

In this document, the practitioner profile is embedded within the researcher's analysis. The document begins with an introduction written by the researcher, moves to the edited profile (the practice story as told in the voice of the practitioner and edited by the researcher), and concludes with the researcher's analysis of the profile.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION WITHIN THE CONFINES OF A HOPE VI GRANT: A PROFILE OF STEVE JENKINS* & ANALYSIS

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INTRODUCTION

As practitioners prepared to implement HOPE VI awards in the mid 1990's, it was clear that the public participation model for urban renewal projects could be significantly impacted. The grant stipulated intensive participation by the current residents, potential end-use residents, and the community at-large. In recent years, an abundance of qualitative and quantitative information flourished regarding the successes and failures of the HOPE VI projects across the country. The information primarily focused on the economic life of the HOPE VI neighborhood, the trials of the public housing clients, analysis of the design features of these mixed-income communities, or critique of the implementation of the funds by the administrative body - the public housing authority. However, there is a scarcity of information regarding the actual planners who are participating in the administration of these funds. Their experiences can reveal how planning practitioners cope in a heavily bureaucratic system that force and regulate community participation.

Steve Jenkins, the HOPE VI Director at the Public Housing Authority of Upstate, offered insight into his experiences with residents and public/private partnerships involved in the HOPE VI implementation process. In the planning practice, institutional restrictions

* All names and places have been changed.

such as grant requirements, politics, planning commissions, and organizational structure often impede the process to the point that a department or individual feel paralyzed. Specifically, local Public Housing Authorities have earned the reputation as being a “necessary evil” – they are the definitive vehicle to obtain federal funding for local public housing needs, but often wield their power uncontrollably with little community accountability and ultimately discount the end-user - the low-income resident.

In the midst of this contentious atmosphere, Steve Jenkins emerged as a positive, innovative director who implemented the HOPE VI Rye Homes grant with much accolades for his fiscal responsibility, timely project completion, and satisfied residents and community members (Jones 2003). His reputation drew me to a phone interview with him in November 2004. By being a member of a HUD-designated “failing” public housing authority, Jenkins’s ability to remain focused on his tasks and work within the confines of the external regulations and contentious political arena is remarkable. His humility and ever-present “team spirit” guide his practice which ultimately creates a positive culture for his HOPE VI Department. Additionally, his hiring practices are aimed at not only increasing the technical skill set of the department but also developing an understanding of the every day lives of the clients – at least 20% of his employees at any given time are current or former residents of public housing.

Thus, the intent of the interview was to explore Jenkins’s over-riding philosophy he brought to his job and how that philosophy played out in a the public participation process set in an extremely political context. It seems categorically impossible to maintain a positive, fresh attitude that incorporated innovative ideas within the Upstate Public Housing Authority in the late 90s. However, Jenkins was able to maintain this outlook as

well as appease political factions, redevelop a relationship with HUD, and empower the citizenry to take the lead in designing an efficient public participation process. One only can ask, HOW?

PROFILE OF STEVE JENKINS

[From an interview by Janine Cuneo, November 2004
Transcription and Editing by Janine Cuneo]

For the past five or six years the Upstate Housing Authority has been working on the HOPE VI programs. In 1998 we applied – it was maybe our third or fourth attempt in applying for a HOPE VI grant – and we finally got the grant to revitalize Rye Homes which is a 292-unit housing development in North Upstate. North Upstate was pretty much our target neighborhood although our HOPE VI program had other phases that spread to other parts of the City. Basically the outline of the program was to completely redevelop Rye Homes from scratch – demolishing 292 units of outdated housing that was built in the 1950s as temporary housing.

The Homes were not only outdated but no longer served the needs of the residents. It did not help [the residents] establish their own identity nor establish a means toward their own self-sufficiency. It wasn't dignified housing anymore. And beyond that, it wasn't marketable. It was designed as temporary housing and it just wasn't meant to last for 50 years.

As the market changed, so did the demands of people requiring affordable housing. Rye Homes became a place of last resort. People didn't really want to live there. It didn't meet their needs as far as the size of the rooms nor the quality of the amenities. Also, it was tract housing that was really undignified – it didn't give anybody a sense of ownership or pride – two factors that we find go a long way developing one's own sense of self-sufficiency.

Background & Education

As for my background, I came out of the Modernization Department. I was hired into the Housing Authority from the Modernization Department when we got the grant. The grant was so comprehensive and demanding that it required us to create a whole new department. I became the head of that department as the HOPE VI Coordinator. The grant was for 28.8 million dollars, that was HUD's investment into the project, but that's really just a fraction of the total project cost.

Since I had a pretty big desire to be an architect, in high school I started working in private architecture firms so I could get an idea of what that would be like. I worked in several architecture firms through high school and through college. I got a wide range of experience in private practice – everything from a two-person firm to IBM where I worked in their physical facilities department in outside Upstate, New York. I went to school at Upstate University where they provide a five year Bachelors of Architecture program as well as a four year Building Science program. If you complete the five year program you get both degrees. So, I went through [the five-year] program.

My fourth year in college I went to an architecture program at the Association of London and got that whole experience. Upstate U. indoctrinated its students with the tech language and a certain way of thinking which I thought was good. But, I felt I needed to sort of test it out and have those assumptions challenged. While all my classmates went to Rome for a semester, I decided to go to London for a full year. Upstate U. taught me a lot of good things, but I think in London I started thinking I didn't necessarily wanted to design buildings anymore, especially high-end housing, stair details [or] skyscrapers for

the first fifteen years of my career. What I really wanted to do was to find a meaningful purpose for what I had learned.

I started thinking more and more of applying my education toward what I thought would be more helpful – especially to people who don't normally have access to professionals with that kind of degree. I started thinking along the lines of community revitalization. It really wasn't called that at the time, it was called community development. Basically, I wanted to do something in the community – giving back to the community.

When I graduated in 1992, there were no jobs. The market was really, really soft as far as jobs in architecture go – even jobs in which the architecture degree wasn't the primary focus. I had to be creative in figuring out what to do. I stayed locally and volunteered at a company called BarnRaisers. It is now defunct, but it was a small, nonprofit construction and development company in Upstate. We provided construction and development services to non-for-profit organizations who operated on grants and a shoestring budget and really needed the kind of sensitivity and lower costs services that a nonprofit construction company could provide [like Barnraisers].

One [BarnRaisers] project I did was to redevelop an abandoned firehouse into office space in the south end of Upstate. The primary occupants of the building were the New York AIDS Council. Also, there was the Upstate Law School Legal Clinic in a part of [the building]. They provided advocacy to a wide range of clients who did not have the financial needs to hire a lawyer and a lot of their clients happen to be people who were being discriminated against in housing. BarnRaisers also had their offices in the building

for some time until they moved out into another building and I was in that building for about three years.

I started my first affordable housing construction projects at BarnRaisers. We built twenty units of housing for people living with AIDS. The eventual owner was a neighborhood non-for-profit improvement corporation called CHIC – Capital Hill Improvement Corporation. Also, I was involved in several other smaller projects focused on providing affordable housing – rehabbing existing buildings or building new housing.

My favorite project [that I] was involved in was working with an Indian Reservation way up in northeastern New York on the Canadian border. I worked with them to build a school. The government financing that the Nation was going to receive mandated that they teach English as a first language in the school. The Mohawk Nation – their cultural – is based in their language and they felt it was very important to have a school that taught in Iroquois since it was an Iroquois reservation.

My passion for affordable housing began early – particularly in college. I had some sort of an epiphany. By that time, I had done and seen the work being done in several small architecture firms that were [working on] high-end housing and retail. Then, I got the experience of IBM in an enormous organization focusing on maintaining and building buildings for that organization. I just couldn't see myself doing that for the rest of my life and I didn't find what the real value was of doing that. I felt that there were lots of people graduating from architecture school that were going to do that. I thought “where would my skills be better utilized and be more useful to people?” I felt that was somehow supplying those skills in communities, in inner-city communities specifically. But I also recognized the need for rural affordable housing. I guess I didn't have a definite idea of what I wanted

to do, but I know what I didn't want to do – that was more or less what architects do for the private owners – whether they are homeowners or businesses.

At Upstate U. and, especially in London, I developed a larger perspective of what's more important – the building or the community that the building sits in? And even another aspect of that – what is more important: the physical aspect of the community or its people? I figure it's really the people and the activity of the people that really drives architecture. Architecture, I find, is just a physical manifestation of people's goals. They build architecture and cities to house what they do. So, architecture and cities are just a vehicle for accomplishing what they want to do. I wanted to get more and more into the core on how to best facilitate that [theory]. I decided that buildings are still important and I still really wanted to be involved in designing them and deciding where they go. But it has to be done in a much, much larger picture of what we are trying to accomplish – specifically accomplishing and creating a healthy living environment for people realizing their goals.

Public Participation Ideology

When speaking about public participation in the context of HOPE VI and the Rye Homes project, I need to address some general thoughts – preconceived notions or ideas that have come to light as many people have researched [HOPE VI] projects. We don't make assumptions on what they [the residents] think. I have never lived in public housing and I don't intend to live in public housing. I don't assume what its like to live in public housing, although, I have worked very closely with it for quite a while now and have a sense of it.

The important part in developing a sense of ownership or a sense of pride in people over something is to involve them from the get go in the decision making process – especially the decisions that will ultimately affect how they live. A lot of that decision making is based on the residents’ experience living in and around public housing. I believe that they can tell me best how and why it works and why it fails. This dialogue and understanding is key to an approach that ultimately works.

I realize my limitations, but I also bring a set of skills to the table. I was trained as an architect and I have a lot of experience in community planning – that is what I bring to the table. I don’t bring the actual real life experience of living in public housing and living in these destitute urban neighborhoods – I don’t bring that to the table. So, I need to get people with that experience to the table – engage and involve them in the process to answer or at least get to the problem of why things have not worked and figure out how to change that.

The HOPE VI program, in general, made a huge leap from previous efforts in constructing public housing and revitalizing inner city neighborhoods. The old mentality was to put up high rises in the worst parts of town where land value is the cheapest and where there is little resistance from the population as possible. If you put public housing in a disenfranchised community with those who don’t vote, who don’t have much money to organize nor much ability to organize then you are much less likely to get a concerted response. City Hall would get a lot of complaints that they would have to react to if they chose other sites. So, the idea was to warehouse the poor with the poor. The process exacerbates the preexisting problem that way.

Also, [previous revitalization efforts] were being done as urban renewal – wiping out entire parts of the city and starting over. HUD finally got that this is not the way to provide long-lasting, sustainable housing. But, that is only part of it. HUD began to think about integrating [Public Housing Authorities] better into these communities as well as breaking out of these communities and start building affordable housing in non-impacted Census Tracts. The question was: how do we get into those more affluent, or at least moderate-income areas of cities where we begin to diversify or spread this low-income population amongst people of greater means as a way to deconcentrate poverty?

That [deconcentration of poverty] was just the first thing they got. The other thing is [HUD] had to address the social problems and the lack of social services in these community. Along with rebuilding public housing, we [Public Housing Authority] have to marry up the supportive services and make them work hand-in-hand. We don't want to put people with the same issues back into new buildings because we'll end up in the same situation, especially if you pack up again in large concentrations.

To HUD's credit, they realized that you have to have a two-prong approach: you have to have people identify goals toward their own self-sufficiency and then provide programs and other assistance that helps them get to their goals. At the same time, you have to build housing that is integrated into the community better – diversify that community with more homeowners. The construction and design has to be something that doesn't stand out and scream “poverty or low-income households” or any sort of negative stigma. It really should blend into the community. So, with that philosophy is how we started in North Upstate to revitalize that community up there.

Two Fronts of Public Participation

I have to disagree with most of the stuff out there on public participation. At least, I disagree with it when speaking about HOPE VI projects. Public participation is not only trying to actively get the residents of Rye involved, but also trying to get the service providers on board and become partners. Many do not feel that these providers would be considered the “public,” but I cannot disagree more. They are the real public. Usually, at least the grassroots organizations here in Upstate, the organizations are everyday citizens that dream to make their community a bit better. Granted they might have a stated mission and specific skills to further that mission which differs from everyday Jane Doe from Rye, but they are just as part of the ‘public’ as the residents of the public housing. I find that this two-fold approach to public participation – [one] the residents and neighbors, and [two] the social service providers – makes things hypercomplex, but overwhelmingly rewarding on the back end. I have two examples of this public participation during our HOPE VI project – One that was very successful and one that was successful during the HOPE VI grant but has really failed since then.

It is important to say that the Upstate Public Housing Authority had not been engaged with social service provision up to this point. We were actually frightened by this prospect. However, we recognized that it was essential to move away from this fear if we were ever going to have a substantial impact on the residents we currently housed as well as the tri-city region. Also, it was mandated by HOPE VI – and, trust me, we desperately needed to do something in that area and HOPE VI was the biggest pot of money out there.

In this effort to move away from our fear, we gave HOPE VI an entire department under the PHA. This really gave pride to the new staff and showed how important this

project was going to be for us and the City. Although some people thought this was exacerbating our fear by placing us off into the corner – literally we were given the basement – I was prepared to show off how great this was and how much great work we could do if we were given our own area to fight from.

The application really spelled out a lot of requirements that we had to take [on] as recipients, they're called milestones. We really decided that these were just markers for us – rather than points we had to *just* meet. I didn't want us to just check these things off as an exercise in and of itself, rather I really felt that we could utilize these points that HOPE VI says to do and expand on them. Participation wasn't just going to be meetings where folks showed up, we spoke at them, they left and never thought about it again. Or worse, they [the residents] became contemptuous of the entire process and negativity would run rampant.

We started with outlining our milestones. If you can imagine, I blocked off an entire wall right outside my office and that's where our planning for participation went down. We set up a list of all the markers, really milestones, [that we] needed to accomplish the public participation section of the grant. This really only took up about a third of the wall. Then we just started adding things that would bring the residents on board and make it a cohesive process. There were very simple ideas like “Call Joannie” – a long time resident that one of the staff knew very well [who] could motivate some folks to come to meetings. And there were some very complex ideas like: “Do community mapping focusing on density approaches and service provider needs.”

The most important part of the wall was a section that we left completely blank. We felt that this was the area for the residents ideas and thoughts for making the

revitalization the best possible. We knew that some of the technical stuff of demolition or construction would not be actively part of the public participation stage. That, however, doesn't mean that we couldn't be working on behalf of their expressed needs and concerns and always have their statements in my mind.

So, the first meeting comes up. We have done hours and hours of preparing for this. I was told that there was a buzz around Rye Homes. The HOPE VI [grant] was in the papers a while back and we were getting a barrage of calls. I think many residents thought two divergent things – either their house was going to get fixed up and all would be great; or, what I heard the most was they [the residents] would be homeless very soon.

I was very nervous going into this meeting. Both of these [thoughts from the residents] created a lot of emotions and issues that could not be dealt with from the top. We really needed to get in there and work with the residents so that we created a collaborative vision for the project while keeping in mind the application requirements and the politics, especially issues with my bosses. I know that might sound counterproductive, or actually impossible. We already had a vision of the project, the money was there for a certain thing and, as good grantee stewards, we couldn't renege on the project that we got the funds for. It was essential to balance these two pressures: the responsibility as a grantee and the concerns and rights of the residents.

Well, the first meeting didn't go so well – nor did the second or the third. I had a former public housing resident and new employee run the meetings. She did do a good job – she followed all my instructions on what I wanted done. The problem was me. I really had a skewed vision of these meetings. I thought if we first alleviate the residents' fears of their displacement, then we could go forward. It wasn't until the facilitator told me that

these residents will never trust words, no matter if it is coming from her or from me. We represented a bunch of lies that these residents had heard throughout their lives. It is only through action that we can progress. The problem wasn't getting people at our meetings – we had almost 75% turnout, the problem was getting them to calm down and trust us to actually make effective change.

I have to admit I was stumped. I wasn't sure how to progress in a fear-based context. I hate talking with people that only talk about the negatives or just sit in their fear. I really couldn't imagine these meetings as positive. But, I trusted Carla [the facilitator]. I trusted her explicitly. Not because she had any education or experience as an expert facilitator, but because she hesitated in taking this job – because she was afraid, actually, she was contemptuous of the public housing authority herself. She didn't like the way she was treated as a resident and had a general distrust for the government. Her grandfather was a policeman and one of the first minority hires in the city and was shot on duty. Since he was banned from moving up in the ranks and also had substandard insurance because of his race, the family was left with almost nothing. They went from a hard-working family to welfare recipients. Carla was 17 when this happened. It was the first thing she told me when I took her out to my new-hire lunch. She told me if it wasn't for her third child who she found out was really sick and needed better health care, she would never work for the government, especially not with the “public housing people.”

Overall, she did not trust the government whatsoever. But I think she was coming around on the HOPE VI project. She really started to believe in this policy once she got into it. She thought that she could sway the residents' views. This change was what I was looking for. I didn't think they [the Rye Homes residents] needed to agree with it 100% but

I did need them to know that there was going to be changes happening and that they could be part of the entire process and maximize those changes to benefit them. It was Carla who swayed them – she was amazing.

Basically, we decided to split Rye Homes into four districts. Each district would elect a captain and this captain would get a small stipend and work with Carla directly. The first meeting they had with Carla I came to also. I really wanted to show them my support. First, I showed them the wall and where I left an entire space for them. They looked at me like I was crazy. They said that they should get the entire wall and we could overlay the requirements when they were done.

I felt deflated. I thought this was my best work yet. The staff loved it, my bosses loved it. We even had the mayor swing by and comment on how great it was to have every part of our community have a niche – with the HUD [milestones] taking front and center. I decided not to take it down, but to see where the captains would take us during the first month and then reevaluate. Let me tell you, they took us places. They were the most influential women on any project I have ever done. I think they could be presidential campaign managers if they actually thought it could effect them and their kids or grandkids.

First, they demanded a space. So we used one of the vacant rentals in Rye and set up shop. Then they demanded resources. And I don't just mean papers and staples. They wanted people. They recognized that they had no idea how to do some of the important work – like mapping, construction costs, defensible space designs, and financial proformas. They actually didn't even know that they were asking for these resources

specifically. That is where I came in. I interpreted the resources they needed into professional development things.

We set up a six month series of meetings and workshops for the Rye Home residents and the surrounding neighbors. We did community mapping, neighborhood indicators of what would make this community vital and vibrant, simplified versions of financial statements showing the money we were working with, needs analysis for the social service provisions, mediated talks on the high crime in the area. It was amazing. I went to every meeting, but Carla and the captains ran them. To see a former resident and four current residents run some of these meetings was just amazing. It was like watching a first time mother just naturally do all the things needed to be a mother without ever touching a how-to book.

The result of all these meetings was a comprehensive plan on how to implement the Rye Home demolition and revitalization. We worked out the relocation plan down to each individual [Rye Home resident] – all in that little rental apartment [the headquarters] on Block C. The captains could get the true incomes of each resident and so relocation expenses were based on actual numbers, not the fudged numbers that we see at the authority.

The most important thing was that my vision wall came down and a new one went up. But not outside of my office, but at the apartment [the headquarters]. I moved two of my workers [besides Carla] over to the site during the first year and really set up shop. At first, I wanted to transfer the vision wall there, but they resisted. Basically, they just never did it. I find inaction can be just as strong as action.

Then, I wasn't able to get to Rye for about a week, and when I finally got over there, I saw they had erected a new vision wall. It was not inside the apartment, but rather right outside. It was this interactive wall that acknowledged the HOPE VI milestones, but really highlighted the work that had been done up to this point. It had pictures of the people who had suggested ideas and also who were major workers on certain aspects of the plan. The kids colored and the whole community seemed to take pride in that wall. I don't really see my vision wall as failing, but rather true public participation as succeeding in the form of this great vision wall, now called the Participation Wall.

Engaging the Service Providers

My second example of the public participation process for our HOPE VI was with the [social service] providers. The new model that HUD is trying to get Housing Authorities to adopt is called a mixed-finance approach – where HUD is not the sole investor in the redevelopment of public housing. Though they gave us 28.8 million dollars to demolish 292 units and build 360 replacement housing units, 28.8 million dollars is not all of what you need to do all that. You have to seek private investments and investments from public sources such as state programs and local programs

We created a new department and I have been running the program since its inception. I had my hand in every part of it – from organizing the residents and the public, to helping plan and design new units, bringing together advisory committees on supportive services that are needed in the community and doing economic development in that community. It is a holistic approach to revitalizing the community.

So, we made it a holistic approach to participation. Most practitioners call this a public-private partnership. I do too, to an extent. I think when we are talking about the actual work being done it is a partnership, but when we are trying to think about how to incorporate the providers in this picture it needs to be done on a participatory way. It can't be us thinking who do we need, and them thinking how do we get the most out of the project with all the money they have at their disposal. I know it's not conventional, but I really have applied my theory that public participation is not just the residents but the service providers when doing on HOPE VI.

My prime example was the North Upstate Community Center. The construction has been delayed for several years now but it looks like it will actually start next month. Originally, in the grant, it [the North Upstate Community Center] was going to be a much smaller proposal of a community center with a few rooms, a branch of the Upstate Public Library, a branch of the housing authority's new employment center which is called the WAGE center – or Working to Achieve Gainful Employment. And that was going to be it. It was going to be built next to School 20 – an elementary school in North Upstate that is right next to the Rye Homes housing development. Basically, it was going to be a very limited community center in that neighborhood but nonetheless it was going to be a community center.

Again, we didn't go in with any really assumptions [in creating these partnerships]. We went in and just started asking questions and getting people together who were experts in each of the fields. When it came to supportive services, we looked around in the City of Upstate which is a service-rich community. We have non-for-profits coming out of our ears, government agencies and a lot of other people that already provide supportive

services. We brought them together as well as the captains and their teams [from Rye Homes] who really knew what they were lacking or what wasn't working. We put [these groups] together. We worked through meeting after meeting trying to understand the point of each of these groups. Of course, we did surveying and those types of those things to find out the needs of the overall community – not just the people sitting around the table. The group came up with a game plan of what services were there and needed to be linked better together and what services were not there and how we import them into that community. Then, we tried to come to some sort of a consensus to work from to start a true consortium. I think we accomplished the theory side of things quickly, but people were thinking big when it came down to services.

But there was a real problem here. It wasn't the complexity of participation, but the severe constraints placed on the group. There wasn't enough resources – no money. The crucial piece is that HOPE VI really just provides start-up funding. Many at the Public Housing Authority see this as limiting. It [HOPE VI] does not provide long-term subsidy to keep programs going. So, in the back of our mind, we had to keep thinking, "How do we make these programs sustainable so that this isn't just a flash in the pan?" We didn't want to flow a lot of money into this community and then five years from now all these programs dry up and we start to back slide into the kind of community that we wanted to change in the beginning. We sought partners in other funding sources that could address the sustainability issues, but most of the time those partners wouldn't come to the table because they didn't want the stigma of working with the Public Housing Authority.

Self-sufficiency is a common thread throughout this process for the residents and the participants. How do you make yourself independent from that government subsidy

and partnerships and looking for other ways of bringing money was the key to a lot of that. So, we needed to come to these meetings from a public participation mentality.

As we began to implement the overall HOPE VI program, we realized that there was no real long-term way of sustaining this community center. And, the housing authority is *not* in the business of running community centers. It was through the meetings with the partners – in forming the public participation of the providers – that we figured this out. I owe the next steps we did to them. The Coalition wanted to find an organization that was experienced in community center maintenance and had other assets that it could put towards or access to keep the facility open. One of the small non-for-profits moved around to YMCA's to implement their mission and so through them, we developed a conversation with the local YMCA.

The YMCA in the capital district is an organization that runs somewhere between ten YMCAs throughout the tri-city area. And, we agreed to put two million dollars towards this project, basically our developer fee from redeveloping Rye Homes. But that's not going to be enough [money] so the YMCA agreed to go on a Capital Campaign to raise the other four and half million dollars that it took to make a full service facility and the whole concept kind of grew. To be honest, we [at the Public Housing Authority] aren't to sure what happened – what made the “Y” come around. They wouldn't even come to the table when we started all this. They were one of those groups that had some money, historically at least, but wouldn't be caught dead close to the 'projects.' I attribute them coming on board to our Coalition. They just wouldn't let up. They all thought the Y was our hope and they pulled on every network they had to get them on board. We folded our cards on the table face up – we didn't have anything to lose. I mean it's a 6.5 million dollar

project because it's not just going to be a couple of community rooms, a branch of a library and an employment center. Now it's going to be a full service YMCA, in fact it's the first urban YMCA that has been built in the area in the past 25 years, where they had three or four YMCAs built in the suburbs. It was about time for them to come back in and we were thankful they choose Rye.

The new facility which is going to start construction next month will be a full length swimming pool, a fitness center, locker rooms and all the support spaces that they need, plus a two-bay gymnasium. At the same time, the coalition decided to go to the New York State Dormitory Authority and apply for a construction grant for a day care center that would provide affordable day care to fifty children on a sliding scale fee basis – so you pay to your ability and it would be affordable to anybody. And, of course, there still would be the branch of the Upstate Public Library and the Employment Center.

We also teamed up with the school district who at the same time was going through a physical facility planning initiative for the entire district. This partnership, like the Ys, was a testament to the Coalition. We found that they really felt like they, not the Public Housing Authority, owned the Coalition. This ownership gives them the license to be bold – to ask, to beg and to utilize some of our resources – resources like Census Data, research, mapping, empirical analysis. You name it, we used it.

The district was going to redevelop School 20 – actually update it. It was built around the 1900s so they really needed to update it. They were also expanding it to include a classroom for [the] arts, a music room and a couple of things that were lacking from the original building. The best thing is that it's going to be connected to the new community center. The school is going to lease space from the new community center. The lease

allows them to use the pool and the gymnasium and the library for \$100,000 a year for ten years. So, that was a million dollars worth of capital that is going into the construction project. Its that kind of partnership where we are getting a much better facility and one that will serve the community much better than if the housing authority had to try to go it alone. But its not just the partnership but the public participation forum that got people moving and shaking.

I should mention too that in that employment center there will be office space for the service provider consortium. They are not going to have a desk per service organization. But this office space can be used on a schedule basis so, say on Monday morning somebody who helps people to become viable homeowners would be there and that schedule will be posted and people can come there if they are interested in that service. Later in the day there might be somebody who would be providing GED services – there is going to be a computer classroom. It is a way of providing space for a lot of services without building a facility that we couldn't afford to build or that we couldn't afford to sustain. The coalition really sacrificed so much –they only have a shared desk. But, like the rental apartment [the headquarters of Rye Homes], it is possibly the most important site in the entire complex. It's where people feel ownership, pride, and collectively.

Jenkins's self-recognized limitations

I had to realize, and I try to tell that to other people, that I can't do everything. That is just one reason why I need other people involved. I need their time, their effort, and their resources. Combined we have a much better chance to tackle all this than any one person or a couple of organizations could possibly hope to. None of us alone have the ability to

make a dent in these inner-city neighborhoods. The Public Housing Authority's primary responsibility is providing affordable housing. Now we've grown that because we realize that you can't have quality affordable housing without having X, Y, and Z – quality of life issues. That is why we are into this broader scope of work.

If we alone put up several units of housing in a neighborhood, or even if we embrace the old school mentality of razing their entire neighborhood and starting over and building housing, that neighborhood would probably revert back to what was demolished in a matter of a couple of decades, if not sooner. The social problems are still there: economic problems are still there. We can't do it alone. And so we are interested in preserving our investments and keeping those affordable housing opportunities there for future generations. It's in [the residents and the providers] interest to be involved in this holistic community revitalization initiative, if only for self-preservation point of view. But, it is also a way of providing housing as really able to affect change in people and in neighborhoods. We can't do it alone and we have our fingers in a lot of different things but we are certainly not doing everything. We are working with lots of other organizations and people in order to coordinate all of their time, effort, and resources –focusing them into a specific area and doing it in a methodical way so that even though we can't do everything, we are trying to address everything in that way.

I believe [public participation] is an old idea that has gotten new legs in the past ten or so years. People have participated for ages – it's what we were founded on. Especially in the nonprofit world where it's a hand-to-mouth business – where they don't have a lot of flexibility in the grants they get and they don't have the luxury of really stepping out and to look beyond tomorrow. But I think that the change in mentality is that we have to reach out

and work with other organizations in an open, ownership-setting way. If not, if it doesn't benefit each individual or organization directly it benefits them indirectly – that is the key to a lot of these programs. [For example], we work closely with Senior Service of Upstate. They have an interest in housing because their seniors live in and need affordable housing. It's a part of their mission, it's not their primary focus, but it is part of their mission to provide the higher quality of life for their seniors.

Participation also provides an ability to collaborate on grant writing. They are more likely to get grants and leverage those grants with private investments if they are not the only one doing what they are doing. This is an oversimplification, but if one organization goes to a funding source with ten other groups then they are, with you, more likely to get funded than if they go out alone.

ANALYSIS

HUD as a contributor, not a barrier

Institutional structures in our democratic culture often impose barriers for planners to fully engage their vision. The political framework is not an independent entity that authorizes the government to act solely as a referee that creates and enforces the rules of conduct agreed upon by rivalrous groups (Klosterman 1985: 91). Instead, politics is a culmination of lively, on-going debate sessions that often, deliberately or unintentionally, excludes the powerless and underserved populations. The planning practice is intrinsically connected with politics (Forester 1989) and often finds itself institutionally caged by the restrictions and limitations imposed by this political system. When a planner becomes caged in, many either revert back to the technocratic persona or become masters at “working the system.”

Two evident examples of practitioners that manipulate the system to further their or their department’s vision include Thys Van Cort, the current Director of the City of Ithaca Department of Planning and Development and Norman Krumholz, Planning Director of the City of Cleveland, 1969-1979. In a visiting lecture by Van Cort, he revealed his displeasure for a particular mayor of Ithaca during his tenure. This tension with the mayor, however, was not an impediment to his goals for the Department. Van Cort stated, “I just nodded to him in a meeting and then went back to the office and mobilized staff and commissioners to rally the troops...there are clearly other ways to get around a narcissist like [the mayor]” (Van Cort 2004).

Krumholz also encountered political barriers that impeded the progress of Cleveland’s planning department in fulfilling its equity planning mission. He consistently made his presence known by attending internal meetings that the department was not

explicitly invited to, producing reports for multiple departments or writing speeches for the mayor. He even utilized the local media as a tool to “educate” the public on the department’s stance even when they were being silenced internally.

Jenkins, however, shied away from these tactics - opting to work within the restrictions and requirements of the system. He perceived the role of the HOPE VI grant administrator, the Housing and Urban Development Department (HUD), as the author of a productive, sustainable approach to urban revitalization and community building. According to Jenkins, HUD created processes such as resident participation and public/private partnerships that will encourage Public Housing Authorities to renovate and modernize low-income communities instead of razing and rebuilding from scratch. Although critical of past HUD urban renewal programs, Jenkins credits their progressive, two-prong approach HOPE VI demonstrates as the basis of the philosophy in which he “started to revitalize [the North Upstate] community” (Transcript: 10).

In embracing HUD’s position, Jenkins was able to surmount the everyday grind that a HOPE VI grant entails. Notably absent from Jenkins’s discussion are the intensely restrictive regulations placed on HOPE VI recipients. Jenkins briefly acknowledges the magnitude of the grant, stating, “the grant was so comprehensive and demanding that it required us to create a whole new department” (Transcript: 4). However, he never permits himself to become paralyzed by institutional restrictions. For example, Jenkins utilized the quarterly, financially-based milestones not as barriers, but as markers of progress:

The application really spelled out a lot of requirements that we had to take [on]... We really decided that these [HUD-imposed milestones] were just markers for us – rather than points we had to just meet I didn’t want us to just check these things off as an exercise... rather I felt that we could utilize these points.” (Transcript: 11)

He seemingly regards HUD as the lead agency that the Public Housing Authority systematically builds upon. Unlike Krumholz and Van Cort, Jenkins was willing to work with the technical restrictions imposed by the outside forces and develop non-contentious relationships. Ultimately this freed him up to heavily concentrate on the areas where he envisioned meaningful change.

Passion, not technique, drives the practitioner

The approach to planning practice often originates from a personal set of values. The planner commits to the community, the city, or the unrepresented members of a neighborhood. The profession has emerged over the past decades from one of spatial policing and technical jargon to concerted efforts towards multi-level participation and envisioning a healthier community for all. Although the ultimate decisions and plans may fall short from the envisioned goals, there is an intentional effort within the academic planning environment as well as the planning practice itself to encourage personal values and experiences as starting points for practice.

As Norman Krumholz's developed his "equity planning" theory during his tenure with the City of Cleveland, he strayed from the traditional planning tools to incorporate a set of personal values based on his evaluation of the underserved population of the City. "I *believed* in [my ideas] and I wanted to try them out" (Krumholz and Forester 1990: 21). Similarly, Jenkins approached his practice from a strong set of established beliefs regarding the built environment and people's place within this spatial orientation. He developed this set of beliefs during an alternative study abroad program in London and an array of entry-level jobs and internships. These experiences shaped his outlook on his

chosen profession, architecture, to such a great degree that this specialty became subservient to the people he was serving.

It's really the people and the activity of the people that really drives architecture. Architecture, I find, is just a physical manifestation of people's goals. They build architecture and cities to house what they do. So, architecture and cities are just a vehicle for accomplishing what they want to do." (Transcript: 7)

Thus, Jenkins evaluates his career in much larger terms than just a member of a professional class. Rather, he developed his own set of beliefs and values that catapult him into unconventional professions for a trained architect, such as public housing management.

Moreover, Jenkins's path to the planning field, specifically the public housing authority, emerged as a calling or "epiphany" (Transcript: 6). As planners begin to expand their role from that of technical experts to comprehensive, community-oriented advocates, the notion that planning is just a career choice also changes. For some planners like Jenkins, planning is not what their initial studies were based in (Forester, Goldsmith, Sletto Lectures 2004). However, social concerns and hopes for the future often alter their paths so that planning develops into their vocation, even when it is not always clear: "I guess I didn't have a definite idea of what I wanted to do, but I know what I didn't want to do" (Transcript: 6). Through a long discernment process, Jenkins eventually established a clear set of values that were based on his architecture background, alternative education experiences, and for-profit and non-profit experiences to clarify that he "wanted to do something in the community – giving back to the community" (Transcript: 5). Thus a vocation was born, not just a career choice.

This passion and desire drove his management style once he entered the planning practice. He continually refocused his efforts on his overriding mission: “to give back to the community.” Jenkins embraced challenges wholeheartedly:

They gave HOPE VI an entire department under the PHA [Public Housing Authority]. Although some people thought this was... placing us off into the corner – literally we were given the basement – I was prepared to show off how great this was and how much great work we could do if we were given our own area to fight from. (Transcript: 11)

By fighting for the community, Jenkins focused his passion coupled with his technical skills to legitimize the HOPE VI department’s position in the Authority as well as the community. This legitimacy rooted him in the belief that he could, and would, “make a difference.”

Public Participation within the Boundaries

A pertinent debate in the planning practice field is the function of public participation and the role of the planner to facilitate this process. Some theorists argue that consensus building, communicative rationality, or perhaps representation will effectively lead to local comprehensive planning that empowers local public entities and individuals to reach good decisions not based on the views or economic/political interests of a few in power (Innes 1996; Forester 1989). Jenkins’s approach to the public participation process is rooted in the HUD requirements for HOPE VI grantees:

The money was there for a certain thing and, as good grantee stewards, we couldn’t renege on the project that we got the funds for. It was essential to balance these two pressures: the responsibility as a grantee and the concerns and rights of the residents. (Transcript: 12)

Thus, Jenkins did not rest content with the power structure imposed on his department, rather he evaluated the redistribution of power between the powerholders (the PHA) and the end-use clients (the residents) and built participatory process from that vantage point.

At first, Jenkins approached the participation exercise as a process of education – the clients teaching him about their first-hand experiences and his staff educating the clients on the boundaries of the grant and their role in the process. This approach failed for two distinct reasons. First, there was not collaborative discussion between the two parties; rather they just talked at each other. This limited, one-way conversation could never lead to any level of consensus building where discourse and deliberation propelled discussion and information sharing (Innes 1996: 461). Nevertheless, according to Sherry Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation Model, engaging in a one-way flow of information, however limited, can be the “most important first step toward legitimate citizen participation” (Arnstein 1969: 364). In order to move towards “legitimate citizen participation,” Jenkins recognized a redistribution of power would ultimately allow the residents to be the lead entity in developing a plan for social service provisions in the renovated Rye Homes.

Secondly, Jenkins initially did not allow for other parties to be vehicles of creativity and develop their own sense of control of the process. The agenda placed before the residents was steeped in pre-determined visions with little room for community partnering. Even Jenkins’s staffer was a puppet for his agenda: “she followed all my instructions on what I wanted done” (Transcript: 13). Although Jenkins had valid restrictions imposed upon the Department by the HOPE VI grant, he was not able to convey to the residents that their opinions and innovations could be vital components of the project.

I didn’t think they [the Rye Homes residents] needed to agree with it 100% but I did need them to know that there was going to be changes happening and that they could be part of the entire process and maximize those changes to benefit them. (Transcript: 13)

In the midst of this initial failure, Jenkins recognized that a true distribution of power must develop for the citizens to hold control of the process and the ultimate outcome. Specifically, Jenkins backed down from his agenda allowing the residents and an entrusted staffer to take the lead. This action demonstrated a large degree of trust and confidence as well as restructuring the power dynamics. This came to fruition in several ways: the residents defined their own method of representation, the staffer assigned to the residents was a former public housing resident that shared many of the same views towards their local government and PHA, funds were set aside to employ the resident “captains” and a physical location was set up at Rye Homes rather than at the PHA office.

Admittedly though, Jenkins did not fully embrace the new power structure. This hesitation played itself out in the vision wall he created to outline his agenda. The vision wall symbolized HUD’s public participation milestones and only permitted a small section for the residents’ “ideas and thoughts” (Transcript: 11). After showing the vision wall to the resident captains, they explained that “they should get the entire wall and we [Jenkins and staff] could overlay the [HUD] requirements when they were done” (Transcript: 14).

Jenkins, however, was not ready to relinquish his agenda altogether. He continued to be an active participant in the process by developing resources and sharing his knowledge as the Director, but he did not take down the vision wall at the Public Housing Authority. He even attempted to move it to the new office space that the residents established in Rye Homes, but the staffers resisted this request. Although the majority of Jenkins’s actions expressed a sincere attempt to create citizen power, his need to be a responsible grantee continued to weigh heavily on the process.

In the end, the residents respected Jenkins's idea for a vision wall and the community's accountability to the funding source, but adopted it to represent their interpretation of the public participation.

I saw they had erected a new vision wall. It was not inside the apartment [at Rye Homes], but rather right outside. It was this interactive wall that acknowledged the HOPE VI milestones, but really highlighted the work that had been done. It had pictures of the people who had suggested ideas and also who were major workers on certain aspects of the plan. The kids colored it and the whole community seemed to take pride in that wall. (Transcript: 16)

It was with this act that a modified version of Arnstein's highest level of public participation – citizen control – was reached. Both Jenkins and the residents recognized the political structure they were working in and that, due to this structure, the residents would not have direct access to the funding source like Arnstein's citizen control level argues for. However, both parties acknowledge this limitation and the citizens still had governance and local control for their own participation model.

Ultimately, the Rye Homes public participation process demonstrates a highly effective model for local groups to actively gain control within the boundaries of our democratic, capitalist society. It respected the established limitations determined by funding sources and legitimized the role of local government entities. In the end, citizens gained control and the overseers acted as a support network and resource provider. As Jenkins reflected on the symbolic seizure of the wall, "I don't really see my vision wall as failing, but rather true public participation as succeeding in the form of [the resident's] great vision wall, now called the Participation Wall" (Transcript: 16).

CONCLUSION

Jenkins, like many planning practitioners, face a politically charged climate with several entities imposing their own set of rules and regulations. This allows little room for creativity and innovation to flourish. Instead of engaging the public and empowering community members, planners often fall back on their technical expertise. The combination of a heavily regulated atmosphere and passive, unproductive planners can severely stifle the public participation process.

For Jenkins, though, he did not view the regulations as oppressive, stifling trappings that broke down public participation. Rather he adopted the philosophy of the overall manager and incorporated the regulations as feasible challenges for the Department as well as the community. He incorporated his passion for doing good works for the community with that of the larger mission of HUD. Therefore, Jenkins created an atmosphere that allowed creativity and innovative within the pre-established boundaries.

More importantly, he effectively encouraged others to work within those boundaries as well. His community participation model, in the end, empowered citizens to seize control of the process and establish their own agenda. This agenda, however, was mindful of the regulatory nature of HUD and the restrictions of the political climate. Therefore, Jenkins, in his role as a planner, did not only become empowered by recognizing the power structure in which he worked, but he transferred this information to the citizenry, effectively empowering them as well. Thus, the public participation process was not just an empty exercise to satisfy requirements. Instead, it developed into a meaningful example of how public participation on a local level can seize control even when the final approval is not within their hands.

Jenkins's interview, though, presents just one side of the discourse. It is necessary to engage the residents of Rye Homes to evaluate how they perceived Jenkins as a planner and public participation facilitator. Their opinions and concerns cannot be taken lightly since the residents ultimately conceded to the imposed restrictions. Above all, though, Jenkins's role as planning practitioner spurred on an effective, comprehensive model of public participation: one which recognizes the imposed restrictions and the political arena in which it works without stifling creativity and citizen control.

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