

Envisioning Local Futures: The Evolution of Community Visioning as a Tool for Managing Change*

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Abstract

*Citizens' right to participate in decision-making and the planning of their future is a key tenet of western democratic thought. Community visioning is one process for community engagement that has been used to affirm the principles of democracy and address issues facing society today. Paula A. Ding interviews Steven C. Ames, a leading expert and prolific writer on visioning. Steven Ames is a consulting long-range planner and futurist, author of *A Guide to Community Visioning* (American Planning Association: 1993, 1998) and developer of the Oregon Model of community visioning. He has worked with numerous communities in North America and Oceania, including Maroochy 2025 and Blue Mountains Our Future in Australia, Flagstaff 2020 and Hillsboro 2020 in the U.S., Future Path Canterbury in New Zealand, and Alberta 2020 in Canada.*

In their conversation, they touch on several matters including the visioning process, common pitfalls, elements of successful visioning, and implementation. Ding's contention is that community visioning is an innovative tool that can compliment traditional planning practice and offer communities high-level input into the decision-making process on a range of issues and concerns. By facilitating deliberative engagement that is publicly advocated at both an organisational and individual level, community visioning can provide a practical vehicle for driving community well-being and the democratic principles advocated in theory.

An Evolving Career in Community Visioning

Tell me about your experiences in community planning and visioning. How many visioning projects have

you worked on? How long have you been involved in this area?

The how long is probably about 15 years. I think the very first time I had this idea was in 1987 when the City of Beaverton, a local jurisdiction in the Portland

*An Interview with Consulting Planner and Futurist Steven Ames

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area, asked me if I might help in this way. Before that project in 1987, I had been working as a planner and became very interested in futures research, which was very hot at that time. This was after a series of state-level "futures projects" had happened, which was an early form of visioning. I developed an interest in this when I worked briefly for our regional government (Metro) in the Portland area. But the community aspect didn't surface until I was encouraged to see how we might adapt this visionary futures research approach to the local level. And so I thought about a visioning-style project for Beaverton, but it never went anywhere.

In 1988-89, I really did work on my very first visioning project in Oregon. I was part of a committee with the Oregon Chapter of the American Planning Association. We called ourselves the Oregon Visions Project. The committee had been formed to promote more long-range thinking on the part of local communities in the state and then one community came forward, the city of Corvallis, which is where Oregon State University is. We worked with them...I was involved partially as a consultant but also on a volunteer basis as part of this committee. The Corvallis project was really the state of Oregon's first comprehensive community visioning process. So I guess I have been directly involved in community visioning for about 15 years.

However, technically, the very first visioning project I worked on was not in Oregon. It was actually several months before the Corvallis project and for the province of Alberta in Canada. They knew that I was doing this futures research related work and asked me if I could help them design a process for the province that they could use with their local jurisdictions. So, the real Oregon Model, if you will, kind of began in Canada!

Since that time, I've consulted with around 20 communities in Oregon on the visioning process, most of them in a very involved way. I've also worked with two larger consortia of communities in Oregon, advising them on the use of the visioning process. One was the coastal landscape visioning process sponsored

by the state Department of Land Conservation and Development and encompassing all the communities on the Oregon Coast. I didn't actually work with the communities directly, but advised the program. I also was a consultant to the Willamette Valley Liveability Forum, which was a gubernatorial commission. They came up with a 50-year vision for the entire Willamette Valley, which is where 90 percent of the population of the state lives. It probably encompasses some 75-80 cities, including Portland, but most quite small and rural. I didn't work, again, directly with all the communities, but rather with a task force of citizens planning a vision for the region where we did focus groups with citizens from local communities, business groups, farmers, etc. In the end, I've worked with a lot of communities in Oregon.

Outside Oregon, I've consulted with communities mainly in the American West...in California, Arizona, Idaho, Washington, a little bit in Nevada, and then I had that big project in Alberta, where we designed this process for some 350 municipalities. More recently I've started to work with communities in other parts of the U.S., on the Big Island of Hawaii and along Minnesota's North Shore. Beyond that, I've started to branch out internationally and work with communities in Australia and New Zealand as well too. In Australia, I've probably worked with 6 or 7 community visioning projects. I also do a lot of taking calls and answering questions about visioning for people from all over the place.

Yes, I would imagine that you get bombarded with questions.

It's fun though, I love it. I like the feeling that I can help somebody that I don't even have the chance to work with, you know. There are some people that I never hear from again, but it makes me feel good about my work.

The Community Visioning Process

How do you see community visioning in relation to community planning and strategic planning?

Well I think that visioning is a convergence of those things. First of all, I like to say that

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community visioning is really an adjunct and an overlay for community planning. I don't see it as a substitute for it; it shouldn't be that way because it's such a broad, overarching kind of process. In that sense, it really is an additional tool. On the other hand, it does incorporate aspects of community planning, such as public involvement and community meetings, and clearly incorporates aspects of strategic planning as well.

What processes have you used to incorporate public involvement in community visioning exercises?

Well, really it's everything. In terms of the Oregon Model of community visioning, every step of the process requires different types of skills and develops different types of information. (Editor's note: see Figure 1.) That's why I like visioning; there's something for everybody in it.

I think you really get into the public involvement piece when you get into the visioning stage. Anything – public meetings, forums, visioning workshops, focus groups, surveys or polls – can be used. You can also use the Internet to allow the public to register their opinions, community fairs or open houses where you have displays where people come and look and poll, but don't necessarily talk. You know, it runs the gamut. The participatory aspect of it is very much part of the philosophy of the process. You really try to do things to engage people at the local level and that may range into the realm of fun activities – things that are more marketing related or intended to create a brand for the process like contests, youth visioning efforts, lecture series, art exhibits. I mean, in a full-blown, no-holds-barred visioning process, you can use all that stuff.

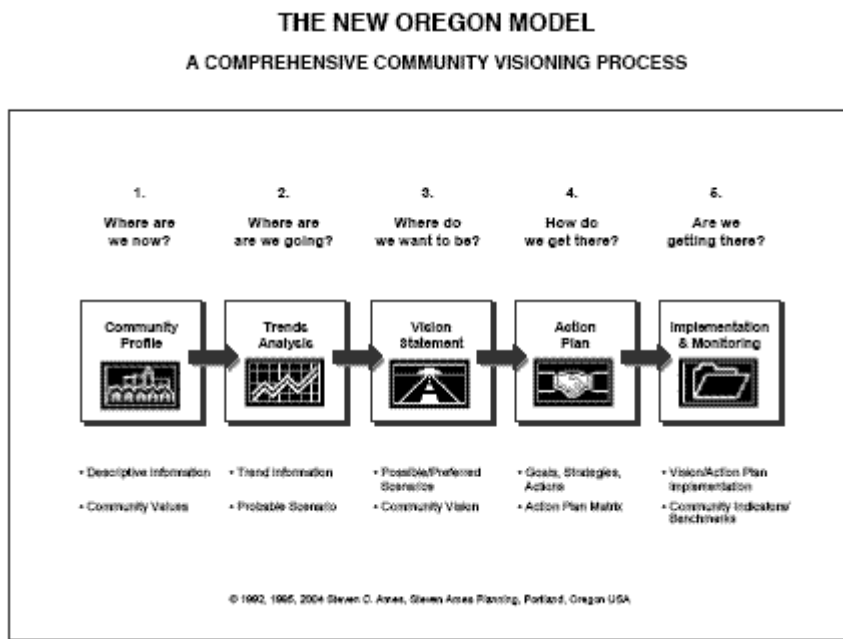


Figure 1: The New Oregon Model of Community Visioning (courtesy of Steven Ames)

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I would also divide these methods and techniques into two general categories. The first is those things that are more representational in that you're working with more select groups of people. That could be, for example, focus groups where it's a random select group of people or surveys where it's a random scientific sample. Or it could be, and I didn't mention this earlier, task forces or citizens committees.

So that's the representational piece. Note that I say *representational* not *representative*. These techniques are not about *representative* democracy, per se, as in the normal functions of elected officials or local councillors. Rather, they are *representational* in that they work with groups that are reflective of a given population or subgroups.

On the other hand, there are the flat-out participatory techniques, you know, the public meetings and the events and activities like that. I'm very much an advocate of using both, but in a very strategic way because you can't involve everybody at all times, and it's very difficult to make decisions or write vision statements in large groups of people. So, you have to work back and forth between those two. It's very much an art. I don't see visioning as just having a large meeting and asking people, "what do you want?" recording it, and saying "that's what you told us and that's what we're going to do." I think it's far more subtle, complex, and interactive than that, and it takes more time. I think the more it is that way, the more sophisticated the vision you'll get.

So, what are the effective techniques or what ones are more successful? To me, one of the techniques that I'm really big on is scientific surveys even though it's representational and very much a quiet, in-house process that has no visible public interface. But, on the other hand, in order to give the planners the certainty of really knowing what the public thinks, I think it's a fantastic tool. And I like to advocate using it in two phases – to do a survey at the beginning of the process and then, in a perfect world when you have the money and the time to do it again, close to the very end, where you try to validate the vision that you're coming up with to make sure that the public truly accepts and sup-

ports it. When I've done this, it has been a superb tool for adding rigour to the process and making sure you really are being true to the public perceptions.

On the public side...I like public meetings that have limited purposes to get people to consider information, think creatively and generate ideas. To me, those are the most successful large-scale public meetings because it's hard to do technical, detailed work with the public. So, I'm talking about a visioning workshop where you're just flushing out ideas from the public, or open houses or vision fairs, where people come, view, comment and poll. I like such approaches because they are low-risk and don't tend to fall into the trap of getting people into debating and being adversarial, which is a natural tendency of the public involvement process.

This raises an important point: Healthy disagreement and debate are natural; and, in visioning, discussion of trade-offs and choices are essential. But these types of dialogues are almost always more productive in representational groups, not in public meetings. Much of what is traditionally passed off as dialogues in public meetings are, in essence, community shouting matches – really ineffective and unproductive. I think large-scale public involvement events work far more effectively when they are about qualitative perceptions such as values and visions, when they are collaborative rather than confrontational, and when they are focussed on the long term. That's the beauty of the visioning process: by focusing communities on the longer term, it can move them out of the realm of immediate conflict to consider mutually beneficial long-term goals.

Many people have decried participatory processes, like visioning, and especially those that use ratepayers' money. They contend that these projects are a waste and attract little attention due to a lack of time, interest, etc. Hence, the existence of a representative system...how would you respond to such views?

I think it's a very valid question but I have, obviously, very strong opinions because visioning, in essence, is an adjunct to, or extension of, local democracy. Some people really take

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offense at that. They feel like, "Hey, we have a government. We elected our officials. We trust them to decide and just let them do their work." Quite frankly, my response to that assertion would be: "Where has that system gotten us in terms of local planning and local government?" There are a lot of pitfalls to that type of governance. I don't believe that's the only valid way to engage the public in figuring out what a community should be or where it should head.

Visioning is an overlay, but I don't think it is inconsistent with local representative democracy at all. I know many elected officials who think visioning is the greatest thing since sliced bread. So, I don't see it as being contradictory. I do see that representative view as being very restrictive and it does smack a little bit of, well, "we know what's best for you." That's not really the philosophy of the visioning process. The philosophy of visioning goes back to the term *anticipatory democracy*, which was coined by futurist Alvin Toffler years ago when he said that we need to combine local governance with community participation and foresight if we're going to navigate the rapid change in the world in which we live today. That really is the heart of visioning.

Successful Community Visioning

Given the numerous projects that you've been involved with, what have been the most common weaknesses or pitfalls of visioning?

There are a lot of visioning projects that have been unsuccessful or very unsuccessful and there are always specific reasons for why that happens. First, there's inauthentic public involvement where the public really isn't engaged, which goes back to that representative question. In other words, you get this kind of corporate vision and there's no interaction with the public and there's no ownership. If a vision doesn't have ownership, it doesn't have very much power.

The other thing is lack of follow through – they did the vision and then nothing happened. There are a bunch of reasons why that happens: they weren't that serious, they didn't do it right, they didn't do an action plan, they didn't try to

implement their action plan... It varies from place to place. But I think, most typically, people say "that's done, let's file it away and we'll move on." And that absolutely sends the wrong signal to the people who participated: first, that the decision-makers weren't all that interested, and second, that this stuff doesn't work. When you do visioning poorly, it not only renders the results somewhat less effective, but it also poisons the environment for that type of long-range planning to happen again.

Conversely then, in the projects that have been successful, what criteria (in terms of characteristics of the community, etc.) have been a critical part of the process?

There are a series of things. First of all, you want the support of local opinion leaders and that may not just be elected officials. It might be people who have prominence in the community, whom other people listen to, which may include local elected officials but others as well. You want them to say, "this is a good idea. We support it. We're behind it." Even if they don't participate very much, which is often the case, their support is important – especially elected officials. Oftentimes, mayors and councillors, you know, they've got so much stuff they're doing and they're busy following the representative model that they don't have time for this and perhaps they don't believe in it anyway. That's not a problem. But what would be a problem would be if they say, "we're really not behind this." The support and some degree of involvement of elected officials and opinion leaders is really critical to the success of a visioning project.

Next is authentic public involvement – truly engaging the public in some way so that you really are understanding who they are and what they're thinking about. The visibility of the process, making people aware of it – all that stuff lends to its success. Branding is something I've come to realise is more and more important, because there's so much competition for people's attention in this day and age. Between Internet and television and football, it's so hard to do public involvement. And in a way, visioning is partly intended to redress that by saying let's make this more interesting, engaging, and

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even fun. It engages the public at the level at which they are most capable of participating proactively, which is to say in a very broad, creative, qualitative, value-based way. Everybody has opinions on the future, what they'd like their city to be, what should change, and what shouldn't change.

Community visioning is an overlay, an adjunct, and a precursor to more detailed, technical, and traditional forms of community planning. The big challenge to that is timing. Ideally, in a perfect world, you would do your visioning process first and generate the broad brush images of where people want their community to be and use the resulting visions as guidelines for the other detailed technical planning. So, not only use the vision to promote action in the community through an action planning process that connects to the vision, but also use the vision as an overlay for all the stuff that continues to go on, on a daily basis, whether it's capital improvement programs, or functional plans, or redevelopment plans or whatever. That hardly ever happens because you're kind of bringing the process into a planning system that already exists. It's a question of timing, when is the right time to do this?

What has been the most successful community visioning project you've undertaken and what has made it so successful?

Well, there are two of what I would call benchmark visioning projects that I'm most proud of having been involved with and I think have had the most success. One of them is Flagstaff, Arizona – the Flagstaff 2020 visioning process (1996-97), and the other one is Hillsboro 2020 (1997-2000) in Hillsboro, Oregon.

For Flagstaff, there are a variety of reasons for its success. One is that it was a truly public-private partnership. The City of Flagstaff and eight other community organisations, public and private, came together to sponsor and fund the process. Just bringing together those nine groups was such an accomplishment for a community where there was a lot of divisiveness, polarisation, and, you know, poisoned relationships between different groups. To get those nine groups to sit around the table and decide

that they were going to co-sponsor this process was a minor miracle but it happened.

Another reason why it was so successful was it got an unbelievable amount of community participation...not only as participants in the process, but also as volunteers to make the process happen. They didn't have a very big budget, but because it was public-private effort, they did have connections to virtually every citizens' group in the community and they used those connections to get people to engage as volunteers. So much of what happened in that project was donated by people – meeting rooms were donated, printing of vision statements were donated, huge, incredible prizes were given out in the process. (They gave away a house at the end of it that was designed by local developers and architects to be consistent with the vision. That really gave quite a buzz to the process!) But also just citizens handing out leaflets, you know. I mean, it was unbelievable. They estimate in terms of direct participation in the visioning process that around 5,000 people participated. That was in a community of around 63,000, with a large transient student population. It was amazing.

The third reason was the incredible creativity in the community. They did all kinds of creative activities. They did youth visioning in schools, in middle schools, in high schools. They did this contest for the house that involved writers in the community writing this kind of mystery game where there was a clue that was written as a chapter in a book which came out every month during the process. They had art exhibits where they asked photographers to take pictures that related to their community's identity, its future. I mean, it was unbelievable. That made it fun. It made it an event. They even engaged a lot of the prominent people who are patrons of organisations who like to make donations, attend social events, and so on, where they can feel good about doing something for their community, but aren't really going to go run a meeting. We got those people involved too.

I have to say, and this kind of reveals my bias, that I think the Flagstaff vision statement is the best of any project I've worked with. The

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reason it reveals my bias is that it's a very long and very in-depth vision statement. Having said that, it was written in such a way that it could be excerpted so you could get the one-line tagline, the one paragraph version, the one paragraph for each of their separate focus area visions, or you could get the whole thing. It was built like a wedding cake. We also had a professional writer come in and write the key text for all the vision statements. She worked very closely with me and with our vision task force, so that there was not one word in there that hadn't been reviewed many times. It really rang with a real clarity, which was nice.

Finally, I think the fact that they accomplished some major things – the vision statement was very bold, very progressive. It proposed some dramatic new changes to the community. Some of those changes actually happened. So, from beginning to end it was a winner. And it wasn't a long process – under a year and a half. It had its problems too, but the good far outweighed the bad.

The Hillsboro project was good for different reasons. Hillsboro's visioning process was very long. It took the better part of three years. But they took the summers off to analyse data they had gathered. I like that model, but it had a downside in that the momentum peaked and "valleyed" several times during the process, even though they didn't really call off the work. But the real way that Hillsboro shined was in their action planning and their implementation. They were incredibly rigorous and disciplined and organised in creating their action plan. It was kind of a forced march, but it resulted in what is probably a perfectly realised action plan that is the best that I've seen of the communities I've worked with.

And now, they're actually making the action plan happen. They have a follow up vision implementation committee that has met the last four years while they're in the implementation phases. So the process didn't go away, it just morphed into this new effort of vision implementation as opposed to creating the vision and the action plan. Right now, four years into a five year planning cycle, they have either achieved or are working on 94 out of 114

actions in their action plan. So, it's just unleashed a flurry of activity and that's the main reason I think Hillsboro was so good. Also, Hillsboro has really engaged the community at-large in implementing its plan. It was a city-sponsored process. No other agency sponsored the process and the plan. But the City of Hillsboro was very clear that it was going to be a community-owned plan. Therefore the city "owns" a little over one-half of the actions in the plan; all the rest of the actions are owned by other public, private, and NGO groups. So, it truly is a community plan. And all these groups are out working on their bits. And the vision implementation committee is keeping tab on how they're doing and helping them out. So, Hillsboro has been superlative in that way.

So, given that there are these successes, what are examples of cases where visioning has not been as successful?

Well, I'm sure there are many out there that haven't worked. But, from my own experience, it has been in communities where there are deep levels of polarisation and distrust and, therefore, it's hard to have a civil dialogue in creating common goals or identifying shared values. I like to say that there are very few communities where you can't do this, but clearly you're not going to do a visioning process where there is deep division or distrust. And ironically, in my experience, they are the smallest communities. Everybody knows everybody, where people have a history of bad relationships and it's very hard to get over that. Or where a few people control a lot of things; that can make it very difficult.

I would say that outside the ones I've worked with, I would presume and this is only presumption, that a lot of projects are unsuccessful because they're too corporate in their orientation. They don't have a lot of substance, there's no intention to really follow them up. In other words, where the process was kind of floated out there as a symbolic thing... or if they just don't do a good job.

It sounds like openness and flexibility make a big difference in how the process runs.

Well, transparency, getting everybody into the tent, getting them to accept the key princi-

ples, giving them some wiggle room so that you're not saying this is going to force you to change. So, at least getting them to acknowledge the validity of the process and then making the process worthy of their trust, by doing your homework, involving people and not making it look like it's a done deal or something.

So, for example, unlike in Australia and New Zealand where a lot of this work is done under the rubric of sustainability, I would not have gone into Flagstaff and said this visioning process is about sustainable development. Because in some parts of the U.S. "them's fighting words" – or people simply don't know what you're talking about. It's a different kind of environment there; the culture has not cozied up to that principle like they have in Australia, where everybody talks about the triple bottom line.

That's not my way of saying don't talk about sustainability. I had to struggle with this in my head for a long time – the relationship between visioning and sustainability. Because, in part, of the American experience and my experience in Flagstaff, for a long time I took the line that I don't think it's a good idea to go in there and frontload a project with such value-based assumptions, which they are. Sustainable development is a value-based assumption, a preference. I'm 100 percent behind the concept and have a very environmental background. But I was so nervous about not alienating certain segments of the public and therefore not having everybody "inside the tent".

Lately, I have started to change my mind because I think sustainability is becoming, even in the US now, more recognised as the norm. And certainly in Australia and New Zealand because the idea of sustainability is so much integrated into public policy and I think there are probably very few people who would publicly say we should not be sustainable. The subtext is that even in a place where it wasn't a good idea to acknowledge sustainability as a guiding principal, Flagstaff still came up with a vision which was very much about sustainability. Many paths – same results!

Putting Vision into Action

In what ways can a vision statement best be implemented?

Well, the Hillsboro model, to me, is the way to go. At least, based on what I've seen thus far, which is that it's a city-sponsored process resulting in a community-based vision and action plan. So, the community involvement and ownership was built in from day one. The implementation of it is being driven by a citizen committee that is very representative of the community. There's a slot for the community's key stakeholder groups on that committee, excluding citizens-at-large, but people representing the faith community and people representing the Hispanic community and so on. ... They also continue to have that broad based participatory philosophy behind the implementation of the plan, which underscores the fact that nearly 50% of the plan is owned by the wider community.

How can those organisations outside council, who have been involved in the visioning process, implement the vision?

I haven't followed it that closely to know how each organisation then takes that program or policy. But I can give you some examples. In Hillsboro, the Chamber of Commerce was very proactive. They were a key partner throughout the whole process. They took on the lion's share of the non-City implementation actions. And in order to monitor that, they set up their own committee making sure that all of their commitments they made are integrated into their own planning and operations that they have. So, that's one model. How the rest of them do it, I don't know. I have a feeling it's probably somewhat informal. That's why we like to say the role of the Hillsboro Vision Implementation Committee is "community nagging", which is kind of a joke. But we decided very early on that the implementation committee would use friendly persuasion rather than arm-twisting, because that doesn't get the organisations to buy into the plan. We weren't going to go back and shake our finger at them. So we do it by support, saying "how can we

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help you, do you need anything answered, are there actions you want to transferred to another group, or are there actions you'd like to take on?" It's a collaborative relationship. And most of those groups are represented on the implementation committee, so they are "hardwired" right into the committee.

Even though Flagstaff's action planning effort was a little weak and their follow-on with their action plan really didn't happen in a formal way, it did happen informally. So, they didn't have a vision implementation committee; once they hit a certain point, that was it, they stopped. We've always talked about, we should do an annual meeting vision plan, but in reality that has happened informally because the buy-in to the vision was so strong with all these organisations. In a way, they didn't have to form an implementation committee and they chose not to.

But, there are two things that I think that really show how successful that's been. One concerns one of the ideas that came out of the Flagstaff vision for "strategically managed growth" – to do a better job of managing rapid urban growth. And that was the single most controversial subject in the entire community. It's why the community was so polarised at the outset – there were pro-growth and anti-growth people. And they came up with a vision for strategically managed growth, which was: we will grow, but we're not going to do it willy-nilly and it's not going to interfere with the quality of life or ruin our environment. And one of the many actions that they came up with was the concept of an urban growth boundary.

In the meantime, and this is the second thing, the City of Flagstaff decided that it was going to forestall an update of its general plan, which regulates growth and development. It had been scheduled to do an update right around the time the idea the visioning process was to be launched. And the City said, we're not going to do it. Instead, they said, we'll kick in money, we'll support the visioning process, and we're not going to do any of our own long-range planning for a year until the vision is done and then we're going to use the vision to front-end our general plan update, which was quite

bold. That's what happened and they *did* use the vision as the initial public involvement for their plan update. They did do committees and public meetings, but they were more low-key because the bulk of the general directional input from the public had already been captured. They didn't need it. So that was a huge efficiency for the city.

Then they did their plan and they did come up with an urban growth boundary. So they did honor the vision. It took them 5 years to do it, to go through all the hoops, to design and do the statistical and analytical work in order to determine where the boundary would be, etc. But they finally came up with it. Right before they finalised it, the state of Arizona passed new statutes that required all new updates of land use plans to be submitted to the public for a vote. Flagstaff conducted their vote and it was overwhelmingly in favor of its regional land use plan, including the urban growth boundary. And I think that's because they had done their homework – they had used public involvement, they had captured what the public wanted, and, very importantly, they had all these key sponsoring agencies that had signed on...such that, when it came time for that plan to be adopted and the vote came up, the Chamber of Commerce was out there lobbying for its adoption. To me, it was "WOW!", the "feed-forward" of the visioning process and the relationships that were built between these people and the commitment, the shared vision about how can we manage growth in a way that's not going to kill business, but also not kill our environment, had paid off. They nailed it right on the head and they now have an urban growth boundary. As far as I know, it's the only one in the state of Arizona.

Local Government and Community Visioning – Cross-Cultural Perspectives

How does local government's role in community visioning processes in Australia, New Zealand, and the U.S. compare in your experience?

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Well, in the U.S. or in Oregon, for example, which is probably the leading state in the U.S. that has done this, it is not a requirement. I think in Oregon and around the rest of the country in general over the last decade, there has been a wave of very conservative initiatives to restrict government power, its ability to tax, and so forth. Even in Oregon, with our strong, very prescriptive planning system, I don't think anyone would say let's make visioning yet another additional requirement. In Oregon, there's no legislation that says you need to have a vision for your local community ten or twenty years down the road even though a 20-year land use plan is required. But, having said that, the State is highly aware of visioning. It has put money into visioning projects. They have encouraged communities to do it because they see it as a good precursor and an overlay for the more technical planning that's involved in a comprehensive land use plan.

Would I like to see a vision required of every community, kind of like what they're doing in New Zealand? Yeah, sure, I think that'd be great. Will that happen? Probably not anytime in the near future. I don't think there's the support for it right now, given the very conflicted nature of politics. Politics has become very partisan in Oregon, and, I think, in the U.S. as a whole. So, I don't think a statutory approach is necessary, but I do think it's important that communities integrate some form of long-range planning into their ongoing community planning. Whether it's a full-fledged community visioning process or they require all local communities to have a long-term vision but it's just a part of the normal community planning – it really doesn't matter. And the whole point of the Oregon model, which is, you know, a construct and nothing more, is you need to design this to be very place-and culture-specific.

Were there any major differences between the visioning processes in Australia, NZ, and the U.S.?

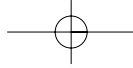
I really can't say that much for New Zealand because I've only advised Future Path Canterbury. My perception is that in Australia, and these are fairly gross generalisations, that

the tradition of community engagement and consultation is not very deep and that may be a reflection of the overall approaches to local governance. Local governance, as you well know, in the U.S. is very grassroots. You know we are a society that was founded by a revolution and that's in our genetic code. Therefore, we have a very deep tradition of involvement in local government – New England-style town hall meetings and all the rest. This has changed, but we do have this tradition of local involvement. Citizens can create cities; you can incorporate communities and become a city. The tradition of voter initiative and referendum is also very powerful. People feel innately that they have the right to determine what their communities are or should be.

Unfortunately, that's never been done in a long-range context. It's always been like, we want this and we want that, and we don't want this and dammit we're going to do it our way. It's been a little bit more cranky, if you will. But that genetic code I think actually lends itself very well to the visioning process. Because the participatory part of visioning really fits that model beautifully. It says, you know, you do have a right to decide what your community should be in the future, regardless of what the state's doing or regardless of what the country is doing. And why shouldn't you have the right to do that? Americans love that. They just love that feeling.

However, if you overlay on top of that the polarisation that there is now between the parties and the different interest groups and belief systems at work in our country, it can make visioning contentious. Because you have one side saying, we love this and the other side says, no, no, no we love that. So, you know, it's not perfect in that model.

In Australia, my perception is that governance tends to be more top-down or at least more corporate. They talk about CEO's of local government, corporate plans... That language, when you say that to an American in the context of a local community they wouldn't know what you're talking about. Some Aussie councils call their land use plans strategic plans, which is interesting to me. So, there's more of a



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corporate parlance. This is speculative, but I think the tradition of community engagement is not nearly as deep. I don't think it's as genetic as it is in the U.S. and therefore it needs a little bit more engagement. It's no surprise to me that many working committees are often called reference groups...interesting choice of words to me. And then public involvement is often called community consultation – that's also an interesting choice of words to me. It implies that we're going to go out there, tick off the box, and then we'll be out of there.

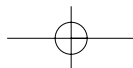
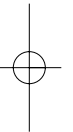
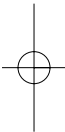
Having said all of that, I think this top-down approach is changing very dramatically because why else would people be going through visioning and why would they be asking people like me to come over and talk to them about it? I think that's changing and I don't know why it's changing but my guess would be it's because local communities are going through so much change. And they inherently realise that being more strategic, having a long-term vision, and having the public more engaged all makes good sense.

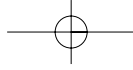
Visioning, to me, doesn't seem to be a fad. You know, I think a lot of people think, well, it's just a fad. But, to me, it's not a fad in part because, at least in the U.S., it has had a very sustained run-up. It didn't happen in one year and then everybody got tired and nobody came back to it again. It continues to build slowly and that, to me, is a good sign. There's an attempt to incorporate longer-range perspectives into public engagement and into community planning...this continues to make sense to a lot of communities. And my theory is that it continues to make sense because it's getting tougher and tougher to plan for communities at the local level because the world is a crazy place and we are dealing with so many issues and changes.

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