FOREWORD

By Alexander Garvin, former vice president for planning, design, and development for the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING

At long last we have a great book on public participation in the planning process. *Designing Public Consensus* presents examples of the interaction among architects, planners, landscape architects, engineers, and the public. More important, Barbara Faga presents situations when that interaction has worked, when it has not, and why. She is able to extract from what she has dubbed "civic theater," practical recommendations for professionals who practice in a democracy that requires such interaction.

Designing Public Consensus is as much about the role of professionals as it is about the politics of planning. Too many analysts ignore the professionals and concentrate instead on local politics. Barbara Faga tells the story from the perspective of the professional interacting with the public in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Youngstown, Ohio, and even a low-income squatter community in Brazil. In doing so she goes beyond local politics to reveal the planning process in our democratic society as it exists today

What the Public Expects

In 1968, I attended a meeting with about 100 residents of the Bushwick section of Brooklyn, New York, which at that time was a depressed, lower-income neighborhood that had been largely neglected by public

officials. A "professional planner" taped an enormous sheet of paper across one end of the room. Using a Magic Marker he listed numbers on one side of the page. Then he asked: "What do you want in Bushwick?" One by one he filled in desires listed by some of the people in the room. Suddenly, a very angry welfare mother took the floor. "We don't need a wish list," she screamed. "We want things to happen, but we don't know what is realistic. You're the professional! You should be telling us what the alternatives are, how they can be paid for, and what you recommend. Then *we'll decide*." From that moment, I understood the difference between a serious public process and a charade.

In the 1960s, planners focused on the demand for a role in decision making by poor city residents opposing government projects. They paid little attention to suburban communities, where residents did not like what was being built. Since that time residents in rich and poor neighborhoods, urban and suburban locations, historic and ordinary places, and, in fact, in communities everywhere have been given a role in determining their future. As Barbara Faga points out in telling the story of Disney's America, there is even a demand for participation in making decisions for areas without a resident community.

Participation often begins with opposition to a proposed development. Some opposition is of the usual "not-in-my-backyard" variety; some is an attempt to keep things as they are. During the middle of the twentieth century, these demands were a reaction to decades of secret agreements, secretly arrived at. In part, this was the legacy of government procedures during the 1950s and 1960s. In those days high-handed redevelopment officials, like Robert Moses in New York City, obtained legislative approval for uprooting entire neighborhoods before residents were aware of what was happening.

In response to community resistance, the Eisenhower Administration altered the urban renewal program to require "citizen advisory committees." The Johnson Administration went further. Its Model Cities Program called for "widespread participation," and its poverty program required "maximum feasible participation." More recently, opposition has reflected unhappiness with secondary effects of private real estate development or government action. But, whatever the reason for opposition, it quickly grows into demands for transparency, objectivity, open competition for government contracts, and participation in the decision-making process.

Barbara Faga presents the keys to transparency in the fascinating sidebar of Chapter 5. There is no guarantee of transparency, however, even when residents "participate" in the decision-making process. A good example is the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC), established by the mayor and governor of New York to guide

rebuilding after the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. The LMDC established nine Advisory Councils in early 2002. In the haste to restore basic services to lower Manhattan, and in response to the heat of demands from victims' families, none of these committees were informed of the rights and obligations of the Port Authority, which owned most of the site of the World Trade Center; the terms of its leases with Westfield America (retail), Host Marriott (hotel), the U.S. Customs House, or the Silverstein Organization (offices); the obligations to provide for electric lines, telephone cables, or city traffic; or the problems of operating PATH commuter rail service at the site. Nor was there any accounting of the sources and uses of funds. To this day there is no single place one can find out precisely how billions of dollars in insurance proceeds or $20 billion in federal assistance were allocated, or where, in fact, the money went. Only in 2005, nearly four years after the terrorist attack, has the problem of security become part of the public dialogue. Transparency did reign for one brief period after public displeasure with six initial redevelopment schemes. Once Studio Libeskind was designated the site's master planner, people breathed a sigh of relief. It seemed no longer necessary to shine a spotlight on the reconstruction of the World Trade Center. Thereafter, the planning process reverted to the usual suspects working behind closed doors.

Participation requires an objective presentation of the facts. The earliest and simplest government response to the demand for objectivity has been to seek outside professional expertise. The Urban Land Institute (ULI), a 25,000-member, nonprofit research and education organization representing a wide range of real estate development professionals in and out of government, is one of many organizations providing analysis and recommendations that are independent of local political and business interests. ULI began offering its services for a fee, 11 years after it was founded in 1936. The American Institute of Architects, the American Planning Association, and numerous university design workshops provide similar assistance to communities.

The most important source of objective information about major projects results from legislation. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 requires an examination of the impact of actions by federal agencies or federally financed programs on landmarks and historic districts, listed in the National Register. The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 at a minimum requires a "detailed statement" examining the environmental impact of proposed action, the alternatives to that action, and adverse environmental effects that cannot be avoided. Most states followed suit with local environmental impact legislation.

Communities also demand a say in awarding government contracts. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, political machines,

dependent for votes on neighborhood residents, often controlled public construction. Whether for good or ill, they rarely selected designs that would not please their supporters. Those machines have atrophied, as have the reformers, who thought that the best way to avoid the influence peddling and corruption of political machines was to turn over the decision-making process to expert professionals.

In many states, government officials, who once were able to steer work to their supporters, are now required to select professionals on the basis of an open public process. High-fashion designers, who once dazzled clients with their brilliant solutions, must submit to local review. Even engineers, who took pride in devising the most elegant, technically correct solution, must seek community input.

Outside experts, no matter how qualified, are no longer sufficient to prevent opposition. Even when faced with reports from independent experts or voluminous "objective" studies of environmental impact, community groups still come out in huge numbers to testify at public hearings, stage demonstrations, threaten litigation, or go to court to stop development. As a result, many localities have made community involvement an integral part of the planning process.

New York was one of the earliest cities to institutionalize the role of citizen participation. Robert Wagner established informal community boards while he was borough president of Manhattan in the early 1950s. Then, as mayor, he made them a formal part of the land use review process in the 1961 revisions to the city charter. Today, every land use decision acted upon by the city council is preceded by local public hearings and an advisory opinion from the relevant 50-member community board, as well as by citywide public hearings and a vote of the 13-member city planning commission. Portland (Oregon), Atlanta, and many other cities have established community boards that by law must vote on projects within their jurisdiction.

Public hearings have an inherent problem. Speakers testifying can be questioned, but they cannot ask questions, nor can they be sure that the "listeners" will accept their recommendations. The process encourages advocates to bring a large number of participants who present repetitive testimony and grandstand. But it rarely provides much of useful commentary.

Public officials have learned that if they do not pay careful attention to the public, their projects will be stalled, or even defeated. For that reason, Atlanta's Freedom Park, Boston's reconstruction of the Central Artery, New York City's rebuilding of the World Trade Center, and the other projects discussed in this book were brought before the public for review. As Barbara Faga points out, neighborhood groups expect more than an opportunity to voice concern. They expect to determine what

happens in their community. Consequently, the effectiveness of the professional designers involved in these projects depends on their effectiveness in engaging the public in a serious planning effort

Recommendations for the Professional

Professional planners, architects, landscape architects, and engineers may realize that they must engage the public in the decision-making process. Too often, however, they are unprepared for serious interaction. They think their role is the same as that planner in Bushwick who listed community desires. Chapters 7 and 8 of this book offer thoughtful advice to professionals seeking a road map through the thicket of public participation—the most important being to concentrate on what professionals can actually control: their own conduct.

The role of the professional engaged in a serious process of public participation does not begin with a meeting, nor end with responses to public demands. It begins with professionals getting to know people in the community prior to any of the meetings. It is advanced by a few early successes that demonstrate professional wisdom. Prior to devising recommendations, it will require presentation of an overarching strategy, and then working to ensure that strategy is accepted by all concerned. Most important, professionals must devise proposals that capture the public imagination.

As Daniel Burnham argued nearly a century ago: "Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood and will not be realized." Too often, though, the big idea is conceived as a finished product. Burnham knew this was a mistake. He explained that "radical changes . . . cannot possibly be realized immediately." Thus, "when particular portions of the plan shall be taken up for execution, wider knowledge, longer experience, or a change in local conditions may suggest a better solution."[1]

Twenty-First-Century Techniques

Nearly a century has gone by since Daniel Burnham explained that planning did not end with the publication of a plan. He also understood the role of the public. Speaking in London just before his death, he pointed out that "it is 'publicity,' which, although unknown in older times, now exposes everything in the United States to open view. . . . [Thus] when the majority of the people of any town come to think that convenience and its consequent beauty are essential, they will have them, for a democracy has full power over men, land, and goods, and can always make its laws fit its purpose."[2]

Big projects like the rebuilding of Boston's Central Artery and New York City's World Trade Center cannot be dealt with in a room of 100 people. Every issue that arose in rebuilding the Central Artery became a story covered by the Boston media. Every time the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) released proposals for the site of the World Trade Center, newspapers, magazines, and TV stations across the country ran polls to determine the favorites. Thus, any planning that involves the public must keep the press adequately informed. They, in turn will report to the public. Unfortunately, too few professionals spend time spinning stories for reporters or radio and TV broadcasters and, therefore, the media creates its own story—often to the detriment of a project.

Computer technology has opened entirely new opportunities. It allowed the LMDC to open up the decision-making process using a website. During the six weeks following the December 2002 release of the nine innovative designs, the LMDC website received 7 million hits, 2 million of which were from individuals who visited the site only once. Equally important, the results of computerized polling by the media affected the selection of the designers for the site.

The July 20, 2002, Listening to the City event (a computerized twenty-first-century version of a town meeting developed by America*Speaks* described in Chapter 2 of the book) made possible an entirely new form of interactive participation quite different from public hearings. Unlike a public hearing, Listening to the City prevented any particular interest group from dominating the discussion. This was achieved by using the press and the LMDC website to announce to millions of New Yorkers that the event would be held at the Javits Convention Center. Those who wished to participate had to fill out registration forms. When the 4,300 participants arrived, they were assigned to tables seating 12 people in a manner that ensured diversity and precluded domination by any particular interest or demographic group.

Each table had a volunteer facilitator, electronic keypads, and wireless connections to a central computer network. The central staff included a "theme team," who read and distilled key ideas from each table, and a "tabulating team," who sorted demographic information, reactions to key ideas, and responses to specific questions. Large video screens projected this material throughout the hall. Consequently, participants had visible evidence that they and their opinions were part the process. They were able to compare their positions with those of the group as a whole. Computer tabulation allowed the LMDC to see how different demographic and interest groups responded.

Never before had so many people participated in a single discussion of planning, urban design, or downtown redevelopment. Rather than

asking the public to comment on decided-upon plans, the LMDC presented alternatives and asked for their opinion. It was unequivocally told to come up with better alternatives than what had been presented to them.

Computer technology has made interactive participation possible. It is now possible to disseminate information by email and websites to thousands of people just by pressing a button. Computer hookups can bring together large numbers of people to participate in face-to-face deliberation, even in a sprawling metropolitan region. It is now up to all of us to learn from the contents of this book how to make an interactive process of this sort an integral part of the planning process for future projects.

A Twenty-First-Century Role for Professionals

In Europe, elite professionals enter competitions and propose designs (often very exciting designs) that are selected by a panel of experts. The projects that are built are usually fairly close to the original design. As this book demonstrates, a similar process is inconceivable in the United States, where community participation has become a central element in deciding what will be built.

Just as technology has altered the way we communicate, it has changed the way in which citizens participate in the planning process. Consequently, twenty-first century professionals will have to be comfortable dealing with journalists, ready to operate within the glare of publicity, skilled in the use of computers, and proficient in the use of websites and Internet communication. *Designing Public Consensus* explains how and why decision making used to be restricted to professionals and their clients and how and why it now includes community groups, civic organizations, and neighborhood residents. Far more importantly, it provides all of us with a road map for making our way through ever more complex decision-making processes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I set out to write a book that would bring together many different voices and perspectives, and it seems that the effort involved a large cast. I offer thanks and appreciation to everyone who has guided, supported, challenged, and disagreed with me over the years: coworkers, professional associates, mentors, teachers, public officials, citizens, students, and friends.

More particularly, I owe special thanks to the best team ever: M. E. Kieffer, my fabulous editor, for helping me turn countless outlines, drafts, notes, conversations, and random thoughts into a book; Amanda Walter for shepherding us through a challenging process and keeping it all on track; Anne Rollings Clauson and Anyeley Hallova for their spirited assistance and special talent for locating information and images; Kim Christensen and Ellen Heath for sharing their professional viewpoints and extensive knowledge of public process; Louis Merlin for conducting dozens of interviews and asking the right questions; and Dixi Carrillo for her sharp eye on graphics and her brilliant photography.

For putting the resources together to help me write this book, I thank my EDAW colleagues: CEO Joe Brown, Sandy D'Elia, and Bob Pell. And for their much-valued support: Leo Alvarez, Liz Batchelder, Allison Blum, Dennis Carmichael, Liz Drake, Kristie Farnsworth, Todd Hill, Richard Marshall, Jacinta McCann, Pat Peters, Avinash Srivastava, Brodie Stephens, Ray Strychalski, Natalie Topa, and Marcia Tobin.

For their advice and guidance on how to work with the public and how to write a useful book: Beth Dunlop, Gail Evans, Alexander Garvin, Dr. Gary Hack, Dr. Frederick Steiner, Dr. Michael Elliott, Dr. Thomas Galloway, and Dr. Judith Wasserman.

For taking the time to share their perspectives, stories, and insights: Doug and Susan Abramson, Fred Aiken, David Alumbaugh, Matthew Amorello, Rob Augustine, Uri Avin, Tina Arbes, William Banks, Doug Barlow, Cathy Bradshaw, Zarinah Boykin, Amanda Brown Olmsted, Yves Cabannes, Heather Campbell, Al Caproni, John Copley, Jeremy Crockford, Chip Crawford, Bill D'Avignon, George Dark, Rick Dimino, Ed Toumey, Don Edwards, Leon Eplan, Doug Farr, Danny Feig, Benjamin Forgey, Janet Gavarrete, Eric Goldstein, Richard Hahn, Doug Hanchett, Eva Hanhart, Ira Harkavy, Joel Harrell, Jacquie Hemmerdinger, Doug James, Oliver Jerschow, Neisen Kasdin, Duryea Kemp, Fred Kent, Lucy Kerman, Anthony Kobak, Kim Kobza, Carolee Kokola, Ed Kus, Susanne Lavoie, Nancy Leibman, Susan Mendheim, Richard Moe, Tom Palmer, Andy Paven, David Pendered, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Fred Previts, Pam Prouty, Randal Roark, Will Rodgers, Peter Rummell, Harvey Sasso, Stephen Schrope, Mona Seragaldin, Elda Sollaso, Peter Skosey, Harris Steinberg, Rita Strazzeri, Kit Sutherland, Dr. Lolly Tai, Petra Todorovich, Jay Williams, James Wolff, Lynn Wolff, Graham Wyatt, and Fred Yalouris.

For providing information and images: 2010 Vision Committee; Atlanta Development Authority; *Atlanta Journal-Constitution; Boston Globe;* CAUTION, Inc.; Center for Urban Development at Harvard; City of Boston, Massachusetts; City of Youngstown, Ohio; Copley Wolff Design Group; Farr Associates; Georgia Institute of Technology; Imagine New York; Neighborhood America; Norfolk Southern Railroad; O'Neill & Associates; Ohio Historical Society; Penn Praxis; Roadbusters; Artery Business Committee; The Carter Center; Massachusetts Turnpike Authority; Midtown Alliance; *Washington Post;* Urban Strategies, Inc.; *New York Times;* and the Wharf District Task Force.

Finally, I want to thank my family, especially my husband Paul Kulinski, who kept order with Chris, Matt, and Betsey on the home front while I attended all these public meetings. And my parents, Beatrice and Frank Faga, for standing by me from the beginning, when I had to get special permission to breach the male-only bastion of my high school's mechanical drawing class.

INTRODUCTION

I was sitting in a conference room in Boston's City Hall, meeting with the Mayor's Completion Task Force and various members of the public on a Friday morning in November of 2003. Our purpose was to review our schematic design for the five-acre Wharf District Park, part of Boston's infamous Big Dig project, and we were nearly halfway through a four-hour public meeting. The tenth speaker droned on as I rearranged my notes.

Suddenly, the speaker captured my full attention.

> *You need to describe the deeper relationship of form to meaning . . . The escape from the birthplace of the religious abolitionist movement in Boston (contributed to) change over time in the separation of church and state. The culture, the design and the iconographic meaning of this park should have a deeper interpretation.*

I glanced around the room and saw several of the other 40 people present nodding in agreement. Did I understand this correctly? A member of the public wants us to design a city park that interprets the separation of church and state?

In my 30-year career as a city planner and urban designer, I've conducted, managed, presented, advised, and otherwise participated in hundreds of public meetings. But this was the first time I'd heard a request like this. Of course, this was Boston, and I put Boston right up there with the toughest places to manage public process.

The park in question is in fact situated in a very historic area, near the original Boston wharves. The Big Dig has buried the expressway that once separated the city from the Boston Harbor, and the park will serve

as a vital connection between the two. For Bostonians, it is hallowed ground. The plan calls for the park to be built over a car-jammed tunnel, sandwiched between two busy streets in the downtown business district. The $16 billion Big Dig has been a contentious and extremely complex project riddled with cost overruns, political wrangling, and general hand-wringing by government officials and the public. It is a project of a thousand ramifications, undertaken in a city that seems to delight in "a tyranny of details," as one observer put it.

But Boston's quirks are not the real story. It seems to me that the public's role in guiding urban planning and design has expanded everywhere. Public clout has increased and expectations have reached new heights. We are seeing a bewildering rise in public demands on planners and designers, and an expansion in the influence that the public expects to bring to the process.

Anticipating and juggling the demands and expectations of the public poses a growing challenge, and the stakes are higher than ever. Meetings are tough and getting tougher. The public has more of a say in what gets done and how, but there are big gaps in their understanding of the goals and rationales of design and planning. A professional's head spins, trying to digest the conflicting menu of needs and desires expressed in one public meeting.

In many cases, the public cannot and does not read the plans, and the meaning of renderings and drawings is often lost on them. Yet they never lack for opinions. It can sometimes seem as if professionals and the public speak different languages.

Whether congenial or contentious, the public process continues. The designs and plans that are forged are often the better for it. On the other hand, professionals have to be aware of the juggernaut of politics and local agendas. Sometimes we're behind the wheel, and sometimes we're the unwary bystanders who have to jump out of the way when the vehicle goes out of control. We have to learn how to steer, hit the brakes, and accelerate the process without letting it run over us.

Sometimes "the public" seems to include anyone with an opinion, and the old adage "'Tis easier to oppose than to propose," never seems truer. As soon as there are problems with getting a design or a project approved, plenty of people will step forward to diagnose what's going wrong. Volunteer advisors often offer their criticism without knowing the whole story or actually showing up to the meetings in question. They'll say, "The design's not good enough," when they have not seen the design. Or, "The client will not like this," when they have never met the client. Or, "You have the wrong designer on this project," even though the client picked the designer and is happy with her or his designs. This sort of second-guessing happens all the time, both within an office or

organization and in the wider public arena. And *never* in my presence has anyone suggested that we should just leave this up to the professionals involved.

It's hard not to feel insulted by the lack of respect for our professional expertise, and to compare it to the deference shown more "objective" professions. While medical decisions are ultimately made by individuals and their families, people do not generally second-guess their doctors, although they may sue them later if the results aren't accurate. There is no widespread perception that lawyers' strategies should be kibitzed, although people may grumble about the bills. Perhaps lawyers get a pass because there is always a judge to make a ruling, and a higher court to appeal to.

Not so with design. Sometimes it seems the public process never ends. There is no way to be right or to have an end to it. Instead, we simply move along at the best pace possible. We listen. We go to the mat for some ideas, though not for every idea. Often only time can tell whether the final decision, plan, or design was the best we could do.

Yet the issues and challenges of public process are taught in very few planning and design schools and are often glibly dismissed by practitioners as peripheral to our work. One young professional fresh out Harvard and MIT told me that the prevailing academic attitude was that students should focus on good design, and to regard whatever public process headaches they encountered later as just part of the job. Of course, learning on the job is something we all do. But wouldn't it make much better sense to send professionals out into the world with some understanding of how public process works and how to make it work for them?

After all, it is not as easy as it looks. Planners and designers entering the field will have to be subtle politicians, caring counselors, patient educators, and masters of fancy footwork in order to actually get anything built. Far from being peripheral, issues of public process are central to our work.

Even experienced practitioners, after many rounds of public process, may find themselves scratching their heads over strange and unexpected moments. I certainly did in Boston, as I pondered the separation of church and state in relation to a public park. Just when we think we're in the driver's seat and know what will come next, or what may be expected of us, or how we can prepare ourselves for every issue, we may find that someone else is behind the wheel and we are just along for the ride.

Encounters with the public can range from benign and enjoyable to protracted battles in a court of law. A firm grasp of the phenomenon eludes us. Academic schema and models and decision matrices can present a sketch of what's involved in public process and perhaps offer

some guidance about how to proceed. But I'm more interested in the inevitable surprises that never seem to fit in the boxes. What works today may not work next week. Every public and every process is so different as to confound any general approach. Done right, it works great—but there's no right way to do it.

Rather than a scripted reading, managing a public process is much more a continuous improvisation. This is another image that came to me in Boston, about halfway through the 19 months it took to get final approval of our design for the Wharf District Park. As we debriefed after a particularly fractious meeting, our colleague, Lynn Wolff, insightfully described this series of public meetings as a form of "civic theater," an entertaining way for involved and curious citizens to spend an evening. At this point, we felt like lion fodder in the Roman Coliseum, so the metaphor seemed particularly apt. The power plays, emotional outbursts, bitter arguments, tiresome soliloquies, comic relief, sudden plot twists, and dramatic resolutions of the typical public process somehow seem better suited to the stage than to the hardheaded realities of designing and building our public spaces.

As I participated in the public drama that played out in Boston, I couldn't help noticing the strong parallels to soap opera, Kabuki, and a three-ring circus. Some of our most important work will be performing (not acting, precisely, though a little dramatic flair doesn't hurt) for audiences we have to win over. If we design and planning professionals think we can stay safely in the wings, ensconced at our comfy desks or drafting tables, we've got it wrong.

It's like the old vaudeville act in which the guy gets all those plates spinning at once, in time to the music. That guy has nothing on us. Sometimes I'm amazed that most design and planning professionals manage to keep those plates spinning as well as we do. But like any performer who has met with a tough crowd, I have to ask: What are we really trying to achieve? How can we do it better? Is there a way to make it easier for all concerned?

These are the questions that I attempt to answer in the following chapters. I've tried to present a wide-ranging assessment of the public's role in designing public spaces; our responses as professionals; and what it all means when the bulldozers have left and the roads, parks, buildings, and developments have become part of the built environment.

I'm not a historian or sociologist or theoretician. What interests me is planning on the ground. When and how is it best to start? How do we maintain the integrity of the design or plan through numerous iterations? Is there a point at which we should end the public debates and take over as professionals? Is it all just politics?

I'd also like to know how best to define success in public process. Is it bringing the public around to our way of thinking? Ensuring that everyone with a stake in the results is at the table? Coming up with a design that everyone can live with? My own definition of success has been to get projects approved and built, and by that standard, I've actually had a good deal of success. But sometimes the process felt like sausage making: something no one wants to observe too closely, however tasty the end result. I'd like to know how to make it a bit more palatable.

This book is an exploration. It tells the stories of a wide variety of projects and, in the spirit of participation, presents perspectives from professionals, clients, stakeholders, citizen activists, and others. I've tried to cover the ups and the downs, moments of brilliance and leadership, good intentions gone wrong, common pitfalls to be expected, and roadblocks that seemingly arise out of nowhere.

My goal is to present some practical methods for making the public process more manageable and useful. My hope is that these chapters will give readers a leg up on what to expect; reiterate what many of us know; challenge our assumptions; and help us prevent some future mistakes. With any luck, we can at least prepare ourselves (both professionally and personally) for the way it really works.