Appendix A:

Planning Approaches

Trends-Driven Approach

Description: The simplest form of planning is also in many ways the most misleading – that is simply to project today's trends into the future and to plan around those. The trends typically used as the basis of such future planning are population and employment trends. As many investors have learned the hard way, the most certain thing about a trend line is that it will change. Thus, simply to project current growth (or non-growth) rates will not produce a realistic view of the future. On the other hand, it is useful information. Russell Ackoff has referred to such projections as reference projections. It is useful to consider those trends in the context of understanding what created them and what may change them. For example, if a community's past growth was tied to increasing employment at an auto parts manufacturer, it becomes important to examine the continued growth potential of that industry. Reference projections may also show undesirable trends – like a continued youth drain or brain drain. By understanding those trends and recognizing which ones it might like to change, a community can make its future better than a simple trend projection. Thus, a series of trends scenarios can provide the basis for developing an excellent issue-driven plan –

from the trends come many of the issues to be resolved.

Process: Like all other plans, this begins with an analysis of existing conditions. In this planning process, however, it is important that the existing conditions analysis include historic information, also. Future trends are generally based on past trends, so it is important to gather population, employment, economic and other data from several past periods (usually decennial census dates) as well as from the most recent period. Professional planners or consultants hired by the local government analyze and project those trends, indicating one or more possible future scenarios. A sophisticated trends analysis includes *what if* alternatives, indicating how the trends might be changed if particular variables change.

Personnel Requirements: Trends analysis is a relatively sophisticated technical process. Projecting trends involves analysis of those trends rather than just extending a line from past dots on a graph to future ones. Thus, use of this process often requires outside assistance. Simple trends can be analyzed by county or township staff using Census data and information from the Michigan Information Center in the Michigan Department of Management and Budget.

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Citizen Participation: There is little opportunity or need for citizen participation in a trends analysis. The work is largely technical. Communities typically present the trends analysis to the public for comment, but it is often difficult for citizens to comment usefully on such a technical process.

Best Use: A trends analysis provides an ideal reference projection or context for other types of planning.

Opportunity-Driven Approach

Description: In an opportunity-driven approach, a community examines its opportunities and constraints – or, stated differently, its strengths and weaknesses. Those planning the community assess its future based on these opportunities and constraints, rather than on simple projections of trends. In land-use planning, the opportunities and constraints generally fall into two categories: natural environment and human-made environment or infrastructure. The environmental opportunities and constraints (features like good agricultural soils, floodplains, unstable soils) are long-term factors in planning. Human-made features like roads, sewage treatment plants, and water supply systems are medium-term factors that will significantly influence development over several years but that are almost certain to change over the long run. Planning may involve the simple projection of what can or is likely to happen in the context of these opportunities and constraints, or it may involve the development of alternative scenarios, based on these opportunities and constraints, leaving to policy makers the choice among scenarios.

Process: The process begins with an assessment of opportunities and constraints. That is typically a very technical process, particularly where it involves mapping environmental constraints and assessing the growth potential within current infrastructure systems. At the conclusion of the technical analysis, the planners conducting that analysis present it to policy makers to consider its implications. If they develop alternative scenarios, the policy makers, usually with public comment, then choose among those scenarios.

Personnel Requirements: This process requires highly-trained technical staff. Not all professional planners are able to conduct a complete opportunities and constraints analysis, so even a community that has a professional planning staff may need to hire a consultant to implement this approach. It is also extremely time-consuming and thus can be an unreasonable burden on a busy professional staff.

Citizen Participation: This is not a particularly participatory process, although it is both appropriate and useful to solicit citizen comments in selecting a preferred scenario at the end of the process.

Best use: This process is best used in areas where opportunities or constraints – natural or human-made – represent the key determinant of future growth and development potential.

Issue-Driven Approach

Description: This process begins by identifying major community issues. The focus of the planning effort is then on what to do about those issues. In most communities, the list of major issues can be narrowed down to about a dozen, although the number may vary between half a dozen and twenty. Issues that arise through the issue identification process are likely to include issues like these: revitalize downtown, expand employment base, improve traffic flow, and expand housing opportunities. The first stage of this process, issue identification, can and should have broad-based citizen participation, although the resolution of the issues is typically best accomplished by a small group, such as the governing body. The result of this process is typically a policy plan with a series of policy statements intended to resolve the issues.

Process: This process starts with issue-identification, which can and should involve broad community participation. If the community plans to do a **Trends Analysis** as a starting point for the plan, it is useful to do that before the issue identification process begins. The public participation can be in the form of mailed surveys, public town meetings, television town meetings, neighborhood meetings, focus groups, meetings with interest groups, or special workshops. When information from the **Trends Analysis** is available, it should be presented to people participating in the issue identification process as useful background information that can be communicated in a report or in an oral presentation at the beginning of a public or small group meeting. The form of the participation is simple – asking people to list the five most important issues facing the community as it plans for the future or to list the community's three greatest strengths and the two things that it ought to work to improve. Staff or a small committee then compiles the lists of issues or lists of strengths and weaknesses. That is not simply a clerical task; someone needs to compile the lists thoughtfully, recognizing that economic development and more jobs are part of the same issue. Once there is a list of issues to consider, policy makers (ideally the governing body, with advice from staff and the planning commission) develop recommendations for those issues. Alternatively, an advisory group composed of community representatives may develop a set of recommendations. For some issues, there may be one recommendation that seems most appropriate. For others, there may be alternative recommendations. Those recommendations, including alternatives, then become the subject of a public review process. That can be as formal as a public hearing or as informal as having members of the policy-making body take the draft recommendations and alternatives back out to the original groups who contributed to the issues list. With the benefit of the public comments and suggestions, the policy makers then revise the recommendations and compile them into a policy plan to guide the community.

Personnel Requirements: This is the planning process that can most easily and most successfully be conducted by volunteers. A skilled staff member or

outsider who can serve as facilitator of the process and help to compile the results can improve the process and help to keep it objective but this is a process that a community can manage itself.

Citizen Participation: This is in many ways the most satisfying process for citizens, because it asks them what they know best – what they think about their community. Other processes ask them to make technical and policy judgments for which they may be ill-equipped. This process simply asks them what concerns them. The rest of the process then focuses on addressing those concerns. The resulting plan is typically directly responsive to citizen concerns and consistent with their perceptions of the opportunities and challenges facing the community.

Best Use: This process can work in any context, but it is particularly useful in three sets of circumstances: 1) where there is little or no professional assistance available to facilitate the process; 2) where the primary reason for the planning process is because of public concern over one or more critical issues; and 3) where the community wants and needs relatively quick and strategic results.

Goal-Driven Approach

Description: This approach to planning begins with goal-setting. An effective goal-setting process almost always requires a professional planner or other facilitator. One of the interesting challenges in such a process is identifying the list of topics to be addressed by goals. Communities that use this process generally attempt to develop an all-encompassing list of topics and then to develop a list of goals under each. General topics on such a list may include: natural environment, infrastructure, economic base, taxes and fiscal issues, downtown, neighborhoods, and open space.

Process: Someone has to develop the goals – elected officials, a planning commission, professional staff, or one or more advisory committees. Some communities use separate advisory committees to address separate topics, but that approach can lead to conflicting goal statements from different committees; even if some central committee, like a government body, resolves those conflicts, there can be hard feelings among participants if their committee's goals are given short shrift. If it will be a governing body or other small group, that makes for a fairly simple process. If the process is to involve a diversity of citizens and interest groups in goal-setting, the process becomes more complex. Probably the most typical form of goal-driven planning process involves the creation of several subcommittees, each focused on one topic area. Such topic areas might include: agriculture, manufacturing, downtown, natural environment, open space, infrastructure. Each committee then develops its own set of goals for that particular topic area. A central body, usually the planning commission or governing body (but possibly an advisory committee composed of community representatives), then assembles all of those goals into a plan. Ideally, that central body reconciles conflicting goals and sets priorities among different goals; for example, one committee

may want a new airport for the community and another may want a new convention center. Both may be desirable goals, but both cost money and it is thus essential to set relative priorities. Unfortunately, this step is sometimes omitted and the result is then a collection of different goals rather than a plan. At its best, this kind of process results in a comprehensive set of goals and priorities to guide the community into its future. Late in the process, the assembled goals and policies are typically presented to the larger community for consideration and comment. The central policy-making body then makes revisions and additions to the goals before formally adopting them.

Personnel Requirements: Of the policy-oriented processes, this requires the most intensive staff support. Committees working with goals often need technical support to facilitate their discussions. The very task of coordinating the efforts of a variety of committees can take a great deal of time. Assisting the central body in compiling and reconciling the goals from all of the committees is a process that requires considerable organizational abilities and a good deal of political acumen. It is very difficult to accomplish this sort of planning effort without considerable professional staff support.

Citizen Participation: Citizen participation in this sort of process can be difficult to balance. If too many citizens become too involved in the initial goal-setting, the process becomes too complex and too many goals result. On the other hand, if citizen participation is deferred to the end of the process, the entire effort may be preemptive

or may appear so. That is, the effort may have focused on the wrong issues – for example, emphasizing the expansion of open space in the community when most citizens are concerned about expanding the job base. Even where the goal-setting process has been responsive to current community needs, that fact may not be obvious if there has not been significant community participation in the effort. In its purest form, this sort of process is very frustrating to citizens. Note, however, that the **Issue-Driven Approach** ultimately results in goals and provides for significant citizen participation in the early stages of the plan.

Best use: This is the classic process for developing a comprehensive plan for a community. It works best when the community can afford to devote significant professional staff time to it or can afford to hire a consultant to manage the process.

Vision-Driven Approach

Description: A vision is typically an over-arching goal that drives an entire planning process. A vision like that of San Antonio's River Walk or the lakeshore plan in Chicago that arose from planning for the Columbian Exhibition can truly change the face of a community. Such visionary planning ideas, however, are relatively rare. Some, like Robert Moses' vision of a New York dominated by highways, are not widely accepted as desirable. A true vision generally arises on its own rather than from an orchestrated planning process; in most cases, a single individual or a small group develops and promotes the vision, although

the strongest visions find their roots in the larger community. The challenge for community leaders and planners is to recognize when a vision is so strong and so good that it should become the focus of the community's entire planning efforts. Visioning efforts led by consultants for communities can range from goal-setting processes under a different name to unfocused exercises in imagining impossible futures. Communities that recognize a vision that can drive their future should generally follow a goal-setting planning process to develop that vision into a workable plan.

Process: For reasons suggested in the description of this approach, there is no process that a community can use to create a vision where none has arisen naturally. The emphasis of a vision-driven planning process should be on fleshing out the goals suggested by the Vision. An **Opportunities-Driven Approach** is particularly useful to supplement this approach, identifying opportunities and constraints as they relate to the adopted vision.

Citizen Participation: Typically, a vision-driven plan is not broadly participatory in development, although it is very important to solicit citizen comments on the vision and its implementation. Although the best visions are drawn broadly from a community and its character, the vision itself is usually driven and carried by a small group or a single individual. The visionary group is not always in a position of elected leadership. In fact, many commentators would argue that most visionaries are not

public officials. In that sense, this process is potentially quite egalitarian, but it is not particularly participatory.

Best use: This process works well when there is a vision that finds wide community acceptance or interest. To try to use it in other circumstances may be futile.