STRATEGIC THINKING

A Planning and Management Guide for Local Communities

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One of the more important tasks public managers face is planning for what lies ahead. Logic requires it, circumstances demand it, and common sense justifies it. Those who have a clean idea of what they want to do, of available resources, of problems they are likely to confront, and of a feasible approach have a better chance of succeeding than those who do not.

To plan, of course, is not easy. The plans we make often seem to have an unreal aspect to them. Many are out of focus from the start. Circumstances change, and new contingencies arise; so the plans we make to laboriously are often cast aside.

This leads to some fundamental questions. Can we in the public service afford to be without good planning? And if not, how can we integrate good planning principles into the fabric of public management? The answer to these questions may lie in the practice of “strategic thinking.”

Strategic planning and management, development of strategic directions, and the integration of local comprehensive plans into county and regional planning processes are all examples of “strategic thinking.”

The strategic plan is a dynamic way of providing public services, not a document to put on a shelf to collect dust. Strategies developed must be regularly reviewed for their effectiveness and should be adjusted or completely modified if results fall short of targets.

The vision of the future should not be firmly fixed, but remain flexible to accommodate change.

The concept of strategic thinking is based on a system of strategic planning and management. Strategic thinking should be grounded on an adequate understanding of the constraints and opportunities impacting a community and be well informed with regard to the consequences of the various possible courses of action. Good
decisions are the products of good management, but the systematic process suggested by “strategic thinking” helps a good management to function at peak effectiveness. It is a concept of watching over the application of policy and implementation of strategy on a continuing basis.

From a strategic viewpoint, community leaders can establish that all policies and operational procedures are open to change, that reevaluation is constant and ongoing, and perhaps that organization members can participate in planning the changes affecting their community.

The people that we in the public service serve are our customers. The views of our customers are important in identifying strategic issues and defining strategic directions. Information collected from our customers should serve as the foundation of our future plans. Customer input can provide insight into the strengths and weaknesses - opportunities and constraints - of our organization and may generate new ideas for improving customer services.

In developing strategic issues and defining strategic directions, those who deliver the service - the public employee - must be included in the strategic thinking process. Employees can provide insight relative to the work environment, communication, management support and fairness, level of motivation, quality of customer service, future challenges facing the organization and other suggested changes to enhance customer services.

Part I of the book provides a rather detailed overview of the strategic planning process. Each step in the process is reviewed with action steps to assist in the application of the process.

Part II advances the philosophy of developing “strategic directions” to guide future community decision-making.

The final chapter, Part III, illustrates a planning model that applies strategic thinking to the process of developing a countywide development plan that integrates individual local plans into a comprehensive planning process.

It is hopes that the application of the concepts described in this book will assist
local government leaders to think strategically in guiding their communities into the future.

Introduction

The purpose of this book is to provide a practical guide that will assist local government leaders in addressing complex problems in a strategic manner—that is, to think strategically.

Increasingly, public officials are focusing on strategic planning and management, as a process of strategic thinking, to cope with and address challenges confronting their communities. While strategic planning has been a standard part of management thinking and practice in the business world for more than 30 years, it is a relative newcomer to government.

Strategic planning can be defined as a systematic effort to establish basic organizational purposes, objectives, policies, and to develop the strategies which will be used to achieve organizational purposes. Strategic planning/management (strategic thinking) should be undertaken for the purpose of achieving mandated or discretionary objectives in the most effective, efficient, economical and democratic way, while balancing community interests.

There are several basic benefits to be realized with the employment of strategic planning and management: promotion of strategic thinking and action; improved decision making; and enhanced organizational responsiveness and improved performance.

There is no more important element in performance-based management than strategic plans. These plans set the agency’s course, its overall programmatic and policy goals, and describe how these goals will be achieved. Importantly, the comprehensive planning process and strategic planning must be community integrated to achieve maximum benefit. The old adage "failing to plan, is planning to fail" has never been more true, particularly in the public sector faced with reduced funding, increasing political pressures, and changing work processes and technology.
Community leaders, managers, and planners must use care in how they engage in strategic planning/management because their success will depend at least in part on how they tailor the process to their specific situation. The practitioner should always keep in mind that most golden of maxims: tailor the application to thine own organization, with its own unique conditions and needs.

Effective strategic planning/management begins with a series of strategic decisions that focus on the organization’s mission and how best to achieve it. Inasmuch as the most important public resource is our public employees, strategic decisions must concentrate on the composition of the work force necessary to achieve the mission, and the staffing and communication strategies needed to accomplish that mission.

Strategic thinking organizations are capable of adapting to change. Organizational strategic thinking is facilitated when there is an openness and mutual trust that allows people to embrace change and experimentation without feeling personally threatened. It also helps if the culture of the organization supports widespread participation in decision making, a strong public service ethic, and a diversity of skills and viewpoints. But most of all, a strategic thinking organization needs plenty of feedback, which can only be obtained through careful monitoring and tracking of the strategic direction.

This can be accomplished through internal and external environmental scanning as suggested in Part I of this book, “Strategic Planning and Management.”

An important part of strategic thinking is prudence: monitoring change, making the necessary mid-course corrections, and knowing when to initiate a new vision-forming process. Thus, far from being the last word, strategic thinking is part of a continuing process of orienting an organization to the emerging realities of the outside world.

There is no regular schedule on which a strategic direction should be revisited. As long as it appears to be working and is consistent with developments in internal and external environmental, it should be affirmed and supported. At some point, however, the signals from the monitoring and tracking activities may begin flashing the need for altering - or perhaps even replacing - the strategic direction.
There are no hard and fast rules for when you need to revise an existing strategic direction. A wise organization doesn’t wait for the alert to be sounded before thinking of alternative new directions. Rather, the strategic direction forming process, discussed in Part II of this book, should be a continual one. An organization should be constantly developing and examining alternatives for change so that when and if the alert is sounded it is prepared to act.

One way to assure that strategic direction formation is a continuous process is to spread the leadership role throughout the organization at every level, so that every unit is encouraged to develop its own strategic direction. A county government agency, for example, will have numerous local governmental units headed by leaders who are in a position to create a strategic direction for the future of that unit. Indeed, we have visionary leaders at the local level who can take change, dream dreams, and build a unique future for their local units of government. Thus, the purpose of this book on “Strategic Thinking”: to guide local planning and management decision-makers in the act of “Strategic Thinking.”

With that said, there emerges one best way to ensure that the strategic thinking process is alive and well and continuously practiced in an organization, and that is to multiply the number of strategic thinking leaders at all levels of an organization. Encourage them all to articulate strategic directions worthy of their commitment and the organization’s confidence. Applaud their initiative and tolerate their mistakes. The continuous strategic thinking that this stimulates will keep the process of organization evolution alive and vital and will make it far less likely that important threats or opportunities will be overlooked.

The role of the strategic thinking manager is to set the direction of the organization and personally commit to it, to spread visionary leadership throughout the organization, to empower employees to act, to listen and watch for feedback, and to always focus attention on helping the organization achieve its greatest potential.

This brief introduction illustrates part of the strategic thinking process encouraged throughout this book. However, strategic thinking is no panacea. Governmental strategic thinking (planning and management) appears to work best in governmental units that have effective policy-making boards, strong and supportive process
sponsors, superb process champions, good strategic planning/management teams, enough slack to handle potentially disruptive crises, experience in coping with major disruptions, a desire to address what is truly important for the organization and the realization that planning is the first function of management. Any unit of government exhibiting the foregoing characteristics probably already uses some sort of strategic thinking process.

It is hoped that this book will assist local government officials and their organizations to meet the changes of tomorrow through strategic thinking today.

I. Strategic Planning and Management

Introduction

Strategic Management is a decision-making process that enables local government to better manage its future. It enhances public policy leaders’ abilities to develop agreements that their communities accept and use about the critical issues affecting their communities.

Public sector strategic management combines priority setting, agenda building, decision-making and implementing processes in order to establish agreement about the important issues and opportunities facing a community: it identifies what ought to and can be done to enhance a community’s future. It identifies and negotiates the differing purposes, visions and aspirations within a community. Emphasis is placed on the crucial few decisions that, if made now, will significantly affect the basic nature, direction, and future of the community. The major purpose is to develop an agenda with specific and timely actions that are designed to achieve a community-wide and shared sense of purpose and vision.

Strategic planning is different from strategic management. The former refers to a planning process focused on defining key variables and events with which the organization must cope if it is to be effective in the future. Planning also creates strategies for dealing with the identified problems and grasping opportunities. Strategic management is the realistic coping with current problems by carefully noting contingencies and consequences so as to achieve the long-term objectives identified by the strategic plan. In essence, strategic management is the flexible but
focused implementation of the strategic plan. In both cases the term strategic identifies key variables and contingencies with which an organization must wrestle explicitly. Together, strategic planning and management promotes “strategic thinking.”

Strategic management in the public sector must deal with both macro and micro level politics. At the macro level, public managers must understand that they are part of a governing system that is deliberately complex. The system includes private interest groups as well as public agencies. Here the need is for ascertaining traditions of governance that can guide managerial behavior. Professional education and networking can help sort out the philosophical questions.

Within the strategic management framework, purpose (meaning and values), strategy (direction), and tactics (action) are consciously analyzed with a consistent eye on the external and internal environmental forces impacting the community: political, technological, socio-economic, organizational, and individual factors. These forces are seen to either help or hinder the community in achieving its vision of the future. A further analysis is made as to which forces are controllable or uncontrollable in the community’s external and internal environments. Given these forces a realistic assessment is made of the community’s capacities to implement successfully future enhancing, critical actions. Having a better handle on purpose with a sense of direction, managing change and uncertainty, building an agenda with community-wide support, and developing necessary, usually interdependent, action plans are the major results to be expected from strategic management.

What makes an issue "strategic" is its tendency to be future affecting, change-oriented, interdepartmental, externally influenced, costly if not addressed, and usually not best resolved in the ongoing planning and budgeting process. If not addressed, problems with these characteristics dominate the communities and get ahead of their policy leaders. On the other hand, possibly a worse case, opportunities can be missed and never find their way to the community’s attention. Depending on the organization’s size, these issues could include intra as well as interdepartmental strategies. It could also focus on the specific concerns of several communities and become an intergovernmental strategic issue.

Because a major part of the strategic management process is based on problem-solving and organization development concepts, there is a tendency to see the world
as being as full of opportunities as it is of problems. Hence, when a potential strategic issue is being analyzed, participants are asked to identify the present and potential strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and constraints that exist in a situation. The strategic management process accepts both short and long-range issues that can have single as well as multiple goals and results.

The significance of the strategic management process is that it accepts a continuum of issues—problems and opportunities—as being potentially strategic. The one issue on that continuum is more complex than another is accepted; however, because vision, critical change, and action are driving elements in the process, a number of interrelated agenda items, actions, and decisions are accepted as being able to achieve change. Policy makers can now move from incrementalism to strategic management. This places them in a more influential position because they can focus on doing-the-right-thing: the policy leader’s primary responsibility. This leaves doing-it-right or implementation factors to the managers.

Local public policy makers have a most important leadership function to exercise in their communities: developing and sustaining a strategic agenda and getting the critical, interdependent decisions made that implement that agenda. Unfortunately, these central and critical functions of their public office and trust are too easily sidetracked. There is a built-in tension and conflict of priorities between public issues with immediate impact and those that have the power to affect a community’s quality of life and its ability to manage its own future.

The most powerful product of the strategic planning process is the pinpointing of future-affecting, public purpose issues. Often they are submerged by the municipality’s everyday workload and/or are seen as too hot to handle because to do so would negatively impact various interest groups. Furthermore, public officials’ attention is usually focused on efficiency concerns. Rarely are questions asked about whether it is the right thing to be doing in the first place. Thus efficiency in maintaining the status quo triumphs over matters of purpose and future enhancing actions. Strategic management is designed to sort out issues so that leaders and citizens begin to have a sense of control over what is, and most importantly, what can be.

Another benefit from strategic management is the opportunity for a community to become more competitive and to obtain a larger share of the market. Communities
may not perceive themselves as part of a marketplace because the services they provide have not been perceived to result in so-called bottom lines. However, when communities’ revenue bases are taken into consideration, then communities do compete. Their markets include not only the firms they wish to keep or attract but also present and future home owners. In this market analysis, both firms and home owners are seen to be equally concerned about the educational system and other quality-of-life issues, as well as what basic services and infrastructures are provided and how they are managed.

Thus, the community whose leadership is able to negotiate and to deliver on its agreements—because it has the policies and strategies that demonstrate it knows where it is going and how to get there—will be a better competitor and will have a better market share of new and retained citizens and investors. Its leaders know that they have a desirable community product to market and they consciously work to enhance its position among competing communities.

**Strategic Planning/Management Process**

Strategic planning/management generally involves three phases (plan-to-plan, strategic direction, and operating plans) and at least six distinctive steps: setting objectives (plan-to-plan); environmental scanning (conduct environmental analysis); developing options (conduct internal assessment); the strategic decision (review statement of purpose and objectives/define strategic direction); the organization (develop operating plans); and the strategic review (implement and monitor plans) as illustrated in Figure I-1. The process relies heavily on the ability of planners to specify objectives, to assess systematically the organization and its environment, and to apply rational, maximizing decision criteria (reference Part III, Figure III-1) to the final outcome.

When applied to the public sector, the process requires a number of assumptions which may or may not reflect political reality common to public organizations.

In the public sector short term orientations often outweigh long-term perspectives. Decisions are often based upon political values that may implicitly govern and limit identification of available alternatives. Much of the agenda for public sector decision makers is pre-established in that certain services must be provided and,
therefore, slack is present only to a small extent on the margin. Additionally, the public sector environment is segmented such that local government decision makers respond to a plurality of interests, including such critical variables as administrative need and equity, needs and interest of the private sector, the rule of law as reflected in home rule provisions, and their public constituents. Moreover, an individual local government makes policy decisions in the context of a fragmented intergovernmental arrangement defined by artificial geopolitical boundaries. Often city is pitted against city, city against county, and local government against school districts in a competition for scarce tax resources and, more importantly, in the competition for securing economic growth needed to build effectively the tax base. In this context, the question of strategy is often reduced to a question of competition which is perceived as a zero sum game. When cities, counties, school districts, and chambers of commerce plan separately, the unit of analysis is inherently artificial and the product must always be less than optimal for those living in the area.

The very nature of strategic management and planning is such that considerable expertise, either outside or inside the organization, is required in order to conduct quality environmental scanning and to set measurable objectives. Consequently, the planning process often does not include policy makers until the necessary assessments and analyses have been made. While the resulting plan may be adopted, the political decision makers often are not sufficiently invested in it to be committed to its success.

Obviously, the rational nature of strategic planning/management does not lend itself well to addressing these aspects of the local government context. These approaches inherent in traditional strategic planning surely are effective in bringing order out of chaos, but implementation for the result is often problematic, especially for local governments. Success in any change strategy requires that participants in the change process be invested in both the process and the outcome.

In summary, the strategic planning/management process is designed to achieve the following benefits:

- A shared vision (strategic direction) about the community’s future that can span administrations.
Decisions that the participants own because of their involvement, hence there is a stronger base of support than a majority vote.

A process which permits local policy leaders to focus their scarce decision making time on strategic, significant, future-enhancing issues that usually have intersectoral, intergovernmental, and interdepartmental dimensions.

Positions the community to capitalize on favorable circumstances because a shared vision (strategic direction) fosters development of a strategic agenda, contingency plans, and a supporting information system that are designed to adapt to changing circumstances.

Community acceptance and legitimacy. There is a Partnership of vision (strategic direction), pragmatism, rationality, politics, negotiations, problem-solving, and group process within a public, structured forum. This combination lessens criticism of the decisions that are reached because strategic management is not done in a pressured, formalized, and politicized setting. In fact, a different forum is created for the strategic management process; therefore, the aspects of precedent and community culture that are debilitating are constrained because alternatives are solicited beyond standard forums and are then reviewed to see what makes sense.

Community development and citizen participation results that address complaints about community malaise and citizen dropout. Specifically, if properly adhered to, the process enhances enthusiasm, unity of purpose, commitment to action, sustained leadership, and shared risk taking.

A vehicle for public-private cooperation. This is because the significant issues that confront a community often cross into the private sector as well.

Preplanning and identification steps which identify internal and external factors (forces of change) that can help or hinder the achievement of strategic change. Therefore, community leaders decrease the likelihood of being blind-sided by unanticipated resistance.

A process which expects and accommodates negotiations among the competing values in a community; for example, efficiency, economy,
effectiveness, justice, responsiveness, equity, and political control which are usually present when significant public decisions are made.

Conclusion

The first priority for the community considering strategic planning/management is a leadership that will stay involved in and support the process from beginning to the end. Strategy and leadership are intimately related; therefore, whether the chief elected or appointed official or a legislative body initiates the strategic planning effort, there will be a considerable investment of time and reputation. However, if need, commitment, and support are present, a strategic management process can prove beneficial to any jurisdiction regardless of its size or form of government.

As a process to manage complex and competing public demands, strategic management creates a forum to get coordination and to improve communication among separately elected or appointed boards and commissions. The process further creates a safe setting in which neglected or unknown problems and opportunities get a hearing and are analyzed with a problem-solving forum.

Given the limited professional staff available to most chief elected and appointed officials in smaller and moderate-size communities, the strategic management process pinpoints and justifies where to make investments in additional professional personnel (full-time, part-time, shared, or consultants). This justification occurs because specific, recommended actions are developed and the problems associated with the internal and external demands are now more explicit and understandable to the community’s citizens.

The process demonstrates that a community can develop a public agenda that presents critical strategies that the community wishes to accomplish. Though comprehensive plans also attempt to create an agenda, the strategic management process identifies doable pieces that are judged to be the critical few that are future affecting, and as such, must be part of; and integrated into, the comprehensive planning process (reference Part III).

The data needed for strategy setting and decision-making sessions need to be managed in order that they do not become so burdensome that the purpose of the
strategic management process is subverted. Strategic management needs to be seen as a process that enhances the ability for communities to make better decisions because they have opened themselves up to the generation of ideas and information. The important product is not the amount of data produced to justify a decision. Rather the real product is the will to act because of a set of priorities has been agreed to: a public agenda of critical issues has been developed.

The strategic management process demands the attention and involvement of the central cadre of a community’s elected, appointed, and citizen leaders who are usually already overburdened. Time needs to be managed well and results and/or meaning need to come from the meetings. One way of decreasing time demands is to decrease the energy used in getting organized and started. This objective can occur more easily when some mix of these factors is in place:

- the political actors tend to trust one another or have reached an understanding about the strategic planning/management process;
- an accepted, trusted system or habit of working together is in place among the professional staffs, boards and commissions; and
- the actors involved in the process, including the process facilitator, have realistic expectations as to what outcomes are desired and what amount of time/energy is needed to accomplish those results. For example, there may be a desire for significant immediate actions. However, the development of agreement on a community agenda may be as much as one can expect to accomplish.

Because of its eclectic background and flexible approach, strategic management provides a framework and a process within which public policy makers can begin to have a constructive, future-oriented dialogue with the citizens of their communities. While the process may not have caused dramatic turnarounds where it has been used, it has facilitated change.

Strategic management introduces the element of comparative analysis between one community and those that are seen to be potential competitors. It also interjects an element of the market system into the public sector where competition is usually said to be nonexisting. Yet when communities are engaging in economic development,
staff recruitment, and bond marketing activities, are they not competing? Thus, the process is designed to identify factors that facilitate the development of such questions as: what factors contribute to different costs and service levels; what elements affect a community’s ability to compete in economic, monetary, and personnel markets, and how can a community stand out among others as a place to stay in or move to?

More important than efficiency, comparison, and competitive aspects is the central purpose of strategic management: to help policy leaders escape the trap of precedent and to be future affecting. This increases the community’s capacity to manage better the existing and impending issues that are judged to have a significant, strategic impact upon it. It structures identification of the issues and opportunities that the community has avoided, is ignorant of, or has not yet engaged.

The following is an outline of the strategic planning/management process.
OUTLINE OF THE STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT/PLANNING PROCESS

STRATEGIC PLANNING

- Charting future course of an organization.
- Intelligent coping with the inevitable.
- A description of the way the managers of an organization have decided to operate it. It usually includes some quantified objectives they hope to achieve.
- What...where...expected...how
  how will you know?

ELEMENTS OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

- Assessing
  - External environment
  - Programs
  - Internal organization/operations
  - Organizational mission/aspirations

- Defining
  - Constraints
  - Opportunities
  - Alternatives

- Selecting
  - An appropriate direction
    - Programs
    - Organization
    - Facilities
    - Financial
Appropriate strategies
High priority projects/programs/activities

Developing
- Project implementation plans
- Organization plan
- Operating plans
  - Program
  - Financial
  - Development
  - Facility

Monitoring/updating
- Planning assumptions
- Progress against plan

KEY STRATEGIC QUESTIONS

- What is the purpose (mission) of the organization?
- Who does it serve?
- What changes in the organization’s environment could become either:
  - Threats to its long-term viability.
  - Opportunities to fill new or unmet community needs, to improve effectiveness, etc.
- Who does the organization compete with (both direct and indirect)?
- What are the organization’s key strengths/weaknesses?
  - Programs/Services
  - Organization/Human Resources
  - Facilities
  - Financial
  - Other
- Are the organization, financial and operating structures appropriate to support future plans?

- What can be expected in the future?
  - Status Quo
  - Worst Case
  - Best Case

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

- PHASE I: PLAN-TO-PLAN
  - Develop "Plan-to-Plan" (Setting Objectives)

- PHASE II: STRATEGIC DIRECTION
  - Conduct Environmental Analysis (Environmental Scanning)
  - Conduct Internal Assessment (Developing Options)
  - Review Statement of Purpose and Objectives (Strategic Decision)
  - Define Strategic Direction (Strategic Decision)

- PHASE III: OPERATING PLANS
  - Develop Operating Plans (the Organization)
  - Implement and Monitor Plans (Strategic Review)

THE PLAN TO "PLAN" (PHASE I)

- DEFINE KEY STRATEGIC ISSUES

- PLAN DEVELOPMENT APPROACH (WHAT, WHO, HOW)

- MECHANICS OF PLANNING PROCESS

- PLANNING ORGANIZATION/ RESPONSIBILITIES

- PROJECT PLAN/SCHEDULE
  - MAJOR ACTIVITIES
• TIMING
• END PRODUCTS
• REVIEWS

■ DEFINE ORGANIZATION/PLANNING ISSUES

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS (PHASE II)

■ GENERAL ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW
  • CONDUCT REVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS (I.E., ECONOMIC, DEMOGRAPHIC)
  • DEVELOP ENVIRONMENTAL OPERATING ASSUMPTIONS/OUTLOOK
  • COMPLETE ENVIRONMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES/THREATS SUMMARY

■ COMPETITIVE/SERVICE TRENDS
  • COMPLETE COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS
  • CONDUCT SERVICE TRENDS ASSESSMENT
  • COMPLETE COMPETITIVE/SERVICE TRENDS OPPORTUNITIES/THREATS SUMMARY

■ COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT
  • DEFINE CHARACTERISTICS OF CURRENT CONSTITUENCIES
  • IDENTIFY NEW OR UNMET COMMUNITY NEEDS

INTERNAL ASSESSMENT (PHASE II)

■ ORGANIZATIONAL REVIEW
  • CONDUCT REVIEW OF BOARD/SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS
  • ANALYZE STRUCTURE OF INTERNAL ORGANIZATION

■ FINANCIAL/ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEMS ANALYSIS
  • COMPLETE FINANCIAL/BUDGETING REVIEW
  • CONDUCT REVIEW OF MANAGEMENT REPORTING AND CONTROL
SYSTEMS

- FACILITIES REVIEW
  - DETERMINE ADEQUACY AND UTILIZATION OF FACILITIES
  - IDENTIFY TRENDS AND ASSESS FUTURE NEEDS

- PROGRAMS ASSESSMENT
  - REVIEW GENERAL PROGRAM PLANNING
  - EVALUATE PROGRAM PERFORMANCE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND GOALS (PHASE II)

- STATEMENT OF PURPOSE REVIEW
  - REVIEW PLAN-TO-PLAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL AND INTERNAL ASSESSMENT ISSUES ON ORGANIZATION'S PURPOSE
  - REVIEW CURRENT STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND DEFINE POSSIBLE CHANGES
  - ANALYZE ALTERNATIVES AND DEVELOP CONSENSUS ON CHANGES

- DEVELOPMENT OF OBJECTIVES
  - DEFINE OBJECTIVES TO SUPPORT THE ORGANIZATION'S PURPOSE
  - ANALYZE ISSUES AND DEVELOP CONSENSUS ON STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

STRATEGIC DIRECTION (PHASE II)

- SUMMARIZE "Viable" STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES
• PROGRAMS/SERVICES
• ORGANIZATION
• FINANCIAL
• OTHER

■ DEVELOP SELECTION CRITERIA TIED TO STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

● "MUST" CRITERIA
● "SHOULD" CRITERIA

■ EVALUATE PROGRAM AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES AGAINST SELECTION CRITERIA

■ PRIORITIZE AND SELECT OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING IN PHASE III

■ FINALIZE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

■ OBTAIN STRATEGIC DIRECTION CONCURRENCE BEFORE PROCEEDING TO PHASE III

OPERATING PLANS (PHASE III)

■ COMPLETE DETAILED PROJECT PLANS FOR STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES (MUST BE DEVELOPED DOWN TO THE LEVEL WHERE PROBLEMS CAN BE "EASILY" IDENTIFIED/ADDRESSED)

● SPECIFIC ACTIONS/TIMING REQUIRED
● RESPONSIBILITY
● RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS

■ DEVELOP FIVE YEAR OPERATING PLANS

● PROGRAMS/SERVICES
- Overhead
- Development
- Capital
- Facilities

- Define key assumptions and where appropriate, specific quantitative goals
- Contingency plans should be established in advance based on changes in key assumptions for "sensitive" variables
- Plans should be agreed to by all parties
- Document plan and obtain organization concurrence

Implement and monitor plans (Phase III)

- Define plan monitoring process
  - Projects
  - Financial
  - Operational
  - Other milestones

- Utilize "normal" organization structure to monitor plan
  - Management
  - Board Committees

- Use special task force committees, etc. for major new projects (i.e., capital expansion, new type of program)

- Make problems visible
  - Take corrective action early
  - Make tough decisions
UPDATE PLAN WHEN KEY ASSUMPTIONS CHANGE (I.E., ENVIRONMENT, FINANCIAL)

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS
Major End Products

- Clear direction for organization
  - Common goals
  - Planned allocation of resources

- Anticipation of opportunities and potential problems
  - Changing community needs
  - Contingency plans

- Improved control over direction and operation
  - Proactive versus reactive
  - Resource allocation/focus
  - Financial goals
  - Progress measurement

- Identification of areas requiring improvement or change
  - Forces decisions/actions
  - Defines resources required

- Organizational structure/climate that supports the planning process
  - Responsibility/commitment ("ownership")
  - Planning part of day-to-day operations

THE SUCCESS OF THE PLAN ULTIMELY DEPENDS ON TWO FACTORS:

- HAVING A GOOD PLAN
ACHIEVABLE OBJECTIVES AND GOALS
ORGANIZATIONAL CONSENSUS
PARTICIPATION BY DECISION MAKERS
REASONABLE ASSUMPTIONS
SUFFICIENT DETAIL
REALISTIC ACTION STEPS

IMPLEMENTING AND Updating THE PLAN

Figure I-1

Strategic Management/Planning Process

Planning Flow

Setting Objectives:
Develop "PLAN TO PLAN"

Environmental Scanning:
CONDUCT ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

Developing Options:
CONDUCT INTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Strategic Decision:
DEFINE STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Organization:
DEVELOP OPERATING PLANS

Strategic Review:
IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR PLANS

Phase I
Plan-to-Plan

Phase II
Strategic Direction

Phase III
Operating Plans

REVIEW STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES
Setting Objectives:

THE PLAN TO "PLAN"

EXAMPLE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Planning Flow

- Define Key Strategic Issues
- Plan Development Approach (What, Who, How)
- Mechanics of Planning Process
- Planning Organization/Responsibilities
- Project Plan/Schedule
  - Major Activities
  - Timing
  - End Products
  - Reviews
- Define Organization/Planning Issues
Environmental Scanning:

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

EXAMPLE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Planning Flow

- GENERAL ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW
  - CONDUCT REVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS (I.E., ECONOMIC, DEMOGRAPHIC)
  - DEVELOP ENVIRONMENTAL OPERATING ASSUMPTIONS/OUTLOOK
  - COMPLETE ENVIRONMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES/THREATS SUMMARY

- COMPETITIVE/SERVICE TRENDS
  - COMPLETE COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS
  - CONDUCT SERVICE TRENDS ASSESSMENT
  - COMPLETE COMPETITIVE/SERVICE TRENDS OPPORTUNITIES/THREATS SUMMARY

- COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT
  - DEFINE CHARACTERISTICS OF CURRENT CONSTITUENCIES
  - IDENTIFY NEW OR UNMET COMMUNITY NEEDS
Developing Options:

INTERNAL ASSESSMENT

EXAMPLE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Planning Flow

- ORGANIZATIONAL REVIEW
  - CONDUCT REVIEW OF BOARD/ SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS
  - ANALYZE STRUCTURE OF INTERNAL ORGANIZATION

- FINANCIAL/ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEMS ANALYSIS
  - COMPLETE FINANCIAL/BUDGETING REVIEW
  - CONDUCT REVIEW OF MANAGEMENT REPORTING AND CONTROL SYSTEMS

- FACILITIES REVIEW
  - DETERMINE ADEQUACY AND UTILIZATION OF FACILITIES
  - IDENTIFY TRENDS AND ASSESS FUTURE NEEDS

- PROGRAMS ASSESSMENT
  - REVIEW GENERAL PROGRAM PLANNING
  - EVALUATE PROGRAM PERFORMANCE
Strategic Decision:

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND GOALS

EXAMPLE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Planning Flow

- STATEMENT OF PURPOSE REVIEW
  - REVIEW PLAN-TO-PLAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL AND INTERNAL ASSESSMENT ISSUES ON ORGANIZATION'S PURPOSE
  - REVIEW CURRENT STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND DEFINE POSSIBLE CHANGES
  - ANALYZE ALTERNATIVES AND DEVELOP CONSENSUS ON CHANGES

- DEVELOPMENT OF OBJECTIVES
  - DEFINE OBJECTIVES TO SUPPORT THE ORGANIZATION'S PURPOSE
  - ANALYZE ISSUES AND DEVELOP CONSENSUS ON STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES
Strategic Decision:

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

EXAMPLE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Planning Flow

- **SUMMARIZE** "VIABLE" STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES
  - Programs/Services
  - Organization
  - Financial
  - Other

- **DEVELOP SELECTION CRITERIA TIED TO STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES**
  - "MUST" CRITERIA
  - "SHOULD" CRITERIA

- **EVALUATE PROGRAM AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES AGAINST SELECTION CRITERIA**

- **PRIORITIZE AND SELECT OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING IN PHASE III**

- **FINALIZE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES**

- **OBTAIN STRATEGIC DIRECTION CONCURRENCE BEFORE PROCEEDING TO PHASE III**
Example Strategic Planning Process

Planning Flow

- Complete detailed project plans for strategic opportunities (must be developed down to the level where problems can be "easily" identified/addressed)
  - Specific actions/timing required
  - Responsibility
  - Resource requirements

- Develop five year operating plans
  - Programs/services
  - Overhead
  - Development
  - Capital
  - Facilities

- Define key assumptions and where appropriate, specific quantitative goals

- Contingency plans should be established in advance based on changes in key assumptions for "sensitive" variables

- Plans should be agreed to by all parties

- Document plan and obtain organization concurrence
Strategic Review:

IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR PLANS

EXAMPLE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Planning Flow

- DEFINE PLAN MONITORING PROCESS
  - PROJECTS
  - FINANCIAL
  - OPERATIONAL
  - OTHER MILESTONES

- UTILIZE "NORMAL" ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE TO MONITOR PLAN
  - MANAGEMENT
  - BOARD COMMITTEES

- USE SPECIAL TASK FORCE COMMITTEES, ETC. FOR MAJOR NEW PROJECTS (I.E., CAPITAL EXPANSION, NEW TYPE OF PROGRAM)

- MAKE PROBLEMS VISIBLE
  - TAKE CORRECTIVE ACTION EARLY
  - MAKE TOUGH DECISIONS

- UPDATE PLAN WHEN KEY ASSUMPTIONS CHANGE (I.E., ENVIRONMENT, FINANCIAL)
Concurrent with, and emerging from the strategic planning and management process is strategic directions. With a strong understanding of current and future issues facing the organization, it is now necessary to establish a future vision for the organization and a series of strategic directions to move toward that vision.

The next part of this book explains the articulation of strategic directions through the application of the strategic planning/management methodology previously discussed.


II. Strategic Directions

Introduction

Within the overall context of strategic planning and management, strategic directions must be defined to guide future courses of action. This section of the book examines a variety of strategic direction examples for the development of an integrated -- local government strategic partnership.

Committing resources intelligently is what strategic thinking is all about. It requires public officials to develop a strategic direction of the future and to direct the use of available resources along the lines of excellence to achieve that future. This strategic direction -- this vision of the future must be shared by employees of the organization. In order to reach a common vision of the future, management must develop a common planning and management methodology. A methodology that allows the various units within the organization to generate independent visions of the future, while at the same time promote a discipline that will be consolidated into a common vision.

Most organizations conduct some kind of long-range planning; few look beyond five years, and the numerous plans do not reflect a uniform methodology. With this viewpoint, public officials will find it difficult to develop and implement organization-wide strategic thinking.

The process of thinking strategically, therefore, requires participants to identify alternative possible futures (strategic directions) and to form a main strategy for the future most likely to occur, and contingent strategies for other futures. The process requires management to continuously scan the internal (organization) and external (world) environments to identify organizational strengths and weaknesses vis-a-vis opportunities and constraints, to understand the forces of change, and a willingness and methodology to adapt the strategy to new visions of the future. Ultimately, the process will lead to forecasting change and planning for the future -- a proactive, rather than reactive management strategy.

The methodology to achieve strategic thinking and ultimately a strategic direction within the organizational environment can be viewed as a series of interrelated steps. In many organizations, particularly public sector
organizations, the previous decade witnessed cutback management techniques coupled with creative financing initiatives. In the decade of the ’90s the next logical step will see the public official evolving from technocrat to strategist. The public official will be far more responsible for organization-wide productivity improvement, organizational growth attainment, utilization of information management systems, attraction, retention, training, and deployment of personnel, promotion and marketing, and creative customer relations.

Technology will continually extend the realm of opportunities. Converting concept to practice, however, is the fundamental challenge that will be handled best by those managers who are capable of strategic thinking.

Strategic thinking requires a public official to maintain an awareness of new technologies (realm of opportunities), and also to quantify the impact of those techniques on his organization (practice).

Supporting the public official’s strategic direction will require a practical understanding of how to access and use information systems and a working knowledge of how to apply decision-making support systems for organizational improvement. Access to information is a vital element in developing a strategic direction. The quantity and quality of information available to public officials makes it possible to draw timely conclusions about the organization’s internal and external environments.

Articulation of a strategic direction, will require public officials to develop an appreciation of how systems optimize information. That application must translate into action.

Developing a sense of strategic thinking involves moving beyond traditional strategic management. Successful public officials will emphasize the need for better communication to allow the various functional divisions of the organization to present their individual visions of the future and resource needs. The real planners within the organization are the line and staff personnel responsible for policy implementation. These divisional administrators, therefore, are the ones who need to conceptualize the future. To assist in the process, top management will need to provide more realistic assumptions about the future and a methodology for planning the future. Public officials must look at the future to ensure that necessary resources will be available to adequately support planning objectives.
Thus far, the need to develop a strategic management methodology has focused on developing a vision of the future or strategic direction. To develop that "strategic direction" it will be necessary to obtain and optimize information about the organization. Development of a strategic management methodology should be directed towards strategies which include standards of performance with emphasis given to innovative approaches that advance the mission of the organizations.

There is a clear need to understand the underlying internal and external environments affecting attainment of the organization’s mission and its client’s needs. The best insights of any decision-maker require clear knowledge of opportunities and constraints found to impact upon the organization and the strengths and weaknesses found within the organization. The successful manager will develop strategic skills to turn external constraints and internal weaknesses into organizational opportunities. Analyzing and anticipating orientations, perceptions, needs, strengths, constraints, and weaknesses found within and outside of the organization is what makes strategy proactive.

Inherent in this methodology is the importance of public officials to examine their respective organizations from various perspectives: as human resource managers assessing staffing requirements, as negotiators and integrators of conflict resolution, and as organization strategists.

In many organizations today, and even more in the future, functional lines of authority are becoming hazy. Access to operating information, for example, often unites and integrates individual departmental objectives with the mission for the organization. This will supply data into a common information system that simultaneously benefits individual departments and management.

Public officials will need to take the lead to formulate strategic directions that exhibit clear goals accepted by the organization while providing a feedback mechanism to monitor the process.

It should be clear from the foregoing that the successful public officials of the future will demonstrate development of strategic directions that have evolved along with technology. They will be able to utilize information management systems to make better informed decisions. And, most importantly, they will welcome the responsibility for contributing to the
success of their organizations.

Following are examples of strategic directions for a county government encompassing multiple local units of government.

**Strategic Directions**

The overall distribution of population, employment, housing, and green spaces, and the transportation network of water and sewer pipes, and utilities should be reflected in local community development plans. How local community plans develop and are implemented has many important implications for enhancing the liveability of the community. It affects the length of daily commutes and the accessibility of the transit network, which in turn affect the amount of congestion and air pollution. The overall development of the community also determines access to services and shopping, opportunities for new businesses to locate, and the ability of exiting businesses to remain viable.

All local governments with a county must work together to ensure that all land uses can be serviced efficiently and effectively, and in ensuring that the overall distribution of services contributes to a healthy environment, economic vitality, and social well-being.

The challenge facing county government is how best to mold the individual local plans to achieve liveability effectively and with cost efficiency. This means taking advantage of under-utilized sites, particularly those located along transit corridors and major arterial roads, to add new housing, commercial, and retail opportunities in mixed-use developments.

By encouraging the location of jobs and housing near each other, along with supportive commercial and recreational uses, a county can expect to see a more efficient pattern of development. Such a pattern means more population can be accommodated within currently developed boundaries, which may take the development pressure off the green spaces and agricultural lands within the county.

These strategic directions, when coupled with an ecosystem approach, provide a sustainable planning framework for a liveable countywide community.

- Development of under-utilized areas in a manner that enhances their
viability, diversity, and sustainability.

Much of the county development pattern has changed as a result of economic and social conditions. The decline in the manufacturing sector, the increased use of the automobile, and restrictive zoning practices have produced many under-utilized areas within the county. These include shopping centers with large parking areas at grade, under-utilized landscaped areas surrounding apartment sites, strip retail malls, obsolete industrial lands, and suburban office parks that are deserted at night. Such areas represent a vast supply of land available for development in areas that are already serviced by infrastructure (transit, water, sewage disposal), yet do not pose a threat to the established residential neighborhoods.

- The promotion of mixed-use development.

Also characteristic of the county development pattern is a quite distinct separation of land uses. In many areas across the county, employment-related land uses, such as office and industrial use, are distinctly separated from residential uses. This separation made sense when industries where incompatible because of their noise and odor, but it makes less sense in today’s economy of information services and cleaner industries. The benefit of mixing land uses is to utilize land in a more efficient manner, to create more accessible and viable residential and employment opportunities, and to create a more diverse environment.

- The protection of critical areas of economic enterprise and the promotion of a variety of locations for economic activities.

Changes to a county economy may reduce the need to separate many economic activities from residential uses. However, some economic activities may continue to be sensitive to the impacts of other land uses and require relative isolation and protection. In order to provide the appropriate range of location choices that will support the full range of economic activities necessary for economic health, certain areas must be identified and protected for particular types of activities while other areas are promoted for mixed use.

- An emphasis on integrated countywide planning to improve the physical
form and quality of the county structure (reference Part III).

For development to lead to a more liveable county, it must be undertaken in the context of clearly defined objectives for the physical form and quality of the structure.

- **Comprehensive environmental policies** designed to ensure that environmental integrity is properly considered in land use decisions.

  A major focus of environmental policies is to significantly enhance air, water, and soil quality across the county.

  Policies must also encourage energy conservation through more concentrated, intense land use that favors non-automobile transportation (more public transit, foot traffic, and bicycle use), in order to reduce the harmful emissions produced by automobiles.

- **Achievement of an integrated greenway system**, recognizing its key functions within the county structure.

  A county greenway system can often provide the structural frame for a county strategy. These areas provide a contrast to the built environment and offer much-needed breathing space, both physically and psychologically, to the county resident.

  In fulfilling this need, greenways provide five important and often overlapping functions that contribute to the social well-being and healthy environment of the county.

  **Ecological Preservation:**

  Greenways can encompass a varied mosaic of ecological systems in a county. These comprise many natural resources, including wetlands, woodlands, lakes and streams, core wildlife habitats, and other environmentally sensitive areas.

  **Physical Safety:**

  Many greenways cannot be developed without risking flooding or erosion, which could pose hazards to life or property.
Amenity:

Greenways provide a wide range of leisure and recreational opportunities that contribute to individual and social well-being.

County Identity:

Greenways are a major physical defining feature of a county structure and can play a significant role in creating a coherent physical identity for the county.

Economic Vitality:

Greenways provide the setting for many activities that contribute to the economy.

- A balanced transportation system — including surface transit, pedestrian and cycling amenities, and best use of the road system for movement of goods and people — with the existing facilities used to their fullest capacity.

The transportation system is a key component of the planning framework. Improvement and expansion of the transportation system is necessary to accommodate population and employment growth, to meet emerging travel needs, and to support economic vitality. A balanced transportation system is essential, with emphasis being given to improving each of the various modes of travel in accordance with mobility needs for people, goods, and services.

- Provision of infrastructure capacity to serve future populations.

Development/redevelopment should occur only in locations with the physical potential to accommodate such development/redevelopment and where stable residential neighborhoods would not be disturbed. To encourage this type of development, and to enhance its economic feasibility, local units of government should target additional
infrastructure and service improvements — such as water supply, sewer systems, waste disposal, transportation networks, and community services — to these areas.

- Provision of implementation mechanisms that make effective use of the resources available to a county and other local units of government in plan implementation, including:
  
  - a planning process in which a county and the area local governments fulfill distinct and mutually supportive roles reflecting their interests;
  
  - a development review process that is clear, consistent, and undertaken within a reasonable time frame;
  
  - a development review process that stresses the integration of environmental, social, and economic considerations in land use planning;
  
  - continuous monitoring and evaluation of development impacts to ensure that services, facilities, and opportunities are equitably distributed, and that adverse impacts are accounted for, prevented, or mitigated;
  
  - a participatory planning process.

The foregoing may be achieved through the planning process outlined in the next part of this book.

These strategic directions are guided by the principle of sustainability, which requires future development/redevelopment to be socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable. This requires a comprehensive decision-making process that can incorporate the objectives and policies of healthy environment, social well-being, and economic vitality in a way that recognizes the relationships and connections among them.

Planning for the livable community is a responsibility shared among many, including county government, the area local governmental units, other levels of government, individuals, and business. Implementation of public policy requires establishing a planning process that clearly reflects
intergovernmental interests in all planning applications that may affect a county structure and the operational programs of a county, and addressing the need for all local governmental units to be involved earlier in the process, and in a greater coordinating capacity than at present. Effective implementation also requires a process that clearly establishes the requirements to be met by any proponent at the beginning of the process, and at the same time minimizes the number of unnecessary reviews and approvals by participating agencies.

As strategic directions evolve at the local level of government, a need emerges to coordinate local plans into an integrated comprehensive plan.

Part III of this book explores one approach to integrate local comprehensive planning into a larger integrated county planning process.

SOURCES

III. County Planning Perspective

The intent of this section of the book is to demonstrate the importance of a county to work cooperatively and collaboratively with townships, villages and cities in viewing the county as a single interrelated physical, social and economic unit. This requires county planning to collaborate with local units of government to assure that individual plans are integrated with one another in a fashion that promotes the best land use and development of the entire county community, rather than a portion of the county. The county must plan with this countywide perspective.

Two basic considerations underlie this philosophy:

- **Good government**, like good business, depends upon sound management. Sound management requires a sense of direction and wise allocation of resources. As a partner in the government of the county community, county planning has the responsibility to offer advice on the directions of growth and development and the allocation of resources to serve and nurture that growth and development.

- The county planning process is more than a patchwork of local plans. While its recommendations have been built upon a foundation of locally derived ideas, the intent is to resolve the greater conflicts and opportunities which confront the county. It should be viewed as the framework for solving intergovernmental problems. The county planning process is not a substitute for detailed local land use, transportation and utility plans, but local plans should fit within the objectives identified for the county community.

A county department of planning has a unique responsibility to guide county growth so that valuable resources will be preserved, so that the environment will be made more attractive instead of being disfigured, and so that scarce public funds for development will be spent to benefit all, not just a few citizens of the county.

Decisions on how the county will grow rest in the hands of many persons and organizations. A county department of planning’s basic objective is to bring county considerations into these many different actions and decisions. If
County planning sees itself as responsible only for making studies, providing information, and answering questions, then the entire operation might as well be given to one of the universities of the region. County planning, however, was created to do more. It was created to plan for the county and to assist in implementing these plans through the established townships, villages and cities. If most development decisions of county importance are made without regard to local plans and the local planning process, then county planning is not doing the job it was established to do.

To continue its positive record of influencing development in the county, county planning must continue to consider itself to have two major responsibilities in the future. First, it must continue to be responsible for developing clear and explicit guidance to local units of government about what is desirable for the county. Second, it must continue to be responsible for implementation, for assuring that the many decision-makers in the county act consistently, and in partnership with established guidelines.

The process of making county development guidelines is complex and difficult, for it is at this point that the people of the county, through their local units of government and county planning, decide how they want their county to grow and develop. Regardless of the difficulties, county planning cannot escape responsibility for preparing, adopting, and publicizing, as widely as possible, guidelines to guide development in the county. Thus the reason for this book.

As growth and development guidelines are promulgated by the planning department, its job will extend to seeing that these guidelines actually influence what happens in the county. Decisions can be influenced when county planning assists in the application for federal assistance. If local governments know that the department of planning will stand behind its stated county guidelines and that the federal government is likely to honor the county’s recommendations, particularly if the recommendations are based on a partnership between the county and local units of government, they will undoubtedly be more interested in submitting proposals consistent with county planning growth and development guidelines.

A second way in which county planning can implement its guidelines is to tie in closely with the decision-making structure of the county, trying to persuade those who are in key positions to affect county growth and development to follow county guidelines.
A third area of activity which is extremely important in influencing county growth and development is information collection, analysis, and dissemination. County planning guidelines, to a large extent, are based on the analyses and projections prepared by county planning staff which are usually found in a variety of department produced professional publications. If local units of government and private development groups in the county use the same data, they will more likely follow county planning guidelines since they should arrive at essentially the same conclusions. County planning should be the acknowledged center of information on and for the county, its characteristics, its growth, and its problems and opportunities.

It is apparent that to move forward the county planning will need to continue its strong leadership position within the county with considerable commitment to the guidelines on the part of elected officials. We are, in effect, asking all elected and appointed officials within the county who are part of this process to become county statesmen, to think constantly in terms of what is best for the county, and not to view their role as merely an opportunity to protect or advance the interest of their own local governments, but rather, to be in partnership with all who comprise the county community.

County planning should be viewed as an instrument designed to identify county problems, to shape solutions to these problems, and to work toward cooperative and integrative intergovernmental action for implementation of those solutions. Its power is that of persuasion. In this context, county planning is more comprehensive—both in geographic extent and scope of study—local and single purpose agency planning is more detailed—concentrating on the specifics that must be dealt with by agencies concerned with plan implementation on a daily basis.

County planning is not a substitute for professionally detailed local plans. Rather, it establishes the general framework for important areawide or county significant development determinants—the local plan "fills out" the county skeleton and determines the details of the locally significant public facilities and services which most directly affect the day-to-day living conditions of its citizens.

County planning cannot be fully effective without well executed local planning programs. Without the county overview, local planning may produce programs which will not yield optimum results for either the citizens of the local area or
the county as a whole.

It should be the position of county planning that the county planning process cannot be successfully implemented unless due regard is given to each community’s unique local characteristics — nor can a successful county planning process ignore regional, state and national policies and programs.

This continual exchange of information and ideas is essential to the success of both county and local planning. Through this process the county planning program can be kept informed of the multitude of decisions which significantly influence the development of the county. Similarly, this communication linkage should enable each local governmental unit to continually check its ideas and plans against the county planning process and guidelines so that all programs fit together in a logical areawide framework.

The specific planning process — the tactics — utilized by county planning in its comprehensive planning program should be based, in part, on certain basic principles:

Comprehensive planning must recognize the existence of a limited natural resource base to which urban and rural development must be properly adjusted to insure a pleasant and habitable environment. Land, water, and air resources are limited and subject to grave misuse through improper land use, utility system and transportation facility development. Such misuse can lead to serious environmental problems that may be difficult or impossible to correct.

Although detailed land use decisions are primarily of local concern, the aggregate effects of the spatial distribution of land use activities are county in scope and interact strongly with the need for county utility and transportation facilities.

Transportation planning must be conducted concurrently with, and cannot be separated from, comprehensive planning. The land use pattern determines the amount and spatial distribution of travel to be accommodated by the transportation system; and, in turn, the transportation system is one of the most important determinants of the land use pattern, forming the basic framework for all development today.
Transportation planning must be county and regional in scope. Travel patterns develop over an entire county and region without regard to corporate limit lines. Thus, transportation planning cannot be accomplished successfully within the confines of a single municipality or even a single county if that jurisdiction is a part of a larger urban/rural complex. The county/regional transportation system, which is composed of freeways, regional thoroughfares, and express and local transit, must form a single integrated system over the entire county and region. The highway and transit systems must be planned together to provide complementary rather than competitive service.

Accepting these basic principles, county planning embraces a planning process by which the county and its principal functional relationships can be analyzed. This analysis includes both graphical and numerical descriptions of: land use and activity patterns; the complex movement of people and vehicles over highway and transit facilities; and the effect of different courses of action with respect to county land use, utility and transportation system development, all in partnership with local units of government.

The end result of this ongoing process will be a series of coordinated county land use, utility and transportation plans scaled to future land use, travel, and resource demands and consistent with county and local government development goals. Another important result will be the beginning of a continuing planning process that permits modification and adaptation of the plans and the means of plan implementation to changing conditions. Each step in this planning process includes many individual operations which must be carefully designed, scheduled, and controlled to fit into the overall system.

An understanding of this planning process is essential to any appreciation and understanding of the results. Each step, together with its major component operations, is diagramed in Figure III-1.

Every planning program should include a formal structure or study design so that the program can be carried out in a logical and consistent manner. This design must specify the content of the fact gathering operations, define the geographic area for which data will be gathered and plans prepared, outline the manner in which the data collected are to be processed and analyzed, specify requirements for forecast and for forecast accuracy, and define the nature of the plans to be prepared and the criteria for their evaluation and adoption.
Step 1: Measure the Current Status of the County. Reliable basic planning and engineering data, collected on a uniform, areawide basis, is absolutely essential to the formulation of workable development plans. Consequently, inventory becomes the first operational step in any planning process. The crucial nature of factual information in the planning process should be evident, since no intelligent forecasts can be made or alternative courses of action selected without knowledge of the current state of the system or area being planned.

The sound formulation of county land use and utility plans requires that factual data must be developed for a base year - the starting point in the process. The existing land use pattern; the principal determinants of potential demand for each of the various major land use categories; and existing local development objectives and constraints are key inventory items. In addition, the underlying natural resource and public utility base and its ability to support land use development must be addressed.

A county transportation plan requires that data be developed on the existing and potential demand for transportation between various points within and outside of the county; on the relative demand for alternative modes of transportation; and on the major determinants of these demands; as well as on the existing and potential supply of transportation system capacity.

The necessary inventories may be grouped under eight major headings illustrated in Figure III-1. Each of these major inventories when considered together must be as comprehensive as possible. In the interests of economy, the data collected in the inventories must be pertinent to:

- describing the existing county situation with respect to land use, utility and transportation development;
- permitted identification of problems and formulation of ideas about possible solutions;
- forecasting future county land use, utility and transportation requirements;
- formulating alternative regional land use and supporting utility and transportation plans; and
quantifying and evaluating the alternative plans.

After the inventory data has been collected, it must be edited, checked, summarized, and analyzed before it is available for advanced techniques of forecasting, plan design, or plan test application. The data collection and processing operation is the most time consuming and costly of the entire planning process, absorbs a major portion of the budget for comprehensive land use and transportation planning, and provides the most formidable obstacle to successful completion of the planning program.

**Step 2: Analyze and Project.** In this step the important areawide relationships are identified. There are three basic elements to this work: prepare areawide total population and economic projections; analyze land use relationships; and analyze transportation relationships.

Although the preparation of forecasts is not planning, the preparation of all plans must begin with some kind of forecast. In any planning effort, forecasts are required of future events and conditions which will affect plan design or implementation. For example, the future demand for land, utilities, transportation, and natural resources may depend primarily upon the size of the future population and the nature of future economic activity within a county. Future population and economic activity levels must, therefore, be forecast. These levels, in turn, determine the aggregate future land use demand. Forecasts of gross land use requirements, along with the forecasts of future levels of population and employment on which they are based are necessary inputs to the county planning process.

Two important considerations involved in the preparation of necessary forecasts are the forecast target date and the forecast accuracy requirements. Both the land use pattern and the utility and transportation system must be planned for anticipated demand at some future point in time.

Analysis of land use relationships involves the determination of procedures to estimate the distribution within the county of future employment, population and other county significant economic activities. The county totals are independently derived and together with a proposed development plan, serve as controlling inputs to the allocation procedures.
Analysis of transportation relationships involves the correlation of the many complex relationships which help explain or predict transportation patterns. Trip generation, trip distribution, modal split, and traffic assignment are all studied within the context of a community to prepare appropriate estimates of future travel patterns.

Trip generation in which the total number of future trips generated in each subarea of the county is determined using the relationships found to exist between land use and travel from analyses of the planning inventory data is the initial step. Then trip distribution is determined where the originating trips so generated are then allocated to destination zones and the interzonal travel desire lines established for both transit and highway travel, using a trip distribution model. Next, modal split is identified by looking at future trips and dividing these trips into those using transit and those using private automobiles. Finally, traffic assignments are made in which the interzonal trips are then assigned to existing and proposed transit and highway facility networks.

**Step 3: Formulate Alternative Plans.** At this stage in the planning process, local township, city and village plans are integrated into the overall county development plan. In its most basic sense, planning is a rational process for establishing and meeting goals. Therefore, local planning must provide the basis for countywide planning. The articulation of goals is an essential task to be undertaken before plans can be integrated and formulated into a county plan. The goals chosen guide the drafting of alternative plans and, when converted to standards, provide the criteria for evaluation and selection from among the alternatives. Since goals that are determined in the local community plans provide the logical basis for county plan formulation, the identification of sound goals is a crucial step in the county comprehensive planning process.

It is much more important to choose the right goals than the right plan. To choose the wrong goals is to solve the wrong problem; to choose the wrong plan is merely to choose a less efficient physical system. While, because of differing value systems, there may be no single argument to support a given choice of goals, it is possible to state certain planning principles and practices which help provide support for the choice.

If the best local plans identified fall short of the chosen county goals, either better planning must be initiated or the goals must be integrated and refined to meet the needs of both the local community and the county. The integration process may
take three forms: certain goals may be dropped because their satisfaction has been proven unrealistic; new goals may be suggested; or conflicts between inconsistent goals may be balanced out through integration of the differences. Thus, refinement of goals must proceed hand-in-hand with plan formulation and plan implementation as a part of a continuing county planning process.

Concern for goals should not end with a mere listing of desired objectives. The goals should be related in a demonstrable and, wherever possible, quantifiable manner to physical development proposals. Only through such relationships can alternative development proposals be properly evaluated.

Plan formulation forms the heart of the planning process. The most well conceived goal; the most sophisticated data collection, processing, and analysis operations; and the most accurate forecasts are of little value if they do not ultimately result in sound plans. The output of each of the previously described planning operations; formulation of goals, policies and standards; inventory; and forecast become inputs to the county comprehensive planning process.

The integration of local land use plans consists essentially of determining the allocation of a scarce resource — land — between competing and often conflicting demands. This allocation must be accomplished so as to satisfy the aggregate needs for each land use and comply with all of the design standards derived from the plan goals and policies, all at a feasible cost.

The transportation element of the planning process requires a similar reconciliation between travel demand derived from the land use plan element; transportation design standards; existing facilities; and new facility costs.

The countywide total projections developed in Step 2 serve as controlling inputs to the planning process. The magnitude and characteristics of the future population and its economic activities set the overall dimensions or scale for the county plan.

The task of designing the major components of a community environment is a most complex and difficult problem. Not only is each component in itself a major problem in terms of the sheer size of the system to be designed (townships, cities and villages), but the pattern of interaction between the components is exceedingly complex and constantly changing.

The land use pattern must minimize conflicts between population growth and limited land and water resources; maintain an ecological balance of human, animal, and plant
life; avoid gross public health and welfare problems; and importantly, maintain the quality of life enjoyed by the residents of the community.

The transportation system must not only serve and promote a desirable land use pattern but do so without creating a demand which aggravates its own congestion. The combined land use/transportation system must be organized so that its construction and reconstruction do not constantly disrupt its performance.

The magnitude of such a planning process approaches an almost insoluble level of complexity; yet, no substitute for intuition in plan design has so far been found, much less developed to a practical level. Means do exist, however, for reducing the gap between the necessary intuitive grasp of the planning process and its growing magnitude. They center primarily on the application of systems engineering techniques to the quantitative test of the land use, utility and transportation system plans. These techniques are outlined below under the plan quantification and evaluation steps.

In order to overcome the limitations of individual intuitive grasp of the planning process, maximum resort should be made to team effort in actual plan formulation. The knowledge and experience of professional county staff coupled with that of local government elected and appointed officials most familiar with selected geographic and functional areas should be applied to the planning process.

**Step 4: Quantify Plan Implications.** Given the development plan formulated in Step 3 together with the countywide total projections of employment, population and economic activity from Step 2, the planning process raises the question: if the land use and transportation policies represented by the plan were implemented, what would be the probable consequences in quantitative terms? That is, how many people might live in the community, how many jobs would locate in the identified commercial and industrial areas of a county, and what would be the demands upon the proposed utility and transportation systems, etc.?

Partial answers to these questions are found through application of the activity allocation and travel forecasting procedures developed in Step 2. These interdependent techniques permit estimates of the distribution of population, employment and economic activity which translate into travel forecasts and projections of usage for utility systems and other public facilities and services. The distribution of activities is, in turn, strongly influenced by the location and
characteristics of the transportation and utility systems. This interdependence can only be accounted for if plans and projections for all are developed together, in other words, comprehensive planning.

**Step 5: Plan Evaluations.** The appropriate evaluation criteria may be grouped into major headings as illustrated in Figure III-1.

Plan evaluation should include answers to these and similar questions: does the plan satisfy all of the stated goals; is the plan acceptable to the public; what are its impacts -- social, economic and environmental; what are the public costs and can they be paid from foreseeable revenues; and will the utility and transportation systems perform efficiently?

Communication between local units of government, the county planning, appropriate public officials and the technical community is an essential ingredient to the successful accomplishment of the Plan Formulation, Plan Evaluation, and Action steps.

Note that the Evaluation step feeds back to the Formulation step. This implies two different kinds of activities, either:

- a. A recycling of the formulate-quantify-evaluate sequence for conceptually different overall development plans; or

- b. Within a given overall plan, a recycle to test major modification of one or more of the functional components of the plan (e.g., to test the effect of a relocated freeway or express transit line).

**Step 6: Action.** This step includes three major subheadings: selection, priority setting and adoption.

The general approach contemplated for the integration of local plans into a single countywide development plan is to include the input of local government officials into the planning process as often as it is appropriate and in accordance with the provisions of state enabling legislation. Due consideration must be given in such a process relative to the ability of the public financial resource base to meet the costs of plan implementation. Plan integration, development and adoption necessarily involve both technical and nontechnical policy determinations and must,
therefore, be founded in the active involvement of the various governmental bodies, technical agencies, and private interest groups. Such involvement is particularly important in light of the advisory role of the county planning commission in shaping countywide development. The integration of local plans into the overall county development plan appears to be the most practical and effective procedure for involving public officials, technicians, and citizens in the county planning process and of openly arriving at agreement among the affected government bodies and agencies on goals and on plans which can be jointly implemented.

Following Plan adoption, the development of a priority program for Plan implementation is the next logical and necessary Action step. Such a program should guide the county’s capital investments during the short-term in a way intended to promote a logical progression toward ultimate implementation of the long-term Plan. As with the Plan, a dialogue with appropriate officials and interest groups must be accomplished so that when the program is formally adopted, all involved fully understand and agree with its recommendations.

Step 7: Continuing Program. The county planning process will be little more than an academic exercise unless plans and programs reflect local plans while influencing decisions and effect completed project. County planning’s role is often advisory only. County plans and programs must be implemented by local units of government who are directly responsible for the delivery of services to their residents. County planning should continue to do all in its power to encourage and promote integration of local plans and their implementation.

A Plan is not a static document. The concept of a once and for all time comprehensive plan is not acceptable. The county planning process must permit, even encourage continuous reappraisal of areawide plans to account for changing conditions, new technologies and evolving public attitudes and goals.
Sources


