

**Public pandemonium.** Landscape architect Barbara Faga offers a little of everything—from tips to detailed case studies—in her new book, *Designing Public Consensus: The Civic Theater of Community Participation for Architects, Landscape Architects, Planners, and Urban Designers* (2006; John Wiley & Sons, Inc.; 253 pp.; \$65).

The case studies include New York's 9/11 monument controversy, Chicago's zoning reform, Atlanta's Freedom Park, Philadelphia's Penn's Landing, and Boston's Wharf District Park. Faga deserves credit for including an episode (Disney's Civil War theme park in northern Virginia) where public opposition killed a project, in part because the corporation overestimated its power and didn't involve the public early on. Faga chairs the board of the international consulting firm EDAW, which was involved in most of the case studies, but her book does not read like a public relations exercise.

Nor does she have a comprehensive theory of the one right way to do public participation; in fact, she doesn't believe in such a thing. "Rather than a scripted reading, managing a public process is much more a continuous improvisation," she writes. While admitting that she's not sure exactly how to define success, Faga acknowledges at the start that she'd like to make the process more palatable, because sometimes it "felt like sausage making: something no one wants to observe too closely." And she notes that planners and other design experts often feel insulted by how little the public respects their expertise, compared to that of, say, doctors or attorneys.

Inevitably, a few of the author's "lessons learned" will seem obvious to some: Eschew public hearings whenever possible, and never be confrontational or combative. Others will be illuminating: "Many people cannot read a plan, so don't rely on it."

Another point is to listen well and take notes. "I often observe husband-and-wife teams of my parents' generation at public meetings," Faga writes. "The men will talk while the women silently absorb information. I make it a point to take the wife aside later and ask her what she thinks. Usually, she can offer very useful feedback because she has spent so much time listening."

The book's organization is a little quirky. Specific tips for practitioners are buried at the end of various chapters—the table of contents won't help to find them. Still, this is good stuff from someone who's done serious time in the sausage factory.