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LAND-USE PLANNING EDUCATION —

A Public Policy Issue In Washington County, Oregon

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Between December 1976 and May 1977 Extension personnel worked with the citizens of Washington County in developing a public policy shortcourse on land-use planning. I will describe key components of the planning process which were important in developing the program.

Washington County is located in the western portion of the rapidly growing Portland metropolitan area. The county is a composite of suburbia, small communities, forests, and fields. Agriculture is still an important facet of the local economy; however, urban growth is occurring. In the past 17 years the county's population doubled to 199,000 people. Total farm acreage between 1964 and 1974 dropped 17.7 per cent. Population growth, land development, and land use pressures are becoming signs of the time.

Sensing this trend, the Washington County Extension Service became involved with the public policy issue of land-use planning as early as 1937. In more recent times the Extension Service assisted local people in the development, adoption, and implementation of a public policy project called the Community Planning Organization or CPO program. CPO is an on-going project. Its purpose is to promote direct citizen input into the county's land-use planning process, including the formulation of comprehensive community land-use plans. As community development coordinator, the Extension agent has over-all program responsibility, including coordination, communication, facilitation, and education. My efforts in this project were directed toward the educational element.

The project began with the formation of an advisory committee for purposes of program planning and legitimization. The 12-member committee represented diverse geographic and occupational backgrounds and citizen interest groups.

The committee met only four times and had the specific assignment of designing a land-use educational program. Goals, clientele, curriculum, co-sponsors, and workshop mechanics were developed. The advisory group had the satisfaction of developing its own program. The Extension agent assisted as a facilitator, primarily through questioning, prodding, and clarification.

Our goal was to provide people with the opportunity to develop or broaden their levels of understanding or to encourage their participation in the land-use planning process. Implicit in this was the identification of a specific clientele — primarily people who in some way dealt with land-use planning issues.

The advisory committee did not direct the program towards a general clientele. It was felt that a broad brush approach would work against the success of the program. Rather, it was established relatively early that efforts should be directed toward those lay persons who had some interest in the subject. As a result, the program was primarily for developers, realtors, land-use citizen involvement groups, quasi-judicial bodies, farm organizations, real estate appraisers, and social studies teachers. Some of the potential clientele were not typical Extension fare.

Because the target groups had varied levels of knowledge, a curriculum had to be designed to meet the needs of both the novice and the more experienced. In developing the curriculum two overriding factors were kept in mind:

1. The program would be localized to meet perceived needs.
2. The program would be designed to maximize audience participation and to minimize straight lecture.

Prior to meeting the advisory group, Extension personnel believed that the roles of co-sponsorship and legitimization could be combined under one umbrella. We hoped co-sponsorship would follow when potential legitimizers were involved in developing a program to meet the needs of their organizations.

Legitimization for this program rested not with existing government power or interested groups but with various land-use interest groups. The traditional power groups were conspicuously absent from participation in the project. It is conceivable that such participation could actually have proven a deterrent.

Once these program elements were defined and developed, it was a relatively simple procedure to organize an agenda, pull together the resources, and deliver the program. The net result of our planning effort was a five-week, 15-hour short course on land-use planning. The program began with an overview of land use planning from historical and state-wide perspectives. The following three weeks included a land-use planning simulation session, a discussion of state-wide land-use planning legislation, and the economic impacts of planning and zoning decision-making. The final week was a simulation exercise on the quasi-judicial process in land-use planning.

Generating publicity for the program followed two avenues — direct mailings made to over 3,000 people from Extension Service and co-sponsor mailing lists, and an intensive radio, television, and newspaper campaign. Most participants (69.6 per cent) heard of the program through a direct mailing or newsletter, and approximately 23.5 per cent via newspapers, word of mouth, radio, or television.

Four months after its completion, the greatest spinoff from the program has been with the radio and television media. Utilizing the publicity techniques developed for the workshop, a method was developed to produce and air public service announcements of PSA's with a minimum of specialist's time and production costs. Two PSA projects have been used to date with the latest effort currently being aired. The media recognized that the Extension Service deals with newsworthy public policy issues.

Another spinoff has been the use of the Washington County workshop as a model for future public policy efforts. Some of the planning elements used in the Washington County program were utilized in a short course scheduled for late September encompassing five counties in the Portland metropolitan area. These planning elements included media, direct mailing, co-sponsorship, and expanded clientele groupings.

Extension, in order to be effective, must have relevant and up-to-date knowledge. For our short course, knowledge was available. People responded favorably to the program because it met current needs and answered relevant questions. Anything less would have been disastrous. Clientele, especially in areas related to public policy, are becoming too well versed in current issues to be handed irrelevant and outdated program material.

The public policy program in Washington County is a continuous one. This was not a shot in the dark, scatter-gun approach. This short course is just one element of a program to involve people in planning their community. An option is provided for people to continue in the land planning process after the initial educational experience.