

GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING

Involving citizens in the process of planning for their community creates trust, goodwill, common understanding, and widespread support. Rather than the often times divisive methods that cities have followed in planning for the future, this community planning process invites the possibility of bringing citizens together with public officials to create a plan that not only serves the common good, but also reflects the community as a whole.

It is important in implementing this process to follow guidelines that allow input without control, communication without disagreement, and decision-making without alienation. The following process supports this kind of environment.

FIRST MEETING

The first community meeting begins with a blank page, with the process completely open to all ideas, visions, and possibilities. An introductory slide show is helpful in reviewing the history and reminding participants of the existing status of the site.

- 1. OPEN SHARING:** The leader invites the participants to briefly share their **issues, ideas & concerns**. If there is disagreement with a comment, participants are invited to offer up their own idea rather than criticize another. All comments are recorded on newsprint in the front of the room.
- 2. ORGANIZING COMMENTS:** The recorded comments are categorized to enable a clearer understanding of the comments that have been offered.
- 3. PRIORITIZING:** Each participant is given 5 sticky dots with which to indicate their **top priorities listed on the newsprint**. The facilitator summarizes the results of the vote so there is a common understanding of the priorities chosen by the participants.
- 4. REFLECTION:** Comments are invited from the participants.

SECOND MEETING

The sheets of newsprint from the first meeting are displayed on the wall of the meeting room.

- 1. OPTIONS:** The facilitator presents three alternative plans for the site which are based on the established priorities.

- 2. EVALUATIONS:** The participants break into three groups to evaluate the plans. The facilitator of each group records the responses on newsprint.
- 3. REPORTING:** A spokesperson for each group presents the group's ideas/ responses/conclusions to all the participants.
- 4. DISCUSSION:** General comments from all participants are invited after the presentations.

(NOTE: If there appears to be a general consensus on the direction of the project, then the community is ready for a final plan. But if there appears to still be some disagreement, two plans are presented in a third meeting with comments taken.)

FINAL MEETING

The comments on newsprint from the first and second (and possibly third) meetings are displayed on the wall of the room.

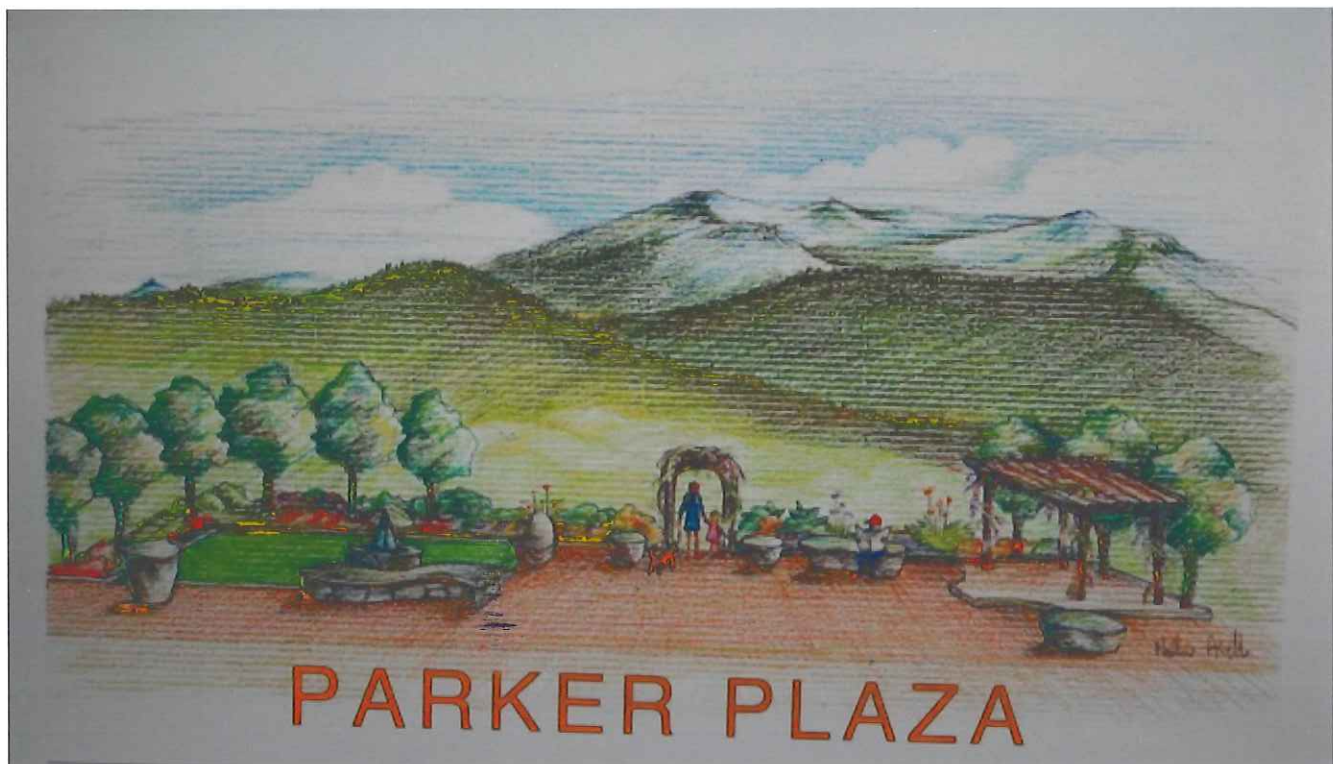
- 1. The final plan is presented at a celebratory party.**
- 2. Refreshments are served!**

Parker Plaza

The Parker Plaza in Shasta is an example of a hardscape Plaza that was created by an inclusive community design process, where far more than ten or fifteen minutes per session was allocated for community input. The entire Shasta community came together to design this beautiful Plaza, with heartwarming features such as colored pavers, lush greenery and trees, and a flowing harmonious, welcoming design. Contrast that with the Plaza design process here in Ashland, where the initial concept plans were devised apart from the community and preconceived forms were foisted upon the Public.

Committee members, I assure you that if such a process were embarked upon in Ashland, and a Plaza with the qualities of the Parker Plaza were to be created, you would definitely NOT get another 500 petitioners AND 65% of the population polled disliking the result. I thoroughly disagree with the fatalistically negative assessment made on April 3rd concerning an inevitably contentious new public process for enhancing the Plaza's overall form.

Surely some aspects of the present form of our Plaza warrant a degree of modification. A public process similar to one initiated for the Parker Plaza, would serve our interests. I feel a graceful yet open plaza like Parker, suited to our space, would satisfy both the needs of businesses and the public. I urge the committee to reconsider its thinking on modifying our Plaza's form.



Re: April 3rd Downtown Beautification Committee's meeting:

Mayor Stromberg wrote me the following in his email of January 4, 2014 concerning the Downtown Beautification Committee:

"I'm going to try to appoint people who do not have a preconceived idea of what should be done to accomplish the committee's mission. I want them to listen to all the public and professional input and then, as a body, come up with a recommendation for the Council."

1. The vote two weeks ago by this committee, to retain the Plaza's form came before all public and professional input had been solicited or heard on the topic of Plaza redesign as requested by the mayor. Further, when affirming the vote, the Chair did not ask if there were any dissenting votes, nor was a voice vote called. Roberts Rules of Order, adopted by the Council in 2007, were violated. The vote to retain the Plaza's form was therefore premature, and is not valid. A revote must be taken, and this only after all public and professional input is heard as directed by the mayor.

Last week's vote on the Plaza was apparently, and oddly, unanimous. Was it a silent affirmation of the Chair's question: "Are we all agreed?" No dissenting votes on redesigning the Plaza's form were heard, although none were called for, as is required. Doesn't it strike you all as odd that not one person here voiced any disagreement on the vote not to improve the Plaza's current form? No one here spoke for any substantive change!

2. Concerning the Beautification Committee membership's views on Plaza form, I think the public has a right to know that this committee is biased in favor of a singular viewpoint. This committee is composed of a Plaza business person who expressed to me last year that she supports and likes the current Plaza redesign; Another business owner on this committee spoke at the April 3rd meeting that she likes the Plaza's functional design, she says it fills the Plaza "with the kind of people we want to see;" Also present on the committee is the city Planner, who feels any new redesign process inclusive of more public input would create an equally dissident outcry, touts the "public process" which created it's form, and discounts the value of over 500 petition signers, and he neglected to mention the 65% of Ashlanders currently polled who dislike the Plaza. A number of other members of this committee are directly or indirectly responsible for the creation of this current, starkly formed, Plaza. There appears to be an underlying fear among this committee, that if the form of this Plaza is altered, then the Plaza will again be filled with "the kind of people we don't want on the Plaza."

This committee is charged by the City Administrator's top staff person, overseen by the city administrator, who is in attendance at each of these meetings. It's certain this staff person, (and some councilors) neglected to share vital information regarding the Plaza paver color from the public for months, all the while salmon colored pavers were being shown to the public. To date they have all refused to answer any further questions about what they knew of the gray paver selection, and when they became aware of it. The obvious bias of many committee members discredits the objectivity of this committee's decision regarding retaining the Plaza's form, and related issues. It is evident the mayor's intent for an unbiased Beautification Committee has fallen far short of his stated goal.

3. On the topic of "public input:" Significant public input was not sought in the creation of the original concept Plans delivered by CoveyPardee. These plans set the possible form, the shape of the envisioned Plaza. At the first public meeting, three very similar renderings were presented to the public. These renderings predetermined the Plaza's form. The public gave its input. Two weeks later, the final Plaza blueprint appeared. Subsequent public input was intentionally limited to "tweaks" of pre-drawn blueprint designs. Therefore this Plaza's form, its shape, its blueprint, was not a product of any meaningful "public process," it happened in just a few weeks with only very limited public input, therefore the Plaza's form should not again be so quickly reaffirmed by this committee without full and complete public and professional input. This is my understanding of the mayor's mandate to you.
4. Committee members: It's an "open secret" among many that the Plaza was created to dissuade "vagrants" from using the Plaza. This cannot be mentioned or discussed by officials. Nonetheless it's known. The Conservation Committee's chair has openly discussed it in the past. It has not worked. "Vagrants" still frequent the Plaza. The Plaza does not need to continue to be made hot and ugly to accomplish this underlying mission.
5. The credibility of this city government is on the line when for 9 months colored pavers were shown to the public and dark gray were delivered instead. This is hypocrisy in practice. The council must be advised to honor its promises.
6. Parker Plaza in Shasta has ample hardscape for large public gatherings, yet it has greenery and ground cover, is flowing and welcoming in design. (See enclosures.) The Callie Walkway has just been paved with salmon colored sidewalks and will soon be paved with beautiful, citizen approved, colored pavers. The Callie Walkway and Parker Plaza are great examples of what can be accomplished in public spaces when public input is continuously sought and followed.

NOTE: APPROXIMATELY TWO WEEKS WAS ALLOWED BETWEEN THE FIRST AND SECOND PUBLIC OUTREACH MEETINGS. THREE VERY SIMILAR CONCEPT PLANS WERE SHOWN ON JUNE 21, 2012. QUESTIONS WERE TAKEN BY COVEY. JUST TWO WEEKS LATER, FINAL CONCEPT PLANS APPEARED, AND THE FORM OF THE PLAZA WAS SET.

THIS IS WHAT HAS BEEN REFERRED TO BY THE CITY COUNCIL MAJORITY

THE CITY ADMINISTRATOR AND THE CITY PLANNER, AS THE “PUBLIC PROCESS IN DESIGNING THE PLAZA'S OVERALL FORM. IS IT ANY WONDER THE PUBLIC FEELS SLIGHTED AND ABUSED BY THIS PROCESS?:

FB: Preserve Ashland's Historic Plaza

New members of the Downtown Beautification Committee could go back to the 8-21-12

City Council meeting and view the testimony from the Plaza landscapers, Covey and Pardee: Part of their testimony stated, "Heat retention is directly affected by the color of the material, the darker the material the more heat it will absorb."

Maybe that's why their Concept Plan showed a heat reflecting salmon color. We still haven't heard how the pavers were changed from a lighter warmer color to a dark, unfriendly heat absorbing color. The new Committee has the TOT money to change the pavers and add more green to the Plaza. This should be their first priority.

Committee members:

Here is a direct quote transcribed from Conservation Commissioner Tom Beam's comments to the Commission some time ago:

Beam: *"...There's a concern - and I'm not going to speak for anybody else, that (inaudible) downtown public safety with people being accosted, beat up, and run out of town, whether they're vagrant or not vagrant (inaudible) They're saying this plan, this item, what they're trying to do is clean up the plaza and make it a safe place for people to use their parks again whether they are being vagrant or not being vagrant, and the Council wants it done. Or certain people want it completed and finished..."*

Was the underlying motive for redesigning the Plaza was to put a lid on the violence and disruptions by either "vagrants" or non "vagrants," downtown.

Greg Covey also stated in a study session: that: The darker the pavers, the more heat will be absorbed. (see enclosure)

Was an unstated goal of the Council and Conservation Commission working alongside the city Administrator for the Plaza design and dark pavers to make the Plaza hot and sterile and open, to discourage gatherings that might lead to disorderly behavior? Was the Plaza was purposefully made ugly to dissuade the homeless into thinking it was a gathering place?

It's become apparent that 65% of folks who live here, who were not told of the real motives for the Plaza redesign, think the council went too far. Because the Plaza is now regarded as unsightly site by approximately 2/3rds of our townsfolk.

Has the underlying goal of dissuading the "vagrants" from the Plaza really worked? We all saw they were out in droves all last

season. They're used to extreme weather and the heat. It didn't seem to bother them in the least. They're downtown because of the proximity to handouts. It's the location that attracts them. They are not at all put off or shooed-away by the sterile Plaza redesign.

Who is bothered by the Plaza? The very folks we want to come here and enjoy our town and shop and stay here: Our visitors and our residents. The very people we want to attract are repulsed by the Plaza.

The Plaza plan has backfired on its very creators.

What's to be done? When an organization is having problems with its internal functioning and performance, an outside consultant is often sought.

It's been suggested the committee consult a designer/architectural/historian, someone outside the city government, someone whose thinking is not cobbled by "groupthink," someone who thinks independently, for guidance on all future Plaza projects. An outside design consultant may even provide helpful suggestions to further the committee's goals and warm up the Plaza. Please consider seeking such a person. And listen to the citizens who are informing you that the Plaza must be improved, and how it should be improved. Committee members, don't rush to judgement on the Plaza's overall form. Even some small adjustments to its shape, increasing the green areas a bit and removing or modifying the longest seat wall, will make a huge overall difference in the feeling and the flow of the Plaza.

Suggestions have already come in from the public and outside designers on how to bring the Plaza back to a state where it fits in with our Downtown Historic District:

- Replace the pavers with colored pavers.
 - Enlarge the green areas of the Plaza and reshape them to more flowing shapes; Paul Stranberg had some wonderful ideas on using hardy evergreen plantings for the Plaza.
 - Remove or reduce the longest seat-wall and replace it with not pedestrian friendly plantings. These ideas will reduce the overall amount of pavers while still retaining enough hardscape for larger events. The Plaza will still retain usability, but lose its present stilted feeling.
 - Create a focal point for the Plaza such as a fountain or an arbor.
 - And most importantly, the move up the timeline for the Plaza improvements to this year. A timeline and budget for these improvements needs to be put in place soon, and funds committed for these improvements.
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It's encouraging to see that replacing the gray Pavers and adding more greenery of the non-pedestrian variety are included in your agenda. We don't want this to drag out for the next three years, and as I've presented to you in my last email and will submit in writing also today, there is no reason to extend Plaza improvements past the end of this year. In fact, once a plan is in place, these improvements can be undertaken very quickly, in a matter of a few weeks, with little or no disruption to Plaza businesses or visitors.

- I support Neil's ideas for the Plaza. They would create a wonderfully welcoming downtown area for our visitors.
- Finalize a Plaza improvement plan, and commit funds to Plaza refurbishment well before the Nov. elections.

Additional points to consider:

There are underlying criteria for the Plaza developed in 2012 that caused the current Plaza to be created. One was that it had to be open enough for a fire truck to park on it. I think that criteria needs to be reexamined. There appears to be enough space to the west to accommodate a large fire truck. We see large semi's parked there all the time.

Another criteria was that the vegetation had to be kept low. The only reason for this was to keep a clear line of vision for the police. The amount of visibility seems to be excessive. Would it hurt to plant several small trees along the business side, such as we saw when they were filming the movie wild? It made the Plaza look much more inviting. Please explore this possibility.

Also, for the Plaza to be safer at night, bright floodlights need to be installed to illuminate the entire Plaza after dark, and video surveillance cameras mounted and turned on after dark until dawn with "video security cameras in use" signage posted. That may help put a lid on unruly behavior after-hours on the Plaza and downtown.

Submitted by:

David Sherr

Petitioners for Restoration of Our Plaza