

facilities are typically underutilized much of the time, including evenings, weekends, and summers. Yet, school gymnasiums, libraries, computer centers, theaters, woodshops, kitchens, classrooms, playgrounds, and parking lots could be put to good use by the community. Neighbors with skills, knowledge, and time to share, meanwhile, are generally overlooked by the schools. By fully utilizing the resources of both communities and schools, community school programs can benefit students and neighbors alike.

Strong communities can also play a major role in crime prevention, but too many block watch programs focus on encouraging residents to install deadbolt locks and peer through their peepholes for suspicious behavior by outsiders. Real security comes from opening doors to community life. No amount of public safety spending can buy the kind of security that comes from neighbors caring and watching out for one another.

Community initiatives such as these are essential as local government revenues fail to keep pace with increasingly complex social and environmental issues. Government can be a catalyst for community initiatives but, to do so, it must first change some bad habits. Too many local governments treat citizens as nothing more than customers; citizens, in turn, think of themselves only as taxpayers; government resources, consequently, continue to decline. All local governments have citizen participation processes, but most of them are only a charade. As Daniel Kemmis wrote about public hearings, "the one element that is almost totally lacking is anything that might be characterized as 'public hearing'."

Government must learn to see neighborhoods not simply as places with great needs, but as communities with tremendous resources. Communities can do so much that government cannot and, working together, they can do even more that could not be done otherwise. For example, citizens are willing to tax themselves for projects and programs that their communities request. Government can tap these resources to the extent that it respects the wisdom of the community and acts more as a facilitator than as an expert.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Excerpted from *Neighbor Power: Building Community the Seattle Way*. University of Washington Press. December, 2004.

# Assessing the Depth and Breadth of Participation of Seattle's Neighborhood Planning Process

Hilda Blanco

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## ABSTRACT

**Neighborhood planning is the closest practice we have to participatory democracy. As Dewey put, "Democracy begins at home, and its home is the neighborly community." Prompted by Washington State's Growth Management Act (1990), which required cities to prepare comprehensive plans to accommodate their growth allocations, the City of Seattle recently undertook (1995-2000) an extensive neighborhood planning process, recognized as a successful model for participatory neighborhood planning. The framework of the neighborhood planning process was the City's Comprehensive Plan (1994). Seattle's comprehensive plan adopted a strategy of concentrating new growth in a set of centers, from urban (e.g., Downtown), to industrial (e.g., Duwamish) to urban villages, to distressed neighborhoods. Seattle developed an innovative way of generating neighborhood buy in-it left it up the neighborhoods to organize themselves for planning, while providing them with guidelines, some technical assistance, and funds for hiring consultants (from \$80-100,000 per urban village center). The City estimates that over 20,000 people participated in the neighborhood planning process that produced 38 neighborhood plans. Also, Seattle established a distinctive way of reviewing plans for incorporation into the comprehensive plan, and for implementing such plans (e.g., reorganization of city services, and incorporation of plan recommendations into the capital budget). This paper sets out the characteristics of the neighborhood planning process and examines the participatory aspects of the process, using the distinction developed by Berry, Portney, and Thomson (1993) that outlines various aspects of the breadth and the depth of participatory democracy. To assess the extent of participation along these two dimensions, this paper will rely on a review of city documents, and a set of structured interviews with planners (both public sector and consultants) that were active in the process, as well as neighborhood activists. It will conclude with exploratory findings on the breadth and depth of Seattle's neighborhood planning process.**