

CITY OF PORT TOWNSEND'S
Application For:

THE 1993 AWC MUNICIPAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

◆ SPECIAL AWARD FOR GROWTH MANAGEMENT ◆

"Innovative Public Involvement Techniques"



PORT TOWNSEND 2020: Getting Together

"The future of Port Townsend depends on the actions and plans of its citizens today. It is important, therefore, to understand what Port Townsend citizens want their city to be like in 20 years and beyond, what they want to preserve, and what they want to change."

(from Port Townsend Draft Community Direction Statement)

City of Port Townsend
Population: Approximately 7500

PORT TOWNSEND 2020: *Getting Together*

Leadership is best when people say, "we did it ourselves."

-Lao Tse

What It Is

Port Townsend 2020: Getting Together project is an innovative public involvement tool on how one city has attempted to revive the endangered art of public discourse within the living rooms of its citizens without the interference of government. Citizens around the city have been coming to "coffee hours" in their friends and neighbors homes to discuss issues related to growth, change and the future of their community.

Faced with declining attendance at City Council and growth management meetings the city has sought innovative ways to get people to come together and discuss important community issues. According to Mayor John Clise, "What we have found is people are hungry to sit down and talk in informal settings -- we have to find ways to do things on a small scale."

What the city has discovered, through the Port Townsend 2020 process is that when the coffee's strong, the chemistry's right, and Port Townsend citizens are involved, one person's ideas and dreams inspire another's, and another's which can lead to people once again becoming involved in community affairs.

Why It Is Needed

The need for more abundant and more effective communication between citizens and city government in Port Townsend was recognized by Mayor John Clise as he was elected in November, 1991. He and City staff wanted to develop a non-traditional way to encourage citizens to talk with each other, and with City officials and decision-makers about how they want Port Townsend to be in the future. The Port Townsend 2020: *Getting Together* project was intended to fulfill this goal, as well as enhance the citizen participation process required under the Growth Management Act.

* } One of the primary objectives of the PT 2020 process was to encourage people whom normally do not participate in city governance issues. By facilitating an informal, open process, at neighbor's homes throughout the city, without direct city staff or elected official participation, it was hoped the community would realize an innovative yet effective public involvement technique to foster community-wide discussion on important city issues as well as gain specific responses from a wide spectrum of the community.

How It Works

Over 80 citizens volunteered to host coffee hours. Between March and May, 1993, over 1400 hours of citizen discussion took place in living rooms throughout town about the present and future conditions of the city. Responding to seven questions, approximately 560 citizens expressed their values, concerns, and challenges about Port Townsend, their home. High school and junior high school students held coffee hours during regular class time. Approximately 60 elementary and intermediate school children wrote essays and made cardboard models of the town which expressed their vision of Port Townsend in the year 2020. The results of the coffee hour discussions will be used to develop the framework for future city planning and policy decisions.

Two public workshops have been held since the coffee hour results have been compiled. The workshops (May 11, and May 25) were intended to open broad discussion about the process, the coffee hour results, the potential use of the results, and whether to continue to use the coffee hour process as a regular method of public participation. The group also discussed a DRAFT Community Direction Statement derived from the results, and how it might be used. Approximately 50 citizens, consisting of mostly coffee hour hosts and guests, attended each of these workshops. It should be noted that many of the citizens at these workshops were not regularly involved in city activities. They expressed their general agreement with the results, and great satisfaction with the coffee hour process. Everyone felt an eagerness to continue to use the process to gather citizen input on important city issues and decisions.

What Its Costs

The payback of the coffee hour approach is stimulating! That is, overall costs to the city were minimal. Supplies to develop the materials for hosts to use during their coffee hours were approximately \$500. An additional \$750 was spent to mail host packets and postcards hosts mailed to invitees. Additional city resources of one full-time city planner for about 4-5 weeks (approximately 200 hours) was needed to prepare packets, work with the media, answer host questions, attend public meetings, and tabulate information generated by the coffee hours.

How It Benefits The Community

Perhaps the most important benefit that the coffee hours do is enrich and elevate the level of discussion among their participants, and, by extension, in the community as a whole. Similarly, out of this process new attempts will continue to develop new etiquette for participation that will invite a deeper sharing of ideas, greater community knowledge of city issues, and help to resolve the polarization of the community over growth issues.

In addition to the benefits of facilitating discussion about important city issues and concerns, there was a strong desire to ensure that the results would be used by City officials and staff. At the May 25, 1993 follow-up workshop, a "Citizen Forum Steering Committee" was

established with volunteers at the meeting. Their charge is to take-over the facilitation of this process and to track the use of the original results. This will include deciding how and when coffee hours will be held, what topics will be discussed, and how the results will be compiled and used. They are also charged with ensuring that broad and diverse representation is achieved.

The City staff will provide assistance with topic research, mailings, advertising and other organizational details. But, generally, the Steering Committee will work without City staff representation, with their aim to be a citizen-driven effort. As we develop our comprehensive plan, the city will use the information in the coffee hour results to guide the goals and policies in the plan. City officials will use the final results as guidance in decisions in the future.

In summary, this process has benefitted the community greatly by bringing people together in a non-confrontational atmosphere to discuss city issues important to all residents of Port Townsend. Moreover, the getting-together process has been a first step in achieving the Mayor's commitment to improve communications between citizens and city government, and between different polarized groups in the city. The process has proven that citizens want to work together to solve problems and achieve mutual goals in creative ways. This process has empowered citizens to come forward and make their voice heard, get involved in growth management planning activities and to proactively help chart the future direction of their community.