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# CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

“ TO ME **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**  
MEANS THAT YOU ARE PART OF  
**SOMETHING BIGGER** THAN YOURSELF. ”

—**KAREN MAJEWSKI** Mayor of Hamtramck and new League President





# PLACEMAKING

## *Planning for 2020 Today*

By William M. Costick

*“Ask yourself—will things really change if we have no plan?”*

We think of long-term needs and projects for our community, we dream about the future, ideas of what we would like to do to improve and our first thought is...whoops! We have no money. More often than not, community leaders so caught up in dealing with declining revenues, budget cutting and doing more with less, are discouraged from making plans for long-term projects, renewal and revitalization for the future.

### **Develop A Fresh Attitude!**

Michigan's economy is not going to stay in the tank forever! Local government leaders need to look ahead with vision and positive, creative and realistic leadership. We need 2020

vision! Clear, bright, sharp, focused and yes, hopeful that we can renew, improve and create a 21st century community with all of the working assets, features, and attractiveness we desire today for our citizens and in the future for our children.

### **Is There A Void In Our Thinking?**

Traditional community planning can include a master land use plan, a zoning ordinance, maybe a downtown development or brownfield development plan; and while these are necessary they are not what this article is about. What communities need today is an exciting vision for the future of what the city, its downtown, its neighborhoods, its commercial corridor or waterfront could become or what its citizens would like it to become. A vision with a series of goals that can be converted into action plans and a realistic time frame—a 2020 (call it what you want) Plan. Think of your planning efforts as plant-

ing a "seed" and nurturing and watering the small plant until it bears fruit. With most good ideas it may take eight to ten years to realize your objective, and if you have a good plan and are willing to nurture the vision at every opportunity, by 2020 you just might realize your dreams for the community.

### Getting Started

Open the door wide and invite lots of citizens to be part of your new visioning and planning process. Include a true cross section of the community, residents, business owners, industrialists, educators, developers, citizens interested in the arts and sports, include elected officials, staff and members of existing commissions. The group might consist of 30 people, maybe 60, maybe more? Bring them together, hand out assignments, give them a time frame, and write down a workable process that might outline as follows:

1. First, invite citizens and business owners to participate in the visioning process. Make this an open invitation.
2. Distribute a detailed outline of the process, goals, committee assignments, expectations and deadlines.
3. Break up into specific groups or focus areas. These could include public safety, physical design and walkability, downtown or corridor redevelopment, cultural or economic development, education and recreation, lake or riverfront redevelopment, infrastructure, community image and attractiveness, finance and taxes, etc.—or whatever fits your community needs.
4. Set deadlines for interim and final reports, and a rigorous meeting schedule. Will the process take

90 days, six months, a year? What is a reasonable time frame to develop your year 2020 plan?

5. Make sure someone, preferably two people, are responsible for each study group, its meeting schedule, research and report writing.
6. Be open to creative thinking. Ask people to "think out of the box," yet be realistic. Remember today there might not be money or a private investor, but if you stick to your 2020 vision and plan, who knows what opportunities might present themselves.

### Lessons Learned

It doesn't cost a lot to go through a visioning and goal setting process. It does require leadership, short-term spurts of extra energy and time commitments and a real desire to make a difference.

Past practices have led to master plans, policies and ordinances that were intended to regulate development. We must now be open to practices and even partnerships that will attract development.

To help in setting goals and assist in getting started, utilize the League's initiative, Center for 21st Century Communities (21c3), and the eight essential assets that today are considered vital to strengthening Michigan's cities and villages.

Make certain that when the final vision plan is completed that it is summarized and concise enough to be mailed to every home and business, that it is explained clearly through local media, the press, and on cable, that it is always available at city hall and in the library and that it is never just placed on a shelf to draw dust.

Make the 2020 plan a regular part of city or village business and at least twice a year made part of a formal agenda for the city or village council, planning commission, DDA, park commission, school board or chamber of commerce. Keep a core leadership group together that will make twice a year progress reports to such groups.



### Final Pay-Off, Support!

Following a similar outline, a year 2000 Plan was actually developed in the city of Farmington Hills in 1989. It was a ten-year plan. In the beginning of almost a year-long exercise some 150 citizens with a wide variety of interests stepped forward to be part of the visioning process. In the end the city found this group to be supporters and one could say "cheerleaders" for every good cause the city faced in the ensuing decade. The same could be true for you. Good luck!

## Farmington Hills Year 2000 Plan


- 1989 city puts out a call for visioning process
- 150 citizens signed up!
- Divided citizens into six focus groups
- Agreed on a rigorous six-month meeting schedule
- Steering Committee assembles focus group reports
- Published a 20-page vision statement with goals and action ideas
- "Year 2000" vision and plan mailed to every citizen & taxpayer
- Involved citizens become city's greatest asset "cheerleaders"

## Farmington Hills Today

### Farmington Hills 2020 Visioning Process

In a renewed effort to stay connected with interested residents and gain valuable insights into what they want in the community, Farmington Hills embarked upon a 2020 Visioning Process. It started with:

- City issues open invitation to residents to attend one of four open house opportunities in the four corners of the city
- Residents asked two questions: "What do you like about the city?" and "What do you dislike about the city?"
- Five committees appointed to look ahead 10 years and identify what these five aspects might look like.
- City conducted standardized, statistically valid community-wide survey (through ICMA).

This is a citizen driven effort—the staff is only to help with meeting logistics. 

*William M. Costick is director of community relations for Orchard, Hiltz & McCliment, retired city manager of Farmington Hills, and member of the League Foundation Board of Directors. You may reach him at 734-466-4405 or [bill.costick@ohm-advisors.com](mailto:bill.costick@ohm-advisors.com).*

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**Mika Meyers Beckett & Jones** PLC

900 Monroe Ave NW Grand Rapids, MI 49503  
[mmbjlaw.com](http://mmbjlaw.com) 616-632-8000