

It Takes a Vision to Raise a Village: **A Case Study of The Village at Market Creek Development Project**

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Abstract

This paper analyzes how developers can use community participation in the planning and development process to enhance the social infrastructure of a neighborhood. A case study of the Village at Market Creek development project in Southeastern San Diego was conducted, beginning November 2010 and continuing through February 2011. The developer of the Village at Market Creek project, The Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation, held three planning meetings during the study period in an effort to collect input that will be used to update The Village at Market Creek plan. Based on observational data collected at each of these meetings as well as interviews with key players in the development process, this paper will detail methods to: 1) Increase participation and attendance at development meetings. 2) Provide community members with the skills they need to make informed development decisions. 3) Address concerns about the effect of the development project on the future of the community. The symbiotic relationship of these three aspects of the development process serves as a model for planning a viable project for the community it is intended to serve.

Key Terms: community participation, urban design, sustainability, equitable development

The Development of an Urban Village

The cultural movement to include sustainable practices within all professions underscores the importance in the urban planning profession to create a sustainable settlement model for redeveloped areas. The pressures to create well-used, functional, development projects include concerns regarding the three “E’s of sustainability: economic success, environmental health achieved through smart and appropriate use of limited resources, and equity achieved by creating socially vibrant and inclusive spaces. While large strides have been made to incorporate the first two aspects, the concept of equality is often pushed aside in development projects.

The Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation (JCNI) has a unique approach to building a community through urban design and development. Founded in 1995, JCNI is a non-profit organization based in southeastern San Diego. The JCNI works within the area they define as the “Diamond Neighborhood,” which includes some 88,000 residents in ten adjacent communities (See Figure 1). At the center of the Diamond is the Market Creek Plaza site, a 10-acre commercial and cultural center, that is a physical representation of the JCNI’s goals as listed on their website:

- Our goals are to unite residents, organizations, and funding partners to:
- Build the social well-being of the neighborhoods.
 - Foster the creation of businesses, jobs, and community wealth.
 - Support the enhancement of the physical environment through neighborhood-owned assets.
 - Expand the avenues and opportunities for resident participation in the planning, decision-making, implementation, and ownership of community change.



Figure 1: Communities within San Diego’s Diamond Neighborhood
Source: <http://www.marketcreekplaza.com>

The Market Creek Plaza will serve as the hub for what is to become the 60-acre neighborhood revitalization project known as The Village at Market Creek (The Village). The Village will be a network of residential, cultural, and commercial projects. From the project's website, the vision for the upcoming development is to create a "cultural village — with a focus on healthy living, supportive learning, compact design, walkability, transit-oriented development, equity, environmental sustainability, and resident ownership." In line with JCNI's goal of "expanding the avenues and opportunities for resident participation," several community meetings were planned to include a community voice in an anticipated update of The Village plan. These community meetings, VOCAL retreats, were the epitome of developing a community voice. Project VOCAL- Voices of Community at All Levels- is an organization of community groups that emerged in 2009. VOCAL is comprised of 18 cultural and neighborhood groups and made up the bulk of the attendees at each of these retreats.

This study analyzes how community participation functioned at three VOCAL retreats held during the study period, beginning November 2010 and continuing through February 2011. The JCNI's role in enhancing the social infrastructure of the neighborhood and their methods of extracting input from participants will also be dissected. Specifically, methods will be identified to achieve the following four aspects of community participation: 1) Increase participation and attendance in development meetings. 2) Provide the community members the skills they need to make informed development decisions. 3) Address concerns about the effect of the development project on the future of the community.

The development of The Village is undoubtedly a complex process that will continue to evolve throughout the next decade. This study is limited to a small aspect of the grandiose task of implementing a project of this scale. The funding, permitting, construction and maintenance

of The Village will involve a myriad of agencies, each with their own methods, goals and techniques to ensure the success of the project. However, the symbiotic relationship of the four aspects of the development process as they occurred during the VOCAL retreats provides insight into the practical application of JCNI's goals for the neighborhood. The methods also serve as a significant model for planners and developers alike who seek to create a viable project for the community it is intended to serve.

Creating a Sustainable Settlement Model through Increased Social Infrastructure

The concept of sustainability has been defined, dissected, and reinvented countless times in scholarly literature in the past few decades. Though many disagree on the exact definition, the underlying idea remains constant: the world contains limited resources and in order to sustain life on this planet the use of such resources needs to be managed under the umbrella of sustainability. In neighborhood development, this definition is widely used: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Hodge 1997: 9). Sustainable development must also include a interdependent relationship between three main goals: social equity, economic vitality, and environmental health. These are commonly known as the three E's of sustainability (Hodge 1997:16).

Of particular interest to me is the aspect of social equity and how it is manifested in redevelopment areas. Many redevelopment areas seem to be focused on improving and upgrading the neighborhood and inadvertently- or intentionally- create a gentrified space that excludes the lowest socioeconomic classes. The two other concepts, environmental health and economic vitality, are given much more prominence in most applications of sustainability theory. Advancements have been made to infuse the aspects of environmental health into collective American consciousness. "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle" has become the mantra of the masses.

Popular emphasis has also been placed on economic vitality in light of the recent economic climate of the nation. Where sustainability practices are on the rise, the third “E” is easily ignored. This study intends to provide a perspective on how social equity relates to development practices and the design and functions of the public arena.

As mentioned in one discussion of injustice in development: “the people whose needs justify the whole development industry are the people with the least power to influence development and to whom there is least accountability” (Wheeler 2009: 201). This research project shows how the developers of Market Creek Plaza are doing something contrary to this universally applied view of developers and holding themselves accountable to the residents and users of the project. There is much scholarly discussion of how developers (quite literally) bulldoze the rights of lower income and minority groups and of the inequities that result from certain development policies, but little research on how some commercial developers consciously and purposefully contribute to social equality (Wheeler 2009: 183). The study of the planning process behind The Village at Market Creek provides a model for including community participation in development projects in an attempt to create functional and vibrant public spaces.

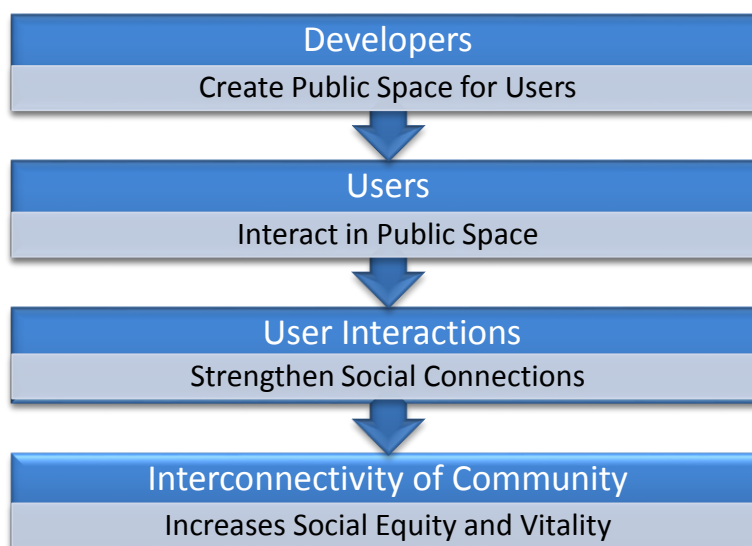


Figure 2: Concept Map

The development of quality public spaces is vital to the interconnectivity of a community (See Figure 2). Many scholars have discussed the importance of public space in the evolution of a community's culture. The following is a modern example of ideas on public space:

The street as a site of interaction, encounter, and the support of strangers for each other; the square as a place of gathering and vigil; the corner store as a communicator of information and interchange. These spaces, without romanticism or nostalgia, still define an urban culture. (Vidler 2002: 84)

Although this modern American life prizes the autonomy of the individual and public spaces are increasingly virtual and digital, there is still a need for face-to-face interaction. Interactions in public space not only define urban culture, but also continually redefine and reinvent that culture. Jan Gehl describes a contact scale that ranges from high to low intensities, from passive encounters to close friendships. She argues that without passive encounters in public spaces the lower end of the contact scale disappears and the "boundaries between isolation and contact become sharper- people are either alone or else with others on a relatively demanding and exacting scale" (Gehl 1980: 87). This type of pressure undoubtedly has negative effects on the human psych. In other words, humans need human interaction on a casual and public scale. Therefore, developers need functional examples of how to create spaces that will facilitate this social need in order to create sustainable neighborhoods.

To have these types of interactions, the spaces people frequent also need to be inviting and representative of the area's social culture. Scholarly literature on urban design elements includes theories on how to design a variety of public spaces, including particular examples of cities in which certain design elements have been successful. Where the urban design literature offers numerous ideas on what makes a space succeed, it fails to offer specific and proven solutions on how to create spaces that foster social equity and support community identity.

Community identity and participation are essential to the success of any neighborhood. The decline in interconnectivity of community began to materialize in settlement patterns during the middle of the twentieth century with suburbanization. The suburbs contained major social defects in their design, creating a caricature of a real community and a predictable homogeneous environment. Lewis Mumford wrote extensively of the problems with this type of settlement, describing “families in space” and the damaging effects of living in “the irreality of retreat” (Mumford 1961: 494). In an effort to bring connectivity back to the neighborhood, the idea of urban villages emerged. These villages were envisioned as equitable, heterogeneous neighborhoods, in which residents could benefit from inclusion in a community identity. Some scholars described this as a “sense of place and community commitment” (Biddulph 2003: 167).

While the sum of the literature discussed above offers a general idea on the importance of public space and community building, this case study of the Village at Market Creek provides an in-depth analysis of functional methods of community participation in development practices. This study will also contribute to a more dynamic view of sustainability by examining the development process through a social equity lens. Methods will be detailed on the process of creating a space that can function as a multi-cultural village, in which the diversity of a community is celebrated through incorporation into the development project.

Research Strategy

First, it was necessary to fully understand the goals and intentions of the JCNI in including the community in the development process. This was accomplished through examination of materials made available to the public by the JCNI. The Social and Economic Impact Reports for the 2008 and 2009 calendar years, the JCNI website, and The Village project website all were examined to understand the history of the project, the role of the developer in

the current revitalization efforts, and the organization's plans for the future. Content from these reports also helped define the sometimes ambiguous terminologies used in neighborhood revitalization projects, such as "community," "civic engagement," and "cultural village."

The bulk of the data collected for this report was obtained through observation of three key community meetings, referred to by the JCNi as "VOCAL Retreats." VOCAL is an acronym for "Voices of Community at All Levels" and refers to the self-organized community groups, which make up most of the attendees of these community retreats. The first of these meetings- on November 13, 2010- was a workshop titled "Cultural branding and Urban Design." The second- on December, 12, 2010- was a workshop titled "Connectivity and Sustainability." The third- on January 22, 2011- was a workshop titled "Land Use and Open Space."

Each of the VOCAL retreats provided significant insight into the development process. Direct observational data was collected to determine the content of the meetings, including the type of information delivered to the community and the methods used to present information. The formats of the meetings were analyzed in an attempt to understand the social dynamics in the room, including who facilitated dialog, the role of each organization in the dialog, how objections were handled, and what key words and ideas were being emphasized. The nature of the dialog- whether it appeared to be casual or combative- was observed to determine if the presentation of certain ideas or topics affected the tone of the dialog and the efficacy of the communication.

The setup of the meeting room included 10-14 individual tables, oriented towards a large presentation screen. Observations were made to determine the role of the participants at each of these tables, which generally consisted of a combination of community groups, youth groups, and meeting facilitators among others. Several times during each meeting, the focus of the

informational presentation would be on a task at each individual table. During these table-top exercises, direct and participant observational data was collected. Printed materials provided by the meeting facilitators were examined. These included voting packages, large format maps with proposed community facilities, and informational sheets. Elements of these materials were analyzed to determine the type and content of the graphics, and whether the information on each topic appeared to be comprehensive or selective. If the information appeared to be less than comprehensive, further analysis was done in order to uncover any potential biases.

To compliment the observations listed above and provide more detailed insight, further data collection was done in the form of interviews. Based on observations of the format of these meetings as well as informal conversations, key actors and organizations were identified. Four main factions participating in the meetings were observed: representatives of the JCNI, project consultants, community residents, and VOCAL members. An effort was made to interview at least one member from each of these identified groups- as each one of these factions contribute to a dynamic view of the process (See Figure 3).

Interviewee	Affiliation
Charles Davis	Director of Project Development, Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation
Bennett Peji	Brand Consultant, PEJI Designs
Mike Singleton	Consultant, KTU+A
Elaine Kennedy	VOCAL Member, Resident of Diamond Neighborhood
Absallah Farah	VOCAL Member, President of Somali Youth United

Figure 3: Interviews Conducted

It is important to take note of several limitations to this study, including time restraints and logistical challenges. A comprehensive survey of meeting participants could not be

completed, as it was not possible to gather a complete sample of the attendees. Further research in the form of a survey would provide a more accurate understanding of the specific demographics, perspectives and affiliations of the attendees. Also, the study period was limited to a four-month period. Examination of the upcoming stages of the development process would be useful to assess the value of the information gathered at each retreat and how community ideas and preferences were incorporated into the final design.

Findings and Analysis

Most developers have a reputation in the social consciousness as machines of capitalism, which intend for each project to generate as much money for the outside investors as possible. The development process for the Village at Market Creek is unique in that it involves an explicit and public commitment of the developer to meet the needs of the community. According to JCNI's 2009 Social and Economic Impact Report, The JCNI states their project in the following terms:

Centered around a major transit hub, The Village will transform over 60 acres of blighted land into productive use; replace substandard housing with nearly 1,000 quality, affordable homes; and restore nearly 5,500 linear feet of wetlands. Over 1.6 million square feet of new construction will bring more than \$300 million in contracts to the community, attracting over 250 new businesses and 2,000 jobs.

This summary of the project seems innocuous enough and contains all the usual optimism of a new development project. A summary of this type is helpful to people unfamiliar with the project and, in most cases, serves as sufficient explanation of the project at hand. In the case of the Market Creek project, however, this explanation barely scratches the surface of what is happening within the community. Two of the three sustainability aspects are touted; environmental health is improved through the restoration of the wetlands and economic vitality is enhanced through the construction projects and

employment opportunities. In the case of The Village at Market Creek Project, their work in the third aspect of sustainability, social equity, is particularly innovative. Indeed, the dynamism of the social processes at play in this project makes it near impossible to distill a succinct summary that might be included in the excerpt above.

The JCNI has identified five interconnected elements (see Figure 4) that will ensure the success of the development project, and ultimately the success and sustainability of the community itself (Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation 2011). With these five elements as the center of the JCNI philosophy, community development meetings are held to gather and analyze input from the members of the community. Then, this input is translated into the overall plan and the development moves forward within the framework of the five goals.

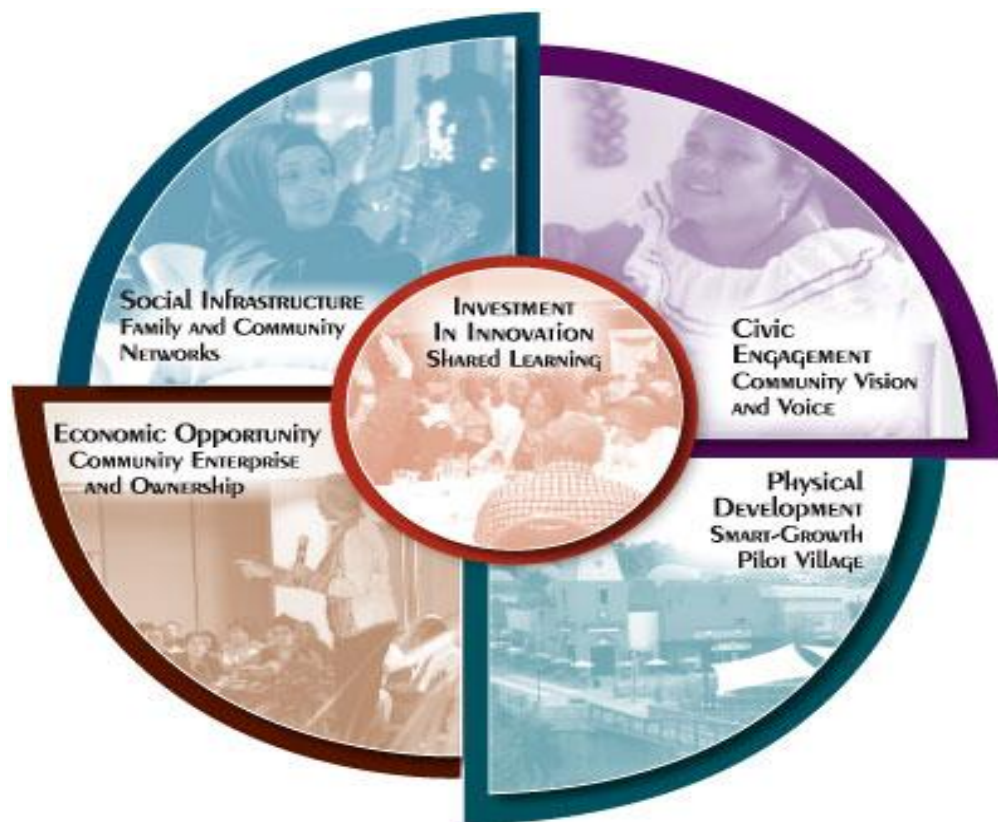


Figure 4: Strategic Focuses of JCNI
Source: <http://www.jacobscenter.org/whatwedo.htm>

The first goal in the JCNI's annual Social and Economic Impact Report is to achieve civic engagement through "large-scale, cross-cultural resident participation in the planning, decision-making, implementation, and ownership of change," which will lead to a unified community vision and voice (The Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation 2011). It is the methods used to develop this community vision and voice- as they occurred at the three VOCAL retreats during the study period- that are the focus of this analysis. The various techniques and methods employed at these retreats to guide the participation process have been grouped into three significant and distinct categories. The first category focuses on increasing community attendance and participation. The second category presents avenues to provide attendees with the knowledge and skills necessary to make development decisions. The third category analyzes methods of addressing community concerns.

The JCNI and their team of hired consultants, which included representatives from MIG¹, KTU&A², and Peji Design³, facilitated the VOCAL retreats. Each of these meetings occurred on a Saturday from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm. The majority of this time was used for presentations by each of the consultant groups followed by open-forum discussion. Practical exercises were often incorporated in the form of table-top exercises, often referred to as breakout sessions. Though the length of individual activities varied, attention was always given to ending the meeting promptly at the designated time "out of respect" for the participants time (Davis 2011).

¹ Further information on MIG can be found on the company website: <http://www.migcom.com/>.

² Further information on KTU&A can be found on the company website: <http://www.ktua.com/>.

³ Further information on Peji Design can be found on the company website::
<http://www.pejideisgn.com/bpdweb/fhome.php>

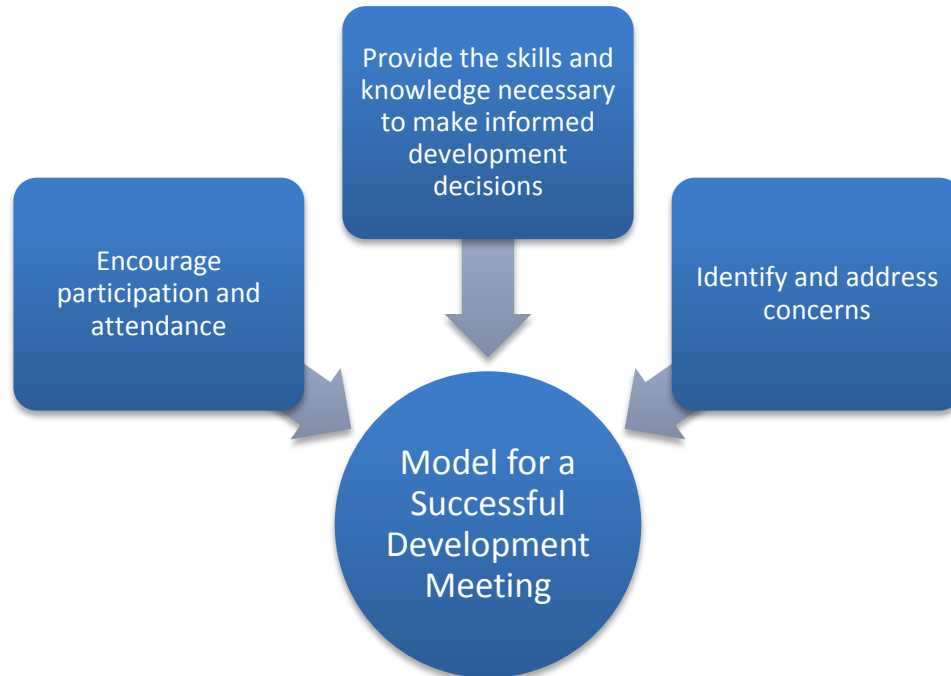


Figure 5: Summary of Findings
 Source: Original Research Data, February 2011.

Attendance and Participation

To have a successful community meeting, the most obvious and necessary component would be the community members themselves. The members of Project VOCAL make up the foundation of the attendees and include 18 distinct community networks. Based on a review of the VOCAL member listing in the Social and Economic Impact Report (SEIR) for the 2009 calendar year, these groups range in type from educational institutions, cultural groups, youth organizations, historical societies and more. Elaine Kennedy, a resident of the Diamond neighborhood, has been involved with the Market Creek project since 1998 and serves as a perfect example of the dynamic community ties that attendees have with this neighborhood revitalization project. Ms. Kennedy has been involved with at least seven community teams in the past thirteen years (Kennedy 2011). She is also an investor in the Diamond Community

Investors⁴ group, which holds 20% ownership in Market Creek Partners, LLC (the company that owns Market Creek Plaza.)

While Ms. Kennedy's involvement represents direct investment in The Village project, other participants were also financially tied to the VOCAL retreats in a way. Each community group within the VOCAL project was given an incentive in the form of a stipend to attend the retreats. During an interview, Charles Davis mentioned this stipend when asked about his organization's efforts to ensure people from the community showed up to the retreats, though he describes it is a "very small" stipend. Further research into this stipend would be required to understand the influence this type of financial incentive has on attendance. Ms. Kennedy opined that the neutrality of the data gathered at these meetings might be influenced by the choice to pay (in the form of a stipend) specific organizations that are chosen by JCNI to be included in the VOCAL project.

There was assumed to be a certain effort by JCNI to increase participation through neighborhood outreach. The JCNI does have a Neighborhood Outreach department. Unfortunately, Lisette Islas in the Neighborhood Outreach department could not be reached for official comment. Several attendees reported that the community networks affiliated with VOCAL were expected to recruit at least five people per organization to the retreats, and a sign-in sheet was observed in circulation at each gathering. Also, word-of-mouth came in the form of mass e-mails sent out by JCNI, which one member of VOCAL mentions as one of the methods that reached him (Farah, 2011).

The first two of the three VOCAL retreats were held at the Jacobs Center, the third at a local elementary school. Basic services were provided by JCNI, such as free childcare for the

⁴ Further information on The Diamond Community Investors can be found on their website: <http://www.dcinvestors.org/index.php>

duration of the five-hour retreats. Meals were prepared by the JCNI's in-house event catering service and were also a complimentary service. As the chairs in the meeting room filled up, the attendees casually chatted, sipped on coffee and munched on bacon and eggs. The open and friendly dialog between the coordinators, facilitators, and attendees was informal and welcoming. Immediately, it was apparent that there was a strong social infrastructure in the room.

The sharing of meals can be a powerful force to unity a group of people. In an article by food activist Michael Pollan, he refers to Mediterranean communal ovens “centers of social gravity” (Pollan 2010). At the retreats, the center of social gravity seemed to be the lunchtime cookie trays. In each of the VOCAL retreats, the lunch fare was set up buffet-style with several trays of cookies at the end. At the first of these retreats, the cookies ran out before everyone had a chance to get one. At the second meeting, Charles Davis gleefully announced that there would be enough cookies for all this time, and there were. By the third retreat, this simple act of increasing the availability of cookies during lunchtime served as a symbolic reminder that the JCNI did observe community needs and that they had the ability- and facility- to respond with immediate solutions. Although baked goods are hardly on par with the promise of a 60-acre community revitalization project, the cookies were emblematic of the sweet and friendly spirit of these meetings.

The success of the meeting attendance can be measured further through a comparative analysis with another community meeting just a few weeks later. The Neighborhoods First initiative in neighboring Sherman Heights held a meeting on February 10, 2011, a session on “Affordable Housing and Financial Feasibility.” The facilitators of this meeting also provided food and conducted neighborhood outreach in the form of emails and flyers. The outstanding

difference between these two meetings was the turnout. The meeting put on by Neighborhoods First had a total of 14 attendees, 5 of which were UCSD students conducting research on the process. The VOCAL retreats each had well over 100 participants. While a daunting number of variables affect attendance of any meeting, a disparity of this size is mentioned as an indicator of the scale of JCNI's ability to draw participants. The sheer volume of participation in The Village meetings may simply be proportionate to the size of this 60-acre revitalization project, but the unique efforts by the JCNI cannot be entirely discounted.

One obstacle in facilitating a community meeting as large as the VOCAL retreats is ensuring participation opportunities are frequent and equitable. Some such methods varied by presenter or topic area, but at least one method was universally implemented; open forum comment sessions occurred after each major presentation that allowed for participants to weigh in on the topic with questions, comments or concerns. During the third VOCAL retreat, KTU&A presented design concepts for the project that focused on land use planning. According to an interview with Mike Singleton, a consultant with KTU&A, his company was responsible for making sure they received a broad range of input and that all the participants had a chance to provide input. Mr. Singleton gives credit to the open-mic format of the presentations in reaching this goal, during which they would electronically transcribe notes on community comments for later use.

The importance of participation is extolled by a number of scholars. In a pertinent article on community development a distinction is made between top-down development and participatory design. With participation, the process is key. Further, participation "is not regarded as having been committed to any social goals but is regarded as a technique for setting goals, choosing priorities, and deciding what resources to commit to goal attainment." (Ahmad

and Zadeh 2010). Mr. Singleton also spoke to the importance of equitable participation:

“Jacob’s staff was very clear in how important this input is in making community decisions and they did not try to influence the input or how the input was summarized.”

Education and Skill Development

Involving the input of the entire population of attendees, whether they are stakeholders or casual participants, involves a certain amount of calculation. Ensuring the design and development decisions are informed is vital to the success of any project. One challenge with a development project of this scale and ambition, is keeping expectations realistic. Participants are guided to make their choices through a cost and benefit analysis. Ultimately, this is a financially limited project. A goal of these meetings must be to ensure the attendees that participate in the design process have a basis for making informed decisions that can be useful to the project planners as they move forward with the development process.

Techniques utilized at each meeting to present options and give participants foundational planning knowledge varied by both topic and presenter. PowerPoint presentations remained a universally preferred medium for presenting images to the room. Each presentation seemed to be a slight variation of the following formula: Begin with definition of terminology; transition into case studies and best practices; finish with how these elements apply to The Village site. Further, the communication of how certain elements of development or design applied to the project site was reinforced through practical, hands-on exercises. These were most often referred to as breakouts or table-top exercises.

One such table-top exercise, had a unique approach of communicating a cost and benefit analysis. At the KTU&A facilitated a game-style task to familiarize the participants with the U.S. Green Building Council’s LEED rating system. LEED, an acronym for Leadership in

Energy and Environmental Design, is a third-party rating system that provides “a concise framework for identifying and implementing practical and measurable green building design, construction, operations and maintenance solutions” (United States Green Building Council 2011). There is a wealth of funding available to LEED projects, the amount directly proportionate to the LEED achievement level of the project (Environmental Protection Agency 2011). Achievement levels within the LEED program, from “certified” to “platinum,” require a significant amount of extra spending in some areas, but the options for certification at each level are flexible enough that developers can choose the elements on the LEED checklist that work best for their project and budget.

KTU&A designed a playing board fashioned after the popular Hasbro game Monopoly, naming it LEEDopoly. The game was complete with LEEDopoly money and community chest cards. There was one board at each table, and the participants seemed eager to begin. As a team, each table group was to move around the board making development decisions within each certification level. Much like the traditional Monopoly game, various options for purchase were listed in individual rectangles along the path of play, and an estimated cost for each at the bottom of the square. Unlike Monopoly, the choices were of community investment and LEED-qualifying design elements. Community chest cards gave teams another investment options and represented enhancements beyond the LEED requirements such as civic plazas and community programs. With the allotted LEEDopoly money, each team had to make their way around the board and choose their investments. There was, like most projects, not enough money to make all the improvements on the board, so the game became an exercise in priority. At the conclusion of the game, the microphone was passed around once again and each team triumphantly detailed their choices.

Most of the tabletop exercises were large-format maps of the project area on which the participants were invited to write their comments. A technique such as this one can assist participants in envisioning the spatial components of the neighborhood project. The exercise designed to help participants find sites for open space and park projects appeared to be particularly useful in envisioning the actual size of proposed spaces. Participants at each table were given a map of the project area and an envelop of green squares, representing plots of various acreage at the same scale as the base map (see Figure 6).



Figure 6: Open Space Exercise, VOCAL Retreat, January 22, 2011.

In sum, the techniques used by meeting facilitators were effective, creative, and comprehensive. The information presented was mostly generally accepted planning knowledge, so it did not appear to be biased. It should be acknowledged that preparation for presentations at the retreats inescapably had involved some personal decisions on the content. For example, to discuss parking management solutions, it would be logistically impossible to include a comprehensive assortment of case studies to illustrate every option in the time allotted.

Therefore, the cases presented were necessarily a selectively representative sample. In this way, it could be said that the presentations were slanted, but to an inconsequential degree.

Addressing Community Concerns

The presentations by the consultant teams at the VOCAL retreats contained the introduction of a numerous options for each element of the proposed site plan for The Village. Inevitably and necessarily there would be some debate as to which method would gain consensus from the large group of participants. The facilitators of the VOCAL retreats welcomed this debate, both during open forums and individual table-top exercises. A community member would present a concern or alternative idea and the facilitator would immediately offer the microphone to anyone who wished to present a rebuttal. This practice of seeking dissent was observed numerous times during the retreats.

MIG began their presentations at the third retreat in January with a summary of their findings from the second of the VOCAL retreats that occurred the previous month. They then prompted the participants to raise one of a series of three colored cards to represent their opinion on the issue. These cards were referred to as stoplight cards and are a common pedagogic tool used to encourage cooperative learning (Richards and Renandya 2000: 52). The three colors each represent a level of agreement; red representing a disagreement with the statement made, green representing an agreement, and yellow to represent a neutral opinion or that more information was required to make a decision on the issue. This technique was incredibly effective in visually representing the individual opinions of a large group. The facilitators could easily identify a consensus by looking out on the range of colors being presented by their audience (See Figures 7 and 8).



Figure 7: Use of Stoplight Cards to Indicate Agreement, VOCAL Retreat, January 22, 2011.



Figure 8: Use of Stoplight Cards to Indicate Disagreement, VOCAL Retreat, January 22, 2011.

Addressing community concerns early is a vitally important aspect of any successful development project. As mentioned by Charles Davis, “it can expedite the building process by building consensus early rather than having an adversary battle later once a lot of money has been spent.” In addition to financial benefits, openly addressing concerns can also bring to light sensitive issues of class and race. The format of these VOCAL retreats- as an open forums- lends itself to these types of discussions. During the second meeting, in December of 2010, a

resident raised a concern during a discussion of building height and density. “We don’t want the projects. Don’t give us the projects.” Previously, the dialog had been focused on architectural style, but this comment sparked a much more dynamic discussion. The issue was aired and the participants came to an important consensus. They wanted the housing structures that were to be built in their community to have a distinct architectural character, so the buildings did not look like the government housing projects of the past. This is yet another example of how community participants added to the rich diversity of opinions that will influence the final village project.

Conclusion

Urban designers and developers can use open community participation to create functional public environments in existing communities using the model that the JCNI uses in the Market Creek Development process. It is increasingly important to the sustainability of any neighborhood undergoing revitalization to create and support a strong social infrastructure that will contribute to the social vitality of the area. This is particularly challenging in neighborhoods, such as South Eastern San Diego, that have been have experienced a history of underinvestment. A development project like The Village can have drastic effects on the social dynamics of the neighborhood as new businesses open and new residents move into the area. Therefore, it is extremely important for the developer to take a proactive role in community involvement to ensure these changes have a positive effect on the area.

The information gathered in this study gives insight into how community participation can support an equitable and socially diverse neighborhood, both in San Diego and in redeveloping areas nationwide. There is a great responsibility that comes with neighborhood revitalization. The JCNI has a solid foundation to bring improvements to the Diamond

neighborhoods: clearly stated goals, a reputation for community participation and ownership in the process, and the organizational capacities to implement change.

Whether the decline of social capital is a perceived or actual threat to our society has been a debate since at least the beginning of the twentieth century. This decline was famously discussed in the Middletown studies of the 1920s, in which sociologists used an anthropological approach to study the town of Muncie, Indiana (Lynd 1924). The Lynd study concluded that American social culture was on the decline and that families would eventually resort to completely private lives. In the book “Bowling Alone,” David Putnam made a similar prophecy. Putnam presents a fairly solid analogy that the rise in bowling’s popularity viewed in combination with the decline of the popularity of league play provides evidence that social infrastructure in neighborhoods is increasingly disappearing (Putnam 1995). Neither Putnam’s nor Lynd’s predictions have fully come to fruition. Perhaps what we take away from The Village at Market Creek Study is that communities do still have a strong desire for social infrastructure, they just need strong facilitators to help them build it.

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