

>>> "orion" <orion@telcomplus.net> 4/23/2011 10:46 PM >>>
To all,

I hope you also took time to read through the 4MB regional Public Participation Plan PDF that was also attached.

That PPP's focus is far better. It's so much better, in fact, I'd say it's incomparable.

It actually talks about public outreach. Novel.

Best to you,

Ellen Baker - Glacier

599-2544

From: john lesow [<mailto:jlesow@whidbey.net>]
Sent: Saturday, April 23, 2011 3:04 PM
To: orion; 'Gary Davis'; 'Becky Boxx'
Cc: john lesow; Whatcom Planning Dept.
Subject: Re: Draft Public Participation Plan - Comments & Exhibits, additional

Thanks again for your trademark thorough research

Munster, Gary, Hammond. "The Region" I know the area well.....

Yes, "Who You Gonna Call" is particularly helpful, including the fact that phone numbers are liberally listed throughout the mailing. We tend to rely too much on the "net" in County Government. Many would just like to be able to call a number and speak to a courteous, informed person. Too often we get voicemail.

Enjoy your Easter weekend and thanks again

John Lesow

----- Original Message -----

From: orion <<mailto:orion@telcomplus.net>>

To: 'John Lesow' <<mailto:jlesow@whidbey.net>> ; 'Gary Davis' <<mailto:GDavis@co.whatcom.wa.us>> ; 'Becky Boxx' <<mailto:rboxx@co.whatcom.wa.us>>

Sent: Saturday, April 23, 2011 12:45 PM

Subject: RE: Draft Public Participation Plan - Comments & Exhibits, additional

Thanks for asking, Mr. Lesow. I was referring to Lake County, Indiana. I hope all of the commissioners see this additional information.

I've attached the Public Participation Plan for the NW Indiana Regional Planning Commission - which includes Lake County. I searched, and found it on-line at:

<http://www.nirpc.org/OldNirpc/pdf/Public%20Participation%20Plan%2007.pdf>

The plan is "all about" public outreach. It describes and illustrates numerous methods and pathways (website, mailings, newsletters, print notices) to achieve early and iterative participation. The approach integrates the efforts of local jurisdictions along with county and regional efforts. Look through its "Chapter 4 - Public Involvement Techniques." What a difference!

I've scanned and attached a local outreach newsletter - in this case, from the Town of Munster (population 23,000) - it's a water bill "stuffer." While this particular newsletter is a "city" publication, Munster's a part of the regional public communication network. It's part of the program.

If you look through the contents of the "News You Can Use" newsletter, you'll see it includes information about state and county code. It offers news about regulation changes. It offers "useful tips." I've seen quite a few of these (I've been doing work back there for about five years), and I've seen calls to participate in transportation planning, zoning, and other public business. People actually read these. Folks also see ads in the local newspapers, and receive postcards about planning efforts. At least the public has an opportunity to know what's happening.

In comparison, Whatcom County's PPP is department-centered and driven. It reads more like an internal work plan, with little emphasis (if any) on public outreach beyond dependence on select special-interest groups and special-purpose boards and commissions. Small wonder that "public participation" here is sparse and reactionary. Form follows function.

The PPP for Whatcom County seems strategically dysfunctional in comparison to what I see happening in Lake County, Indiana. Just my observation, just my opinion.

Ellen Baker, 599-2544

NOTE: Whatcom County Population (2010) 201,140. We have just a few cities, and they contain most of the county's population. The entire rural population is served by SSC. Everyone gets a SSC bill every other month.

Lake County IN Population (2010) 496,005. It has many more cities and township-type jurisdictions, but they "integrate" these in their public participation plan - they work at it.

From: john lesow [<mailto:jlesow@whidbey.net>]
Sent: Saturday, April 23, 2011 9:17 AM
To: orion; 'Gary Davis'; 'Becky Boxx'
Cc: john lesow
Subject: Re: Draft Public Participation Plan - Comments & Exhibits following Testimony 4-14

Thank you, Ms. Baker

Just curious; what county in Indiana includes public notices with their water bills?

Best regards, John Lesow

----- Original Message -----

From: orion <<mailto:orion@telcomplus.net>>
To: 'Gary Davis' <<mailto:GDavis@co.whatcom.wa.us>> ; 'Becky Boxx' <<mailto:rboxx@co.whatcom.wa.us>>
Sent: Friday, April 22, 2011 12:59 AM
Subject: Draft Public Participation Plan - Comments & Exhibits following Testimony 4-14

Dear Gary and Planning Commissioners;

This letter is a follow-up to my testimony at the Planning Commission last Thursday evening, April 14, 2011. I wanted to review other citizen comments before sending this, and to prepare more exhibits for you. I apologize for its length, but I wanted these comments to be comprehensive. They do include suggestions, and this letter has four exhibits.

Lack of public participation is a prevalent concern. Comprehensive planning has become extremely elaborate in this county. Development regulations (and zoning, as "governance") become more complex every year. The likelihood of "getting it right the first time" would improve significantly if the public were more aware, and involved, from the start.

I expect the draft "Public Participation Plan" (PPP) to move forward with few edits, and without any substantive improvement. Unfortunately, it seems to memorialize a confusing and ineffective process. Overlapping "issues" are deliberated (and recommendations are made) in so many places by so many groups at any given time that the public has little chance to participate "early" or "iteratively." A broad, representative, cross-section of community input is rarely achieved.

The perspective of the PPP is clearly "agency first." It is written from the viewpoint of the Planning Department and Whatcom County, entity. Little in the PPP describes a process that attracts or achieves broad public participation at the planning concept level. Because participation is not early, public input is not incorporated in the "options" that Planning offers. The public doesn't "participate" so much as "react." The problem is systemic - public participation in board and commission "planning recommendations" and other inter-agency work follows the same pattern. Public input is more ancillary than it should be.

Therefore, I feel the greatest weakness of the "Public Participation Plan" is its failure to address or commit to effective general public awareness and input at any stage - regardless of complexity "level."

Suggestion #1 (broad notice): The PPP should describe and commit to a notice effort that will ensure general public awareness. (Participation cannot occur without awareness.)

. Post printed notices (single page flyers) about pending and continuing work in "public places" (post offices, community bulletin boards, etc.). This is not impossible. I know of a county in Indiana that includes public information notices along with water bills. A half-page insertion could be made in SSC invoices throughout the entire county at marginal cost. Notices could be added to property tax mailings - numerous options are available. (See exhibit)

. Place display ads and "community meeting notices" in newspapers. I have included an exhibit, with a cost estimate, for a regular print notice that could be tried. The Planning budget runs about \$5 million per year or more. A bi-weekly "current planning alert" in the Herald (in combination with other papers) every other week for a year would cost about \$7,200. That's barely over one-tenth of one percent (0.144%) of the Planning Department's annual budget. That's not "too much to spend." Outreach consultant expenses have been known to reach six figures. Only a few hours

of staff time per month would be required to do this.

Suggestion #2 (website content): The county/planning website needs content improvement.

Because the current PPP modus operandi places the burden on "interested citizens" to seek information almost solely by visiting the County website, the website must be improved. IF citizens find the county website, and locate the planning section, and discover that planning is underway in their community or interest-area, they must place a request to be added to contact e-mail lists. This approach ranges from "chancy" to remote. (Who can deny it?)

The idea of "adding a "planning project schedule to the website" has merit. But if such a schedule is posted, it should be continuously updated, and include information for at least a two-week or three-week window. It takes time for citizens to research an issue, find out where a meeting will be held, and make time in their schedules to attend a meeting or hearing. Written comments take time to prepare, too. It's not uncommon for e-mail notices to be launched a week (five working days) ahead of a hearing date or deadline.

Not all "Boards and Commissions" (or "community advisory groups") are shown at the County website. I have prepared a complete list as an exhibit (see attached list).

- o Every "board" and "commission" should have a web page on the county site. The public should know that these exist, and when they meet. Major policy deliberations are made by quasi and "public-private" organizations, entirely outside the public view. Not all of the decisions that affect the Comprehensive Plan are decided by Council, itself (WTA, Port, city planning). The activities of "3.2 Governmental/Quasi-Governmental Groups" are not particularly transparent or responsive to public involvement.

- o Appointee names (boards and commissions) should be listed on the website, along with linked scans of their applications. Appointee names aren't shown now, and they should be. Once they're added, they'll only have to be periodically updated. We need to know more about those who have been selected to "represent" the views of the public. Persons with fiduciary interests (in receiving grants or funding for their organizations) must not make self-serving policy.

- o Many (most) board and commission pages don't include links to agendas or minutes. They should. (Exercise: Try to find minutes from Rural Library Board meetings on the county website or internet. I never have.)

- o The names (and scans of the applications) of advisory committee

participants should be available to the public on special planning project web pages. If these "volunteers" are representing the public, surely the communities they represent should know who they are, and what their interests and affiliations are. Again, persons with fiduciary interests (in receiving grants or funding for their organizations) must not make self-serving policy.

. Few Planning Department memos and reports that reviewers see (like the Planning Commission or Council) are available for the public to follow. More intermediate documents and revisions should be linked for public review. The public often finds it's responding to outdated material.

Another major weakness of the PPP is its overwhelming dependence on "stakeholders," "advisory" and "community groups" for public input. The interests and concerns of property owners, businesses, and residents is grossly understated. The term "residents" only appears three times in the entire PPP - and only once in "Project Participants" Chapter 3.

Compared to residents, there's an overwhelming dependence on "stakeholders" and groups. It is undeniable that groups form to pursue special interests - and these may not bring the views of the "general public" to the table. I realize that it's convenient to invite groups (3.1.1, 3.1.2, 3.1.3, 3.2), but they are no substitute for the kind of public participation that would reflect the general perspective and needs of communities.

Suggestion #3 (balance): I believe that that a valid PPP must offer some methodology for arriving at a reasonable balance between "stakeholders," "groups" and "residents." The public does not elect or select "stakeholders" and "groups," therefore the public can't eject them. Some "volunteers" become so deeply embedded in planning processes personal - not public - opinion may dominate the process.

. Limit the number of "advisory" members from any single group or association to 1-person. A reasonable ratio of "non-group affiliation" residents to "group members" should be attempted, to reflect the land-use mix. (Example: A business district might have a higher ratio of business participation than "resident" participation.) Also, be wary that some sub-committees of associations operate with different "aka" operating names. A single organization should not dominate an entire "advisory" committee or board. This does happen, and the effect can be very detrimental.

. Invite advisory committee nominations from the general public. Notices about advisory posts should be broadly and prominently posted on bulletin boards, post offices, etc. when advisory committees are forming, and when vacancies occur. This is possible.

. Provide a mechanism for the retirement of "plan advisory" members. Because a "non-confidence vote" or "community challenge" process would be unpleasant, I strongly recommend implementing staggered term-limits for long-range planning advisory participants. If the 'advisory' approach is sound to begin with (if these groups produce widely accepted planning product) periodic participant changes shouldn't impact work in process negatively.

The last serious problem I see in the PPP is the overlap (and redundancy) in planning efforts, countywide. It is extremely difficult for the public to follow and participate constructively when an issue or project is discussed concurrently by numerous "bodies" and "quasi-planning" agencies. Transportation projects overlap with parks projects. Economic studies cite economic claims made in transportation and parks reports. Health committees may have an interest in recreation (and public works, and transportation) projects. Any single issue or project may be presented before six or seven different boards, commissions, agencies, or advisories in a given month, quarter, or year.

Suggestion #4 (consolidation): Planning efforts have become so diverse that it may be necessary to consolidate some boards and commissions to assure bona fide public participation of any kind.

. I have prepared an exhibit that demonstrates how this might be achieved over time. State and federal requirements would not necessarily be compromised if this were undertaken with care. I believe some individuals already serve on more than one of these groups.

. If groups must remain separate, perhaps they could join periodically not only for the benefit of the work, but to improve general public participation, perhaps at local town-halls. Example: A joint noxious weed, horticulture & agriculture committee town hall meeting in Lynden.

While the PPP will proceed as-is, perhaps the Planning Commission can recommend early and regular public notice, improvements to the website, better balance between residents and special-interests, and the benefits that some consolidation may bring.

I am happy to provide further comments and ideas. Feel free to call any time. Thanks for reading this through.

Respectfully submitted,

D. Ellen Baker - Glacier

Resident since 1973

Attachments: Sample Print Ad or Insertion Notice, Issue-Participation
Overlap, List of Boards,

Commissions and "Quasi" agencies and
organizations, Sample "Advisory Forming"

Notice

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