

"Meeting in a Box "

"Meeting in a Box" evolved over a ten-month period and is the citizen participation tool designed to take the Urban Growth Area information to Spokane County residents. "Meeting in a Box" is a self-guided and individually hosted workshop that can be presented by any club, service organization or neighborhood group in the privacy of one's home.

The box contains an Instruction Manual, a 10-minute video, brochures, and maps that relate to regional planning issues and *Common Ground*, a Regional Growth Management Newsletter. A survey was also included in the 'box' that asked the public to weigh information for determining lands most suitable for urban development.

Originality

To the best of our knowledge the concept of a self-guided public participation program packaged, as a self-contained "Meeting in a Box" has not been done in the Pacific Northwest. As a result of the approach taken, Spokane County has achieved a higher level of public participation than ever before. The multimedia materials contained in the "Meeting in a Box" appealed to a wider range of the public than previous programs. Additionally, the attraction of holding an informal meeting in an environment where the participants felt comfortable with friends, neighbors and peers assisted in creating an open dialogue that does not often occur in the traditional public meeting format.

Transferability

The entire "Meeting in a Box" public participation campaign began as a regional program in which the primary objective was educating our region on the current issues of growth management, while also providing jurisdictional information and gathering public input on lands most suitable for urban development. It was so successful at the regional level that local jurisdictions used the program to complement their local citizen participation programs. In addition to the jurisdictions within our own county using the "Meeting in a Box" program, we have received requests from numerous cities and counties throughout the USA and Canada to utilize "Meeting in a Box" as a conceptual model.

Quality

"Meeting in a Box" was conceived and produced by elected officials, planning commission members and professionals in the fields of planning, graphic design, film and media production. The combined efforts of the group lead to a public participation process and product that received the highest achieved level of citizen involvement and acceptance of any program in the history of Spokane County Planning. In addition, "Meeting in a Box" has been compared with 287 citizen participation programs from cities and counties throughout the United States and was judged as the top citizen participation program in the 1996 *Savvy Award* competition conducted by the City / County Communications and Marketing Association (3CMA).

Comprehensiveness

"Meeting in a Box" was available to the residents of Spokane County from June 1 through July 31, 1996. To get the community involved and to let county residents know where they could reserve their very own "Meeting in a Box," a series of Public Service Announcements (PSA) and display advertising was developed. More than 320 column inches were written about "Meeting in a Box." This includes a full-page story in the *Spokesman-Review*, an eastern Washington

regional newspaper. All 3 major television networks aired at least one story on "Meeting in a Box." The video, "Blueprints 2000 - Citizens Managing Regional Growth" aired on 5 cable channels during the 6-week program and the PSA's ran more than 150 times between the 3 network stations. During the 6-week program there were over 100 individually hosted meetings, with average meeting size of 20 individuals. Approximately 2,500 residents of Spokane County participated in "Meeting in a Box."

Implementation

The Steering Committee of Elected Officials allocated funds from the Washington State Growth Management Planning Assistance Grant for production and implementation of "Meeting in the Box."

The "Meeting in a Box" is a user-friendly and flexible citizen participation tool that was available for easy pick up and return at Spokane County Public Works, Division of Building and Planning. A meeting host, simply had to call the Division of Building and Planning and reserve a 'box'. Each 'box' was custom tailored to meet the needs of the group according to size and location. For example, if a meeting were larger in size (over 50 participants) a series of 36" by 48" maps would be provided to a group. If the group were smaller in size, the group would be provided with the same maps, but at a smaller scale (these maps are contained in the 'box'). A citizen opinion questionnaire (survey instrument) was part of "The Meeting in a Box" packaging. The questionnaire was intended to gather public comment and input on defining Urban Growth Areas, the areas of land that would be most suitable for urban development over the next 20 years. The concept of "Meeting in a Box" also reduces the amount of staff time needed to carry out a more traditional public participation program.

Media

More than 320 column inches were written about "Meeting in a Box" as a result of press releases phone calls made to the media during the "Meeting in a Box" campaign, which began June 1 and lasted until July 31, 1996. Many of these stories were taken directly from our press releases. This includes a full-page story in the Sunday edition of the *Spokesman-Review* Perspectives pages, where an essay on the program was written internally and printed by the newspaper on the "Meeting in a Box" program.

All three broadcast stations aired at least one story on "Meeting in a Box". One story included a live interview with county staff about the program. KREM TV reported on "Meeting in a Box" three separate times.

PSA's ran on KXLY, KHQ, KREM, Cox Cable and City Cable Channel 5.

PSA's ran on the three broadcast stations more than 150 times. Three of the spots ran during the NBA playoffs.

All the major radio stations in Spokane reported on "Meeting in a Box" during the campaign and KPBX did two special shows on the meetings.

As for advertising, we placed print ads in the *Journal of Business*, *Spokesman-Review*, *Valley News*, *Cheney Free Press*, *Inlander* and *Medical Lake Examiner*. We also purchased TV spots on all three broadcast stations.

Citizen Response Questionnaire

The survey responses were integrated into the planning process, used by the Steering Committee of Elected Officials in determining where each jurisdiction's Interim Urban Growth Area boundaries would be drawn.

Summary of Findings

The questionnaire was completed by 554 respondents. A summary of the findings follows.

- ¥ Over 91 percent of the respondents indicated that places that flooded were not suitable for urban development. Places that are considered wetlands (84.7%), places where storm-water has no place to go (81.3%) and places with not enough water (73.8%) were also considered not suitable.

- ¥ Almost 95 percent of the respondents were very satisfied (45.2%) or satisfied (49.4%) with fire protection. Eighty-seven percent of the people were very satisfied (35.7%) or satisfied (51.3%) with public water. Over 30 percent of the sample was not satisfied with public transit and street cleaning.

¥ Over 70 percent of the respondents indicated that protecting water quality in lakes and rivers and protecting air quality were very important issues. Around 60 percent of the sample indicated that controlling sprawl, requiring public sewer service for new development, and preserving open space were very important issues. Over half of the respondents considered preserving wetlands, retaining public access to shores of lakes and rivers, reducing traffic congestion, and protecting farmland development very important issues.

¥ A total of 398 respondents indicated that environmental quality was either the most important (217 people), second most important (98 people) or third most important (83 people) issue. A total of 359 respondents indicated that retaining community character and values was either the most important (128 people), second most important (110 people), or third most important (121 people) issue . A total of 303 respondents indicated that preservation of current lifestyle was either the most important (134 people), second most important (102 people) or third most important (67 people) issue. A total of 237 respondents indicated that job opportunities was either the most important (128 people), second most important (114 people) or third most important (34 people) issue .

¥ Over 67 percent of the sample want their area to grow moderately over the next 20 years.

¥ Over half of the sample want to expand to take in some surrounding areas, while 41.6 percent of the respondents want to stay about the same size.