<u>Planning to Participate: Exploring Discomfort in Participation</u>

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Foreword

As noted in my Area of Concentration land use planning within Ontario is an exceedingly formal process. This formality, characterized by a wide range of technical requirements and differing levels of political approval, can be seen as one of the more significant barriers to meaningful public participation and effective community planning. In response to this argument my Plan of Study generally focuses on developing a better understanding of how planning within Ontario can be made to be a more accessible process for public citizens. More specifically, a greater understanding of the different groups involved, the relationships that exist among these groups, why public citizens often fail to become involved at the onset of planning processes and finally how this failure can be overcome and subsequently allow public citizens to become more influential members of the process throughout all stages.

While my Plan of Study identifies a number of broad barriers to public participation and meaningful engagement my Major Research Project more narrowly focuses on the barrier of discomfort. More specifically, how discomfort experienced by members of the public, professional planners and other parties that aid in the facilitation of public participation processes can prevent meaningful participation.
My Major Research Project has allowed me to further my understanding of these issues as well as more thoroughly accomplish the learning objectives described below.

The learning objectives, which have been further accomplished through my research include:
- Explore the relationships between and the roles played by the different parties involved in the planning process;
- Understand barriers that can inhibit meaningful public involvement in the planning process within Ontario;
- Explore how community planning is understood in relation to land use planning process within Ontario and;
- Explore how a more proactive community engagement process can increase public engagement in the planning process, thereby increasing meaningful public involvement, awareness of public concerns and a better-informed public body in relation to planning issues.

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Introduction

Planning methods designed to engage and encourage the active and meaningful participation of public individuals and groups have become more broadly valued and utilized in recent years. This increase has grown, in part, from an increasingly dissatisfied and civically aware public (Sorensen & Sagaris, 2010). Currently, in Ontario, there are very few formal planning exercises that do not require, by legislation, some level of public consultation. Concurrent with this shift many planning theorists have argued for and written about the benefits of including public citizens in the planning process. Resulting from this value-laden policy shift several corporations and government organizations have in the past and continue to attempt to develop new and exciting strategies to more effectively engage with the public.   The primary aim of this research project is to better understand some of the barriers, which inhibit meaningful public engagement, within the field of planning, in order to better understand how planners can work together with members of the public to begin to overcome these barriers.

While there are many barriers to meaningful engagement, this research project will primarily focus on the barrier of fear. As will be explained throughout this project, fear, or more gently described as discomfort, experienced by both the planner or facilitator and the participants, has the potential to discourage public citizens from actively engaging with the planning of their communities.

In order to better understand fear, how it can inhibit meaningful engagement and how it can be overcome, this research project utilizes a variety of research

methods. First a review of the relevant literature is used to identify and describe some of the advantages and disadvantages associated with public participation in the planning process. Relevant literature is also used to explain some common fears, which are experienced by planners and members of the public when they interact with one another in the process of planning.

Second, a series of semi-structured interviews with professional planners and private facilitators are used to better understand what makes these individuals uncomfortable when they invite members of the public to engage. These interviews also allow planners and private facilitators to speculate, based on their experience, as to what makes members of the public uncomfortable with participation.

Third, this research project utilizes a two-part focus group with public citizens. The first session of the focus group allows participants to describe their experiences with the act of planning in their community and explain what has made them feel both uncomfortable and comfortable about the process. The second session has participants explaining how they believe the process can be improved in ways that would make them feel more comfortable and in turn would increase their likelihood to participate in the future.

The majority of the research was conducted in the municipality of Clarington. Clarington, which is located approximately 80 kilometres east of Toronto, is a medium sized municipality with a population of approximately 85,000 residents and is made up of a number of small-urbanized communities including Bowmanville, Courtice, and Newcastle. Clarington also encompasses a number of rural settlements.

This municipality was chosen for a number of reasons. First, I was born and raised in Clarington and therefore have strong connections to both the place and a number of the people, including municipal planners, who live and work in Clarington. These previously formed connections have allowed me to make new connections more easily and in turn have helped me to carry out my research. Clarington was also chosen due to the receptive attitude of many of the municipal planners and politicians who work for Clarington. I was fortunate enough to complete my field experience as a student intern planner in Clarington. During this time I had a number of conversations with the municipal planners who informed me that they are always looking for new ways to work with members of the community to ensure they are able to participate in a meaningful way. This receptive attitude has aided in the progression of my research. Finally, Clarington was chosen because its size. As a relatively small municipality it carries with it a number of unique perspectives that are not found in larger urban centres such as Toronto. One such perspective provided by Clarington is the form of interaction that takes place between members of the public and the planning staff. Members of the public can, on any given day, speak directly with planning staff, even the director, by simply visiting the planning department. This as well as the other unique perspectives provided by Clarington has contributed positively to this research project. For these reasons I believe Clarington is a prime municipality for me to carry out my research.

Finally, this project concludes with a toolkit, which includes a review and analyses of the comments and insight provided by all the interviewee and focus group participants as well as a review of different engagement strategies, which aim

to better connect planners with members of the public by improving the

relationship between the parties through open and direct conversation. This toolkit,

referred to as Appendix C has been produced for and provided to all the participants

involved in this research project.

Review of the Literature

<u>The need for public participation</u>

Prior to investigating how fear inhibits public participation and how to overcome this fear in order to improve meaningful participation it is crucial to first provide some justification for public participation. As noted by Sorensen and Sagaris (2010) participatory planning methods became a more influential characteristic of planning processes beginning primarily in the 1970s. This procedural shift occurred largely in response to growing citizen resistance to current urban planning practices as well as the recognition that there was not equal access to more broad decision-making processes in civil society (Sorensen & Sagaris, 2010). In conjunction with well-organized citizen groups several planners and theorists began to emphasize the benefits of and argue for more inclusive and equitable planning practices. This phenomenon gained a renewed momentum in the 1990s, when it was theoretically and practically linked to ideas of deliberative democracy and collaborative planning (Sorensen and Sagaris, 2010).

One of the original proponents of participatory planning methods was Sherry Arnstein. In her seminal piece "A Ladder of Citizen Participation" Arnstein argues for democracy through participation when she states; "Participation of the governed in their government is, in theory, the cornerstone of democracy" (1969, p. 216). Arnstein illustrates her case by highlighting eight ascending levels of citizen participation, *manipulation* being the lowest level and *citizen control* being the highest (Arnstein, 1969) (Figure 1).
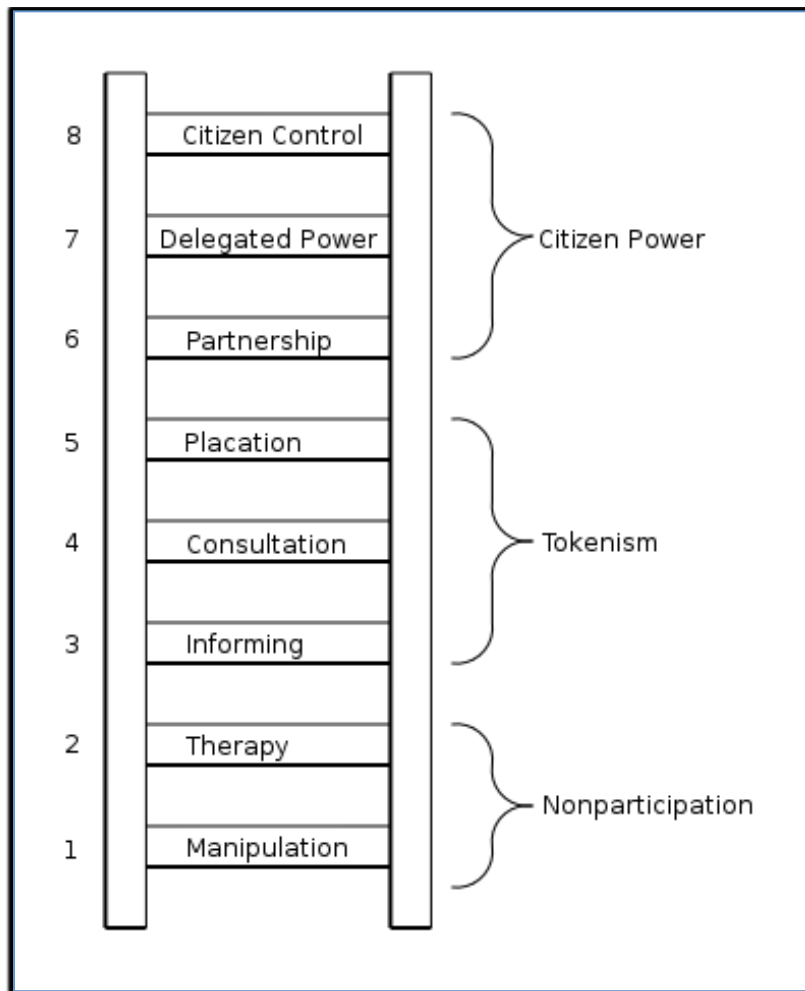
Figure 1: (Arnstein, 1969)

Unfortunately, meaningful levels of participation can be difficult to produce because it means the allocation of power to groups or individuals that do not normally enjoy such a luxury. However, as Arnstein points out this sharing of power is critical in the production of real citizen engagement: "Participation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216). While this method of sharing power may be difficult to ensure, it is evident that it is critical because in encourages a democratic process be carried out in the creation of community plans.

Sorensen and Sagaris agree with the more theoretical argument presented by Arnstein, that participation is vital to the ongoing instatement of democracy. However, they relate participation more directly to the city and the process of urban planning in their article "From Participation to the Right to the City" (2010). Sorensen and Sagaris argue, the right to the city takes shape through the practical implementation of democratic engagement in city building. Cities ultimately represent shared spaces of engagement and the right to share these spaces is realized through a process that allows for the inclusion of all members of the public in development and implementation of plans: "The right to the city, therefore, is a shared right that, unlike other human rights that protect individuals, must be enacted through collective and democratic processes" (Sorensen & Sagaris, 2010, p. 303). As noted by Arnstein (1969) as well as Sorensen and Sagaris (2010), democracy in our cities relies heavily upon the inclusion of the public in decision-making processes and the subsequent development and implementation of plans for such cities.

In addition to ensuring democracy, the production of strong community plans is another reason why meaningful citizen engagement is important. Raymond Burby, in his article "Making Plans that Matter" moves away from the more ethical and theoretical arguments for participatory planning. Instead, Burby (2003) makes the more practical assertion that a lack of citizen involvement increases the likelihood that the public will adamantly contest community plans and therefore the proposed plans will not gain acceptance from their approval authority: "With broader participation in plan making, planners develop stronger plans, reduce the

potential for latent groups who oppose proposed policies to unexpectedly emerge at the last moment, and increase the potential for achieving some degree of consensus among affected interests" (2003, p. 44). Therefore by including members of the public in the development of plans, especially at the early stages it is more likely that these plans will gain broader acceptance and as a result implementation is less likely to be delayed or inhibited by individuals or groups that were not considered.

Wendy Sarkissian and Dianna Hurford also adamantly argue for the active inclusion of public citizens in the planning process. They express their arguments in their book *Creative Community Planning,* where they flesh out a list of five reasons why community engagement is crucial within the process of community planning. These reasons include: finding out the public's preferences, incorporating the local knowledge of community members, advancing fairness and justice, legitimizing public decisions as inclusive and democratic and complying with legal requirements for public notice and hearing (Sarkissian & Hurford, 2010, p. xvii). In addition to these more specific reasons Sarkissian and Hurford also argue that effective community engagement allows for the development of shared understandings of major issues, which create challenges in our current world (2010). This in turn will hopefully introduce new forms of knowledge and new solutions to these complex challenges.

Nick Wates (2000), a contemporary community-planning practitioner and the author of *The Community Planning Handbook* has created a more extensive list of the benefits of community engagement, totaling thirteen in all. While many of the benefits found in Wates' list are similar to those suggested by a number of the

authors listed above he also suggests a few benefits, which appear to be more practical in nature. These include the production of additional resources, methods for easier fundraising, speedier development and sustainability through a realized attachment to one's environment (Wates, 2000). Clearly with all the benefits suggested by these authors effective community engagement for the purpose of community planning is a topic worth investigating and implementing.

Community engagement and participation is clearly an effective tool in the production and implementation of community plans. However, it would be naïve and inaccurate to make the assertion that there are no drawbacks or pitfalls to including citizens in the exercise of community planning. Four such drawbacks, which are examined in the literature are: increased costs, time delay, self-interest and the production of controversy among groups rather than consensus (Burby 2003). While planners and politicians certainly should not ignore these practical issues they also should not use them to create justification for excluding public citizens from the planning process. Instead planners and politicians should become acutely aware of these issues and seek to develop strategies that mitigate them, therefore allowing citizens to be included in a meaningful and productive manner.

<u>Fear/Discomfort with Engagement</u>

As noted in the introduction, this research project focuses primarily on making sense of how fear or discomfort, experienced by both members of the public and those that facilitate public participation within the field of planning, can inhibit meaningful public engagement and participation. Therefore the following section is

a review of literature, which identifies and attempts to provide strategies to begin to

overcome different fears associated with engagement and participation.

Wendy Sarkissian and Dianna Hurford explain in *Creative Community*

Planning: Transformative Engagement Methods for Working at theEdge, that fear

affects both the planners/facilitators who are responsible for running engagement

processes and public citizens who participate in these processes (2010). Planners,

as Sarkissian and Hurford argue, are hesitant to engage with public citizens,

especially in ways that depart from the traditional and are less controlled, because

they are afraid of the different directions that this interaction may take:

> "Planners are often the reluctant initiators of embodied
> sorts of engagement processes because I feel they are
> afraid of the tangible or the visceral when it comes to
> community contact. People move; they smell; they emote.
> Swearing is another physical thing that offends us. But it's
> often part of everyday life and therefore understanding its
> role has to be part of community engagement" (2010, p.
> 19).

Public citizens who play the role of participant appear to be less afraid of the forms

of interaction, instead they fear the process won't allow them to present their

concerns in way that will promote understanding and ultimately change. Sarkissian

presents this argument through the following statement:

> "People are afraid they will be misrepresented or that they
> won't be understood. They may be afraid they won't be
> able articulate the fullness of their story for some reason,
> perhaps because they will be rushed along. Or there won't
> be a place for them to voice their single solitary issue or
> complaint. They're afraid they won't be respectfully
> listened to" (2010, p. 19).

As fear evidently affects both the facilitators and participants involved with community planning it is crucial that concerted efforts are made to recognize, understand and ultimately deal with this fear. Otherwise this barrier will continue to inhibit strategies, which are meant to promote productive community planning through meaningful engagement practices.

In addition to the fears exposed by Sarkissian and Hurford, the fear of conflict also appears to be a key reason why people choose to avoid participating in the planning process. Leonie Sandercock proposes that planning should be about, among other things, helping people work through their needs and fears in or order to help guide positive change. Sandercock, highlights this belief by saying; " I want a city where planners plan by negotiating desires and fears, mediating memories and hopes, facilitating change and transformation" (2003, p. 144). Sandercock goes on to argue that by engaging members of the public, planners in turn run the risk of bringing together people who don't necessarily agree on matters, which are being discussed. Often what is being discussed is very important to those who are involved in the discussion including ones neighbourhood and community. As result disagreements and conflict can arise and this conflict can be quite uncomfortable for those involved. However, instead of avoiding such conflict, just because it will likely make participants uncomfortable, Sandercock (2003) and Mel King (1981) contend that the process of working through this conflict is essential, not only for meaningful participation, but also for the development of community. King states; "Community is the continual process of getting to know people, caring and sharing responsibility for the physical and spiritual condition of the living space" (1981, p. 233).

Sandercock further explains that talking and listening allows for the creation of a safe place and thus can help members of the public and planners to overcome their fear of conflict. Based on these arguments it appears evident that conflict is often an uncomfortable process, however, this discomfort should not encourage planners from avoiding it all together. Rather, conflict must be recognized and dealt with in such a way that allows all those involved to feel safe and believe they have the potential to create positive change.

Another important fear, which is identified in the literature, is the fear of change. Howell Baum, in his article *Forgetting to Plan* argues that people often face the future by attempting to restore the past, especially when the future appears to be negative. Baum states that; "Given the unpredictability of human events, people find it reassuring to imagine that the future repeats the remembered past" (1999, p. 3) and "Community planning participants reacted to threats to their community by remembering and trying to restore a version of the past" (1999, p. 3). As the act of planning deals primarily with the future is it understandable that people's fear of change can inhibit their desire to participate in such a process, which requires them to think about the future and face their fear head on. However, just as Sandercock and King argued that fear of conflict should not be used as reason to avoid public participation Baum likewise argues that fear of change also should not be used to reduce participation. Instead Baum proposes that planners must help people recognize, accept and ultimately work through their fear of change so that they can be active members in the planning process, stating:

> "Planners must let people try to forget parts of the past and
> remember others. They need to mourn for what they decide

to give up. They must talk about what they care about in the past, how they loved it, how it made their lives meaningful, how it made them feel special, and how they don't want to give it up. And they must talk about how they want to give it up, how they will miss it, how they will feel guilty about surrendering it, how they will be angry at themselves for letting go of something they care deeply about, and yet how they must let go, because it is really gone, because holding on holds them back, because it is an illusion, and for any other reasons. And they must talk, once more, about how they will remember what they are giving up, in a different way" (1999, p. 11 & 12).

As Baum identifies, this therapeutic approach to public engagement and community planning is necessary in order to help members of the public overcome their fear of change and subsequently participate in a more meaningful way. Baum goes on to propose that unless planners help members of the public identify and work through their fear of change then they run the risk of inhibiting participation altogether or at the best may produce only superficial participation (1999). Clearly planners must make themselves aware that members of the public may be uncomfortable with change in their neighbourhoods and communities and in turn develop strategies to help people work through this discomfort so that they can be active participants in the change that will ultimately affect many aspects of their daily lives.

Methods

In order to begin to develop an in depth understanding of how fear and discomfort influence public engagement and participation in relation to the planning process three main forms of research were conducted. These included a review of relevant literature, nine semi-structured interviews with municipal planners and professional facilitators and a two session focus group with interested members of the public from Clarington, Ontario.

Literature Review

One of the initial stages of this project was a review of relevant literature. This process carried with it two central objectives. The first objective was determining why meaningful public engagement and participation are essential to an effective and democratic planning process; more simply put, why members of the public should have the opportunity to get involved with the planning of their communities. A number of theoretical and practical reasons were identified and described in some detail. As noted in the literature review it would be irresponsible and naïve to investigate the positive attributes of participation and engagement without also exploring the associated problems or drawbacks. For this reason some of the problems discussed in the literature were also identified and discussed subsequent to the reasons for participation and engagement.

The second objective was identifying reasons why participants, both members of the public as well as planners, may become uncomfortable with public engagement and participation. Again, through an examination of relevant literature a number of reasons were identified and discussed. Some of the reasons identified

relate more generally to the process of participation and community interaction, while others relate more directly to the processes of community planning and development. The general findings discussed here can be read in more detail in the literature review section of this project.

<u>Interviews</u>

The second research method undertaken for the purposes of this project was a set of semi-structured interviews. A total of nine people were interviewed, including six municipal planners from Clarington, Ontario, two public consultation and community engagement consultants based in Toronto, Ontario and one municipal planner from Oakville, Ontario. The six planners from Clarington were chosen as the primary study area for this research project was based in Clarington. The two consultants were chosen because their work often focuses on facilitating conversations between members of the public, planners and politicians. The planner from Oakville was selected due to their avid interest in and experience with public participation and engagement in relation to the planning process. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and all were conducted at the interviewee's place of work. A set of general questions were used to help guide the conversations and achieve the objectives described below. (See appendix A for a copy of the questions used.)

As noted by Iain Hay in *Qualitiative Research Methods in Human Geography:* "Interviews are used to fill a gap in knowledge, to investigate complex behaviours and motivations, to collect a diversity of meaning, opinion, and experiences and finally to use a method that shows respect for and empowers those people who

provide the data" (2005, p. 80). The interviews that were conducted and analyzed

for this research project have been used, at least in part, to achieve these four goals.

More specifically, the interviews were conducted to achieve three objectives. The

first objective being, an understanding of what municipal planner and public

consultation specialists believe inhibits meaningful public participation in the

planning process. Second, what is it about the planning process that these two

aforementioned groups believe makes members of the public uncomfortable with

participation and as a result may inhibit them from participating. Third, do

municipal planners become uncomfortable at times when interacting with members

of the public and if so what are some of the reasons for this discomfort? Finally, I

wanted to better understand some of the strategies that these professionals have

used in the past and continue to use, which help them to overcome discomfort and

increase meaningful public participation.

<u>Focus Groups</u>

The third and final research method carried out was a two-session focus

group. A total of twelve people participated in the first session and fourteen in the

second session; the second session included the same twelve people who attended

the first session as well as two new people who could not attend the first session

due to scheduling conflicts. The age of participants ranged from approximately

twenty-five years of age to approximately sixty-five years of age; with 3 participants

being between the ages of twenty-five to twenty-nine, 3 participants being between

fifty and fifty-four, four participants fifty-five and fifty-nine and 4 participants being

sixty or over. Ten of the participants were male and four were female. The

participants had a wide variety of occupations including: teaching, real estate, high-level management, carpentry and public transit services. All participants identified as being white. While the participants did not necessarily provide a representative sample for the Municipality of Clarington the information they provided was very useful as all participants lived within the municipality of Clarington and were genuinely interested in the planning process. A representative sample would likely have included participants not interested in the research topic, resulting in individuals who likely would have been less willing or able to share relevant information.

Some of the participants were previously known to the researcher and were asked to participate after being informed about the research. A number of these initial contacts then suggested other members of the public, who they knew and thought might also be interested in participating. A number of these people were then contacted resulting in a total of fourteen participants. All those who participated did so willingly.

As noted previously, two sessions were held, each session lasted approximately ninety minutes. Similar to the interviews, a set of general questions and issues was used during each session to guide the conversation and ultimately achieve the objectives listed below. (See Appendix B for a copy of the questions and issues used during the focus group sessions.)

The two-part focus group was conducted in order to gain relevant information from members of the public who reside in the Municipality of Clarington. More specifically, the two sessions were carried out to achieve four

main objectives. The first objective was to get a general idea of the participant's past involvement with the planning process in Clarington. The second objective was determining what generally made it difficult or prevented these individuals from participating in the planning and development of the municipality in which they resided. The third objective was understanding what specifically made these members of the public uncomfortable with participating in the planning process. The fourth and final objective was developing a list of suggestions the participants of the focus group had, which they believed would make the planning process more comfortable and therefore more accessible for the general public.

The first session involved conversations relating to the first three objectives. The second session began with a brief discussion about issues, which were discussed in the first session and then moved on to discuss the fourth and final objective. The focus group was broken down into two sessions to allow participants and the researcher to consider and reflect on what the participants considered problematic about public participation and the planning process prior to presenting suggestions for improvement.

Planners' and Public Facilitation Specialists' Concerns about Participation in Planning

As noted in the methods section of this report a total of nine semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to better understand how fear or discomfort with public participation plays a role within the process of planning. Following seven interviews with municipal planners and two with public facilitation specialists from the private sector a number of themes were identified. The themes have been organized into three general categories including: *areas of discomfort*, *other barriers to public participation* and *strategies for improvement*. The areas of discomfort that were discussed during the interviews include: *fear of conflict*, *knowledge insecurity*, *loss of power* and *fear of change.* The other barriers discussed were: *lack of understanding*, *lack of trust and respect* and *participation fatigue.* Finally, the strategies for improvement that were suggested by both the municipal planners and the public facilitation specialists included: *relationship building through conversation*, *proactive engagement* and *ongoing public education.* The purpose of this section is to identify and explain the themes that emerged during the interview process in order to achieve the objectives set out in the methods section of this report.

<u>Areas of Discomfort</u>

<u>Fear of Conflict</u>

All nine-interview subjects agreed that a fear of conflict can inhibit meaningful participation and in their experience has on several occasions. Although the planners and public facilitation specialists suggested that conflict is not the most enjoyable experience for them they also noted that dealing with conflict is an essential part of their job and something that they have become more comfortable with over time. The interviewees went on to describe how members of the public often become uncomfortable with conflict, especially when they perceive themselves to be in the minority. The planners indicated that in their experience members of the public are often uncomfortable sharing because they are afraid that their opinion may be different from others and once they reveal their opinion they may be judged by other members of the public and those running the process. A number of planners also said that this discomfort could be worsened when members of the public fear that the conflict experienced during the process will not stay at the meeting but rather will be carried out into the community.

Additionally the interviews revealed that conflict is often heightened when a few people who are participating decide to voice their opinions above all others making themselves the loudest people in the room. Several planners noted that this could negatively impact the process in two ways. First, the person or people that have decided to be the loudest people in the room often voice their concerns in a negative manner, which in turn causes the entire process to take a negative tone. Second, this forceful strategy often causes others to refrain from actively

participating because they are uncomfortable with the tone of the process and may be afraid of contradicting the forceful parties. In response to this the planners and public facilitation specialists shared that they have to work diligently, not to avoid conflict, but to deal with conflict in a productive manner that allows all parties involved to share their thoughts and opinions.

Knowledge Insecurity

In addition to being uncomfortable with conflict a number of the interview subjects also indicated that members of the public are often uncomfortable with the level of and type of knowledge that they possess. Several of the planners shared that it is very common for members of the public to qualify their comments with their situation or occupation; they are quick to discredit themselves by saying I am not expert in this or I am just a homeowner. One of the public facilitation specialists interviewed argued that, because there is a perception that certain types of knowledge are valued more than others members of the public who feel they do not possess these specialized forms of knowledge feel they have little to contribute and therefore often do not participate. This facilitation specialist went on to argue that this can lead to an absence of important information, especially when it comes to local knowledge. The planners shared that members of the public can be especially hesitant to share their non-expert opinions with authority figures, such as planners, for fear of being judged and made to feel ignorant.

While all the interviewees said that they understood these concerns they also stated that they want to hear from all interested parties and all forms of knowledge are valued. However, one planner in particular stated that planners have the

undesirable ability to add to the public's knowledge insecurity. This is done when a planner or any other professional involved in a public process carries with them the attitude that they are the expert and they know best. As suggested by the interviewed planner this attitude generally creates a barrier and reinforces the public's insecurity, subsequently inhibiting meaningful participation.

Loss of Power

A planner interviewed shared that one facet of public participation that planners are often uncomfortable with is the sharing of and subsequent loss of power. As noted by a few of the planners interviewed, including members of the public in the process means sharing information with them, discussing their concerns, asking them for their opinions and then using these opinions in some way that shows the public that their concerns were considered and valued. This in turn causes the planners and other authorities to share some of the power they hold. As indicated by the planner previously mentioned this process can be uncomfortable for planners because they fear that they may loose control of both the process and the result. A number of the other planners agreed that the thought of loosing control of the public process has made them uncomfortable in the past but through experience they have become better at working with the public to ensure the process continues in a productive manner. In terms of loosing control of the outcome most of the planners agreed that they do not have ultimate control over this and that they are more concerned with making accurate recommendations based on all the information provided to them.

Fear of Change

The planners and the facilitation specialists agreed that they have to regularly deal with a fear of or distaste for change. This is especially evident when members of the public perceive that the proposed changes will affect them or their property directly. One of the planners interviewed shared an experience where a group of public individuals participated in a process to learn about and help with new design concepts for part of the municipality. During the initial stages of the process when no location was discussed the majority of participants showed a great deal of support for the new concepts and were quite excited about the proposed changes. However, when the group was asked if they could envision these changes happening in their neighborhood support dwindled, with most people saying no it wouldn't fit in their neighborhood and would be better suited for another location in the municipality. As noted by the planner and illustrated by this story people are often less comfortable with change when they believe it will directly impact their daily lives for the worse.

Other Barriers to Public Participation

Lack of Understanding

In addition to the areas of discomfort described above the planners and public facilitation specialist interviewed also identified three other barriers they believe can inhibit meaningful participation. The first barrier identified, mainly by the municipal planners, was a lack of understanding. Planners commented that at times members of the public do not fully understand either the major issues or the

process that is being conducted. Prior to describing this barrier further it is important to note that none of the planners or facilitation specialists believed that the public were at fault for these misunderstandings, rather they commented that this is an issue that exists and needs to be dealt with through further education.

One of the main reasons identified for a lack of understanding was an abundance of misinformation. Planners commented that members of the public often come to public meetings or other events with inaccurate information from a variety of sources. In response to this a number of the planners agreed that, in addition to providing reliable and accurate information, one of their key roles is to help the public analyze external sources of information in order to determine what is reliable and what is not.   Planners also suggested that members of the public have a responsibility to use the resources at their disposal to become well informed prior to and during the public participation process. One of the resources all the planners agreed that the public should take full advantage of were the planners themselves.

Another area where there appears to be some misunderstandings, or a disconnect, between planners and members of the public is with the issue of scale. Some of the planners interviewed indicated that they are generally working in terms of the bigger picture, looking at the whole neighborhood, community or municipality. On the other side, members of the public are often concerned primarily with how a plan or development will affect their individual property. Planners commented that bridging this gap can be quite difficult and is often the cause of much dispute during a public process. Again several of the planners agreed

that achieving a balance between the two different scales is important to a successfully facilitated process.

Lack of Trust

Nearly all the planners who were interviewed highlighted the issue of trust, specifically the lack of trust in planners, as an obstacle to meaningful participation. They noted that they deal with this issue on a regular basis in a variety of ways. One planner shared that they are often told that planners don't really listen to members of the public and that they are just catering to developers and politicians. Another planner argued, for positive relationships and meaningful participation to exist general perceptions about planners need to be altered. They suggested that planners need to be seen as individuals working with the public to help promote the public good, not strict authority figures working to put up obstacles for the public.

When asked how planners can gain and maintain trust from the public the same general sentiment was shared. Planners need to show members of the public respect by being honest and carrying out a well organized and implemented public process. More specifically, more than one planner stated that it is crucial to share the same information with everyone; by telling different people different information members of the public may believe that some information is being hidden, which in turn can lead to distrust. All planners agreed that achieving and maintaining the public's trust is a difficult task but one that is crucial to effective public engagement and further effective planning.

<u>Participation Fatigue</u>

A final barrier to meaningful participation discussed during the interviews was participation fatigue. One planner held that at times and with certain projects there are so many events being held that the public grows tired and disinterested. The planner went on suggest that fatigued participants are less likely to contribute well informed and meaningful feedback because they have grown tired of the process. For this reason the same planner commented that planners need to be careful not to fatigue participants with redundancies in process. Instead they should decide in advance how best public participation can be used then develop an efficient process to elicit this participation. The planner also said that avoiding participation fatigue is important in maintaining positive relationships because a high volume events can be seen by the public as a strategy intent on overwhelming the public rather than a way of obtaining meaningful participation.

<u>Improvement Strategies</u>

<u>Relationship Building through Conversation and Proactive Engagement</u>

Similar to arguments presented by John Forester, a number of the planners interviewed commented that meaningful participation requires ongoing conversations between members of the public and planners. One planner shared that in their experience talking with people regularly and over a long period has helped members of the public become more comfortable with them as well as the overall process. Additionally, a public facilitation specialist suggested that most discomfort and conflict can be mitigated through conversation, stating: "It is really

important that governments mitigate discomfort and we believe that nearly all discomfort can be mitigated by group processes, especially conversation" (facilitation specialist, 2014). Ultimately, there was general agreement among the interviewees that one of the most important aspects of meaningful and productive public participation is ongoing relationship building through open and honest conversation.   There was also general agreement that this must be achieved at all levels from one-on-one conversations to large group processes.

A number of the planners interviewed identified proactive engagement as a first step in initiating productive relationships through conversation. Planners were referring to strategies that take the engagement process to the public rather than having the public come to the process. A number of examples were referenced including having planners attend local events that were not directly related to planning but had the advantage of attracting a large number of people. The interviewees indicated that this strategy had several advantages including: meeting and talking with members of the public that would not normally attend typical planning meetings, talking with people in a more comfortable way by reaching them at their chosen environment and simply introducing people to the faces of the planning department, often for the first time. While several of the planners interviewed agreed that these practices have become more common they also agreed that this is an area that should continue to grow, especially if greater trust is going to be developed between planners and members of the public.

<u>Ongoing Public Education</u>

As noted in previous sections, a lack of understanding of both the issues being discussed and the overall process can inhibit meaningful participation. The planners and facilitation specialists agreed that ongoing public education is essential in order to mitigate misunderstandings and equip members of the public with the knowledge required to participate in a meaningful way. One planner in particular argued that: "If we think of public engagement as education then we can never over engage" (planner, 2014).

The interviewees further explained a number of reasons why they believe public education to be so important. Firstly, by helping members of the public better understand background information and relevant issues, through an education process, they are better able to analyze information and subsequently provide informed feedback. Secondly, explaining the process, specifically what has already been decided, what is still up for discussion and how public input will be used, helps to manage expectations and as a result mitigate disappointment with the process. Thirdly, ongoing public education can help members of the public analyze the information they obtain from a wide variety of sources. Several of the planners indicated that some of the information members of the public review prior to attending a public process is incomplete or incorrect and this misinformation is often one of the primary catalysts for conflict. Therefore it is important for planners and facilitators to identify and explain the errors or omissions present within this information as well as help members of the public find creditable sources of information.   Finally, several of the planners agreed that by openly sharing

information about the process and content can help to create and maintain positive relationships between planners and members of the public. Alternatively, concealing information can lead to distrust, which in turn can inhibit the creation of positive relationships.

In addition to providing reasons for an ongoing education process a few of the planners shared that a key part of the education process is first listening to the questions and concerns provided by the participants. They said that by listening first planners and facilitators are better able to understand where education is required.

Residents' Concerns about Participation in Planning

As previously stated a two-part focus group was conducted in the municipality of Clarington. A total of fourteen members of the public attended and shared their experiences with the planning process in Clarington. A number of questions and discussion points were raised in an effort to determine whether or not participants ever feel uncomfortable with participating in the planning process and if so how this discomfort may discourage them from participating in current or future situations. As with the interviews, an analysis of the responses given during the focus group sessions revealed a number of themes. The themes have been organized into the same three general categories as the interviews: *areas of discomfort*, *other barriers to public participation* and *improvement strategies*. However, the specific areas of interest discussed during the focus group sessions, which fall under the three general themes, were different from those discussed during the interview process. The *areas of discomfort* that were discussed include: *a fear of not being listened to or respected* and *discomfort with conflict*. The *other barriers* discussed included: *a lack of access to information and transparency* and *reporting back*. The *improvement strategy* discussed during the focus group sessions was *private sector inclusion*. The purpose of this section is to identify and explain the themes that emerged during the focus group process in order to achieve the objectives set out in the methods section of this report.

<u>Areas of Discomfort</u>

<u>Fear of Not Being Listened to or Respected</u>

As Wendy Sarkissian and Dianna Hurford note, one of the reasons members of the public may be reluctant to participate in the planning process is a fear that they won't be listened to in a respectful manner (2010). Several of the people participating in the focus group shared this concern, suggesting that in many cases their opinions really don't matter because major decisions are often made prior to the public process. One participant stated: "They tell you they want to hear your opinion but they don't really care" (resident, 2014). Another said: "I think when they make up their minds it won't make any difference what you say or do" (resident, 2014). While several of the participants suggested that this feeling could be applied to the whole process a few participants also agreed that this is especially true of larger projects. Two projects discussed were a wind farm and an incinerator. In relation to these projects one participant stated: "There are particular topics where it really wouldn't matter if I voice my view, that is the way I feel" (resident, 2014).

In addition to believing that decisions are often made prior to the public process some of the participants also shared their frustration with how they are listened to. One participant shared and others agreed that members of the public often spend a considerable amount of time and energy putting together their thoughts prior to sharing them and they find it frustrating that they have a very limited amount of time to share them. This comment was made in reference to the three minutes members of the public are given to make a deputation before council

at a public meeting. Another participant responded that there are often other ways

to provide comments and feedback and suggested that the larger problem might be

that members of the public are not aware of these alternative methods.

<u>Discomfort with Conflict</u>

Similar to the opinions shared by several of the planners and facilitation

specialists a number of the focus group participants agreed that conflict can inhibit

meaningful participation. More specifically, some of the participants shared,

believing your opinion is different from that of the majority of people in the room

can be quite uncomfortable; more uncomfortable still would be to share that

opinion with the room. One participant stated: "Often when people realize their

opinion is different than others they will have trouble sharing it" (resident, 2014).

Participants also agreed that members of the public are likely to be uncomfortable

with the process when others decide to shout their opinion or share it is some other

aggressive manner. One participant said: "More passive people don't get a chance to

be heard" (resident, 2014). While a few other participants agreed that when people

are already uncomfortable with their own opinion that aggressive displays, such as

shouting, can persuade people to change their opinion, especially when they believe

enough other people have already taken this side.

In response to these comments several of the participants agreed that a

variety of strategies or processes should be employed in order to gain public

opinion. Strategies that allow participants to share their opinion anonymously was

agreed to be important. When the participants were asked if they believed people

generally felt more comfortable sharing their opinions anonymously or publically

most of the participants laughed and responded: "Of course people would be more comfortable remaining anonymous" (participants, 2014). With this in mind it is also important to note that none of the participants suggested that all forms of participation have to be anonymous. Rather, they indicated that some, if not many members of the public would likely be more comfortable if they had an option to remain anonymous.

Other Barriers to Public Participation

A Lack of Access to Information and Transparency

In addition to areas of discomfort, the focus group participants also discussed another barrier they believe can prevent meaningful participation. The barrier, which received the most attention, was a lack of access to information and insufficient transparency with regards to process. In terms of access to information the majority of participants agreed that most information is available to the public in some form. However, they also agreed, while this information can theoretically be accessed it is often very difficult to do so. One participant noted problems with access to information are often increased as a result of fragmented information sources. The participant went on to explain that most planning projects or developments involve several municipal departments and at times multiple levels of government. Therefore in addition to knowing which departments to contact the person must then contact each relevant department in order to obtain all relevant information. Several other participants subsequently agreed and suggested that accessing information would be made substantially easier if the municipality had a

point person who could listen to individual or group concerns and then inform the individual group which departments they needed to contact and what kind of information they required.

<u>Reporting Back</u>

In terms of process the majority of focus group participants agreed that they would like to see changes in the methods used to report back how decisions were made and how public input was used in terms of making decisions. This discussion began with one participants stating: "I've never seen much in the way of good reporting back" (resident, 2014). A number of other participants showed agreement for this comment and responded by sharing that they are often more frustrated with the process than the outcome, indicating that they would be more willing to accept an outcome, even if they didn't agree with it, if they had a better understanding of how the final decision was made. Additionally all participants shared a desire to have public input reported back in such a way that members of the public could readily see that their comments and concerns were heard and valued in the overall process. One participant stated:

> "If they just took a little bit more time or space to say that we heard this, this and this and then we decided for these reasons and these other reasons in some kind of summarized statement. Then I may still be somewhat upset that they didn't follow my opinion but at least there would be some recognition that they heard my opinion and that it was considered in the decision making process" (resident, 2014).

Another participant agreed with the above comment and contributed a related comment: "Just saying that we had a public town hall meeting and we decided 'this', well anybody that disagreed with the final decision is going to be upset with the

decision and how it was made" (resident, 2014). Based on the information

described above it is evident that the members of the public who participated in the

focus group share a strong desire to know and feel that their opinions have been

heard, considered, valued and have had some impact on the final decisions that are

made in relation to planning matters in their communities. While it may be and

likely is common practice for planners to do all these things there is clearly some

disconnect between the actual practice and the communication of the practice to

members of the public, at least for those who participated in the focus group. For

this reason it can be argued that effective and accessible reporting back of the public

participation process could be improved as well as the overall process of public

engagement and participation.

<u>Improvement Strategy</u>

<u>Private Sector Inclusion</u>

As it has become somewhat of a common practice to contract members of the

private sector, such as the public facilitation specialists interviewed, to design

and/or carry out public participation processes which relate to planning, it was

important to discuss this practice during the focus groups. Participants were asked

if they were aware of any instances where this had taken place and how they felt

about this practice. While no one individual said that the inclusion of the private

sector would automatically fix the issues discussed above, a number of the

participants did respond by saying that they thought it could be beneficial to the

process for a variety of reasons. One participant commented that members of the

public may find participation to be more comfortable if they could talk to a third party as opposed to directly to planning staff. This participant went on to state: "If you feel like the planners are making the decision and you are trying to talk them out of their own decision, whether you agree with it or are against it, I think it would feel like a more comfortable conversation if it was with a third party" (resident, 2014). As well as acting as a catalyst for more comfortable conversation, some of the participants also said that a third party would be more likely to speak and report back with language that the public can easily understand. Additionally, participants shared that the third party could help planning staff better understand what members of the public were attempting to convey. One participant effectively summed up this discussion with the following two comments: "Depending on the language that the planners are using if they are speaking too technically then hopefully a mediator would be able to translate the technical language." And: "This is potentially a two way street because the mediator can hear things that they can relay to the professional staff and alert them to an issue that has come up several times that people may be reluctant to share with staff" (resident, 2014).

When asked what the role of the private sector third party should be one participant responded quite simply by saying:

> "What I'm really looking for is a more impartial party to chair the meeting who can control all groups in the room equally and without bias and their main responsibilities should be to ensure that everyone is heard and report back what was discussed" (resident, 2014).

While participants agreed that having an impartial third party would benefit the process they also recognized that the third party would likely bring their own set of

values and bias to the process. The participants subsequently shared their

recognition that, as stated above, the introduction of a third party from the private

sector would not create a perfect process.

Reflections on the Process

Reflections on the Interview Process

In addition to the data, which was previously discussed, the interviews also revealed lessons about process. The lessons learned primarily related to the relationship between the researcher and the research subject. As mentioned previously, I, being the researcher, knew a number of the interviewees prior to the initiation of this research project. I worked as a planning intern for the Municipality of Clarington approximately nine months prior to conducting the interviews with the planners from Clarington and as result worked with some of the interviewees in different capacities. While I was aware that this would certainly influence interactions during the interview process, the specifics of this influence only became clear as the interviews were conducted and subsequently analyzed. The main lesson learned was that a pre-existing relationship between a researcher and research subject has the potential to affect the type of questions that are asked during an interview and the level of comfort the researcher has asking certain kinds of questions. More specifically I discovered that some questions were easier to ask because of the previously established relationship while other questions were more difficult to approach for the same reason.

The types of questions that were more easily introduced and discussed were those that dealt with previous experiences. As I had some first hand understanding of the interviewees planning experience prior to the interview I was able to avoid some general questions and move right to specifics. I was also able to anticipate the types of questions that interviewees would respond well to and the types of

answers that they would give. This is not to say that I avoided questions or that I

was not surprised by some of the answers given but rather that I was generally

better prepared for certain answers and ready with follow up questions as a result

of the pre-existing relationship.

The types of questions that were more difficult to ask, due to the pre-

established relationships, were those that I believed might have made the

interviewees believe I was questioning their abilities as a professional planner or

call into question the interviewee's planning practices. These types of questions

include those that asked the planners about their own discomfort with public

participation. As noted, the aim of these questions was to better understand if

planners are at times uncomfortable interacting with members of the public and the

strategies that they use to overcome this discomfort. However, during the interview

process I quickly realized that a number of the planners interviewed believed

interactions with members of the public to be a key part of their job and an essential

skill requirement for a successful planner. For this reason I became uncomfortable

asking these types of questions for fear that they may seem disrespectful or

arrogant. Instead of avoiding these questions altogether I did my best to explain the

reasoning for the questions and made sure the interviewees knew that I did not

pretend to have all the answers or any quick fixes that might appear both utopian

and naïve.

Ultimately the key process lesson learned from the interviews was that prior

relationships between the researcher and research subjects can increase the

researchers comfort level in some instances but at the same time can also make the

researcher less comfortable when asking certain kinds of questions. In order to deal

with the discomfort that might be experienced it is important to ensure all questions

have an importance and purpose, know the importance and purpose, know how the

information gained is going to be used and finally be able to explain this to the

interviewees in an effective manner.

Reflections on the Focus Group Process

One of the primary objectives of this project was to better understand how

discomfort, experienced by members of the public and those facilitating the process,

could inhibit participation. For this reason it seems only appropriate to describe the

participation process chosen for this project as well as how discomfort was

experienced and dealt with during the focus group sessions. Firstly, it is important

to note that the focus group sessions went quite well and that there were no real

disagreements between any of the participants or between the participants and the

facilitator, being myself. This being said there were a few issues that arose prior to

and during the sessions, which are worth describing. These issues include the

facilitator's nervousness or discomfort prior to the sessions, the importance of

ensuring that everyone had a chance to speak and dealing with statements or ideas

that appeared to upset other participants. These three issues are further explained

below.

The first issue around discomfort that arose related to the facilitator of the

focus groups. Prior to the focus group sessions, especially the first one, I was quite

nervous about the kind of interactions that would take place. I was primarily

concerned that the participants might think the research questions and objectives were of little importance and that this would result in them becoming bored and upset that their time was being wasted. Although I never entirely overcame the discomfort brought on by these fears I did utilize a few strategies to help put myself at ease. The first strategy utilized was discussions with other people prior to the focus group sessions. I discussed the process in detail with my supervisor as well as some friends and family members. These discussions allowed me to properly structure my questions and discussion points and increased my confidence with my research objectives and questions. The second strategy utilized was an individual review of my research objectives. This strategy helped me to anticipate questions that might be asked and prepare answers that effectively explained why I was conducting this research and why I chose to include a focus group with members of the public as one of my methods. Again, this increased my confidence and helped me to feel more at ease leading up to and during the focus group sessions.

The second issue that arose and needed to be dealt with was ensuring that everyone had the opportunity to speak. As explained previously, both the interview subjects and focus group participants shared that when a few people attempt to dominate a participation process by shouting or loudly voicing their opinions it usually makes other participants uncomfortable. Interestingly this was not the case during the focus group sessions. Instead a few participants shared prior to the sessions that they may not have a lot to say because they didn't know a great deal about the topic. Hence, the issue was not quieting certain boisterous participants but rather encouraging some of the more quiet and cautious participants. Again,

two strategies were employed to help these members feel confident enough to share their opinions and concerns. First, as a few participants shared their concern that they would not have a lot to contribute in e-mails and phone calls prior to the process I was able to respond to these e-mails and phone calls and explain I was more interested with their individual experiences and opinions and that there was no requirement to be an expert on the matter. Secondly, through these preceding e-mail and phone conversations I was able to better understand why they were interested in participating and I was sure to include topical questions and discussion points that related to these interests. As a result I noticed that participants became more talkative when these points were brought up. In the end there were some participants who spoke quite a bit, some that only spoke a few times and others who were in between. However, based on the behavior of the participants during the sessions and the less formal conversations that took place immediately after the sessions it did not appear that anyone felt as though they could not speak when they wanted to or were made to feel uncomfortable by other participants' behaviour.

The final issue that arose was the presence of statements or ideas that appeared to make some participants uneasy. Although there were some differences of opinions during the two sessions there were only one or two statements made that appeared to actually make some of the participants uncomfortable. The lack of conflict among participants could in part be attributed to the homogeneity of the participants. It would be interesting to conduct the same process in an area with a more mixed community where participants would be more likely to have a greater

diversity of backgrounds. One statement that was made during one of the sessions provides an example of how conflict was avoided, likely due to the lack of diversity. When discussing customer service expectations the conversation shifted from strictly talking about planning and moved to a more general conversation with participants discussing customer service received from phone and internet companies. When one participant shared that they have trouble dealing with customer service representatives from a particular company because they often have trouble understanding the representatives, another participant responded by asking where the representatives were from and suggested that it is hard to understand the representatives from overseas. While it did not appear that this statement was made with malice it could be interpreted at the very least as being insensitive and if there were individuals participating who felt that this comment could be directed towards them a more severe conflict may have arose. Instead, this comment appeared to make other participants uncomfortable rather than visibly upset. As the conversation about a particular company's customer service did not relate to the research objectives and the comment appeared to make some participants uncomfortable I redirected the conversation back to service experienced during planning processes in Clarington. While the minimal disagreement and altogether lack of conflict experienced during the focus group sessions did make facilitation easier it also made me question why this was and subsequently has lead me to believe that it was at least in part due to the homogeneity of the group.

Conclusions

  As stated previously, participatory and inclusionary planning methods have become more broadly valued and utilized in recent years (Sorensen & Sagaris, 2010). This increase has grown, in part, from an increasingly active and conjunctively dissatisfied public citizenry. While it can be argued that this shift in methodologies has produced a more inclusionary and equitable planning process, there are still a number of obstacles to overcome. The data uncovered by this research project has shown that one such obstacle that still exists is discomfort with participation, experienced by members of the public as well as those that design and facilitate public processes. However, the data obtained, being the opinions and insights provided by the focus group participants and the interviewees, also shows that all the parties involved with this research desire to work together to overcome these discomforts and develop stronger relationships, more trust and ultimately a participatory planning process that allows all relevant parties to engage in a meaningful way.

  The toolkit that has produced in conjunction with this report will hopefully become one of many instruments that can be used by planners and members of the public alike, specifically within Clarington, to identify, challenge and begin to overcome some of the discomforts and fears that inhibit meaningful public participation. For this reason the toolkit has been distributed to all those who participated in this project. In addition it will be made available online for free for anyone who might be interested. This toolkit is not meant to be a definitive resource to be used in isolation of other strategies but rather one instrument to be

used in conjunction with other strategies, tools and types of knowledge to ultimately

improve the publics' ability to participate in a meaningful way and create stronger

relationships between the different parties involved in the planning process.

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Interviews

Clarington Planning Official 1: Interviewed at Clarington Municipal Offices on
    February 26, 2014

Clarington Planning Official 2: Interviewed at Clarington Municipal Offices on
    February 27, 2014

Clarington Planning Official 3: Interviewed at Clarington Municipal Offices on
    February 27, 2014

Clarington Planning Official 4: Interviewed at Clarington Municipal Offices on
   February 28, 2014

Clarington Planning Official 5: Interviewed at Clarington Municipal Offices on
   February 28, 2014

Clarington Planning Official 6: Interviewed at Clarington Municipal Offices on May
   16, 2014

Oakville Planning Official 1: Interviewed at Oakville Municipal Offices on May 13,
   2014

Swerhun Public Facilitation Specialist 1: Interviewed at Swerhun Offices on Feb 21,
   2014

Swerhun Public Facilitation Specialist 2: Interviewed at Swerhun Offices on May 1,
   2014

Focus Groups

Session 1: Bowmanville, Ontario, on April 15, 2014. Participants 1 – 12

Session 2: Bowmanville, Ontario, on April 23, 2014. Participants 1 – 14

Appendix A

Interview Questions for Professional Planners

Section 1: Introduction
- Short personal intro: How has work been, anything exciting happening, etc.
- Short introduction about my research and what I hope to accomplish/what data I hope to gather through my interviews.
- Allow participants to ask general questions about my research, if they have any.

Section 2: General Planning Experience
- Make note of their current job, which department they work for, gender and their speciality in planning

1. Can you tell me about your experience as a planner?
   a. Where have you worked throughout your career and what positions have you held?

2. Can you tell me how you make contact with or interact with members of the public in Clarington in relation to planning?
   a. On a day-to-day basis
   b. Through more formal public participation strategies

3. Are there any other public participation strategies used by the planning department?
   a. These can include strategies, which you are **not** directly involved with
   b. Are there any larger scale participation strategies, which have been used in the past, are currently being used or are being planned

4. What do you believe are the most significant problems with or barriers to meaningful public participation in planning?
   a. Who/What is to blame for these problems (ie. gov't policy, public citizens, planners, politicians, the OMB etc.)
   b. Where and when have you experienced these problems most often

Section 3: Comfort & Discomfort
5. What forms of public participation do you find to be the most comfortable or easiest to facilitate?
   a. From working the planning counter to running multiple day design charrettes
   b. Why do you find these forms of participation to be the most comfortable or easiest

6. Have you noticed that members of the public react differently to different forms of public enagement?

   a. Do they seem more comfortable with certain types and less comfortable with others

   b. If so, can you give an example

 7. Do you ever find yourself feeling uncomfortable in situations where you are interacting with members of the public?

   a. If so, what types of situations or issues make you uneasy/uncomfortable

 8. Can you tell me a specific example of a time where you felt particularly uncomfortable?

   • *Ensure I'm at a point where they feel comfortable enough to discuss this and that they haven't already answered this in the previous question*

   a. What was the situation, what specifically made you feel uncomfortable and how did you deal with the situation

Section 4: Overcoming Discomfort

 9. When/If you have found yourself to be uncomfortable when interacting with members of the public what strategies or resources have you used to overcome this discomfort?

   • Provide examples: spoke with someone with more experience, took a deep breath, planned responses ahead of time, etc.

 10. Have past uncomfortable situations caused you to change how you interact with members of the public? If so, please explain what you have changed and why.

   • Provide examples: practiced skills, stopped doing a certain kind of work, brought in others to help, etc.

Section 5: Other Strategies

 11. Are there any other engagement strategies that you are aware of, even if you haven't personally participated in them, that you believe might make uncomfortable situations more comfortable? If so, please describe these.

Section 6: Closing & Thank You (Paraphrase)

At this point I don't have any further questions. Do you have any questions for me? Thank you very much for your time and insights. The information you have shared with me will help greatly with my research.

If you have any questions or comments in the future feel free to contact me by e-mail or phone. I will let you know when I have finished and would be more than happy to provide you with a copy of my work.

Interview Key/Legend

 • Bullet Points = notes to myself

 1. Numbers = Formal questions to be asked

 a. Letters = probes/follow up questions

Focus Group Discussion Questions/Topics

Session #1

1. Level of Participation:
    Discuss with participants whether or not they have participated public participation events that deal with planning in Clarington.
    Discuss how often they choose to participate. Never, one time, occasionally or on a regular basis.

2. Types of Participation:
    Discuss with participants how they participate, the different types or formats of events that they have participated in.
    Encourage participants to list and describe the different types of events they have been involved with. Also how they participated, ie. verbal comments, written comments, simply listened and observed, filled out a survey/questionnaire, etc.

3. Level of satisfaction:
    Discuss with participants how satisfied they were with their past experiences.
    Encourage participants to discuss what they thought was good about their experience, what wasn't good and how they think it could have been improved.

4. Level of comfort:
    Discuss how comfortable participants were during their experience, allowing participants to explain what they were comfortable or not comfortable sharing during their experience.
    Ask participants whether or not they felt comfortable before they attended the event. If participants were feeling **uncomfortable** prior to the event see if they can describe why. If participants were **comfortable** prior to the event but became uncomfortable during see if they can identify what made them uncomfortable. Allow participants to discuss different experiences that made them uncomfortable.
    For those participants that identified being uncomfortable discuss how they responded to this discomfort. If they felt they overcame their discomfort how did they do this? If they felt that they were not able to overcome their discomfort what did they do or not do as a result?
    Discuss how participant's previous experience(s) has shaped how they feel about participating in the future.

Session # 2

5. Possible solutions to discomfort:
    Discuss with participants what an ideal public participation even might look like.

Based on participants answers have a discussion breaking down each component to bring out details about their ideal events or strategies.

6. Wrap-up and thank you

Discuss previous topics with participants to ensure that I have properly understood what participants were saying and clarify and misunderstandings.

Allow participants to add anything that they feel should be included.

Thank all participants for their involvement and ensure that they know how valuable the information they have provided is and will be to my research. Inform participants what the final product should look like and where it will be accessible. Let participants know that the final product can be e-mailed out to them if they wish.

PLANNING to PARTICIPATE

Exploring Discomfort in Participation

Matthew Wheatley

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Introduction

Planning methods designed to engage and encourage the meaningful participation of public individuals and groups have become more broadly valued and utilized in recent years. This has grown, in part, from an increasingly dissatisfied and civically aware public (Sorensen & Sagaris, 2010). As well as an increasing demand from public citizens, planning theorists and practitioners have highlighted the benefits of including public citizens in the planning process. Resulting from this shift, several private organizations and government bodies are continuing to develop new and exciting strategies to more effectively engage with the public. The aim of this report is to highlight some of the barriers to public engagement and begin to provide a better understanding how planners can work together with members of the public to begin to overcome these barriers. This report primarily focuses on the barrier of discomfort, experienced by planners, facilitators and public participants. In order to achieve these objectives different forms of research were carried out including a number of interviews with municipal planners and public facilitation consultants as well as a two-part focus group with residents from Clarington, Ontario.

Benefits of Public Participation in Planning

Prior to investigating and explaining how discomfort can inhibit public participation it is crucial to first provide some justification for public participation. The list provided below is by no means exhaustive and is not meant to provide all the benefits of public participation. Rather, it is meant to provide a variety of benefits, which are relatively easily understood and accepted in order to further justify efforts to improve public participation within the planning process. These include:

1. Promotes democracy;

2. Increases inclusion of all people;

3. Helps to create stronger community plans;

4. Increases awareness of public preference;

5. Increases the incorporation of local knowledge;

6. Legitimizes public decisions as complying with legal requirements; and

7. Allows for a shared understanding of major and minor issues.

Community engagement and participation is clearly an effective tool in the production and implementation of community plans. However, it would be naïve and inaccurate to argue that there are no drawbacks or pitfalls to including citizens in the exercise of community planning. Four drawbacks, which are generally associated with public participation include:

1. Increased Costs;

2. Time Delay;

3. Self-interest; and

4. Increased controversy among groups rather than consensus.

While planners and politicians certainly should not ignore these practical issues they also should not use them to create justification to exclude public citizens from the planning process. Instead planners and politicians should become acutely aware of these issues and seek to develop strategies that mitigate them, therefore allowing citizens to be included in a meaningful and productive manner.

Discomfort with Participation

While there are many barriers to meaningful public participation in planning, this report primarily focuses on the barrier of discomfort. As will be explained throughout this report, discomfort experienced by planners, facilitators and participants from the general public, has the potential to discourage all three of these groups from actively engaging with one another and as a result can weaken the overall planning process. The following section explains five different types of discomfort that can inhibit meaningful participation, as reported by the interviewees and focus group participants.

1. **<u>Discomfort with Conflict</u>**

As all planning issues affect people's day-to-day lives it is understandable that differing opinions can cause disagreements and conflict to arise during public processes. When conflict occurs it can cause individuals participating as well as those facilitating the meeting to become uncomfortable. All interviewees agreed that attempting to work through conflict in a productive manner is one of their key roles when facilitating a public process.

<u>How conflict can prevent participation</u>

- Members of the public often become uncomfortable and refrain from actively participating when they feel that their opinions differ from the opinions held by other participants, especially when they feel they hold the minority opinion.

- Conflict can also prevent members of the public from participating if they have reason to believe that the conflict will not stay at the meeting. People who participate often live near each other and as a result may interact with one another outside of the facilitated public process. Therefore the conflict, which may arise between participants at a public meeting may continue long after the meeting is over. In an attempt to avoid this ongoing conflict participants may choose not to voice their opinion or participate.

- Sometimes one person or a small group of individuals can make everyone else uncomfortable by voicing their opinion loudly or forcefully above all others. These individuals are often referred to as "the loudest person/people in the room". This forceful strategy often causes others to refrain from actively participating because they are uncomfortable with the tone of the process and may be afraid of contradicting the forceful parties for fear of being judged and publically ridiculed.

- As noted by a number of the participants, not all conflict is detrimental to participation. Rather, well-mediated conflict can have the positive affect of introducing new opinions and concerns that might otherwise not have been considered if disagreements didn't occur.

2. **Knowledge Insecurity**

Different people are equipped with different levels and different kinds of knowledge. When individuals feel that they do not fully understand an issue or

believe they do not have the right background to understand an issue they may be uncomfortable sharing their opinion.

<u>How knowledge insecurity can prevent participation</u>

- The highly technical nature of many planning issues can overwhelm participants and make them feel as though their opinion is not informed enough to share. According to some of the planners interviewed members of the public often discredit themselves by saying things such as "I am just a home owner" or I don't really know a lot about this but." prior to sharing their opinion due to their knowledge insecurity.

- When members of the public do not share their ideas and opinions because they believe they don't have the right kind of knowledge or expertise a great deal of important information can be left out. The information that is often absent when members of the public do not participate is local knowledge; information that those running the planning process may not be aware of because they do not live in the immediate area being affected.

3. **Loss of Control**

Including members of the public in the planning process means sharing information with them, discussing their concerns, asking them for their opinions and then using these opinions in some way that shows the public their concerns were considered and valued. This in turn causes the planners, politicians and other authorities to share some of the power and control that they hold. Loosing control of a public process can make those who are meant to be running or facilitating the process uncomfortable.

<u>How loss of control can prevent participation</u>

- When those who are meant to be in charge are nervous that they may not be able to control the process or outcomes they may in turn be reluctant to use methods that encourage high levels of participation. Those in charge may be nervous that increased participation may result in others taking over the process.

- Those in charge often want to maintain control of a public process because they want the process to continue in a productive manner. They may be nervous that if they lose control then the process will become more disruptive than productive and little will be accomplished.

- Some of the other planners agreed that the thought of loosing control of the public process has made them uncomfortable in the past but through experience they have become better at working with the public to ensure the process continues in a productive manner. In terms of loosing control of the outcome most of the planners agreed that they do not have ultimate control over this and that they are more concerned with making accurate recommendations based on all the information provided to them.

4. **<u>Fear of Change</u>**

Several of the planners shared that one of the more common obstacles to meaningful public participation is a fear of or dislike for change. They indicated that members of the public are most concerned with changes that may directly affect their individual property or neighbourhood.

How a fear of change can prevent meaningful participation

- When members of the public learn of a planning initiative that may result in a change to their property or neighbourhood they may choose not to participate in the process because they do not want to be seen as accepting or encouraging any change to take place.

- Alternatively a fear of change can greatly increase public participation. Those who do not want to see any change may come out with great enthusiasm to oppose any change.

- As noted by several of the interviewees, it can be difficult to discuss change and even more difficult to obtain support for it. However, the interviewees added that as change is inevitable it is not something that can ignored but rather must be discussed openly and on a regular basis.

5. **Fear of being ignored**

A number of the focus group participants indicated that one of the main reasons they are reluctant to participate is they feel that no one is really listening to them or if they are heard that their opinions and concerns don't actually have an affect on the outcome of the process.

How a fear of being ignored can prevent participation

- Several of the individuals who participated in the focus groups stated that they believe many of the decisions have already been made even before they are asked to participate in the process. This belief resulted in many of them feeling that participation is often a waste of their time and the public process is just put in place to inform them rather than listen to their concerns.

- Additionally, some of the participants said that even when the decisions are still open for comment and debate they feel as though they are not given adequate time to accurately share their concerns. Again this can reduce willingness to participate because members of the public may feel that they won't be able to explain themselves fully, reducing the likelihood that those making recommendations and decisions will understand what they do want and do not want to occur.

Other Barriers to Participation

1. **Lack of Trust**

    Planners deal with the issue of trust on a regular basis. Planners indicated that they often feel as though members of the public do not trust them. They identified this as a significant barrier to meaningful participation.

    How a lack of trust can prevent participation

    *   When members of the public do not trust the planning staff or those facilitating a public process they are much less likely to share their honest opinion.

    *   Additionally, if members of the public don't believe that the facilitators or planners are working together with them or that they have ulterior motives then they are less likely to want to work with the planner or facilitator. As a result it is unlikely that meaningful participation will be achieved and that the process is less likely to produce positive outcomes.

2. **A Lack of Understanding**

    As noted previously, many planning issues, which involve a public process, are often quite technical in nature and require one to analyze large volumes of information to fully understand both the content and the process. Therefore unless enough time is spent on the education component of the public process it is likely that members of the public will not fully understand all the relevant issues.

How a lack of understanding can prevent participation

- Overwhelming amounts of information from a variety of both reliable and unreliable sources is one of the main reasons for a lack of understanding. Several of the interviewees shared that a big part of the public process is working with members of the public to ensure that they are reviewing only accurate information.

- A lack of understanding of the overall process can also result in problems with participation. Again, several of the planners commented that members of the public either don't know that they can or choose not to speak with them in order to gain more information about the relevant planning issues.

3. **Participation Fatigue**

   Holding too many events or meetings during a public process can lead to what several of the interviewees refereed to as participation fatigue. As an already busy public is asked to attend event after event or is continuously asked for their thoughts on what appear to be redundant topics participants begin to grow tired and as a result often become disinterested in the process.

How participation fatigue can prevent participation

- One planner suggested that fatigued participants are less likely to spend the time and energy required to contribute well-informed and meaningful feedback.

- Participation fatigue brought on by a high volume of what appear to be redundant events can also prevent meaningful participation because the

public may see these processes as a strategy intent on overwhelming the public rather than a way of obtaining authentic feedback.

4. **Lack of Access to Information**

In terms of access to information the majority of participants agreed that most information is available to the public in some form. However, they also agreed that while this information can theoretically be accessed it is often very difficult to do so. One participant noted problems with access to information are often increased as a result of fragmented information sources.

How a lack of access to information can prevent participation

- As providing an informed opinion requires access to relevant and reliable information it is reasonable to argue that this information should be readily accessible to the public. When information is absent or difficult to access then it is unlikely that members of the public will be able to participate in a meaningful way.

- Additionally, fragmented information can make it difficult for individuals to have a proper understanding of the relevant issues. Some of the focus group participants shared that it can be very difficult to properly understand all of the issues pertaining to different planning projects when relevant information is held by different municipal departments or even worse by different levels of government. Without someone guiding members of the public through the process it can be easy to miss important pieces of information.

5. **<u>Incomplete Reporting Back</u>**

The majority of focus group participants agreed that they would like to see changes to the methods used to report back how decisions have been made and how public input has been used in terms of making these decisions. There was a shared desire among all the focus group participants to feel that their opinions had been heard, considered, valued and had some impact on the final decisions.

<u>How incomplete reporting back can prevent participation</u>

- Several of the participants commented that they become very frustrated when they feel as though their feedback had no bearing on the decision making process and as a result are less likely to participate in the future.

- Ultimately members of the public are going to have a better understanding of how their opinions and comments were considered if they are shown in plain language. Otherwise unless the outcome is exactly what they wanted they will likely feel that they were at least in part overlooked and, as the participants indicated previously, this will reduce their desire to participate in the future.

Strategies and Tools

In addition to the Areas of Discomfort and the Other Barriers to Public Participation identified the interviewees and the focus group participants also shared different strategies they believed could increase meaningful participation and ultimately improve the process of public engagement and participation as it relates to the field of planning. The strategies that were shared include:

1. Proactive Engagement;

2. Ongoing Public Education;

3. Transparent Reporting Back; and

4. Inclusion of a Third Party Facilitator

The following section describes the strategies suggested as well as associated practical tools that may aid in implementation of the strategies.

1. **Proactive Engagement**

A number of the planners interviewed shared that meaningful participation requires ongoing conversations between members of the public and planners. One planner in particular shared that in their experience talking with members of the public regularly and on a continuous basis has helped both parties become more comfortable with one another as well as the overall process. Additionally, several of the interviewees identified proactive engagement, on their part, as an important first step in the development of positive relationships between them and members of the public. The planners described proactive engagement as strategies that involve planners taking the engagement process to the public rather than having the public come to the process.

Associated Tool

Planners in Public Spaces (PIPS)

Description

Planners in Public Spaces is an outreach initiative, which was started by the City of Toronto in the summer of 2013. This strategy follows a fairly simple format of placing information booths, staffed by city planners, at different events throughout the city of Toronto. The City has stated that the primary objective of the PIPS initiative is to help residents learn about general planning issues, the role of City planners and how they can get involved in planning their city (City of Toronto, 2013).

Appropriateness

Although it is not explicitly listed as one of the primary objectives of the initiative, Planners in Public Spaces has great potential to initiate ongoing relationships between members of the public and planners that otherwise may not have existed. Firstly, this proactive strategy puts planners and planning information in locations where members of the public converge for a myriad of reasons, thus giving planners an opportunity to meet members of the public that may not attend a typical public meeting. Secondly, unlike more typical public processes, which generally focus on one development application or issue, PIPS allows planners and members of the public to talk about the planning process generally and informally. These informal conversations are less likely to be contentious and therefore have greater potential to begin positive relationships between the two parties. Now we just need to get developers involved!

Barriers this tool may help to overcome
- Fear of Conflict
- Knowledge Insecurity
- Loss of Control
- Lack of Access to Information
- Fear of Change
- Lack of Understanding

Useful Links/Resources

Planners in Public Spaces: City of Toronto (Website)
https://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=0e48ce52bffe1410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD

Planners in Public Spaces: City Planning (Website)
http://wx.toronto.ca/inter/it/newsrel.nsf/11476e3d3711f56e85256616006b891f/25ec73595052613685257bc1004a8acb?OpenDocument

Own Your City: Official Blog of the Chief Planner of the City of Toronto (Website)
http://ownyourcity.ca/2013/08/the-convergence-that-created-pips/

2. <u>Ongoing Public Education</u>

A number of the planners interviewed identified a lack of understanding of both the issues being discussed and the overall process as a key barrier to meaningful participation. The planners and facilitation specialists agreed that ongoing public education is essential in order to mitigate misunderstandings and equip members of the public with the knowledge required to participate in a meaningful way. One planner in particular stated: "If we think of public engagement as education then we can never over engage" (interviewed source, 2014).

The interviewees went on to explain two specific reasons why public education is such an important part of the overall public participation process. Firstly, by helping members of the public better understand background information members

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they are better able to analyze relevant issues and subsequently more likely to provide informed feedback. Secondly, by discussing the process at the onset, specifically what has already been decided, what is still being decided and specifically how public input will be used, helps to manage expectations and, as a result, mitigate disappointment with the process.

Associated Tool(s)

Identifying the Open and Closed Doors & Framing the Narrative

Public education sessions can be done in a variety of ways including but not limited to large-scale public information sessions, online information sites or smaller workshops with expert speakers. No matter what format is utilized there are two specific strategies that can help to improve the education process and subsequently help improve the overall participation process. These strategies, which have been created by a Toronto based public consultation and community engagement firm known as Swerhun in *Discuss Decide Do*, include "Identifying the Open and Closed Doors" and "Framing the Narrative" (Swerhun, 2012).

Identifying the Open and Closed Doors

This is a strategy that involves a discussion and explanation of the decisions that have already been made (closed doors) and the decisions that are yet to be made (open doors). Prior to gathering public input members of the public are made aware of which decisions they will have influence over, which decisions they will not and the reasons why.

Appropriateness

Several of the focus group participants commented that they feel as though most of the decisions have already been made prior to their involvement and they are wasting their time by participating. Telling participants which decisions have been made and which are still open for discussion can help members of the public understand how they can influence certain outcomes and better understand the role that public input will play in the overall process. This in turn can help to manage expectations from the outset of a project and increase public trust. Swerhun argues, "The more transparent you are about what is open for influence and what is not, the easier it is for people to understand their role and what they can contribute. This builds participant trust because it is clear from the beginning what is on the table for discussion, what isn't and the reasons why" (p. 12, 2012).

Barriers this tool may help to overcome
- Fear of Conflict
- Participation Fatigue
- Fear of Not Being Listened To

Framing the Narrative

This is a strategy that allows planners and/or facilitators to organize relevant information into manageable topics, which can help participants more easily understand an entire project. Swerhun explains, "Framing is about the language you choose to use to describe your project. It fits issues within the context of a storyline or narrative that participants can relate to" (Swerhun, p. 14, 2012).

Appropriateness

Many planning projects that involve a public process are quite complicated because they involve a variety of competing yet interconnected issues. This in turn can overwhelm even the most expert planner, never mind members of the public that may have little background knowledge of the issues. By breaking down the different issues into more manageable sections all parties involved can better understand each issue on its own and how it relates to the overall project. Swerhun explains,

> "A strongly-framed narrative helps organize the content of a discussion. It makes what could be overwhelming information easily understandable by presenting content around a small number of topics that communicate what a project is about and the thinking that needs to happen to move the project forward" (p. 14, 2012).

Ultimately, this is an important part of any public education process because it can help all parties involved to more thoroughly understand the relevant issues and therefore can improve the public's contribution with well informed comments and opinions.

Barriers this tool may help to overcome
- Knowledge Insecurity
- Lack of Understanding
- Lack of Trust

Useful Links/Resources

Swerhun: Discuss Decide Do (Website)
http://www.swerhun.com

Discuss Decide Do: The value of engagement as a decision support tool (Book)
By Nicole Swerhun with Vanessa Avruskin

3. <u>Transparent Reporting Back</u>

As noted previously many of the focus group participants indicated that they have been disappointed with the methods used to report back to the public how their input was used in the decision making process. The participants shared that they would like to see, in plain language, the input that was received, and how this input was used in conjunction with other information to make the final decisions.

<u>Associated Tool</u>

<u>Write a Report That Supports Decision Making</u>

Description

A step-by-step process can be used to organize information that was received during any process meant to gather public input. This process, designed by Swerhun, is meant to be helpful in creating a report that shows participants that their input was recorded and considered and helps decision makers understand what members of the public said during the process.

> **Step 1:** Take detailed raw notes of everything that's said during the meeting (including the proponents' contribution to the meeting, especially their responses to questions).
>
> **Step 2:** After the meeting, organize the raw notes.
>
> **Step 3:** Translate the point-form notes into full sentences that reflect the feedback received.

Step 4: Identify the three to five most relevant messages from the meeting notes. These act as an executive summary of the meeting.

Step 5: Combine the pieces of the report.

Step 6: Include relevant attachments at the back of the report.

Step 7: Distribute the report with a brief cover note to meeting participants for review. Finalize the report based on any edits received.

A much more detailed description of this process can be found in the book *Discuss Decide Do: The value of engagement as a decision support tool* (Swerhun, 2012).

Appropriateness

This process can be quite useful in writing a report that reflects the views of members of the public, planners and decision makers. As members of the public will be able to see a copy of the report before it is finalized they will be able to review all comments that were made and as a result better understand the viewpoints of other people who participated. They will also be able to see that their comments were recorded and considered. Planners will be able to see all the public comments that were made in an organized format, which can help them with their recommendations. Finally decision makers will be able to see the public input that was received and hopefully how it impacted the final recommendations.

Barriers this tool may help to overcome
- Lack of Trust
- Lack of Understanding
- Fear of Not Being Listened To
- Incomplete Reporting Back

Useful Links/Resources

Swerhun: Discuss Decide Do (Website)

Discuss Decide Do: The value of engagement as a decision support tool (Book)
By Nicole Swerhun with Vanessa Avruskin

4. <u>Inclusion of Third Party Facilitators</u>

In recent years it has become more common to include a third party facilitator to aid in public engagement and facilitation processes. This practice generally involves a level of government hiring a third party, often from the private sector, to aid in the design and facilitation of public participation events.   When this occurs members of the planning department generally still play an active role but are less likely to run the process. The organization that is hired to facilitate the public process will take on a variety of roles depending on the specific project but generally they will act as a moderator between members of the public, planning staff and any other parties involved. In addition to facilitating the public process the contracted organization is generally responsible for creating a report, describing how the process was run and any and all feedback received.

Appropriateness

Several of the focus group participants commented that the inclusion of a third party facilitator could be beneficial and shared a number of ways this strategy could improve the public participation process. One participant commented that members of the public may find participation to be more comfortable if they could talk to a third party as opposed to directly to planning staff. As well as acting as a

catalyst for more comfortable conversation, some of the participants also said that a third party would be more likely to speak and report back with language that the public can easily understand. Additionally, participants shared that the third party could help planning staff better understand what members of the public were attempting to convey. Finally participants shared that a outside third party would be less likely to have a predetermined desired outcome and that they would be more focused on simply facilitating the process.

While participants agreed that having an impartial third party would benefit the process they also recognized that the third party would likely bring their own set of values and bias to the process. The participants subsequently shared their recognition that the introduction of a third party from the private sector would not create a perfect process.

Barriers this tool may help to overcome
- Fear of Conflict
- Lack of Understanding
- Lack of Trust
- Lack of Access to Information
- Fear of Not Being Listened To

Final Thoughts

As stated previously, participatory and inclusionary planning methods have become more broadly valued and utilized in recent years (Sorensen & Sagaris, 2010). This increase has grown, in part, from an increasingly active and conjunctively dissatisfied public citizenry. While it can be argued that this shift in methodologies has produced a more inclusionary and equitable planning process, there are still a number of obstacles to overcome. The data uncovered by this research project has shown that one such obstacle that still exists is discomfort with participation, experienced by members of the public as well as those that design and facilitate public processes. However, the data obtained, being the opinions and insights provided by the focus group participants and the interviewees, also shows that all the parties involved with this research desire to work together to overcome these discomforts and develop stronger relationships, more trust and ultimately a participatory planning process that allows all relevant parties to engage in a meaningful way.

This toolkit will hopefully become one of many instruments that can be used by planners and members of the public alike, specifically within Clarington, to identify, challenge and begin to overcome some of the discomforts and fears that inhibit meaningful public participation. For this reason the toolkit has been distributed to all those who participated in this project. In addition it will be made available online for free for anyone who might be interested. This toolkit is not meant to be a definitive resource to be used in isolation of other strategies but rather one instrument to be used in conjunction with other strategies, tools and

types of knowledge to ultimately improve the publics' ability to participate in a

meaningful way and create stronger relationships between the different parties

involved in the planning process.