide organization with a similar mission. New Hampshire Listens intends to facilitate development of local “Listens” programs in communities throughout the state, addressing local issues through deliberative dialogue. It also plans to convene regional and statewide dialogues.

## **Stewardship Description**

If there is a singular aspect of Portsmouth Listens that contributes to the stewardship of community engagement and planning, it is deliberative dialogue. Through the simple act of creating a space in which citizens can have civil discussions on issues of mutual concern that result in informed action, this initiative has stewarded civic engagement and community planning in Portsmouth, influencing not only city plans and policies but the democratic process itself. This, in turn, has furthered the community’s capacity to realize its values and visions over time.

As described by Portsmouth Listens, a deliberative dialogue has two overarching outcomes: well-reasoned information for input into community decision making, and a stronger sense of community. Jim Nocas elaborates on this point: “One hundred people participating in a four-week study circle with two hours of dialogue each week provide information based on 800 hours of deliberation—as compared to a two-hour public hearing at which 30 or 40 citizens offer their opinions to the decision makers without deliberation or interaction. This produces good information for decision makers to consider in arriving at important decisions. Where people have participated in the

decision-making process, they are far more likely to become involved in the implementation of the decision. This can create social capital to build a community based on a deeper and more informed understanding of issues and solutions. There can be a (personal) transformation, from ‘*the city*’ to ‘*my city*.’”

Noucas cites two foundational pillars upon which rest the deliberative public dialogues of Portsmouth Listens. Interestingly, these pillars reflect the dual traditions of New Hampshire’s democratic culture cited earlier, individual rights and collective power:

1. **Creating a marketplace of ideas.** All ideas must have an equal opportunity to compete openly in the marketplace of ideas, to be deliberated with the best ideas out there. The idea that rises to the top is the “winner.”
2. **Bringing divergent views together.** People must discover the commonalities in their divergent backgrounds and points of views as a first step in finding mutually acceptable solutions to common problems.

From these two pillars, a set of guiding principles for deliberate dialogue has evolved, reflecting the experiences and learning of the organizations associated with Portsmouth Listens:

- **Provide safe places.** Dialogue must be held in places that are safe for all participants, regardless of their backgrounds, ideas, or opinions. By including everyone and making *every* person’s participation comfortable, the process automatically excludes inappropriate, offensive, or threatening behavior by *any* person.
- **Establish commonality.** Participants must explore their common experiences, values, or aspirations in order to establish a common bond for deliberation. Moving beyond divergent perspectives is the first step in finding mutually acceptable solutions.
- **Deliberate openly.** In order to have a dialogue, there must be purposeful and honest consideration and reflection. Participants must identify the issues at hand, inform one another of essential facts, discuss options and solutions, and seek common ground in coming to a resolution.

- **Engage face-to-face.** For such dialogue to have meaningful outcomes, participants must meet face-to-face. Regardless of the benefits of technology to communication, there is no substitute for genuine human contact in building trust, creating understanding, and finding common ground.
- **Dialogue over time.** For deliberative dialogue to attain its full potential, it should occur over a period of time. Participants need to spend time away from the conversation to process information, think about ideas, do research, or have outside conversations, and then come back. Single-event dialogue can be effective in certain situations, but it is preferable to have time to deliberate.

Guided by these pillars and principles, Portsmouth Listens has engaged in three types of public dialogue over the decade:

1. **Decisional dialogue**, in which deliberative dialogue results in or influences a specific public decision, for example, the dialogue about the renovation versus new construction of Portsmouth Middle School
2. **Policy dialogue**, in which a deliberative dialogue is linked to a long-term policy decision—for example, the dialogues about bullying at Portsmouth Middle School and the City of Portsmouth Master Plan
3. **Action plan dialogue**, in which a public (nongovernmental) dialogue is directed at developing a specific action plan—for example, the creation of a community organization called Sustainable Portsmouth and the development of a community sustainability plan

At the same time, some of the newer approaches used by Portsmouth Listens are beginning to move public dialogue into new and interesting realms.

*Where people have participated in the decision-making process, they are far more likely to become involved in the implementation of the decision. There can be a (personal) transformation, from ‘the city’ to ‘my city’.*

*The people of Portsmouth Listens are reflective practitioners; they are conscious about how they go about doing what they do.*

## **Stewardship Approaches**

As the level of experience of Portsmouth Listens has deepened, so has its use of deliberative dialogue evolved and become more sophisticated. Over the decade, the organization has developed, refined, and adapted a number of dialogue approaches:

- **Study circles.** The foundational approach of Portsmouth Listens, study circles have been used as the basis for decisional, policy, and action planning dialogues since its earliest days. Typically, they involve groups of eight to 12 people meeting with a trained facilitator for two hours a week over four weeks to deliberate on a given issue. This format can accommodate hundreds of participants. During the master plan review process of 2002–04, for example, 27 study circles, composed of up to 324 people, were meeting simultaneously!
- **Community conversations.** These are one-day deliberative dialogues based on the same principles as study circles but adapted for intensive conversations on singular issues or more discrete discussion topics, with larger numbers of participants.
- **Candidate forums.** These are single-evening forums where candidates for political office meet with the community in a group dialogue format, rotating between small groups of citizens. The forums promote direct and unrestricted dialogue between candidates and residents. Prior to a candidate forum, citizens identify key issues. Candidates are asked to respond in writing to each, and their responses are published in the *Portsmouth Herald* the day of the forum.
- **Leading by modeling.** The operations of Portsmouth Listens are framed and guided by its principles and ground rules. Says Martha McCoy, executive director of Everyday Democracy, “The people of Portsmouth Listens are reflective practitioners; they are conscious about how they go about doing what they do.”

Using the above approaches, a variety of tools are employed to refine and improve the process of deliberation. These tools feed into an overall dialogue, have been integrated in study circles themselves, or amplify and disseminate a dialogue’s results afterwards.

## Pre-dialogue tools

- **Internet “preheating.”** While Portsmouth Listens has been cautious about substituting web-based tools for face-to-face dialogue, it has found that it can “leaven” a dialogue with the selective use of the Internet to motivate and prepare residents for a given conversation.
- **Bringing controversy into the marketplace of ideas.** Portsmouth Listens does not avoid controversial issues; indeed, it has learned that controversy is sometimes necessary to energize a community dialogue.

## Dialogue tools

- **Group-sanctioned ground rules.** Every study circle or dialogue group, regardless of the specific process or issue, develops its own rules of behavior to create a safe, fair, level playing field. If everyone in a group owns the rules, they will live by the rules. Says Noucas, “This phenomenon connects to the notion of commonality. We all want to be heard. Group rule setting is used to create commonality.”
- **Commonality questions.** A simple question, typically completely unrelated to a group’s dialogue topic, is used to elicit participants’ shared experiences, thus reinforcing the belief that people’s common experiences often outweigh their divergent opinions.
- **Dialogue-framing questions.** A question related to a group’s dialogue topic must cast a wide net in order to embrace all sides of an issue, thus welcoming divergent perspectives. Questions must not exclude divergent perspectives; otherwise, there can be no dialogue. For example, if the group is discussing issues related to urban growth and development, the question would not be “How do we stop urban growth and new development?” but perhaps “How can new growth and development create a better quality of life for our community?”

*Questions must not  
exclude divergent  
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otherwise, there  
can be no dialogue.*

## Post-dialogue tools

- **Newspaper tabloid inserts.** Portsmouth Listens has relied extensively on the *Portsmouth Herald* to publish and disseminate results and recommendations of its dialogues. This gives greater visibility to dialogue outcomes, adds legitimacy through media coverage, and makes it harder for decision makers and the wider community to ignore them. Fortunately, the *Herald* considers this role as part of its responsibility in a democratic society.
- **Listening by decision makers.** If there is a conversation in the community, there has to be a way for decision makers to hear it. Therefore, face-to-face meetings between dialogue participants and decision makers are a key next step. Portsmouth Listens is expanding this tool. In the City Budget Dialogue they have even reversed the usual situation, bringing decision makers to the participants to hear their recommendations. “Making sure the city’s decision makers truly listen is critical to the process,” says Noucas. “We are very fortunate in Portsmouth that our decision makers are actually interested in listening.”
- **Neutrality.** Portsmouth Listens doesn’t take an official position on any issue. It publishes reports but does not even endorse specific decisions that result from its own process. Both participants and decision makers understand this; again, this establishes the commonality and trust required to have the conversation.

## Deliberatively Portsmouth

Portsmouth, New Hampshire has tapped into its New England roots in finding new ways to deliberate on matters of public concern.



## Stewardship Bottom Line

The Portsmouth Listens website describes the organization as a “collaborative effort to shape the future of the city we love.” This mission statement evolved from a dialogue question used in one of its engagement processes. Over the past decade, the impact of Portsmouth Listens on the functioning of democracy in this city is hard to overestimate. Says Martha McCoy of Everyday Democracy: “Portsmouth Listens is a strong example of a sustained, effective public engagement that feeds into city planning, creates collaborative efforts among citizen groups and the city, helps resolve a range of community issues, and makes the community an even better place to live for all its residents.”

Portsmouth Listens was named in 2011 as one of the seven finalists for the prestigious international Reinhard Mohn Prize, for vitalizing democracy through participation, awarded by the Bertelsmann Foundation in Germany. It is also the recipient of the Sarah Farmer Peace Award, recognizing the importance of civic dialogue. In fact, its impact on the quality of community life and integrity of local democracy in Portsmouth has been profound.

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### Learning in Service to Community

Laura MacArthur Elementary School's Spirit of Health Festival, one of many service-learning projects benefitting schools, students, learning and community in West Duluth.

# WEST DULUTH NEIGHBORHOOD, DULUTH, MINNESOTA

## *An Urban Neighborhood Revitalizes and Reinvents Itself*

### **Overview**

West Duluth is a large, older urban neighborhood that is part of the City of Duluth, Minnesota. Between the 1960s and 1980s, this neighborhood suffered economic decline, disinvestment, and urban blight, and became the focus of several revitalization efforts. Beginning in the mid-2000s, the Duluth Local Initiative Support Corporation (Duluth LISC) and its At Home in Duluth collaborative, a program focused on five inner-city neighborhoods, intensified their efforts in West Duluth. Using the national LISC's Building Sustainable Communities framework, Duluth LISC and its partner organizations led the local community in developing the West Duluth Neighborhood Revitalization Plan, a comprehensive strategy for the future of the neighborhood. Since then, more than 40 major initiatives addressing housing, income, economic activity, education, and health have been implemented, resulting in a catalogue of achievements and a reenergized sense of community. West Duluth's success in reinventing itself as a sustainable community provides a dynamic model for America's "inner small towns" in larger urban settings.

### **Background**

Duluth, Minnesota, population 86,250, has transformed itself in recent decades from a struggling Upper Midwest rust-belt city to an active regional center known for its higher education, health care, arts, and tourist and recreational opportunities. West Duluth is one of Duluth's oldest and largest inner-city neighborhoods, part of which has been long known as the Spirit Valley. With more than 7,000 residents, West Duluth is situated close to the St. Louis River waterfront, a historic focal point of industrial development in the city.

West Duluth has always had a keen sense of place, shaped by both its geography and residents, including many Scandinavian and northern European immigrants. With its level landscape framed by hills and

### **Project:**

West Duluth Neighborhood Revitalization Plan

### **Community:**

West Duluth neighborhood  
Duluth, Minnesota

### **Population:**

West Duluth (circa 7,250)  
Duluth (circa 86,250)

### **Organization:**

Duluth Local Initiatives Support Corporation (Duluth LISC); At Home in Duluth collaborative; West Duluth Community Development Corporation (WDCDC) (formerly Spirit Valley Citizens' Neighborhood Development Association)

### **Website:**

[www.duluthlisc.org](http://www.duluthlisc.org)

### **Principal Contacts:**

Pam Kramer and Lee Stuart  
Duluth LISC; Kris Ridgewell,  
WDCDC

### **Nominator:**

Online community  
self-nomination

*These events, along with its older prewar housing stock, decreasing household incomes, and increasing incidences of urban blight, meant West Duluth was languishing.*

water, traditional grid street pattern, modest two-story homes on small lots, and small-business districts serving the community, the area's local identity has always been strong. In fact, given that West Duluth once was its own city, administratively separate from the City of Duluth, the neighborhood still maintains a lingering streak of independence and a go-it-alone attitude.

For most of the 20th century, West Duluth was a thriving working-class community provided with good jobs and steady wages by the heavy industry and shipping facilities nearby. However, many elements of traditional West Duluth began to fade in the latter half of the century.

First came the construction of Interstate 35 in the 1960s. While this major highway corridor connected the neighborhood to the rest of the city, it also divided the community and destroyed hundreds of homes. Beginning in the 1970s, much of the area's older industry began to be phased out, eliminating local jobs and leaving a partially abandoned waterfront. In the mid-1980s, with the city's interest in job creation high, a new paper mill was constructed, which resulted in the demolition of more than 100 homes and several businesses. These events, along with its older prewar housing stock, decreasing household incomes, and increasing incidences of urban blight, meant West Duluth was languishing.

In 1979, the residents and businesses of West Duluth responded to these threats, forming the Spirit Valley Citizens' Neighborhood Development Association (SVCNDA), an all-volunteer community development corporation. This was followed eight years later by the community's first comprehensive neighborhood revitalization plan, and then by a succession of other plans and local development projects, with SVCNDA leading the implementation efforts. Ultimately, new investment began to revive West Duluth's flagging economy, improve its business districts, and develop new housing. In 2008, West Duluth's successful 1987 revitalization plan was given a long overdue update.

Today a renewed sense of pride has taken hold in West Duluth. It is still predominated by older, lower-middle-income residents and maintains much of its traditional community values, yet a younger, more diverse demographic has discovered the neighborhood, which has an urban feel, walkability, affordable housing, and a trail system that connects to the new Duluth Lakewalk. These newcomers are bringing their families and businesses, contributing to the neighborhood's rekindled vitality.

## Engagement and Planning Process

The Duluth LISC was established in 1997 and is one of 30 such local programs of the national network of the LISC, the nation's largest community development support organization. Since that time, LISC has become an integral part of neighborhood revitalization and affordable housing efforts in Duluth, providing resources, expertise, and technical assistance to community development corporations, including the SVCNDA, which is today known as the West Duluth Community Development Corporation (WDCDC).

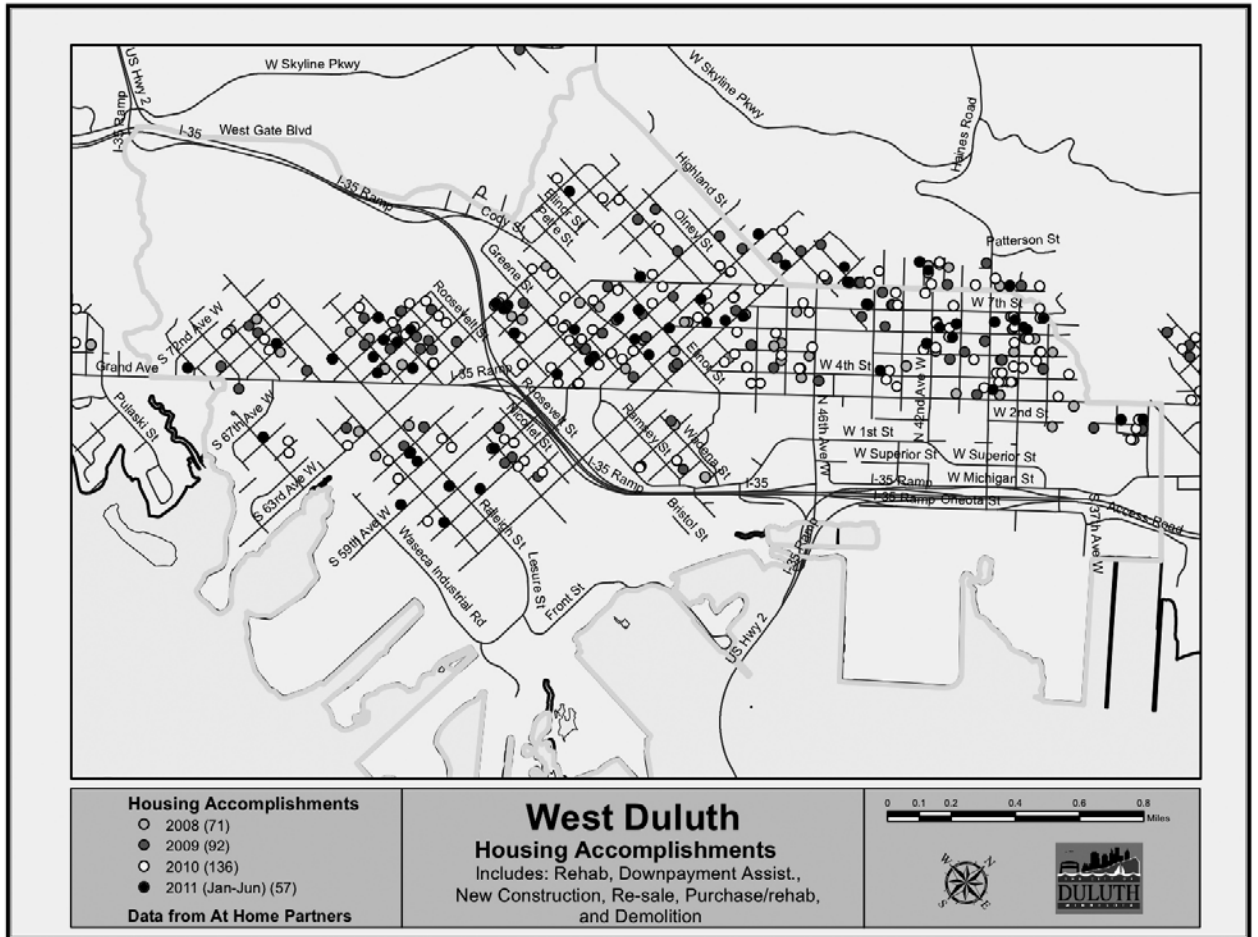
Not long after its formation, Duluth LISC launched its At Home in Duluth collaborative, a coalition of 25 local organizations (including the City of Duluth, local nonprofit organizations, and neighborhood groups) focused on coordinating the revitalization of Duluth's five oldest neighborhoods: Morgan Park, East Hillside, Lincoln Park, Central Hillside, and the largest among them, West Duluth.

In 2000, SVCNDA and the City of Duluth collaborated on the West Duluth Business District Streetscape Master Plan, followed in 2003 by the Ramsey Village Plan, which has led to the ongoing revitalization of housing and open space in a particularly blighted neighborhood.

In 2006, Duluth was named one of 10 demonstration sites across the country for the national LISC's Building Sustainable Communities program. This program takes a broad, long-term, more holistic view of community development, with an emphasis on a community's sustainability over time. The LISC's five sustainable communities goals became the framework for all At Home in Duluth revitalization initiatives:

- **Housing**—expanding investment in housing and other real estate
- **Income**—increasing family income and wealth
- **Economy**—stimulating economic development
- **Education**—improving access to quality education
- **Health**—supporting healthy environments and lifestyles

Building on all these elements, Duluth LISC set its focus on a long-standing goal for the West Duluth neighborhood: to update its original 1987 neighborhood revitalization plan, Opportunities for Change. More than two decades had passed since the plan's creation, and much about West Duluth had changed. It was time for a new neighborhood plan.



Created by the City of Duluth Community Development Division 2011.

In partnership with the City of Duluth and SVCNDA, in 2007 Duluth LISC launched a planning process to create a completely new West Duluth revitalization plan. As a first step, Duluth LISC and SVCNDA took stock of what had been accomplished in the neighborhood since 1987. Not surprisingly, the answer was quite a lot. Over the previous two decades, new affordable housing projects had been developed, West Duluth's core business district had been rejuvenated, new recreational trails had been established in the community and along the waterfront, and private developers had begun investing in the neighborhood after a long hiatus.

One of the biggest factors in the success of the original 1987 planning process was that the residents had been so thoroughly engaged. Coming at a pivotal juncture in West Duluth's history, when the neighborhood was struggling on many fronts, the effort was embraced by residents. Neighbors and local businesses truly owned their plan, and this, in turn, generated the support necessary for achieving its goals.

If there had been a downside to the 1987 plan, it was the document's singular focus on property: It was essentially a land use plan and real estate development strategy. The broader goals of community development were not so evident; nor to anyone's surprise did the plan embrace any of the newer planning concepts that have evolved since 1987, including the entire notion of urban sustainability.

West Duluth's new planning process fully intended to remedy such shortcomings: Duluth LISC determined to broaden and expand the plan's focus and also aspired to revive the engagement of West Duluth residents in its creation. The latter was not as simple as it might have seemed. Since 1987, there had been a lot of changes in the community, including older residents moving on, newer residents moving in, and the simple loss of institutional memory about what had happened over the years. As a result, a considerable effort was invested in boosting community engagement and generating an up-to-date assessment of the community's progress.

Between August 2007 and March 2008, in a series of eight major community meetings and events, the new process involved West Duluthians in developing their new plan. The process began by openly assessing the old plan's achievements. Participants also consolidated the old plan's 15 issue areas into seven new focus areas. While still framed around physical districts within the neighborhood, the new template identified core community assets, including values, and

*One of the biggest factors in the success of the original 1987 planning process was that the residents had been so thoroughly engaged.*

addressed an expanded range of issues, including jobs, tourism, housing, recreation, and education. This framework built ownership and helped set the stage for a broad, meaningful conversation.

When completed, the resulting 2008 West Duluth Neighborhood Revitalization Plan included goals, strategies, and actions for specific areas of West Duluth and linked them to major revitalization themes, including economic empowerment, housing, and community development. All of this was done under the LISC framework of building a more sustainable community. The new plan also had a stated implementation time frame of three to five years, a clear commitment to avoid the 21-year lapse that had followed its predecessor. Most important for ongoing stewardship, the effort thoroughly reenergized community engagement.

That engagement proved vital as Duluth LISC and SVCNDA kept the community's feet to the fire. A whole host of new revitalization projects initiated between 2008 and 2011 addressed the five Building Sustainable Communities goals: housing, income, economy, education, and health.

The next iteration of the neighborhood revitalization plan kicked in, as scheduled, in 2011. The planning process repeated the discovery process of the 2007–08 process, beginning with an inventory of community accomplishments over the previous three-plus years. Compared to the earlier 21-year period, during those three-plus years West Duluth's sustainability achievements had accelerated dramatically. All told, more than 40 major initiatives had been launched and implemented by 2011. These included:

- Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans' new housing and services for homeless veterans
- Twelve new retail businesses recruited to business districts, creating 47 jobs
- Formation of a new form-based code district in a local shopping district
- Collaborative marketing of West Duluth tourism and its waterfront attractions
- Service learning projects in local schools
- Streetscape improvements along major corridors

These successes are in tune with At Home in Duluth's five core goals and demonstrate the diverse range of community development efforts in West Duluth. The visibility of these initiatives among residents interested yet more residents in taking part in revitalization planning for the next three-to-five-year period, which commenced in 2011. Clearly, West Duluth is beginning to experience a kind of local virtuous circle—a positive feedback loop of broad engagement, good planning, successful implementation, the monitoring of progress, community celebration, and public reengagement.

The latest iteration of the West Duluth Neighborhood Revitalization Plan will be completed early in 2012. The expectation is that residents will be even more motivated to get involved in its implementation.

### **Stewardship Description**

Since its inception, Duluth LISC's At Home in Duluth collaborative has worked to develop a comprehensive system for stewarding its community planning and engagement efforts, furthering the community's ability to realize its values and visions over time. Now, more than five years in, the system is continually being refined, demonstrating its effectiveness in building sustainability at the neighborhood level, as evidenced in West Duluth.

### **Having a guiding vision**

Pam Kramer, executive director of Duluth LISC, whose community development experience in Duluth goes back many years, acknowledges the cardinal importance of having a vision to guide an effort as big as building a sustainable community: "You need a big-picture vision to undertake the kind of work that the At Home in Duluth collaborative has been doing in West Duluth. We have two: First are the overarching goals of the Building Sustainable Communities initiative, which collectively provide a framework for more-sustainable communities. Second is the vision embodied in the local plans, such as the West Duluth Neighborhood Revitalization Plan, which serve as the local community's interpretation of the vision and its action plan."

*West Duluth is beginning to experience a kind of local virtuous circle—a positive feedback loop of broad engagement, good planning, successful implementation, the monitoring of progress, community celebration, and public reengagement.*

*You always want a few early wins, because this can help bring people together. They pick a winnable target and mobilize around it. It's part of being collaborative.*

### **Setting priorities**

If a vision is the direction and the local plan is the road map, then setting priorities gives the entire revitalization effort specificity, making it more achievable. As the Duluth LISC staff member working with WDCDC on its neighborhood revitalization plan, Lee Stuart understands the importance of prioritizing: “There is a certain wisdom of taking on things you can do first, but sometimes all the talk about going for low-hanging fruit gets [people] a little jaded. This is not about under-performing. Rather it’s about knowing what you need to know to accomplish things—both in the short term and longer term—and which strategies will best serve you in both regards.”

Pam Kramer adds: “You always want a few early wins, because this can help bring people together. They pick a winnable target and mobilize around it. It’s part of being collaborative.”

### **Building collaboration**

From the partnerships approach of the At Home in Duluth coalition, to the community engagement involved in creating a neighborhood plan, to the many agencies it takes to deliver the actions in the plan, it’s clear that collaboration is a major success factor of West Duluth’s successful ongoing revitalization. “Collaboration is *the* single biggest thing as far as we are concerned,” says Kris Ridgewell, staff member of the recently formed WDCDC, which has succeeded SVCNDA. “We all have certain expertise and leadership skills, and these have to be brought together. We are trying to weave these threads together to make a beautiful cloth. There are layers of collaboration involved in what we are doing in West Duluth.”

Indeed, 25 local agencies are part of the At Home in Duluth collaborative team working to deliver local planning and projects in West Duluth and the other four At Home neighborhoods. For example, no less than six local agencies collaborated to deliver the new Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans housing and services complex for homeless veterans in West Duluth. The City of Duluth and school district are collaborating to deliver a new tax assistance preparation program in West Duluth, bringing hundreds of thousands of dollars back into the community.

Equally important have been the hundreds of local residents and leaders who have played a vital role in this collaboration, especially as seen in the initiatives of the WDCDC.

That there are so many fingerprints on West Duluth's success has actually made the work easier for everyone. In the process, the West Duluth community itself also seems to have moved beyond its historical we-can-go-it-alone attitude. It's clear to everyone that resources coming from across the city have benefited the neighborhood. Local identity has been surging, but so has the sense that West Duluth is part of a larger community.

### **Encouraging communication**

For collaboration to work, especially when so many individuals and organizations are involved, there needs to be great communication. There are many levels to this: monthly meetings of the collaborative; an annual community event highlighting participating agencies; regular monthly board meetings and related meetings of the WDCDC; and comprehensive public relations efforts relating to print media, websites, social media, and special community events. Says Stuart, "These levels create a pattern of what I call 'relationality'—maintaining ongoing relationships that serve our larger purpose."

Kris Ridgewell is quick to add: "It seems that social media is a future direction in which we are headed."

### **Creating new ways to plug in**

One challenge of At Home in Duluth's neighborhood revitalization efforts is that participation can drop off after a plan has been completed. This potentially creates a gap in the revitalization process. To address the challenge, Duluth LISC is forming a citywide leadership team to create ways for local residents to plug into the larger process in an ongoing way. They plan to identify 10 to 20 people from the five local neighborhoods to be part of a citywide group that will work to shepherd the success of local plans over time. Stuart explains: "You can't just engage people once and then stop. It has to be ongoing. The leadership team will provide more continuity over time and keep the local communities engaged. We will try to include both longtime activists and emerging community leaders in this group. And we will do leadership training to improve their skills."

### **Connecting with schools**

Conventional wisdom says that schools are fundamental in building healthy communities. Duluth LISC hopes that local schools, including in West Duluth, will be a big part of stewardship. "One key opportunity has been to show schools how service learning, always beneficial to the neighborhood, can also contribute to school curricula," says Stuart. "The challenge, as with all public institutions, is that there are lots of



#### **Unfurling a Better Future:**

New banners in West Duluth's business district boost streetscape revitalization, business development and community identity.

*We have found that the people who have benefited most from our information and assistance programs have also become among our most active volunteers over time. It's about feeling more empowered.*

structural changes happening in our local schools, and, of course, there is also less money these days.”

Kramer adds, “The West Duluth Community Development Corporation actually has done a great job of connecting with its schools. In the last three years, schools in West Duluth have hosted more than 10 service learning projects, including a Global Youth Service Day, Spirit of Health community health festival, neighborhood map and history project, and community gardens.”

### **Tracking success**

As part of creating At Home in Duluth, Duluth LISC and the City of Duluth agreed to work with the five participating neighborhoods to monitor and report on their progress in implementing their goals over time. Duluth LISC brought on a summer intern with GIS mapping skills, who created a quarterly accomplishment spreadsheet where information is compiled and then physically mapped by local neighborhoods. This system is used to track almost everything, including local participation and community assistance. It also has been used to create benchmarks and to report back to neighborhoods.

### **Stewardship Approaches**

Duluth LISC, the At Home in Duluth collaborative, and participating neighborhoods have developed and implemented a number of specific approaches in stewarding their overall program. Some of them are described in the above stewardship description, but there is much more happening.

Given the importance of local identity to West Duluth, new projects and activities are constantly honoring local values; for instance, the new housing and services project for veterans is linked to a local sense of patriotism. In terms of sustaining citizen engagement, the At Home in Duluth collaborative promotes citywide leadership training and is forming the new City Leadership Team. In terms of achieving visions and plans, a new quarterly accomplishments report allows the project to monitor and track its progress. As one of several ways of holding local leaders accountable, all elected officials and public servants are asked to appear “in their roles” at public events, including wearing their uniform if they have one. And, increasingly, many of the local initiatives are taking into account the need to respond to a changing world; for instance, new attention is being focused on disaster preparedness and food security.

Three areas of initiative, in particular, have become important approaches in promoting the lasting stewardship of West Duluth's revitalization:

### **1. Providing practical information and assistance**

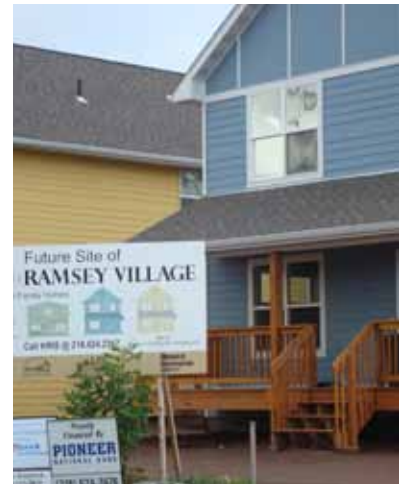
Being a Midwestern community, there is a practical side to everything the At Home in Duluth program does. Now that the West Duluth revitalization plan and program are well established, there is a growing emphasis on providing hands-on information and assistance to the community members. The goal is to help people access information, covering such basic questions as "Where can I go for help?" and "How can I get involved?" Many of the local programs provide nuts-and-bolts assistance with things such as tax preparation, energy-efficiency programs, job training, and more. There is also a longer-term payback for the community from these efforts. Says Kris Ridgeway: "We have found that the people who have benefited most from our information and assistance programs have also become among our most active volunteers over time. It's about feeling more empowered."

### **2. Local celebrations**

Celebrations are an important part of West Duluth's revitalization, serving multiple purposes, including to increase engagement, learning, and fun. More than 500 people attended the 2011 citywide Connecting the Dots celebration, in which West Duluth plays a big role. There were 54 organizations present, displaying exhibits and offering information. City councillors came to hand out awards to Neighborhood Heroes, selected for their contribution to neighborhood revitalization. The older, long-established Spirit Valley Days, a multiday celebration of all things West Duluth, also is an important event for young and old. Says Stuart: "There is a 'community glue' that happens through both traditions and celebration; it's about relationship building."

### **3. Awards and recognition**

Linked to the Connecting the Dots celebration, the Neighborhood Heroes Awards program is a simple way to honor local residents who have given back to the community, while demonstrating to others what can be done by just one individual's efforts. It helps to inspire others to do their bit for the community. On a citywide level, At Home in Duluth also gives out annual Building Sustainable Communities awards. Ridgeway observes: "We have noticed with our heroes that most of them have received assistance and services from us at some point in the past. Once they are back on their feet, they want to give back to the community."



**Housing a Community's Hope**

New housing in West Duluth, including these affordable units at Ramsey Village, is a major focus of the West Duluth Neighborhood Revitalization Plan.

*There is a  
'community glue'  
that happens through  
both traditions and  
celebration; it's about  
relationship building.*

## **Stewardship Bottom Line**

West Duluth, Minnesota, offers a different kind of perspective on small-town planning, community engagement, and stewardship. Once a small town, this large, older urban neighborhood became part of a bigger city and found itself betwixt and between. As its aging industrial economy waned, so did its sense of identity and its prospects for the future.

Thanks to a comprehensive neighborhood revitalization program organized around a framework of urban sustainability and built with the active participation of residents, West Duluth has a bright new perspective on the future. Just as interesting are the inherent assets that this neighborhood's mature, well-defined urban landscape and renewed community identity have brought to its vision. It is a real place with real history, and these same qualities make it all the more appealing to its newer residents. This gives West Duluth unique advantages in creating a sustainable community.

Duluth LISC, its At Home in Duluth collaborative, and the WDCDC have shown how citywide collaboration can help revitalize neighborhoods, with respect for residents. In turn, neighborhoods that may have been disempowered or had poor "local self-esteem" are discovering that their self-improvement efforts can benefit from the information, skills, and resources of others—without them losing their sense of place. This model provides inspiration and hope for other urban, inner-city, and economically distressed neighborhoods across America.

# Stewarding Community in the 21st Century: Top Approaches

## **Emerging Challenges and Responses**

As we move full speed ahead into the 21st century, America's communities face challenges driven by a complex of regional, national, and global trends. Population growth and demographic shifts, a global economy undergoing restructuring, depleted natural resources and continued threats to the natural environment, shifting social and cultural values, massive advances in technology—the list is daunting.

Any one of those megatrends has major implications for life at the local level; but the fact that they are all unfolding at the same time means we are living at a “hinge of history.” All global trends are ultimately local. Surviving and thriving as a small town in an environment of rapid change will be difficult—and there are plenty of stories to that effect these days.

Our five case study communities' efforts to steward their engagement and planning in the face of rapid change present another kind of story, both hopeful and inspiring. By almost any measure, they are exceptional examples of positive, directed, purposeful change that is making lives better.

Representing great diversity in their sizes, locations, backgrounds, histories, and the specific issues they have confronted, these communities have demonstrated, through their stewardship, what small cities and towns are capable of accomplishing when residents and organizations work together.

Covington and Oxford, in Newton County, Georgia, are part of a bold experiment to create a new, smarter growth model for rural communities threatened by the impacts of nearby metropolitan growth and expansion.

Hastings and its surrounding small towns in Barry County, Michigan, have faced down a different kind of rural threat—stagnating population growth and economic decline—by forging new partnerships to rebuild an entrepreneurial local economy and sustainable community.

Hillsboro, Oregon, has embraced rapid growth and economic development but on its own terms, preserving the values and small-town feel embodied in its vision and action plan; and it has an enviable track record for making its vision happen.

Portsmouth, New Hampshire, is proving that local citizens can deliberate and decide in an informed and civil way on virtually any challenge that is thrown in front of them, making better decisions and better governance in the process.

West Duluth, Minnesota, shows that you *can* teach an old town new tricks, as this mature, urban neighborhood rebuilds, revitalizes, and regenerates itself, its economy, its spirit, and its sense of place.

Each of these communities has been led by an innovative local program or organization, and, perhaps most important, has demonstrated that local partnerships and purposeful collaborations of public, private, civic, and nonprofit groups, supported by an engaged and active citizenry, can take on practically any challenge that comes their way.

## **Top 25 Case Study Approaches to Stewardship**

By one tally, between these five communities, citizens have collectively developed and refined more than 60 different approaches for stewarding their engagement and planning efforts for the long term. Major citizen-driven comprehensive planning initiatives, face-to-face small-group conversations, boot camps for young would-be entrepreneurs, quarterly progress reports that map neighborhood progress block by block, and targeted outreach to a community's most underrepresented members—the approaches include a gutsy and inspiring mix. While these efforts are almost always place-specific expressions of the communities in which they occur, their transferability is very high.

From this assortment of ideas and techniques a short list of 25 approaches to community stewardship have been culled. They demonstrate the range of possibilities available to any town that aspires to do the same as the case study communities. This list is below, organized by the five stewardship themes first posed in the introduction to this study. For more detail, refer back to the case studies on page 82 and appendix 3, “Case Study Publications and Resources” and appendix 4, “Case Study Community Contact Information.”

Finally, it is important to note that this list in no way purports to be comprehensive: A number of stewardship approaches are not included among our five case study communities. There are probably thousands of variations on stewardship across the country that a study of this kind cannot cover. That is a good sign.

## 1. Honoring local values

- **Connecting with local values.** Every community has its own unique core values that can serve as the wellspring of community engagement and planning. In West Duluth, virtually every new project in the neighborhood's revitalization process is connected back to its core values.
- **Telling stories.** As old an art form as the first campfire, storytelling is one of the best ways to establish common bond in a community before launching into conversations on bigger, more challenging topics. In Portsmouth, every conversation begins with a “commonality question” to light the fire, get stories flowing, and help establish that bond.
- **Promoting deliberative dialogue.** Any civic decision is guaranteed to be smarter if it has been derived through an open, deliberative dialogue that informs, educates, and seeks common ground. Portsmouth Listens uses tools such as group-sanctioned ground rules and dialogue-framing questions to ensure this happens in virtually all of its meetings and forums.

## 2. Sustaining citizen engagement

- **Branding the process.** A media-saturated world obsessed with celebrity, “reality” TV, and sports has made it tough for community-organizing efforts to attract public attention. Learning from its competitors, Hillsboro 2020 has become the master of its brand. Its crisp logo and tagline can be seen everywhere in town, and its videos are all over YouTube.
- **Bringing people together.** Every community needs third places—not work, not home, but other places where people go to gather and connect. In Covington, Georgia, that place is known as the Center, and it's dedicated to citizen-driven planning. It is where gatherings, lectures, and forums happen, and where Newton County's 2050 Plan was born.

*Communities need time to hit the pause button, assess their progress, celebrate their successes, and recognize local community champions.*

- **Getting out among the people.** Ultimately, all engagement must reach out to community members on their own turf, especially to those members who are not easily drawn into a public process. For this reason, Newton County’s 2050 Plan will soon go out on a countywide road show, complete with fun, food, facts, and 30 traveling displays.
- **Targeting special outreach.** No community planning or engagement process will succeed if a key segment of the community simply doesn’t engage. Hillsboro 2020 uses a variety of special outreach tools—its Latino Outreach Advisory Committee and bilingual meetings and publications, for example—to ensure that a vital 20 percent of its population feels welcomed into the conversation.
- **Convening new kinds of meetings.** Most public meetings are long, poorly run, and boring. No wonder citizens stay away in droves. With its four-week study circles and one-day community conversations, Portsmouth Listens has turned the traditional New England town meeting on its head, with expert facilitation, great dialogue, and consensus outcomes. And it doesn’t shy away from controversy.
- **Reaching out through electronic media.** One thing’s for sure: The Internet and social media are here to stay. All of our case study communities have websites (Portsmouth Listens uses its site to “pre-heat” local dialogues). Most of the case study communities are also scrambling to bring social media—and a younger audience—into their media mix. Not surprisingly, as a kind of high-tech mecca, Hillsboro does it best.
- **Connecting with youth.** The next generation is whom all local communities are ultimately planning for, and who will be running those communities in a decade or two. HomeTown Partnership, in Hastings, Michigan, takes its younger demographics seriously, with programs such as Generation E in local schools, building business skills, jobs, and a reason for its young people to stick around.
- **Celebrating community progress.** All work and no play can make community planning and engagement a dull task. Communities need time to hit the pause button, assess their progress, celebrate their successes, and recognize local community champions. Hillsboro and West Duluth do these things extremely well through their respective annual Vision Town Hall and Connecting the Dots events.

- **Providing information and assistance.** Sometimes the most appreciated thing in a small town can be a bit of well-timed, old-fashioned help. The At Home in Duluth program sees to it that residents of West Duluth and its neighboring communities get hands-on, practical services such as tax preparation assistance, which actually brings local dollars back into the community. And people who, having received assistance, get back on their feet make for committed volunteers to reach out to others.

*If a vision is the destination, a plan is the road map—the way a community intends to get there.*

### 3. Achieving visions and plans

- **Creating a vision.** For any community, a shared, long-range vision is important—arguably essential—in navigating a landscape of rapid change. Each of the case study communities has an overarching vision of some kind, providing a framework and sense of direction for their planning, decisions, and actions. Hillsboro 2020’s vision is most comprehensive, while that of Portsmouth Listens is most succinct. Newton County’s is the most ambitious, while West Duluth’s is the most focused. Hastings’s holistic vision targets a healthy community.
- **Developing a plan.** If a vision is the destination, a plan is the road map—the way a community intends to get there. A robust plan of action is essential in making any vision happen. Hillsboro 2020’s action plan is as prescriptive as they come, with 23 partner organizations and 180 actions. West Duluth’s plan will be tracked, mapped, and renewed by the community every three years. Whatever the format, their plans provide a vital function for stewardship.
- **Implementing the plan.** Plans don’t implement themselves—that takes people. Regardless of the plan, its implementation is guaranteed to require commitment, persistence, and hard work. The Center for Community Preservation and Planning (the Center), in Covington, Georgia, conducts independent grant-funded research and provides technical resources to help local governments implement Newton County’s 2050 Plan. Hillsboro 2020 coaches its lead partner organizations in much the same fashion, making sure every action is ultimately implemented.

- **Tracking implementation successes.** Monitoring and measuring plan implementation over time is important for many reasons, including the communication of real accomplishments to the community. The West Duluth Neighborhood Revitalization Plan is backed by a quarterly accomplishments report, which tracks its progress. Using community-generated benchmarks, completed actions are logged, mapped, and reported back to the community. This information will be revisited when the next plan update occurs, around 2014.
- **Understanding community assets.** A community's assets are almost always much greater than its residents realize and are vital for achieving its vision over time. *Assets-based community development* is community development speak for knowing the human resources, or social capital, that can be used by a community in realizing its values and vision. Duluth LISC determined West Duluth's local assets in developing its plan, while the HomeTown Partnership in Hastings, Michigan, used an assets model to frame its vision.

#### 4. Holding leaders accountable

- **Fostering neutrality.** Politicking, especially at the local level, is often best left to politicians. By assuming a "higher ground" of objectivity, impartiality, and non-partisanship, community engagement and planning efforts may actually accrue more power to their purpose. Fostering neutrality, Portsmouth Listens has learned how to bring people of all political views and persuasions into its deliberative "tent," thus lending more credibility and force to its findings.
- **Encouraging leaders to communicate.** The formal local decision-making process, with its commissions, hearings, and rulings, often seems to limit rather than encourage genuine communication. Sometimes, more progress happens when local leadership works outside such confines. Portsmouth Listens promotes face-to-face meetings between its dialogue participants and decision makers, where the latter can hear citizens' ideas and recommendations. And they've found that decision makers are very interested in listening.

*One of the best strategies for stewarding community planning and engagement is to cultivate the next generation of civic leaders.*

- **Building partnerships and collaboration.** If a stewardship mantra was to emerge from this study, it would be “partnerships and collaboration”—between and among citizens, governments, planners, and community groups. To experts and practitioners alike, it is the paradigm for community engagement and planning in the 21st century. The Center’s Newton County Leadership Collaborative; Hillsboro 2020’s Vision Implementation Committee; the HomeTown Partnership, in Hastings, Michigan; At Home in Duluth; and Portsmouth Listens all embrace this worldview and embody this ethic—and their success indicates it is the way forward.
- **Developing new leaders.** One of the most intractable challenges to stewardship is constantly changing local leadership. Just when citizens and their governments seem to concur, the political landscape shifts, a key elected official moves on, or institutional memory is lost. One of the best strategies for stewarding community planning and engagement is to cultivate the next generation of civic leaders so that no effort is dependent on the good graces of a single local leader. HomeTown Partnership, in Hastings, Michigan, and At Home in Duluth have numerous programs in place to do that very thing.

## 5. Responding to a changing world

- **Anticipating and planning for change.** Foresight, the capacity to anticipate and plan for change, is normally the reserve of big bureaucracies, large corporations, and private think tanks. Given that everything global is ultimately local, *local* foresight is just as important as large-scale foresight. Most experts agree that large cities, not to mention smaller cities and towns, do an inadequate job of anticipating and planning for change. The Center, in Newton County, and its leadership collaborative, is clearly developing that capacity through its 2050 Plan.
- **Educating leaders.** If local governments require greater foresight, then elected officials and community leaders need to be educated to cultivate that capacity. Most local elected officials want data and information that help them to do a better job. The HomeTown Partnership, in Hastings, Michigan, has taken on the task of educating local officials and community leaders from across Barry County on emerging trends and issues of importance to the community, with the topics under investigation determined by the officials themselves.

- **Strengthening local resilience.** Development of greater community resilience is a grassroots phenomenon emerging across America. It is driven by the notion that communities can do much more to prepare for such widely acknowledged global driving forces as climate change, peak oil, and food insecurity. With various programs for urban agriculture, energy conservation, and sustainability plans in place, At Home in Duluth; Hillsboro 2020; HomeTown Partnerships, in Hastings, Michigan; and Portsmouth Listens are already moving in a similar direction.
- **Preparing for emergency.** If a lack of emergency response preparedness is not already on local council agendas, then the seeming epidemic of winter storms, floods, forest fires, droughts, tornadoes, and hurricanes in recent years may help capture local attention. Even if community engagement and planning efforts have not adequately focused on it, emergency preparedness is an emerging issue for all communities. Honoring a long-standing value of planning ahead, Hillsboro's Certified Emergency Response Team training program was an early and vital action plan program of Hillsboro 2020. It is hoped that more communities will soon follow suit.

### **Stewardship for All: The Foundations of Sustained Community Vitality**

Clearly, there is a deep well that can be drawn upon by any town in stewarding its local engagement and planning efforts. Despite significant differences in their sizes, locations, community characteristics, and the challenges they face, our case study communities have used all of these ideas and techniques to build stewardship initiatives that are changing local lives for the better.

While some approaches might be time-, resource-, and expertise-intensive for a small community, others are accessible and affordable, mainly relying on a sound process, effective leadership, and committed citizens. Putting the right mix together for the community in question is the essence of successful local stewardship. Persistence, dedication, and passion can make the difference.

In addition, these approaches hint at larger themes that cut across all our case studies and speak to a deeper set of principles that undergird

the most successful stewardship endeavors. Below is an attempt to capture those themes, with the hope they may point to a way forward for communities across the country seeking to achieve the same kind of stewardship successes as the case study communities.

### **Understanding local values**

Behind every community's local plans and policies, history, and traditions is a set of core values that captures the essence of that place, its heart and soul. Those shared beliefs that are most important to its residents frame a community's hopes for the present and goals for the future. Uncovering and articulating core values, and ensuring that they are continually at work informing the community's deliberations and decisions, are foundational in stewarding a community's engagement and planning.

### **Thinking about the whole of the community**

Small communities are organic entities that function as living systems. It is hard to break even the smallest town down into separate issues or challenges—be they land use, transportation, jobs, housing, schools, or recreation—and still arrive at solutions that will work effectively community wide. The best stewardship efforts recognize a community's connectedness and try to develop whole-of-community strategies and solutions that weave these elements together rather than pull them apart.

### **Committing to broad outreach and inclusion**

Adopting good stewardship practice means working hard to reach out and connect with every member of a community. Of course, even in the most effective engagement or planning process, not every individual voice can or will be heard. Still, making the process open and accessible to all increases the possibility that goals and solutions put into action will be acceptable to virtually everyone.

### **Promoting authentic engagement**

Unfortunately, much of what passes for community engagement and planning has little to do with deep, true engagement of the public. By definition, the stewardship of engagement and planning means that a community's residents are involved in important local policies, plans, and decisions from the very beginning of the process until it reaches its natural conclusion. This is a high standard, but also one to which smaller cities and towns are, in some ways, more naturally inclined.

*Partnerships and collaboration between public, private, civic, and community groups have been the key to the ultimate success of the endeavors of every community in this study.*

### **Facilitating effective communication and learning**

In a world saturated with information, effective communication and genuine learning in community engagement efforts are in short supply. It is not for lack of content but rather a lack of commitment to a high standard of inquiry. Leaders of stewardship efforts must work hard to make sure that everyone has a chance to become truly informed on the issues and options at hand, and instill in residents the importance of this learning far into the future.

### **Developing partnerships and collaboration**

At the end of the day, effecting long-lasting, positive change at the local level cannot—and should not—be the domain of any single institution, organization, or group of individuals. Given the complexity of the problems and scarcity of available resources, the only way that ambitious visions and plans can be achieved is by pooling ideas, resources, skills, capacities, approaches, and tools. Partnerships and collaboration between public, private, civic, and community groups have been the key to the ultimate success of the endeavors of every community in this study.

### **Building local capacity**

Finally, successful community stewardship means strengthening a community's capacity to sustain itself over the long haul. While much has been written and said about capacity building, this simple—and yet not so simple—endeavor is what makes the stewardship of community planning and engagement over time possible. Knowledge, skills, leadership, experience, and confidence are among the hallmarks of stewardship that must be continually cultivated in a community's citizens. Where capacity is strong and endures, the community will survive and thrive, no matter what the challenge, in years to come.

# APPENDIX 1: Study Purpose, Approach, and Methodology

## **Purpose**

The purpose of the Orton Family Foundation's Community Planning Stewardship Study is to conduct strategic research that examines successful community-based planning and engagement initiatives across America, and, based on its findings, describe key elements of their success, including recommended approaches, models, and tools that speak to the challenge of stewardship.

Given that the Foundation launched the second round of its Heart & Soul Community Planning initiative in early 2012, it was interested in using the outcomes of this study to influence the follow-on efforts of participating communities, thereby strengthening the stewardship-related elements of Foundation-supported planning efforts.

## **Guiding principles**

In framing this study, a set of principles was developed to guide project research and help ensure its consistency with the above purpose. They include:

- **Strategic focus.** Focus on community-based engagement and planning projects that are considered significant successes, emphasizing what works and will be most useful and instructive, both to the Foundation and communities everywhere.
- **Best practice planning and engagement.** Start with communities that have undertaken and completed successful values-based or visionary planning and engagement initiatives that could be considered best practice for those types of effort and that positively set the stage for ongoing stewardship efforts.
- **Successful stewardship.** Develop case studies that highlight the stewardship initiatives employed by these communities to ensure their ongoing success and that may serve as models, exemplars, or inspiration.

- **Diversity of approaches.** Select case studies that reflect a diversity of stewardship approaches, each community representing one in a series of identified stewardship prototypes (see further discussion of stewardship prototypes, below).
- **Range of sizes.** Select case studies that represent a range of target populations, making sure to include some smaller towns or communities that reflect where much of the Foundation's work has been focused to date.
- **Strengths and weaknesses.** Focus on the strengths of each community case study and its stewardship approach, while acknowledging and documenting major challenges or weaknesses.
- **Potential for replication.** Identify key findings and strategies that offer opportunities for replication or adaptation by the Foundation and other communities.

### **Stewardship prototypes**

To identify case studies that reflect a diversity of approaches, five draft stewardship prototypes were proposed for this research project, capturing potential structure and participation models employed by communities to sponsor, manage, and maintain their planning, engagement, and stewardship efforts. The idea was to locate one case study community for each of these prototypes: a formal local-government-sponsored project, a collaborative local-government-sponsored project, a formal community-based project (for example, involving nonprofit organizations), a collaborative community-based project, and a uniquely small-town project.

Ultimately, through the case study selection and interview process, it was determined that the most successful community planning and engagement efforts were almost always hybrid efforts that involved strong collaboration between local governments, nonprofit organizations, community groups, and other key stakeholders. This determination, in itself, is an important lesson about what drives successful stewardship at the local level. The notion of trying to find case studies that fit into a predetermined set of prototypes was dropped.

## Approach and Key Research Elements

The overall discovery process underpinning this study included four key research elements:

- 1. Stewardship research.** Generalized research (including selected interviews with noted planning professionals and other community practitioners) into the challenge of community stewardship was conducted. General ideas and observations were gleaned, stewardship prototypes were refined, and potential communities were identified for further investigation.
- 2. Community identification and selection.** Communities that represent best practice, values-based, visionary community planning and engagement projects, and that are also successfully addressing the challenge of stewardship were identified. Five target projects were selected for further investigation (see “Case study nomination and selection process,” below).
- 3. Case studies.** Case studies were prepared for the selected communities. This phase included a series of personal interviews with key project contacts and research of relevant project background information and publications. The case studies represent a diversity of sizes, locations, and stewardship approaches, and analyze their approaches, methods, and techniques.
- 4. Documentation.** The results of the analysis were documented in order to provide key findings and recommendations that are instructive to the Foundation, its Heart & Soul Community Planning initiative, partnership projects, and other communities seeking useful information and practical ideas for stewardship.

### Case study nomination and selection process

Because of the centrality of case studies to the Community Planning Stewardship Study, the process used to identify, vet, and select five communities for further study was an in-depth research process unto itself, comprising these steps:

- Formal nominations.** Initially, a case study nomination form was developed and tested, and nominations were solicited from key representatives of the Foundation’s extended network, as well as from other planning professionals interviewed for the study. A second wave of nominations to cast a wider net, focusing on smaller communities, was also solicited.

- **Online nominations.** To encourage nominations from other communities perhaps not as well known on the professional network, and to help democratize the study process, an online nomination process via the Foundation's website was set up and promoted, allowing any community to nominate itself for the study. Additional nominations were received in this manner. Ultimately, a final list of 20 candidate communities was established.
- **Selection criteria and follow-on questionnaire.** A list of 20 detailed qualitative and quantitative selection criteria reflecting the study's purpose and guiding principles was developed to test nominated communities. Criteria included everything from whether the community had successfully completed a formal community planning process to the type of tangible or measureable outcomes the process had effected. A follow-on questionnaire was developed and sent to the candidate communities. All communities were scored for their responses, with a score of 100 indicating that a community had met all 20 criteria. Most of the communities scored very highly.
- **Finalists.** The 12 cities and towns nominated but ultimately not selected for inclusion in this study are: Columbia, Missouri (population 98,831); Crested Butte, Colorado (population 1,487); Decatur, Georgia (population 19,000); East New Market, Maryland (population 276); Greensburg, Kansas (population 777); Gunnison, Colorado (population 5,854); Hayden, Colorado (population 1,820); Hilo, Hawaii (population 43,263); Madera, California (population 61,400); Manitou Springs, Colorado (population 5,161); Red Lodge, Montana (population 2,500); and Sweet Home, Oregon (population 8,925).
- **Detailed interviews.** Key project contacts from communities that had scored well on the selection criteria were interviewed to assess the merits of their candidacy. Interviews were based on the 20 criteria and also explored the nuances and unique features of each nominated project.
- **Selection process.** A team of Foundation staff and the study author reviewed a matrix of the nominees, with a goal of developing a balanced and diverse short list of case studies. This list was narrowed to 10 communities and then a final five. (A sixth community was held in contingency in the event one of the others might not participate.) All five communities enthusiastically agreed to take part in the study.

## Organization and Key Elements

In the fall of 2011, the author of this study conducted a series of interviews with representatives of the five case study communities. These interviews, along with additional research and information gathered from published and electronic articles, research papers, project websites, and videos, formed the basis for each case study.

While the diversity of the individual communities and their projects was pronounced, the final case studies were developed according to one template created for this study, to foster the making of comparisons between them. Each case study addresses the following elements:

- **Overview**—a brief account of the community, its highlighted planning and engagement effort, its successful stewardship efforts, and the significance of these efforts to the community and to other communities
- **Background**—a summary of the community's location, geography, history, and key features; the major planning and engagement challenges it faced during the decade of the 2000s; and the role of the community-based planning and engagement process highlighted in the case study
- **Engagement and planning process**—a detailed description of the community's foundational community engagement and planning process or related set of experiences
- **Stewardship description**—a detailed account of how the community has approached and attempted to steward its engagement and planning process over time
- **Stewardship approaches**—a description of the community's most successful stewardship approaches
- **Stewardship bottom line**—a summary of what is exceptional and worthy about the community's engagement and planning activities and its efforts to steward them over time

## **Perspectives and Caveats**

As might be expected, the final list of five communities, and their planning and stewardship experiences, shaped the nature of the study itself. In the course of selecting, researching, and preparing these case studies, a number of discoveries and key findings were made that further refined the study's scope and outcomes. These findings provided additional perspectives—and caveats of sorts—on the nature of the project.

### **Diversity of community planning projects**

At any given point, the diversity of community planning and engagement projects across the country is vast, as are the ways in which they are framed, organized, and implemented. In searching out the most successful stewardship efforts, this study ended up with a diverse selection of planning and engagement projects—but probably only scratched the surface. This diversity underscores the fact that the ways to promote stewardship are potentially just as broad.

### **New territory for the Foundation**

In landing on a final slate of case study communities, the study team pushed into new territory for the Foundation. Some of the case studies represent parts of the country where the Foundation has not been active; populations larger than the communities with which it has normally worked (albeit still fitting the definition of *small* by some standards); communities that are more urban than rural; and approaches to planning and engagement that are much more broadly focused than land use, growth, and development. While this new territory ranges beyond the Foundation's current focus, it may be instructive to the Foundation as it continues to evolve.

### **Emerging concept of community stewardship**

Without exception, when the stewardship of community engagement and planning was first mentioned to case study contacts, it had to be carefully defined and explained. It was a new way, perhaps, of grouping and describing a set of ideas and activities that are not all that uncommon. Yet, as with other newer terms that have moved into the planning lexicon in recent years—one thinks of *empowerment*, *ownership*, *sustainability*, and, more recently, *resilience*—it provides a useful and valuable way to capture and describe a group of related issues, ideas, and actions. This new use of an old concept makes it exciting, if also still a bit unformed.

### **Focus on project approach, not wherewithal**

As part of a very broad and general inquiry, the case studies featured in this report focus on overall approaches and specific tools used by communities to promote their planning, engagement, and stewardship efforts—not on the wherewithal required to deliver them. As such, there is little if any discussion of budgets, finances, grants, funding, or organizational structure. Readers specifically interested in financial or organizational how-to information for these efforts are encouraged to consult appendix 3, “Case Study Publications and Resources,” and appendix 4, “Case Study Community Contact Information.”

### **Gaps in stewardship approaches**

Even with the diversity of the case studies, there are specific approaches to stewardship that are inevitably not covered in this study. For example, none of the participating communities has developed a true community indicators system, even though this is a valuable tool in the pursuit of community stewardship. This is not to imply that the stewardship efforts studied are inadequate or limited. Rather, it is a reflection of the increasing number of options through which communities can promote stewardship and the fact that every community must develop its own best approach.

### **The stewardship “X factor”**

In examining some of the country’s most successful community planning and engagement efforts, it became apparent that there is an element of stewardship success that cannot be captured in a project’s design, approaches, or tools. Every successful project seems to possess some version of the “X factor”—the part of its success that is not simple to capture, not easy to analyze, changes everything, and is not necessarily possible to replicate.

In this instance, X factors included: a unique community asset or historical attribute, a passionate or charismatic leader, a cadre of highly motivated citizens, a fateful turn of events, a perceived community tipping point, and even a well-timed infusion of financial or political support. This is one reason why telling the stories of these places—as opposed to merely describing their approaches or repeating their lists of achievements—is critical.



## APPENDIX 2:

# Case Study Nomination and Selection Tools

### Community Nomination Form

1. Your name, title, organization, and contact information (daytime phone; e-mail):
2. Your nominated city or town (include State / Province) for study. Its approximate population:
3. Brief description of nominated city or town (i.e., its locale, economy, history, culture, character):
4. Name / “brand identity” of the city or town’s community-based planning project:
5. Key contact person for planning project (if known) and contact information (daytime phone; e-mail):
6. Is the planning phase of this project completed or ongoing?
7. Would you describe the planning phase of this project as “successful”? Why?
8.
  - a) Did / does the project include an “implementation” element or phase (i.e., action plan or similar program)?
  - b) Is it completed or ongoing?
  - c) Would you describe it as “successful”? Why?
9.
  - a) Did / does the project include a “stewardship” element (i.e., ongoing engagement, accountability)?
  - b) Is it completed or ongoing?
  - c) Would you describe it as “successful”? Why?
10. Overall, why would you recommend this community for inclusion in the Foundation’s Community Planning Stewardship Study?

## **Selection Criteria for Nominated Communities**

- 1. Successful Planning Process.** Did the community successfully complete its original planning process?
- 2. Contribution to Land Use Planning.** Did the process contribute to a new land use plan or related product?
- 3. Statement of Core Values.** Did the process produce a statement of core community values?
- 4. Community Vision Statement.** Did the process produce a community vision statement?
- 5. Action Plan.** Did the process produce a formal action plan to achieve its vision?
- 6. Implementation Strategy.** Did the process produce an informal implementation strategy?
- 7. Implementation of Action Items.** Has a significant number of action items been implemented as a result of the community's action plan or implementation strategy?
- 8. New Community Services.** Have new community services or related initiatives been launched as a result of the community's action plan or implementation strategy?
- 9. New Community Organizations.** Have new organizations or networks been formed as a result of the community's action plan or implementation strategy?
- 10. New Bricks and Mortar Projects.** Have new bricks and mortar projects been stimulated as a result of the community's action plan or implementation strategy?
- 11. Continuous Project Activity.** Has the project remained active since the original planning process?
- 12. Ongoing Committee.** Has a formal committee been charged with ongoing project sustainability?

13. **Ongoing Community Events.** Has the project sponsored community events on a periodic basis?
14. **Ongoing Local Government Support.** Has the project continued to receive support from local government officials or staff?
15. **Ongoing Partnerships.** Has the project continued to involve partner organizations in the community?
16. **Ongoing Volunteerism.** Has the project continued to involve a significant amount of volunteer activity?
17. **Ongoing Media Recognition.** Has the project received significant media acknowledgment or recognition?
18. **Website.** Does the project maintain an ongoing, active project web presence or employ social media?
19. **Awards.** Has the project won any awards (local, state, national, or international)?
20. **A Model.** Would you consider the project a model effort for other small cities, towns or villages?

## Questionnaire for Nominated Case Study Communities

Please indicate your response to the following questions regarding your nominated community.

(Note: Descriptors in “quotation” marks imply the best judgment of the questionnaire respondent.)

1. **Successful Planning Process.** Did the community “successfully” complete its original planning process?  
YES.            NO.            UNSURE.            DON’T KNOW.
2. **Contribution to Land-Use Planning.** Did the original process contribute to a new land use plan, code amendments, administrative rules, or related outcomes?  
YES.            NO.            UNSURE.            DON’T KNOW.
3. **Statement of Core Values.** Did the original process produce a statement of core community values?  
YES.            NO.            UNSURE.            DON’T KNOW.
4. **Community Vision Statement.** Did the original process produce a community vision statement?  
YES.            NO.            UNSURE.            DON’T KNOW.
5. **Action Plan.** Did the original process produce a formal action plan for achieving its vision?  
YES.            NO.            UNSURE.            DON’T KNOW.
6. **Implementation Strategy.** Did the original process produce an informal implementation strategy?  
YES.            NO.            UNSURE.            DON’T KNOW.
7. **Implementation of Action Items.** Have a “significant” number of action items been initiated or implemented as a result of the community’s planning process, action plan or implementation strategy?  
YES.            NO.            UNSURE.            DON’T KNOW.
8. **New Community Services.** Have new community services or related initiatives been launched as a result of the community’s planning process, action plan or implementation strategy?  
YES.            NO.            UNSURE.            DON’T KNOW.
9. **New Community Organizations.** Have new networks or organizations been formed as a result of the community’s planning process, action plan or implementation strategy?  
YES.            NO.            UNSURE.            DON’T KNOW.

- 10. New Bricks & Mortar Projects.** Have new bricks and mortar projects been stimulated as a result of the community's planning process, action plan or implementation strategy?  
 YES. NO. UNSURE. DON'T KNOW.
- 11. Continuous Project Activity.** Has the project remained active since the original planning process?  
 YES. NO. UNSURE. DON'T KNOW.
- 12. Ongoing Committee.** Has a more formal committee been charged with ongoing implementation or project sustainability?  
 YES. NO. UNSURE. DON'T KNOW.
- 13. Ongoing Community Events.** Has the project continued to sponsor community events on a periodic basis?  
 YES. NO. UNSURE. DON'T KNOW.
- 14. Ongoing Local Government Support.** Has the project continued to receive "support" from local government agencies, their staff or elected officials?  
 YES. NO. UNSURE. DON'T KNOW.
- 15. Ongoing Partnerships.** Has the project continued to engage partner organizations in the community?  
 YES. NO. UNSURE. DON'T KNOW.
- 16. Ongoing Volunteerism.** Has the project continued to involve a "significant" amount of volunteer activity?  
 YES. NO. UNSURE. DON'T KNOW.
- 17. Ongoing Media Recognition.** Has the project received "significant" media acknowledgement or recognition?  
 YES. NO. UNSURE. DON'T KNOW.
- 18. Website.** Does the project maintain an ongoing, active project web presence or employ social media?  
 YES. NO. UNSURE. DON'T KNOW.
- 19. Grants or Awards.** Has the project received any follow-on grants, prizes or awards?  
 YES. NO. UNSURE. DON'T KNOW.
- 20. Model.** Overall, would you consider the project a "model" effort for other "small" cities or towns?  
 YES. NO. UNSURE. DON'T KNOW.



## APPENDIX 3: Case Study Publications and Resources

### **Covington and Oxford, Newton County, Georgia**

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## APPENDIX 4: Case Study Community Contact Information

### **Covington and Oxford, Newton County, Georgia**

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[www.westduluth.org/svcndanews.php](http://www.westduluth.org/svcndanews.php)



## APPENDIX 5: General Interview Participants

A number of experts in community planning and engagement were interviewed to help develop the context and background perspectives for this study. They include:

### **Steve Faust, AICP, Senior Planner, Cogan Owens Cogan Portland, Oregon**

Steve Faust has a diverse professional background that includes experience in land use, public engagement, facilitation, economic development, housing, transportation, and strategic planning. He specializes in designing and managing public engagement programs to help communities address land use issues. Before joining COC, he was a community organizer and executive director for the West Side Citizens Organization, a nonprofit neighborhood association in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Steve is a member of the American Planning Association.

Website: [www.coganowens.com](http://www.coganowens.com)

### **Ellen Frisch, Principal Consultant, Ellen Frisch & Associates Victoria, British Columbia, Canada**

Ellen Frisch is a consultant with an extensive background working with urban and rural communities, stakeholders, and industries in British Columbia, Canada, focusing on effective engagement, negotiation, and resolution of conflicting land, resource, and governance challenges. Ellen recently concluded a regional visioning research study that evaluated top-performing regional visioning strategies worldwide. Prior to consulting, Ellen was employed with the Government of British Columbia for more than 18 years. In a range of positions from analyst to executive, she led legislative analysis, strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and public policy formulation on significant provincial government initiatives.

Website: [www.ellenfrisch.com](http://www.ellenfrisch.com)

**William Klein, AICP, Director of Research and Advisory Services,  
American Planning Association  
Chicago, Illinois**

William Klein has more than 40 years of experience in city and regional planning as a planning consultant and planning agency director, and in applied research. Bill has served as the Director of Research and Advisory Services since 1991, heading up a multi-disciplinary team of 10 research professionals. The APA's research unit provides the organization's 40,000 members with practical information about best practices in urban and regional planning. Information is disseminated through research monographs, serial publications, conference and workshop sessions, and symposia. It operates the Planning Advisory Service for some 800 planning agencies and consultants.

Website: [www.planning.org](http://www.planning.org)

**Craig Smith, Executive Director, Rural Development Initiatives, Inc.  
Eugene, Oregon**

Craig Smith has served on the staff of RDI since 1992 and has been Executive Director since 2009. Rural Development Initiatives is a nonprofit dedicated to helping rural communities and people achieve the visions and goals they set for themselves. They have worked with more than 300 rural communities as neutral conveners, facilitators, and advisors. The organization builds leadership networks and communities by working in the areas of community building, leadership development, economic vitality, networking, and organizational development, with specialized programming for Latino, tribal, and youth audiences.

Website: [www.rdiinc.org](http://www.rdiinc.org)

**Ron Thomas, AICP, College of Environment and Design,  
University of Georgia  
Athens, Georgia**

Ron Thomas is a leading innovator of community-based, vision-driven planning. He has award-winning experience in urban and regional planning, with particular emphasis on interactive, inclusive approaches to place making for sustainable development and resource preservation. Ron's expertise includes using communication and decision-support technology for large-scale, democratic, civic- engagement-supported local and regional sustainability planning. Ron was executive director of the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission in the greater Chicago region and recently joined the planning faculty with the College of Environment and Design at the University of Georgia in Athens. He also edits the newsletter of the Regional and Intergovernmental Division of the American Planning Association.

Website: [www.ced.uga.edu](http://www.ced.uga.edu)

**Doug Zenn, Principal, Zenn Associates  
Portland, Oregon**

Doug Zenn established Zenn Associates to focus on public involvement, process management, and effective communications. With more than 18 years of experience in public involvement and more than 25 years of experience in the communications field, Doug has developed and managed community involvement, awareness, and education efforts around numerous issues, including visioning, transportation, water resources, and community-based planning. Zenn Associates focuses on projects that emphasize high levels of public engagement and partnerships among community, government, and business entities. Doug has a long-standing affiliation with the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) and has served on its board.

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## Acknowledgments

The author would like to acknowledge and thank those groups and individuals who helped make this study possible. Several people were instrumental in nominating and vetting successful community planning and engagement projects for possible inclusion in the study. They included: James Kent, President, JKA Group; Martha McCoy, Executive Director, Everyday Democracy; Luther Propst, Executive Director, Sonoran Institute; and Milan Wall, Co-Director, The Heartland Center for Leadership Development.

Additionally, a number of respected community planning and engagement professionals agreed to participate in personal interviews on the nature and importance of community stewardship. They included: Steve Faust, AICP, Senior Planner, Cogan Owens Cogan; Ellen Frisch, Principal, Ellen Frisch & Associates; William R. Klein, AICP, Director of Research and Advisory Services, American Planning Association; Craig Smith, Executive Director, Rural Development Initiatives; Ron Thomas, AICP, College of Environment and Design, University of Georgia; and Douglas Zenn, Principal, Zenn Associates.

The study could not have been undertaken without the enthusiastic participation of the primary contacts for the five case study communities, including their taking part in a series of lengthy conversations and numerous correspondences: Christopher Hartye, Project Manager II, Administration Department, City of Hillsboro, Hillsboro, Oregon; Bonnie Hildreth, President, Barry Community Foundation, Hastings, Michigan; Kay B. Lee, Director, the Center for Community Preservation and Planning, Covington, Georgia; Jim Noucas, Portsmouth Listens, Noucas Law Firm, Portsmouth, New Hampshire; and Lee Stuart, Duluth Local Initiatives Support Corporation, Duluth, Minnesota.

Finally, the guidance, critical input, strategic decisions—and patience—of the Orton Family Foundation’s Community Planning Stewardship Study project team were of inestimable value. Team members include: William Roper, CEO and President; John Barstow, Director of Communications; and Betsy Rosenbluth, Director of Projects.



## About the Author

Steven Ames is a consulting long-range planner and Principal of Steven Ames Planning, a private consultancy providing long-range and strategic planning services for public sector clients, including local governments, regional, state, provincial, and federal agencies. He is also a Principal of NXT Consulting Group LLC, which provides long-range and strategic planning for public sector and nonprofit organizations, including those working in higher education and health care advocacy.

Described as an “architect of public process,” Steven is recognized for his work in community and regional visioning. He is the author of the American Planning Association’s (APA’s) *A Guide to Community Visioning* and innovator of its Oregon Model. He has advised two generations of visioning projects for the City of Portland and numerous other cities across the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia.

In recent years, Steven has consulted on visioning projects in Central Oregon (Bend 2030), the Big Island of Hawaii (Envision Downtown Hilo 2025), the Columbia River Gorge (Columbia Gorge Future Forum), and greater Corpus Christi, Texas (BoldFuture for the Coastal Bend).

Steven speaks frequently on planning for the future, and the relationship between civic vision and planning for sustainability. He has also taught master classes in visioning for the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA), New Zealand Planning Institute (NZPI), and New Zealand Futures Trust. He is a contributor to publications in the United States, Europe, and Australasia, including the APA’s urban planning reference work *Planning and Urban Design Standards*.

Steven is active in the international planning community, including the APA, PIA, and NZPI, and is a recipient of Oregon APA’s Award for Distinguished Leadership by a Professional Planner. He is the first recipient of the Craig Byrne Fellows Program of the Orton Family Foundation, dedicated to helping small towns and communities articulate, enrich, and protect their heart and soul, or unique sense of place. Recently, Steven became an Ambassador for the International Living Future Institute and its Living Building Challenge, a new global benchmark for green building.



Steven Ames

Steven holds an AB in political science from Drew University, College of Liberal Arts, Madison, New Jersey, and an MS degree in natural resources from the University of Michigan, School of Natural Resources, Ann Arbor, where he studied environmental advocacy and long-range planning. He has also studied with faculty of the London School of Economics.

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## Building a Civic Culture in Hillsboro, Oregon

Hillsboro's Civic Center Plaza, an outcome of its 2020 Vision.



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