

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION
8787 Georgia Avenue • Silver Spring, Maryland 20910-3760

MCPB
Item # 9
1/24/02

January 18, 2002

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: John A. Carter, Chief *JAC*
Community-Based Planning Division

Glenn Kreger, Team Leader, Silver Spring/Takoma Park Team *GK*
Community-Based Planning Division

FROM: Don Downing, Planner Coordinator, Silver Spring/Takoma Park Team
Community-Based Planning Division *D.D.*

Marsha Kadesch, Planner Coordinator, Silver Spring/Takoma Park Team
Community-Based Planning Division *M.K.*

Sandy Tallant, Planner Coordinator, Resource Team
Community-Based Planning Division *S.T.*

SUBJECT: Community Outreach Presentation – Planning with Diverse Populations,
University Boulevard Improvement Project, Silver Spring

ACTION: Discussion.

INTRODUCTION

The population in Montgomery County continues to become increasingly diverse. New outreach techniques are needed to serve a population that has not traditionally been involved in public decision-making. The Community-Based Planning Division continues to explore new outreach tools to: (1) increase efficient community participation, and (2) enable persons with varied interests to develop a shared vision within a limited time frame. These efforts are associated with master plan development, review of regulatory cases, and master plan implementation.

In response to the request from the Planning Board, staff have prepared a briefing about an ongoing outreach effort to plan with diverse populations in the Silver Spring/Takoma Park Planning Area.

DISCUSSION

The Community-Based Planning Division is working with the Institute for Diversity and Multicultural Affairs at Bowie State University as part of a four-year, tri-county diversity project. Sandy Tallant serves on the Steering Committee that includes representatives from the multicultural population in Montgomery County. This group has examined and discussed several diversity issues in Montgomery County. These discussions led to the group identifying three subject areas (health, housing, and communications). Action Teams are now developing projects addressing these subject areas. The Action Teams are comprised of both agency and community members. Don Downing and Marsha Kadesch of Community-Based Planning are serving on the Communications Action Team (CAT).

Communications Action Team: Application of the "Listening to Learn" Model of Community Participation to Improve University Boulevard

The staff have been seeking approaches to citizen participation that would be effective in reaching diverse populations. Activists are comfortable with the traditional forms of outreach, but many others in our diverse community are not. Foreign-born people, people with a lack of fluency in the English language, and people with little education have often not participated despite their own stake in the community. The reasons for this lack of participation include the following:

- Government buildings are often intimidating,
- Language is often a barrier,
- Meetings are too structured,
- Meetings are full of well-educated and politically savvy people,
- Lack of time, particularly for those with multiple jobs,
- Lack of interest,
- Child care and transportation problems,
- Perceived unfriendliness and intolerance to new ideas by some residents, and
- Unfamiliar with the democratic process.

In order to address these obstacles and encourage participation, staff developed a model based on informality and convenience. We chose a project, the State Highway Administration's (SHA) "University Boulevard Improvements," that is both timely and familiar to the community. The project involves pedestrian safety, sidewalks, and street design. The project extends from Piney Branch Road in Montgomery County to Riggs Road in Prince George's County. The community has expressed concerns regarding inadequate bus stops, unsafe pedestrian crossings, an unattractive pedestrian environment, and community identity. Ultimately, the project will be presented to the Planning Board as a Mandatory Referral.

Staff initiated a project called "Listening to Learn" based on a model used successfully in Minnesota. The major elements of this approach are:

- Identify target groups,
- Initiate contact through a known person,
- Learn about the cultural norms for communication and group interaction, and
- Meet at convenient locations within the community instead of expecting the community to come to us.

At each session, the staff dressed according to the norms of the audience, provided ethnic food, spent time in “ice-breaking” exercises, met during non-office hours, and met at a place that was already familiar to the group. If possible, we arranged for someone known to the group to hold the meeting and introduce us. We provided an interpreter. We also changed our role. Instead of giving a lecture, we established a setting where our audiences’ ideas and interaction with one another would be the focus, and staff would “listen” instead of talk. At the end of the meeting, “next steps” would be identified to help the community participate formally in the SHA project.

The results were very positive. We heard directly from people we would ordinarily never meet, and we also had an opportunity to “empower” people who are ready to learn how to be heard in public debate. These efforts are beginning to build community organizations where none currently exist. Our presentation to the Planning Board will provide more detail about the “Listening to Learn” model for community participation.

Other Outreach Efforts

The Community-Based Planning Division is actively involved in several other community outreach efforts. The outreach program for Community-Based Planning includes the “Listening to Learn” project and other efforts. In addition to master plan outreach, a list of other community outreach efforts follows:

- National Park Seminary
- Friendship Heights Task Force
- Suburban Hospital Expansion
- Twinbrook and Shady Grove Charrettes
- Wheaton CBD Revitalization Charrette
- Washington Adventist Hospital Joint Advisory Committee
- Maryland Technology Development Council
- Fenton Gateway Project
- Columbia Union College Joint Advisory Committee
- Citizens Advisory Boards and Subcommittees
- Long Branch Task Force
- CIP Review



LISTENING TO LEARN

A NEW COMMUNICATIONS
TOOL FOR PLANNING WITH
DIVERSE POPULATIONS –
January 2002

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January 2002

A Project of the COMMUNICATIONS ACTION TEAM



Of the Institute for Diversity and
Multicultural Affairs
Bowie State University

In Support of the Diversity Efforts of the
M-NCPPC, Montgomery County
Department of Park and Planning

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THE TEAM

- ◆ 3 active participants,
2 from M-NCPPC &
1 from Community
Action Agency
- ◆ Bowie support by
Ruby and Maria



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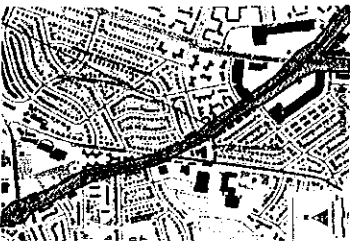
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ACTION TEAM
GOAL:

Involve community residents who are usually under-represented in planning for improvements in their community.

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UNIVERSITY BOULEVARD PROJECT
IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY



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UNIVERSITY BOULEVARD ISSUES

- ❖ Inadequate bus stops
- ❖ Unsafe pedestrian crossings
- ❖ Unattractive pedestrian environment
- ❖ Unsafe conditions
- ❖ Community identity



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GENERAL APPROACH:

- ❖ Focus on SHA University Blvd. Project
- ❖ Contact Social Service Agencies
- ❖ Conduct "Listening to Learn" Sessions
- ❖ Share Community Issues with SHA
- ❖ Offer Empowerment Support

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TYPICAL LISTENING SESSION

– COMMUNITY

- ❖ Meal or informal discussion
- ❖ Welcome and purpose
- ❖ General orientation and icebreaker



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TYPICAL LISTENING SESSION

– LISTENING

- ❖ What do you like about the community?
- ❖ How do you use University Boulevard?
- ❖ What changes would you like to see?




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TYPICAL LISTENING SESSION
- EMPOWERMENT

- ◆ Explain ways to participate



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ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- ◆ Contact with 12 social and community service organizations
- ◆ Held three "Listening to Learn" sessions
- ◆ Planning 2 to 4 more sessions
- ◆ Sharing concerns with SHA staff
- ◆ Assist with letters to the Governor

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COMMUNITY IMPACT

- ◆ Involves diverse community
- ◆ Creates a sense of empowerment
- ◆ Provides impact on the outcome
- ◆ Improves community relations with M-NCPPC

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M-NCPPC WORK PROGRAM

- ◆ Build relations with the full community
- ◆ Improve regulatory reviews
- ◆ Be sensitive to cultural differences
- ◆ Initiate new directions for M-NCPPC
- ◆ Seek budget support

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TYPICAL PROJECT EXPENSES

| Cost Level | Estimated Cost | Expenses |
|------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| Low | \$64 to 264 | Snack and stipend |
| Medium | \$512 | + meal and interpreter |
| High | 1,270 | + child care & other expenses |

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FUTURE APPLICATIONS


- ◆ Initiate ongoing contacts
- ◆ Share approach with other staff and agencies
- ◆ Arrange regular informal meetings
- ◆ Use interpreters as needed
- ◆ Translate public notices and reports
- ◆ Budget for support of each session

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LISTENING TO LEARN



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