



Creating My Hometown:
An Exercise in Land Use Decision Making
By
Steve Kohlstedt
Richland County, UW-Extension



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Creating My Hometown: This activity is a hands-on Learning activity that can be used to foster awareness of land use issues and conflicts, for a wide range of audiences. Through this role-playing exercise, participants will make land use decisions and provide a rationale for those decisions. At the conclusion of the exercise, participants will have an improved understanding of the complexity of land use decisions.

Introduction:

This exercise has been conducted with children, college students, and local elected decision makers. The exercise is designed for a group of 12 to 25 individuals and takes about 40-45 minutes to complete. All participants play a role and are actively engaged in the process. In this exercise the group is introduced to a 10' X 10' area that they are told represents 10 square miles of undeveloped land. Furthermore, they are told that the area will soon be experiencing rapid growth and development. **Let the role-playing begin!**

A designated facilitator asks or appoints different participants to make land use decisions. The first decision maker is asked to lay out a major road and to provide a rationale for the location that is selected and the type of road it is. (county, state, town etc.) That decision is followed by the placement of different land uses, such as agriculture, residential, commercial, institutional, industrial, and governmental. As the decisions become more complex, more probing questions are asked which will reveal potential land-use conflicts and the complexity and importance of land use planning.

Objectives:

1. Provide a hands-on decision making exercise in land use development for the participants.
2. Enhance the knowledge of participants concerning land use conflicts by allowing them to role-play and make their own decisions.
3. Increase the understanding of conflicts in society that arise with land use planning by requesting each participant's decision to be explained.
4. Encourage participants to realize the importance of listening to all sides of an issue before making a decision.
5. Show the value of good planning for any program or project.

Materials Check List:

- 4 flags, stakes or chairs
- 40-45 feet of rope, ribbon or twine
- 1 cardboard "road" (6" X 12')
- 4 cardboard "farms" (different sizes)
- 5 cardboard "houses" (8 ½" X 5 ½ ")
- 4 cardboard "businesses" (8 ½" X 11")
- 1 cardboard "school" (11" X 34")
- 1 cardboard "factory" (34" X 22")
- 1 cardboard "municipal facility" such as county office, land fill, courthouse, etc. (34" X 22") (Cell phone tower?)

(All above sizes are just suggestions and can be adjusted)

You also may include a lake somewhere in the area if you wish.

Steps in the Exercise:

1. Lay out an area 10' x 10' floor space using the rope, ribbon or twine. Use stakes, flags or chairs to make the corners of the space. This designated space represents 10 square miles of undeveloped land and that is the area the participants will be responsible for developing.
2. Introduce the participants to the exercise by indicating that it is an interactive activity, which means that they do all the work and you ask all the questions!
3. Select a "transportation engineer." Give him or her the task of locating the "road" anywhere in the ten square miles and give reason for locating it there. Ask questions such as "What is the weight limit? What is the speed limit? How much traffic will use it?" etc.
4. Ask for 4 volunteers and hand each a farm. Give them the task of locating their "farm" someplace in the same 10 square miles. Ask them what kind of farm they have, how many acres, what kind of animals, what crops they plant etc. Have them think about how complex farming operations can be.
5. Now select or appoint 4 – 6 participants to be homeowners. Hand out the "house" cards and instruct them to place their new homes someplace in the area. They can place their dwellings anywhere except on the road or on a "farm". Then ask such questions as: why they built where they did, how expensive their house is, and whether or not they need to get to work every day, etc. Then have them think about such things as urban sprawl, snow removal, police protection, etc.
6. Next find four or five entrepreneurs to establish businesses in the area. After they have located their businesses on a vacant site, have each tell what kind of business it is, and why they located where they did. Also ask the homeowners and farmers if they like that business located where it is.
7. Then select a couple of participants to be school board members. Their first responsibility will be to find a suitable site for a new school. It cannot be located on a site already being used. Have them tell what kind of school it is and the rationale for locating where they did. How many students will be attending? How many teachers do you employ? Now ask if the residents, business owners, and farmers like where the school is.
8. Now select someone to represent the Board of Directors of a start-up industry which plans to locate in the area. Have them talk about the products they plan to produce, why they chose that location, how many people do they plan to employ, how much and what kind of waste they may produce, do you need wells, etc. How do the other residents feel about this industry locating here? How do the other residents feel about this industry moving into their community?
9. Select a couple of people to be a county board committee who has the task of finding a location for the new municipal facility. Decide what kind of facility it is, (land fill, highway shop, disposal plant, court house etc.) and where it will be. This facility could be located on another site already being used. (Explain "Eminent Domain", which allows them to condemn private property and pay "fair market" value for it, if its use change better serves society.) Why did they choose the location they did? How will the community like this facility?
10. Finally, discuss how they feel about this unorganized approach to addressing development. Is this how development often occurs? If you wanted to look at development that would have less controversy, where would you start?

This is a great tool for all learners. It was developed to get citizens and students thinking about land-use development. As an organization, there are other lessons to be learned as well. It shows what can happen when we have no plan or goal or if we do not make our goals clear to our members. It also shows what can happen when we do not work together toward those common goals.

