A Process to Address Homelessness in Knoxville and Knox County

BACKGROUND

On Saturday, March 5, 2011, fifteen Knoxville and Knox County residents—the Initiating Committee—participated in a workshop to design how the city and county could better address homelessness by engaging the public. The workshop was held at St. John’s Episcopal Cathedral, in downtown Knoxville. The meeting was open to the public to observe and comment. Gianni Longo, ACP Visioning+Planning facilitated the workshop. For the composition of the Initiating Committee see Attachment A.

PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

“To design an inclusive, transparent, and informed process that engages interested citizens throughout the City and the County on how to best address homelessness.”

The meeting agenda (Attachment B) started with a preliminary discussion on why the Initiating Committee was formed and on the purpose of the public process. The facilitated portion of the agenda included three parts: in the first, committee members discussed guiding principles and a preferred outline of a public process for Knoxville and Knox County; in the second, they discussed appropriate questions to be raised with the community; and in the third they made last minute adjustments and considered logistic questions on how to guide and coordinate the process. Participants used a handout (Attachment C) prepared by Mr. Longo to guide the discussion.

A PUBLIC PROCESS TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS

The following is the proposed outline of the public process to engage the public to address homelessness. It includes the general structure agreed at the workshop as well additional considerations related to its implementation. It is divided in four sections:

1. Preparation Steps
2. Conducting the Process
3. Timeline
4. Budget

Each section is described in detail.

1. Preparation Steps

Preparation Steps include all activities leading to the implementation of the proposed public involvement process. Preparation steps include.

a. Naming the Process

This was an unfinished element of the workshop. Members of the Initiating Committee should share via e-mail suggestion for a name for the process as well as a possible tagline that communicates what the process is all about. To select a simple and catchy name to the process will bring its activities to the forefront of the community attention. An example of name and tagline from a recent public involvement campaign in Nashville for the development of a regional open space plan was: NASHVILLE: NATURALLY – CREATING, ENHANCING, AND PRESERVING PLACES THAT MATTER

b. Project Website

The proposed process should have a designated website. The site could be linked and made accessible through the active sites of TYP Choice and Citizens for the TYP and other available sites. The designated site will serve as the official voice of the process in near-real time. During the various components of the program, the site will provide updates on the proceedings. The idea is to make the process transparent and accessible to anyone with just about any level of interest. The website will also provide a critical content feed for media covering the process, including community blogs and newsletters as well as traditional print and broadcast media. The site should have a simple interactive component to allow for community feedback.

c. Convening a Task Force

The Initiating Committee should morph into a Task Force that will make critical decisions steering the process forward. Members should reflect the diversity and complexity of the city-county community and embody the inclusiveness and transparency the process is seeking to achieve.

The Task Force should be small (15 to 20 members) and proactive, with members willing to assist in all phases of the process. If, in order to accommodate diversity, the Task Force becomes too large, an executive committee for day-to-day decisions should be formed. The Task Force will meet monthly and, when necessary, every two weeks. Current members of the Initiating Committee can become Task Force members if they wish to continue their engagement in the process.

d. Identifying a Process Coordinator

A full time coordinator is needed to attend to the day-to-day activities of the process. He/she will have three areas of responsibility: managing the public activities, supporting the Task Force and the Topic Groups, and promoting the effort.

The coordinator could be a loaned executive or could be someone hired for the effort. Given the short duration of the assignment a loaned executive may be preferable. A logistic set up for the coordinator includes a place of business, telephone, basic equipment, and access to a copy machine. These too could be loaned or rented.

e. Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee group will be made up of local, Knoxville and Knox County homeless service providers and others with relevant experience that will be engaged in the Analyzing process of the Community's input stage of the process. As the group collects Citizen comments it will also be very important to gather the input of the agencies that provide services to the Homeless in our community. We are committed to publish all of the comments that are collected.

f. Recruiting Facilitators

Task Force members and Coordinator will recruit facilitators. The proposed process will require 40 to 50 facilitators, each agreeing to take a two-hour training session and to facilitate at least two meetings. There are several experienced facilitators in Knoxville and Knox County who had been trained for the Nine Counties, One Vision process. They could become the core of the facilitators needed to facilitate this process. Facilitators can be recruited from organizations such as Leadership Knoxville, volunteer organizations, schools and from those organizations that have signed on to be Friends of the (name of the process).

g. Facilitator Training

Volunteer facilitators will be trained in all aspects of the process and will be given specific meeting guidelines and checklists. Once trained, the facilitators will be assigned following the calendar of small meeting developed by the coordinator in conjunction with meeting co-hosts.

2. Conducting the Process

Steps for the proposed public process are:

- Gathering ideas from the community;
- Databasing ideas;
- Sorting ideas into topics;
- Analyzing topics and developing recommendations; and
- Presenting results to the community.

Each component is described in detail below. All meetings that are part of this process will be open to the public.

a. Gathering Ideas from the Community

The Initiating Committee agreed that the first step of the process should be in the form of a communitywide brainstorm consisting of small meetings taking place in all parts of the city and county and of one or two large meetings to provide additional opportunities for input to those unable to attend the small meetings.

It was agreed that these community conversations should all have the same format and should be facilitated by facilitators trained in the specific steps of the process. In addition, the Initiating Committee agreed that the process needs to provide an opportunity for interested citizens to submit comments online because it is very difficult for some people to attend meetings. Small Meetings

Small meetings will be held throughout the community. A period of four weeks is recommended to enable the participation of organizations and institutions that have pre-set monthly meetings. Some flexibility in scheduling meetings beyond the four-week window may be required to accommodate those schedules.

The small meetings should involve between ten and fifteen participants each. If an entity organizing a community conversation is expecting more that 15 participants they should be divided in smaller groups and will require additional facilitators. Each meeting should have a co-host, such as the local neighborhood association, a civic organization, or a house of worship. It is anticipated that these organizations could continue to play a role during and after the process.

All meetings will have the same format to ensure that results can be comingled and compared. The meetings will last less than two hours. After a brief introduction to the meeting participants will address two questions. The Initiating Committee agreed to the following two questions:

- Homelessness is an issue that impacts our community, what do you recommend we do about it?
- What are the major concerns you have about dealing with homelessness?[1]

After reading each question, one at a time, the facilitator will ask participants to write their responses down before asking them, in a round robin fashion, to offer their ideas. The recording of ideas continues until all ideas are exhausted. A brief period of clarification follows. The process is repeated for the second question. Finally the facilitator will ask participants for any final thoughts. Recording of ideas will be done using flip-charts paper. All ideas will be visible to the group for the duration of the session.

Large Meetings

The purpose of the large meetings is to provide an opportunity to participants who may have not be able to participate to the small community conversations. The large meeting will start with an assembly period to explain the background of the effort. Assembly will be followed by small group facilitated activities similar to the one described for the small conversations. The same two questions will be asked in the small groups.

Measuring Participants' Diversity

At the end of each community conversation facilitators will distribute an exit questionnaire, comment cards, and a commitment card. The exit questionnaire will include anonymous demographic information and should be completed by all participants. It will measure the process inclusiveness and enable remedial actions, when necessary. The comment card will provide an opportunity to record participants' final thoughts and concerns. The commitment card will probe participants' desire to participate in the Topic Group activities.

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1 These two questions are designed to stimulate a discussion about homelessness among residents. They are aimed at generating ideas about possible solutions while disclosing attitudes and concern participants have. They emerged from the Initiating Committee's discussion about how much information should be presented at the meetings and when. The Committee felt that information should be a critical component of the process and that it should be injected in the discussion of the Topic Groups process described in the next page. The Committee also recommended that the community conversations (small and large meetings) should be free of any information that could influence and lead the community brainstorm. Basic facts about the process and the Ten Year Plan would be posted on the project website for clarity and transparency.

Task Force Members Participation

It is recommended that Task Force Member participate to the community conversation both as contributing participants and as observers. They can also introduce the process in the small meetings.

b. Databasing Ideas

All ideas collected through the community conversations will be transcribed into a digital database and will be coded (to the meeting and small group) so that they can be easily retrieved, if necessary.

c. Sorting Ideas into Topics

Ideas from all the small groups and meetings will be comingled and, subsequently, sorted according to their topic. The sorting can be accomplished in two ways. Ideas can be sorted by the Task Force or they can be sorted by a volunteers engaged for that purpose. After the ideas are sorted, they will be uploaded to the project web-site organized by topic.

d. Analyzing Topics and Developing Recommendations

The purpose of this phase of the process is to integrate the ideas gathered from the community with information from best practices on how to deal with homelessness. That integration is obtained through a process that brings together people with topical knowledge and the public in a series of three tightly structured meetings. This phase includes the following steps.

Forming Topic Groups

Topics will not be identified until the end of gathering and sorting ideas. In preparation, however, the Task Force, the Advisory Committee, and the Coordinator should develop a list of potential participants and their specific areas of expertise. Concurrently, the Coordinator will compile a list of those community meeting participants who have expressed a desire to remain involved (through the Commitment Card distributed at the end of the brainstorming meetings) and their primary areas of interest. After the topics have been identified, the Task Force will convene one group for each topic making sure that a balanced participation of experts and participants is achieved. Guidelines for Topic Group members are included in Attachment D.

Topic Group Process

Members of each Topic Group will agree to attend three sequential facilitated meetings. These meetings will last two hours and will integrate information on best practices and periods for deliberation. The general outline of the sequential meetings is as follows.

- In the first meeting, groups will review the public's vision for their topic and discuss potential discrepancies between the vision and best practices; they will also draft a vision statement/goal for each topic, if appropriate.
- In the second meeting, groups will identify and prioritize recommendations on how to achieve their goal.

- In the third meeting, groups will further develop and refine their recommendations including practical implementation steps.

These are general guidelines. More specific one will be created after topics have been identified. Meetings will take place at two-week intervals and group members will agree to specific days and times to meet.

A key component of the Topic Group activities is the development of a list of projects and initiatives in place or in the pipeline. The coordinator will develop this list by interviewing or polling providers and city/county agencies and will share it with the Topic Groups.

Training Facilitators

The Topic Group process will also require facilitation and training. A team of facilitators trained in the specific of the process will be assigned to each topic.

Databasing Results

The results of meetings of each Topic Groups will be posted on the project website.

e. Presenting Results to the Community

After work of the Topic Groups is completed, the Coordinator will organize a large public meeting to present the results to the community and provide a final opportunity for input and comment. This meeting is the culmination of the process. It will present the results to the community in their totality and for the first time; it will review and ratify the results; and it will initiate a dialogue on implementation and next steps.

Reporting

Recommendations organized by topic will be organized in a report to city, county, and the community as a whole.

3. Timeline

The following is a preliminary timeline for the proposed process. It was develop to sequence the proposed activities and to verify the process could be conducted with the urgency expressed by the Initiating Committee.

- Homeless Report Distributed on 3/14
- Reviewed by Initiating Committee by 3/21
- Naming the Process by 3/31
- Fund raising starts 3/21
- Task Force nomination starts week of 3/21
- Coordinator in place by week of 3/31
- Facilitator recruiting and meeting organizing 3/31 to 4/11
- Facilitator training week of 4/11
- Small meetings and 1or 2 large meetings 4/12 to 5/6
- Databasing ideas ongoing 4/12 to 5/6
- Sorting starts week of 5/2 continues to end of meetings
- Forming Topic Groups ongoing 3/31 to 5/23
- Topic Group process
  - Meetings 1 Week of 5/23
  - Meetings 2 Week of 6/6
  - Meetings 3 Week of 6/20
- Presenting results to the community week of 7/11
- Reporting TBD

4. Budget

Items*	Direct Cost
Project Website	$2,000
Meeting Supplies	$4,000
Databasing (using a temp agency)	$2,000
Total	**$8,000**

- This budget assumes that staffing and office space/equipment are provided in-kind.

1. Consultant Cost

A. Finalize program with Task Force and coordinator's orientation	$5,700
B. Facilitator instructions and training for small and large meetings and Topic Group process	$13,400

Management of Funds

Laurens Tullock, through the East Tennessee Foundation has made available to the Task Force the means to receive Private Donations via Grants and Individual donations. As of 3/25/2011, a Fund, with a $9,000 dollar balance, that had been originally created for the TYP from private sources, has been re-allocated for this process under the umbrella of the East Tennessee Foundation. Laurens Tullock has volunteered to secure the additional from private sources such as United Way, major hospitals, and the faith community.

Once all costs and sources of funds are identified, a final budget will be made public.

Attachment A: The Initiating Committee

In addition to Ron Peabody of TYP Choice and Stephanie Matheny of Citizens for the Ten Year Plan (the conveners of the Initiating Committee) the group included:

Bruce Galyon, Pastor, Central United Methodist Church

Robert Clark (formerly homeless VMC graduate)

Ronnie Jordan (formerly homeless KARM graduate)

Carol Nickle, President, 4th & Gill Neighborhood Org. (central Knoxville)

Jody Mullins, Cumberland Estates West Neighborhood Watch & Neighborhood Advisory Council (north Knoxville) Terrell Patrick, Cold Springs Neighborhood Watch (east Knoxville)

Paula Gumpman, Vice President & President Elect, Colonial Village Neighborhood Assoc. (south Knoxville)

Donna Hottinger, President, Westwood Homeowners Assoc. (west Knoxville)

John Gabriel, President, West Knox Republican Club (west Knox County)

John Fugate, Fountain City Business and Professional Association & North Knoxville Business Association (north Knox County)

Ernie Brewster, South Doyle Homeowners Association, South Knox Republican Club (south Knox County)

Dr. Bruce Spangler, president, Knoxville-Knox County Homeless Coalition

Eddie Young, Redeeming Hope Ministries and The Amplifier

Attachment B: Workshop Agenda,

INITIATING COMMITTEE MEETING ON HOMELESSNESS – MARCH 5, 2011

Introduction of co-chairs and committee members

Why this effort, why now, and how this group was assembled

What we want to accomplish today

Committee questions and comments

Facilitated session Part 1

- Principles to act in accordance with
- General structure of a public process
- Managing the process
- Specific options for Knoxville
- Developing a name and tagline for the process (Small Brainstorm)
- Reports
- ***Comments from the committee and the public***

Facilitated session Part 2

- Baseline information
- Questions we want the community to address

Summary

- Conclusions and adjustments
- Logistic Considerations (facilitation, coordination, budget, etc.)
- Next steps

Adjournment by the co-chairs (5 minutes)

Attachment C: Ideas for Consideration

1. PRINCIPLES TO ACT IN ACCORDANCE WITH

Several principles serve as the foundation for designing a successful public involvement process.

- *Inclusiveness*. Inclusiveness is what lends lasting legitimacy to a public process. In designing a process, no opportunity should be overlooked to ensure that the mix of participants reflects the diversity of the community in which the process is taking place.
    - Inclusiveness requires the implementation of specific outreach efforts targeted to demographic and special interest groups, as well as efforts to ensure that participants come from diverse geographical areas of Knoxville and Knox County.
- *Transparency*. By definition, a public process requires transparency, which is achieved by structuring the process along a clearly defined path that links deliberations and enables participants to make all critical decisions in the open through face-to-face discussions, collaboration, and accommodation.
- *Practicality*. A public process must contain the seeds that will enable the implementation of its outcomes. To achieve that, participants should be able to see, understand, and evaluate the economic, political, and social implications of what has been proposed. The process has to be designed as a two-way learning experience in which the intuitive knowledge of residents blends with specialized information.
- *Creativity*. This objective is achieved in the way participants interact with one another. A meeting design that is too rigid, does not allow for growth and learning, and is dominated by the few will constrain the creativity and potentiality of participants. Conversely a meeting design that is based on fair, agreed-upon rules, is rich in information, safe, and interactive will encourage the growth and expansion of creativity.

Note to the Reader

I could not fine the flipchart paper where I had recorded the addition to the principles made during the workshop. Please review your notes and let me know what those additions are. I will add them to this list in the final version.

2. GENERAL STRUCTURE OF A PUBLIC PROCESS

Brainstorming

Gathering ideas from the public is the first and most important step of any public process. This is where a process question (or questions) is first raised. During a vision, in meetings that take place in various parts of a community, residents are asked to address that question. The ideas the public provides are carefully recorded so that no single idea is lost. Trained facilitators ensure that the process occurs in a safe environment conducive to creative and productive thinking

Organizing the ideas

After the ideas have been recorded a Steering Committee or volunteers have the task of identifying major themes from those ideas. The themes brought forth by the public become the guiding principles around which next steps are structured.

Analyzing Ideas

After ideas have been gathered and themes identified, the next step is to enable the public to analyze information and draw conclusions. Analytical meetings require an intense interaction between the public and the data and are typically organized as workshops that include presentation of information, review of baseline principles resulting from the brainstorming sessions, and small group facilitated activities designed to enable participants to analyze alternatives, address discrepancies, and make informed decisions.

Injecting Factual Information in the Process

This is a critical step to be implementable the process should be both intuitive and informed. When information is provided is a critical question in designing the process.

Ratifying Results

The public can also be brought together a final time to discuss the results, and to rate and rank individual proposals in priority order. To be credible, this type of final meeting needs to attract extensive participation and must be designed to enable decisions, using for example electronic keypads.

Discussion point:

Do we inject information at the very start or do we do it once the major themes have been identified?

3. MANAGING THE PROCESS

After the process has been designed it is critical to form a leadership team to guide and lend credibility to it.

- A leadership team’s members must credibly reflect the perspectives and experiences of the broader community. Any large group from the community ought to be able to identify with at least one member of the team.
- The leadership team becomes the public face of a vision or charrette. It reassures residents to the extent that it reflects the diversity of the community in its composition. It bridges the gap between institutions and residents. By maintaining the integrity of the public process, it represents the interests of the broader community. It engenders good will and often becomes an incubator for future community stewards and leaders.
- The leadership team must be a constituency for change. It should commit to steer the process, and should also be prepared to champion the implementation of the recommendations once agreement is reached. As such, the leadership team will steer the process from the very early steps to its end.

Attachment D: Guidelines for Topic Group Members

In order to facilitate the Topic Group process and ensure successful completion of the required deliverables, each Focus Group member should keep the following guidelines in mind:

- **Acting as stewards –** You are stewards of the public's ideas. Throughout the process, you should refer back to these ideas to confirm that proposed recommendations reflect the community's vision.
- **Thinking strategically** – In addition to considering public input, you should also use your own knowledge about current conditions, trends, and initiatives in your topic area. Your expertise is important to reach practical results. A list of current and pipeline projects will be provided.
- **Building consensus** – Rather than casting votes or relying on Robert's Rules of order, your Topic Group should try to make decisions by consensus. Building consensus is about reworking and revising ideas until you settle upon a solution that is agreeable to all the members of your group. Consensus entails reaching overwhelming agreement among participants.
- **Clearly expressing and explaining your recommendations** – The final list of priority projects and programs should be expressed using straightforward language that the general public can understand. Technical terms can be defined as necessary. Each recommendation should include a brief statement of justification that shows how it supports the goal. The statement should also include recommendations regarding potential funding sources and implementation partners, if appropriate.