Regional Visioning Initiatives: Process and Implementation

by

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ABSTRACT

This paper is part of a larger effort by the USEPA to create a cost/benefit analysis of regional visioning initiatives. While the costs and benefits of various initiatives will not be analyzed here, this paper provides background on regions and on visioning initiatives and their components, and it also contains two case studies of regional visioning initiatives that occurred in the 1990s. This paper will focus on regions that are based on metropolitan areas; it will address regional, rather than community-based, visioning initiatives; and it will investigate those initiatives that are motivated by land use, transportation, and environmental concerns. Because the visioning initiatives discussed in this paper originated in the mid- to late-1990s, effects of these initiatives cannot be discussed with any validity at this time. What will be examined is the robustness of the process, the resulting action plans, and the implementation efforts to this date.
INTRODUCTION

Regions and regional visioning initiatives: what are they, and why are they important?

Regions are geographical areas that cross two or more adjacent jurisdictional boundaries, although residents use a region as if it were one large jurisdiction. A region’s boundaries can be determined by metropolitan areas, watersheds, economic activities, geographic constraints, or by a variety of other shared features. Communities’ issues are interdependent, although the member governments base their decisions on events within their local boundaries. In an increasingly global and mobile world, how can individual member-communities plan together for their futures?

Increasingly, regions are turning to visioning initiatives. Pioneered in the 1990s, but based on planning initiatives in the 1970s and 1980s, visioning initiatives seek to include a broad variety of community members to determine the communities’ values, use those values to create a vision of how the region should look in 20-40 years, and collaborate in small work groups to create a plan to make the vision happen. Implementation and benchmarking are the duties of the associated member governments.

This paper is part of a larger effort by the USEPA to create a cost/benefit analysis of regional visioning initiatives. While the costs and benefits of various initiatives will not be analyzed here, this paper provides background on regions and on visioning initiatives and their components, and it also contains two case studies of regional visioning initiatives that occurred in the 1990s. These case studies and several others will be the basis of the USEPA’s future effort.
This paper will focus on regions that are based on metropolitan areas; it will address regional, rather than community-based, visioning initiatives; and it will investigate those initiatives that are motivated by land use, transportation, and environmental concerns. Planning changes for land use, transportation, and the environment can take several months to several years to implement, and the effects of the changes may not be seen for several more years. Because the visioning initiatives discussed in this paper originated in the mid- to late-1990s, effects of these initiatives cannot be discussed with any validity at this time. What will be examined is the robustness of the process, the resulting action plans, and the implementation efforts to this date.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Regions

 Regions can be any size, from two small towns in neighboring counties to the Chesapeake Bay region, which spans 64,000 square miles and covers parts of six states. While a region’s boundaries cross two or more adjacent jurisdictions, the boundaries themselves can be based on any one of a number of determinants, including metropolitan areas, watersheds, economic activities, geographic constraints, etc. Regions are important bases of planning and policy-making: population, land-consumption, and/or economic growth pressures can cause problems that exceed the ability of one municipality to respond adequately.

Regionalists have noted that once a region’s boundaries have been defined, the areas just outside of the boundaries receive a lot of growth. Often this growth mimics the original situation, in which the population and economic growth pressures were too strong and widespread to be addressed by the individual jurisdictions. When such expansion occurs, regional boundaries must be redefined (Carrier and Wallis, 2005; Peirce, 2002; Kohler, 2000).

While a region’s boundaries are defined based on a particular focus, it is the concerns within that region that leaders must address. The literature about regional planning tends to focus on one or more of the Shore’s (2002) “three E’s”: environment, equity, and the economy. The economic concerns are concentrated around global and local competitiveness (Hershberg, 2001; Kohler, 2000; Richmond, 2000), among other things. Environmental concerns include such particulars as natural resources, quality of life, and land use and transportation planning. Social inclusion, affordable housing, and race and class issues make up a large part of the equity section (Peirce, 2002; Kohler, 2000; Dodge, 1996; Innes, 1992).
The three “E’s” and the concerns that make them up are all interdependent, meaning that a jurisdiction cannot address one without addressing another. Just as the issues are interdependent, so are the jurisdictions: the scope of the problem affects more than one jurisdiction, and affected jurisdictions must collaborate on a set of solutions.

As Neal Peirce (2002) writes, “[w]here American regionalism seems headed, and where it should be most powerful, is in connecting themes, helping advocates, businesses, non-profits, all the players start to understand -- not just that their cause isn't the only one, but that it may only be liable to solution in a much broader context.”

A regional visioning initiative may address some or all of the above issues, depending on the values of the region. Case studies in this paper focus on quality of life, environmental, and economic concerns.

Regional leaders

Effective regional leaders are as different as the regions they lead. Nevertheless, there are commonalities among their leadership efforts. Kohler (2000) catalogs five characteristics of regional leaders who see the need to create a new coalition for change:

- They see the need for more integrated regional approaches that connect the New Economy, livable community, and social inclusion.
- They are boundary crossers who see the need to build alliances across traditional organizations and jurisdictions to address regional problems.
- They are civic entrepreneurs who apply the same entrepreneurial spirit to solving regional challenges that business entrepreneurs apply in building businesses.
- They have a strong sense of place and commitment to making the region a better place to live and work.
They have a long-term perspective and understand the need to make things better for the next generation.

These regional leaders work to connect leaders, citizens, interest groups, and policy professionals. While their end goals may differ, regional leaders share common convictions about the process of visioning. Effective regional leaders aim to include the following in their visioning processes:

- Civic engagement around choosing regional goals and strategic directions;
- Strong private-sector leadership;
- Collaboration between private- and public-sector leaders;
- A more integrated approach to regional development around the economy, the environment, and social inclusion;
- Use of regional civic forums and organizations to influence the direction of public policy; and
- Accountability for measurable results (Kohler, 2000).

Regional leaders want to work with community leaders as collaborators, not adversaries, and they reject single-minded strategies – both top-down and bottom-up – that may win short-term concessions but that do not lay the groundwork for future collaborations. These leaders have found that the most effective approaches to regionalism combine top-down leadership with bottom-up citizen participation (Peirce, 2002; Kohler, 2000; Fishman, 2000). Envision Utah, which is detailed later in this paper, is a leading example.

Criticisms of Regionalism

Regions are difficult to manage because of issue interdependency, the necessity for collaboration among leaders of multiple jurisdictions, and the difficulty of convincing local leaders to give up local advantages for the betterment of the region. Additionally, there is vast public resistance to
regional governance with authority. With a few exceptions, most notably Portland’s Metro organization and the Twin Cities’ Metropolitan Council, the majority of regional bodies do not have powers with which to govern.

Resistance to providing regional organizations with authority rests on the public’s reluctance to create another layer of government, one that may have even less accountability to residents. It has long been a tradition in this country to keep public decision-making as close to the people as possible (Johnson and Peirce, 2004). Citizens may fear that more regulations would be inefficient, corrupt, or both (Dodge, 2001). It is this fear of another layer of government to which citizens and public officials both objected when Envision Utah was first proposed (Osborne, 2001).

Other critics of regional government note that one, overarching bureaucracy is not necessarily the answer: some agencies, such as law enforcement, are actually more productive when they are based locally, even though the situation seems less efficient on the surface (Johnson and Peirce, 2004). Also, multiple local agencies that compete against one another are more creative and less costly than if the services were integrated into one massive agency.

Additionally, Johnson and Peirce (2004) claim that regional governments, in an attempt to serve all constituents fairly and equally, may provide a level of service to rural people who were not asking for it before; and the provision of such services can promote sprawl. The result is that regional government has created policies and performed actions that work against broader growth management goals, another inefficiency.
One more objection to regional governance concerns revenue. Property taxes and sales taxes are local funding instruments, and local governments do not want to lose part of their revenue stream, which is likely to happen if a new layer of government is installed.

In Defense of Regionalism

Why begin to think regionally at all? As Dodge (1996) says,

What used to be resolvable in their individual communities now defies resolution with neighbors or across entire regions. What used to be clearly the responsibility of public, private, or nonprofit organizations now creates overlapping confusion. What used to be perceived as common - even American - values are increasingly contested by conflicted communities and interest groups.

Driving from place to place no longer evokes a distinct sense of different-ness. One area’s economic and environmental strengths and weaknesses bleed into another’s without bothering to distinguish between boundaries, yet adjacent towns compete for industry and discount the effects of pollution that is not their own. One county swears to protect their agricultural land and heritage; the next county extends water and sewer lines to its borders and solicits funds for an expressway. A single metropolitan government might not be the answer, but since many municipalities’ needs are not getting met now, why not try to collaborate with surrounding jurisdictions on some rough guidelines for where and how to develop, or where and how to solicit industry? Why not determine the appropriate-sized “service shed” (Hershberg, 2001) for individual services in order to offer services at the most efficient geographic scale?

Dodge (1996) declares that the presence of one, monolithic regional government is, for the most regions, completely unrealistic. Instead, he echoes calls for simply bringing community leaders and citizens together to address community-wide challenges in a timely, flexible, and effective
manner (Kohler, 2000; Dodge, 1996). He believes that governance such as this complements local, state, and federal governance by addressing issues that cut across those layers; and he argues that taking advantage of regional opportunities as they arise helps to prevent regional threats from becoming regional crises. Operational details of these ideas are lacking, which makes it more difficult to implement his ideas.

Additionally, Johnson and Peirce (2004) strongly negate the efficiency criticisms of regional government. They write that these arguments mask the tensions between still-developing suburbs and older metropolitan areas, and that the arguments also deny that there are some issues that cannot progress without regional action. Finally, they state that carping about efficiency causes delays in realistic ways to plan and implement regional strategies.

There are numerous arguments in favor of regionalism that are specific to the boundary-definition of the region being discussed. One of the most compelling, however, is the opportunity to collectively rise above what each individual municipality would have achieved without collaboration: to be a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

**Visioning Initiatives**

What a sobering thought . . . that the strategic outcomes of many organizations may be the result of the efforts of people simply doing what they did yesterday. – *J. Moncrieff (1999, p. 275)*

If you don’t know where you’re going, you might end up someplace else. – *Casey Stengel*
Description and Process Elements

Residents and community leaders use the visioning process to imagine how they want their region to look and function and how they want to experience it in 20-40 years. As part of the process, they also develop a concrete plan in order to achieve the vision. In short, a visioning initiative is an attempt to step away from business-as-usual by having a broad representation of residents and community leaders dream of a direction and determine how to get there.

More comprehensive and effective visioning initiatives are sparked by a particular problem or are guided by a goal. For example, a common cause is the pressure being experienced by growth in population and in land developed; a corollary goal is to improve residents’ quality of life. A region begins to consider a visioning initiative when it realizes that it needs stronger direction for its future.

Four hallmark elements of visioning initiatives are the following:

- its broadly inclusive nature,
- its collaborative decision-making process,
- its use of scenarios, and
- its emphasis on the interdependence of issues.

These elements are what differentiate the visioning initiative process from the earlier planning efforts of the 1970s and 1980s. Other notable elements of visioning initiatives include strong private-sector leadership and accountability for measurable results (Kohler, 2000; Helling, 1998; Coppel, 1993).
A visioning initiative does not replace traditional land use, transportation, and economic development planning. Visioning initiatives provide long-term, community-based goals for the future, which helps to guide the traditional, shorter-term plans.

The initiatives are implemented in slightly different ways, depending on the sponsoring region. Key elements that differentiate visioning initiatives from past planning programs include broadly representative public participation; some form of consensus-based, collaborative, decision-making process; and the use of scenarios to better communicate different futures. The basic steps of a visioning initiative are listed below:

1. Define the challenge.
2. Assign responsibility for directing the visioning initiative to an existing or new regional organization.
3. Profile the region, including uncovering particular interests that are important to residents.
4. Gather baseline and current-trend forecasting data.
5. Determine the direction in which the region wants to go.
6. Develop a written plan to respond to the challenge.
7. Negotiate the implementing organizations’ responsibilities and then implement the strategies.
8. Monitor the implementation and evaluate successes and/or failures.

(Dodge, 1996; Whitney, 1994; Coppel, 1993)

Based on her analysis of the problems in Atlanta’s Vision 2020 process, Amy Helling (1998) also recommends determining the project’s timetable, the opportunity cost, and what it will add to planning.
At the end of the visioning process, the region has a compendium of its constituents’ values, a vision statement for the region’s growth, an action plan with which to implement the vision, and methods to evaluate the success of the implemented actions.

Role of Planners
Local planners may play more or less active roles in visioning initiatives, but one of the biggest concerns is that local planners work to ensure that their inherent biases not play a part in the visioning process (Hanna, 2005; Moncrieff, 1999). Managing these biases may mean that planners confront and overcome their biases (Moncrieff, 1999), or it may mean that local planners limit themselves to articulating what can be done within federal, state, and local regulatory restrictions (Hanna, 2005). In either case, Hanna and Klein agree that outside consultants are able to probe conflicts more deeply and have more success at facilitation than local planners might (Hanna, 2005; Klein et al, 1993).

One of the effects of a visioning initiative is that structural and power changes in communities’ functions take place, either temporarily or permanently. Although the social capital generated by the broad-based public participation helps to allay fears, change and loss of power are frightening. When local planners remove themselves to a knowledge-importer-only role, they also remove themselves from the direct emotional effects of people undergoing these structural changes. This shelter enables the local planners to continue to be effective in their roles into the future. (Hanna, 2005; Berry, 1997; Klein et al, 1993).

Public Participation
In order for a regional visioning effort to succeed, the initiative must represent as many of the different varieties of viewpoints as possible. As mentioned above, the inclusiveness of visioning
initiatives is one of the elements that separate this planning process from so many others. In particular, people chosen should represent the following groups:

- A broad range of citizens from various ethnic and social class groups;
- Interest groups, meaning groups of people who lobby for a specific viewpoint, such as the Sierra Club, Homebuilders’ and/or Developers’ Associations, organized labor, etc.;
- Policy professionals; and
- Community leaders.

This broad-based participation generates social capital, wins new constituencies for planning, builds trust and credibility for the planning department, and increases the chances that the initiative will be supported politically and will be implemented.

Without these outreach efforts, a visioning initiative runs the risk of being biased or being perceived as biased, which means that more than likely it will garnering little support from citizens, interest groups, community leaders, and politicians (Brody et al, 2003; Codd, 1996; Coppel, 1993; Klein et al, 1993). Without community input, it is not a vision that represents the entire region; and without broad-based support, it quite likely will be difficult to implement.

Consensus-Based Decision-Making

Much of the literature on visioning initiatives emphasizes consensus-based, or collaborative, decision-making. Because of this emphasis in the literature, this author has included a section detailing the process. For the case studies below, use of the process, if any, is not stressed in the materials available to the author and therefore is not stressed in the case studies themselves.

Another key component of visioning initiatives is the consensus-based decision-making model. In work groups, task forces, and community meetings, participants negotiate common ground
regarding the vision and the plan specifics. Helling (1998) comments that “reaching consensus on a general vision is not a unique accomplishment,” but that it is the consensus on the specifics of the action and implementation plans that is difficult.

Discussions are based in part on unarticulated interests and perspectives of the group members (Innes, 1992), and some viewpoints and stakeholders may be diametrically opposed to others. Often, training on consensual decision-making is provided, as is professional facilitation. These groups must follow the basic rules for consensus-based decision-making:

- Group members must represent key stakeholders and people who can make the overall visioning initiative successful;
- Groups must know that the agreements they meet are important and will matter;
- All group members must have an equal voice:
  - all views must be acknowledged,
  - no single voice can dominate, regardless of that member’s power outside of the group,
  - all members must have access to the same essential information; and
- Planning personnel should be available to bridge gaps between technical and everyday knowledge (Innes, 1992).

The consensus-based decision-making process allows members veto power over decisions that they do not agree with, which sometimes can retard progress. In the end, however, the advantage is that the more that people are involved in the planning and negotiation process, the more satisfied they are with the results, and the more they will pull together to support plan implementation (Black and Gregersen, 1997; Kessler, 1993).
**Scenarios**

The use of visual scenarios to illustrate various future forecasts has breathed life into planning processes. Visual representations of growth forecasts translate jargon, lengthy explanatory documents, and dull lectures by government employees into streets and farms, houses and jobs: things that residents can resonate with (Bartholomew, 2005; Brody et al, 2003). Scenarios illustrate the power of choice that citizens have in shaping their environment.

By comparing a current-trends scenario with two or three alternative scenarios, people can choose how they will live. Sometimes more importantly, they also realize that their local government wants to know how they want to live. By asking the questions and putting the power of choice into the hands of the public, planners create immense goodwill that would have been much less likely without the use of scenarios (Berkhout and Hertin, 2002; Winch, 1998; Coppel, 1993).

**Funding**

The purpose of the larger USEPA project is to develop benefit-cost analyses for regional visioning initiatives. As noted above, this paper will not analyze the benefits and costs of these visioning initiatives. It is, however, important to note that these visioning initiatives can be extremely expensive. Envision Utah spent $7 million in federal, state, and private funding, and $2 million more in in-kind support from the Utah planning and budget office. (Peirce, 2002) The money funded town hall meetings and hands-on community-design workshops; printing and mailing surveys; advertising, media campaigns, and tours; and a public television documentary. (Peirce, 2002) The Atlanta Vision 2020 effort took several years and cost $4.4 million, and the effort finished without a strategic plan (Helling, 1998).

The question for the USEPA, as well as for regions considering visioning, is whether it is better to spend this money creating a well-done plan with community consensus, implementation
actions, indicators of success, and widespread political support versus expanding the road-miles in the region’s transportation system. For Envision Utah, “clear civic view, a direction for growth and ultimately the community's quality of place, quality of life, did emerge” (Peirce, 2002); and many politicians and residents, initially disdainful, would agree with the choice made (Osborne, 2001). Additionally, Brody et al (2003) would say that the return on the up-front investment is agreement on policy and implementation, which can lead to more equitable and enduring solutions, both of which protect the stakeholders’ long-term interests.

Implementation

The chemistry of commitment is an amalgam of shared values, purpose, vision, and involvement in planning and achieving something worthwhile. When this chemistry is integrated into a participative planning process, the results are more than a strategic plan.

The planners become inspired to implement it [emphasis added]. – K. Whitney, 1994

Implementation

Translating broad visions into specific actions is challenging. Implementation projects are complicated, finding funding can be difficult, and relationships and power configurations among groups may change (Weaver, 1997). What is more, often the goals of the vision require that the implementation staff try to change fundamentally the way the community functions in order to reshape the values that impel individual choices and behaviors (Weaver, 1997). Making these underlying changes while carrying out specific actions is difficult, and it is at this stage that many visioning initiatives falter.
Many participants have become quite frustrated with the lack of action after the exhilarating and exhausting process of visioning. Julia Weaver witnessed one such moment: “One steering committee member cautioned that if people thought this was simply another plan with no action, they would run screaming from the room” (Weaver, 1997). Peirce et al (1993) call such plans S.P.O.T.S. – Strategic Plan On The Shelf. Clearly, making progress on actions identified during planning is critical to the success of any planning initiative.

While an implementation strategy as vague as “develop commitment by launching exploratory projects and capitalizing on external crises or events,” provided by Boyle (2001) might cause screaming and running, other authors balance short- and long-term tasks with the visioning process’s commitment to imaginative and creative change.

Both Weaver and Whitney recommend implementation strategies that integrate the implementation of short-term projects and working toward long-term systems change simultaneously (Weaver, 1997; Whitney, 1994). Throughout implementation, Whitney recommends finding new and creative ways to respond to changes and evolving trends, as well as creating ways to eliminate organizational obstacles that distract from achieving the vision (Whitney, 1994).

Weaver (1997) offers very specific guidance about how to implement specific actions, including tips on transitioning from the exhilarating and exhausting visioning and plan-making exercises to the implementation stage. Weaver and Moncrieff (1999) caution people to remember that plans are implemented, not by boards or committees, but by people. People are fallible, and Weaver recommends that
the community … keep a constant eye on the long-term goals of the initiative and
continually nurture the process of change. Communities have done this by keeping
projects and activities connected to the vision, and by monitoring themselves to make
sure that they are practicing the values they preach. They build the capacity of the
community to communicate, plan, allocate resources, and solve problems (Weaver,
1997).

Implementation is not the final stage, however. How do communities know whether their
implemented strategies are achieving the goals of the vision? Is it possible to know that there are
other effects that weren’t intended by the actions, and if so, how?

**Indicators**

In order to analyze the effects of actions quantitatively, communities use regional indicators.
These indicators are used as a tool to measure what a region looks like and to determine how it
has changed over time (Carrier and Wallis, 2005). They are representations of measurable data,
which means that they lend themselves easily to quantitative analysis.

An indicator is a set of data that have been collected about particular events. There can be as few
as five data sets in an indicator, or there can be hundreds. The data sets themselves can be
quantitative, or communities may choose to base some data sets on citizen polling (Swain and
Hollar, 2003). The selection of what types of data to include and what types of data to exclude
from the indicator reflects communities’ values. This selection process is inherently biased and
can be quite political. Even determining the geographic boundaries for the data can be biased.
Mitra (2003) notes that the most reliable, influential, and valid indicators were developed by a
broad range of participants. Thus, much like participatory planning, indicators benefit from a
range of viewpoints.
There are several standard indicators, including ones for quality of life, sustainability, health and community, and benchmarking and performance measurement. The efficiency of these indicators is fairly similar (Swain and Hollar, 2003); the choice of which indicator to use is based on a region’s values.

Indicators are most effective when they are tied with public policy and budget decisions as well as when citizens’ direct involvement kindles a feeling of community ownership. If the implementation actions have been consistent with the vision and the plan, as well as with the indicators, then the indicators will reveal progress or its lack. Underlying causes of indicator trends are not identified, which also means that indicators do not provide clear guidance on how to accomplish the desired goals (Swain and Hollar, 2003). In short, indicators’ most important functions are to raise awareness among citizens and decision-makers, which in turn causes decision-makers to rearrange priorities according to community values and to shape the agenda for public consideration of potential and continued actions and resource allocation (Swain and Hollar, 2003).

Failures of Visioning

There are a number of causes for the failure of a regional visioning initiative, and they are listed below:

- There is no clear mandate or pressing problem as a guiding factor for the entire visioning initiative (Helling, 1998);
- When the visioning initiative focuses on the visioning process itself, rather than tangible outcomes (Boyle, 2001; Helling, 1998);
- A visioning initiative de-emphasizes planners’ expertise but fails to provide an alternative credible source of information (Helling, 1998);
• The vision produced is vague, with few concrete details (McCann, 2001); and
• Political leaders remain aloof from the initiative and do not lend their support during or afterwards (Helling, 1998).

There are several articles about failed visioning initiatives, but Helling’s 1998 analysis of Atlanta’s Vision 2020 provides definitive examples for several of these causes, particularly the focus on process rather than on outcomes.

In addition, visioning initiatives can be severely weakened when the facilitators are biased (Hanna, 2005), which can happen if outside consultants are not hired and local planners conduct the exercises; or when too many people, or the wrong people, are in charge of decision-making (Kessler, 1993; Helling, 1998).

As already mentioned, visioning alone is not enough. Actions must be taken to implement the vision’s goals. If not, then the public can become cynical about regional planning efforts, both current and future, and it may be difficult to get them to enlist in a participatory event in the future. Planners can get so caught up in implementing the “vision” that they fail to adjust when cultures and environments change, which means that the vision, the leaders, and the organization become obsolete. This failure contributes to even more cynicism from the public.
CASE STUDIES

According to the article on regionalism from the Harvard Law Review (2005)\(^1\), there are four types of coalitions that attempt regional planning. Case studies in this paper will illustrate two of these coalition types: the consensus model, and the business-led coalition.

**Envision Utah**

*Regional Background*

According to the 2000 Census, Utah has more than 2 million residents. Greater than 80% of them live in a 100-mile swatch between the Great Salt Lake and the Wasatch Mountains. By the mid-1990s, a total of 370 square miles of this area had been developed. Despite the size, geographic constraints left only about 630 square miles available for development.

In the mid-1990s, the Greater Wasatch area contained 88 cities and towns, 10 counties, and 157 special service districts. In 1995, its population was 1.7 million; population projections for the same area were for 2.7 million people in 2020 and 5 million people in 2050. Most of this population was projected to come from the existing residents, not from immigration. In fact, according to a 1997 American Farmland Trust report, 29 Utah counties were among the areas nationwide where development threatened prime agricultural land the most.

In 1995, the state sponsored a survey to determine Utah resident’s concerns and their priorities. The overwhelming result was growth issues: residents were concerned that the region’s fast growth would harm their environment and their quality of life.

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\(^1\) There was no author listed for this article.
Utah’s political climate was a concern for growth management professionals. Utah is a state where local control is revered, especially in land control issues; and state or other higher-government control is always viewed as suspect. While concerns about growth could set the stage for a regional planning effort, organizers had to tread carefully.

**Visioning Initiative**

In 1997 the Utah Quality Growth Public-Private Partnership, quickly renamed Envision Utah, grew out of the Coalition for Utah’s Future. The Coalition was a group begun in the 1980s to stem the population and business outflow effects from Utah’s recession; however, by the mid-1990s, outflow and recession were no longer the problems.

Envision Utah’s mission was to develop a plan for future growth that would preserve the area’s quality of life, protect the environment, and guide growth for the next 50 years. There were 130 key stakeholders, a bipartisan group that included state and local government representatives, business leaders, developers, landowners, conservationists, church and civic leaders, and members of the media. This broad coalition – all of whom agreed to bring their knowledge, experience, and expertise minus their political and economic agendas (Takesuye, 2003) – was selected in equal parts to counter a failed 1970s government-heavy planning movement and to respond to the inevitable resistance from Utah’s highly independent residents.

The end goal? As Envision Utah’s chairman, Robert Grow, said, “We trust the people of Utah to make decisions if they understand what the choices are” (Jarvik, 1998). Envision Utah aimed to bring the choices to the people.
Process

Envision Utah contracted with a market research company to summarize Utahns’ values. The results of the survey revealed that Utahns appreciated “living among people who prize and share a common sense of honesty, morality, and ethics, … [which] dominates all other value orientations and is supported by a dedication to family and the desire to provide lifelong opportunities for the family's descendants. Utah's scenic beauty and recreational activities operate at a secondary level, though the opportunities they afford families to relax and be with each other are related to the dominant value of peace of mind” (Takesuye, 2003).

The values survey also identified six specific goals that need to be addressed in order to support the larger goal of living in place that promotes a peaceful state of mind. The six goals were to accomplish the following:

- Enhance air quality;
- Increase mobility and transportation choices;
- Preserve critical lands, including agricultural, sensitive and strategic open lands;
- Conserve and maintain availability of water resources;
- Provide housing opportunities for a range of family and income types; and
- Maximize efficiency in public and infrastructure investments to promote other goals.

Envision Utah and the state’s Quality Growth Efficiency Tools Technical Committee developed a base-case growth scenario, which depended on the current growth plans with no changes to handle the impending population explosion. Envision Utah then sponsored a series of public workshops in order to develop alternative scenarios centered around the six values/goals identified earlier in the process.
In the public workshops, residents used “growth chips” to mark areas on a map where they would like to grow or that they would like to protect from growth. Each chip represented 16,000 people, and the total number of chips represented the projected growth through 2050. From these workshops, several alternative scenarios emerged. The scenarios explore housing and transportation alternatives, land and water consumption, air quality, and cost of infrastructure. The following descriptions have been taken directly from the Envision Utah website:

**Scenario A** - Pattern of development dispersed, taking the form of single-family homes on larger, suburban lots. Most development would focus on the convenience for auto users, and transportation investments would support auto use.

**Scenario B** - Development would not be as dispersed as scenario A, but would remain primarily single-family homes on larger lots. Limited transportation investments would be made for transit.

**Scenario C** - The focus of new development and growth on unused land would be walkable and transit-oriented development. There would be more infill and redevelopment and investments would be made to extend public transit systems and alternatives to the automobile.

**Scenario D** - The most dense of all the scenarios, the D pattern has significant increases in densities, infill and redevelopment, and an extensive transit system.

In order to select among these scenarios, Envision Utah launched a massive public awareness and media campaign to encourage residents to fill out a public survey and/or to attend town meetings where they could choose a scenario. Nearly 17,500 people responded to the survey, and approximately 2,000 people attended the town meetings. Scenario C was the most favored
scenario, and air quality emerged as one of the top concerns. It is this scenario choice has driven Envision Utah’s subsequent efforts.

Implementation

Envision Utah volunteers created 32 individual strategies in the Quality Growth Strategy document. These strategies rely on citizen involvement with local officials, local land-use decision making and more awareness of free market needs in housing choices. They also require regional cooperation, state incentives targeted to local governments, and local government incentives to developers. As is noted in the Harvard Law Review article (2005), the most effective strategies combine voluntary responses with structural changes on a broader scale. Following is a discussion of local and state-wide changes that have occurred as a result of the Envision Utah initiative.

Local Changes

Envision Utah staffers created a “toolbox” of planning tools, presented them to the municipalities, and asked for ideas on how Envision Utah could help municipalities’ planning efforts. To use the toolbox, municipalities choose what strategies work best for the outcomes they desire and for their residents’ preferences. The tools are designed to help meet housing needs, protect sensitive lands, encourage infill development, develop water conservation strategies, and help municipalities become more walkable.

Additionally, Envision Utah has helped to raise public awareness for transportation needs; and Envision Utah proponents were fundamental in helping to pass a 2000 sales tax referendum in three counties in order to fund transit system improvements.
As a result of this new focus on land use and transportation, several community design workshops have developed plans for specific small areas; and Envision Utah has sponsored several demonstration projects that support the overall goals. One of the demonstration projects was modeled its public participation on the larger Envision Utah effort. Much to the surprise of the local design and planning consultant, residents endorsed conservation subdivisions, and all municipalities involved changed their ordinances to allow them.

Envision Utah’s Community Relations Manager, Kevin Fayles, notes that Envision Utah gives Quality Growth Awards to plans, developments, and ordinances. He says that a list of those winners and their efforts will be compiled and made available to all Greater Wasatch municipalities as a resource for their own growth management efforts (2006).

**State Changes**

In 1999, Utah passed the Quality Growth Act. This act would not have passed without the extensive public support supplied in large part by an Envision Utah-led statewide education campaign. The act allows municipalities to reap monetary rewards from efforts to limit sprawl and protect open space. The act is a direct effect of and in explicit support of the Utahns’ values as well as the scenario citizens chose.

There have been several other laws adopted as a result of the Envision Utah initiative. One bill changed the state code regarding annexations, requiring municipalities to prepare an annexation policy plan describing areas it expects to annex in the future. Another law mimics the concurrency statute in Florida: it requires that new growth occur only in areas where there is existing infrastructure for providing urban services. This law affects most of the Greater Wasatch area outside of Salt Lake County. Others address transportation corridor preservation, land...
subdivisions, the creation of agricultural districts and zoning, and transfers of development rights programs.

**Measurements of Progress**

While technical modeling has shown that the Quality Growth Strategies will save more than $4 billion over the next 20 years, reports of these potential savings do not indicate which strategies must be used to achieve these savings nor how universally they must be applied.

As of April, 2006, Envision Utah has not used any quantitative indicators to determine the efficacy of local and state efforts. According to Community Relations Manager Fayles, because the Envision Utah toolkit is implemented at the local level on a voluntary and market-driven basis, Envision Utah does not have quantitative measures of the progress that has been made. Fayles says that Envision Utah staffers, approximately 10 in number, are beginning to query municipalities in the Greater Wasatch area to determine what ordinances, plans, etc., have been changed because of the Envision Utah initiative; but this effort is in its beginning stages and will not be complete for some time.

Anecdotally, Fayles believes that the fundamental conversations about planning have changed due to the initiative. He says that municipalities and developers call Envision Utah staffers and make statements such as, “I want the Envision Utah approach to this project.” He also lists the numerous local projects that Envision Utah has consulted on in the Greater Wasatch area, as well as the recently-signed contract from the St. George, Utah, area – which is not included in the Envision Utah region – that requests Envision Utah’s help with growth management.
**Funding**

The nonpartisan, nonprofit organization is funded by private donations with the exception of contributions made by the Quality Growth Efficiency Tools Technical Committee, which is financed by the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget.

It has been estimated that the Envision Utah visioning initiative cost $7 million outright and $2 million in in-kind contributions.

**Assessment**

The Envision Utah visioning initiative was responsible for more than 175 public meetings with more than 6,000 participants. Staffers and consultants distributed over 800,000 questionnaires across the region. They have dedicated more than 70,000 hours to technical modeling and meetings, presented at more than 100 city council and/or county commission meetings; and they have provided training to more than 1,000 local officials and/or members of the planning community.

In a state with an inherent preference for local control, Envision Utah managed to engage residents statewide in an effort to protect and optimize its future. The bottom-up process’ transparency and inclusiveness were instrumental in gaining public support; and that public support was instrumental in implementing region-wide changes geared towards long-term effectiveness.

This very collaborative effort, which put the knowledge and the choices into the hands of citizens, was a big gamble. There was no guarantee that Utahns would or could choose a path that would promote long-term welfare at the cost of short-term enjoyment. The political climate of the state – which, as noted, continues to be very independent and resistant to and resentful of external
attempts to exert control over traditionally local decisions – had to be taken into account. Without such a transparent, aggressively all-inclusive process, the Envision Utah initiative could have resulted in a very different outcome.

It is clear that the near-total emphasis on public knowledge and choice in the context of public participation was the deciding factor in the success of the initiative. Many case studies mention that Utah’s political climate is extreme; this author disagrees. Utah’s political climate echoes that of many (until recently) slow-growth states in the mountain West or in the Southeast. It is this author’s contention that a similar process could prove useful to states in those areas that are experiencing rapid growth pressures. In fact, the Nashville area has sponsored a visioning initiative called Cumberland Tomorrow, and the Austin area has sponsored a visioning initiative called Envision Central Texas: both initiatives are modeled extensively on Envision Utah. Case studies of these efforts will be included in the larger USEPA paper.

While the Envision Utah effort is often listed as a consensus-based model, it is unclear what conflict resolution training and tools that Envision Utah and its consultants provided in order to aid the collaborative stakeholder meetings. Particularly in such a contentious environment, some sort of training in dispute resolution should be provided to stakeholders in order to make the process go more smoothly.

It would be beneficial if either Envision Utah, or Utah’s Office of Planning and Budget took a more active role in measuring progress. Specific information such as ordinance and/or plan changes would help to determine what methods have been implemented and where. As well, some sort of standard quantitative indicator set should be used in order to judge the efficacy of the overall visioning initiative.
That said, Envision Utah is known as the gold standard, and it is clear why: the initiative is forward-looking and –thinking, and it has been implemented in a conservative, planning-resistant climate with resounding success. While use of the toolbox and/or overall indicators of quality of life and environmental health are not readily available, the anecdotal accounts from staffers, local government officials, citizens, and the general planning community attest to the initiative’s robust-ness and overall level of success.

**Tri-Valley Vision 2010**

**Regional Background**

The Tri-Valley region of northern California is at the confluence of the Amador, Livermore, and San Ramon valleys and is constrained on the northern and western sides by the San Francisco Bay Area hills. The region, which crosses part of Alameda and Contra Costa counties, contains four cities – Dublin, Pleasanton, Livermore, and San Ramon – and one town, Danville. The municipalities range in population from Livermore’s 73,345 to Dublin’s 29,973 (US Census, 2000). This area is less than 40 miles from San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose, and it experiences population and job growth spillovers from all three areas.

Many residents commute out of the region; however, Livermore is home to the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and the Sandia National Laboratories, among other industries, so a number of residents work in the region. The Tri-Valley area is beginning to see commuters coming into the region from outside, as well as their traditional out-commuters. The area also has a thriving agricultural industry, mostly vineyards, cattle grazing, and horse farms.
Visioning Initiative

In 1998, members of the Tri-Valley Business Council and business leaders in the community noticed a growing disconnect between the actions of the five municipalities, despite their close quarters. There were water and development conflicts; one municipality sued another over a road between the two that did not fully connect main corridors; and the overall quality of life seemed to be in decline. The drive for the Tri-Valley Vision 2010 did not stem from one particular incident. Instead the incidents and declining quality of life intermingled in leaders’ minds with the realization that the region they loved had no collective plan for guidance – a situation that is anathema to business leaders used to dealing with long-term strategic plans. The idea for the Tri-Valley Vision 2010 coalesced, and with the help of the California Center for Regional Leadership, Tri-Valley Vision 2010 was born.

Process

The Tri-Valley Business Council hired the California consulting company Collaborative Economics to help them with their visioning effort. Collaborative Economics had led several similar visioning efforts for other California business councils, and they used their past experience to guide the year-long process. Despite the fact that this effort was led by a business coalition, the steps they used in the visioning initiative mimicked steps used in the collaborative models such as Envision Utah, albeit in a slightly different order.

The steps are listed below:

- Determine a broad vision for the community.
- Fine-tune the original vision concepts.
- Test the vision and values with the general public.
- Implement the actions.
Particularly in the first step, Tri-Valley Vision 2010 endeavored to use as diverse a set of regional representatives as possible. The initiative used two other groups of regional representatives – one group each in the second and third steps – but the diversity efforts faltered after ensuring that there was adequate representation from each locality.

The outcome of the above steps was a bulleted list of briefly-worded vision statements, each of which was accompanied by two or three sentences of explanation. The process also produced a set of value-goals, whose intent was to guide the more specific implementation actions.

Once the vision statements and the value-goals had been approved by the public opinion survey, members of the Tri-Valley Business Council went to work creating implementation committees. The committees included Agriculture and Open Space, Economic Vitality, Education, Housing, Regional Mobility, and the Water Task Force.

Members of these committees were residents with special knowledge of the subject matter as well as members of business communities and of the Tri-Valley Business Council. Each committee determined more specifically what it wanted to accomplish according to the value-goals and the vision statements. The committee members created implementation tasks, and they went to work.

**Implementation**

With the exception of the Water Task Force, which completed its mission with the publication of the Agriculture and Open Space group’s report “Working Landscape Plan,” the committees have continued to work with the surrounding municipalities and county governments as well as with other business councils, economic development organizations, affordable housing and community development groups, etc.
In a telephone interview with Tom O’Malley (2006), president of the Tri-Valley Business Council, he said that the work with various other business councils, regional councils, foundations, etc., – organizations such as the Silicon Valley Manufacturer’s Group, the Bay Area Economic Council, and the Economic Development Alliance for the East Bay – benefits both the specific collaborators as well as all regions involved. The collaborators, for the most part, have been through the same or a similar process. This shared background and the shared concerns make communication much easier. Additionally, all regions benefit because sometimes these collaborators will strategize about state legislation and will lobby the legislature as a bloc in order to get the reforms and/or funding that they need.

The Tri-Valley Business Council’s Vision 2010 website lists a number of accomplishments. A summarized list follows:

- On April 5th, 2006, the Tri-Valley Business Council hosted a Transportation Forum for the region. Tom O’Malley, the Council president, expected participation, especially from the business community, to be quite high (April, 2006).

- Alameda County is strongly considering adopting the Vision 2010-produced Agriculture and Open Space plan for the entire county, not just the portion of the county that is in the Tri-Valley region. This plan was developed in conjunction with the Water Task Force.

- The Tri-Valley Business Council continues to sponsor community-wide efforts, such as one on transportation in April 2006, for the business and broader communities. The Council president reports that they always get good turnout for the events they sponsor.

- The Tri-Valley GIS Project combines the resources of several of the communities to purchase what any one of the communities could not: a flyover of the area. From the flyover and other data, the Tri-Valley Business Council created a regional GIS map. The cities and town involved were very effective at pooling resources, sharing data and exchanging technical information.
A note on implementation: Most of the committee leaders have been in place since the beginning of the project, and they are beginning to burn out. The Council acknowledges the need to continue to support all of the Vision 2010 leaders even as it searches for replacements. Replacing leaders gives those who have served a well-needed rest, spreads the burden of leadership, and eventually creates a much broader pool of knowledgeable and committed citizens.

Measurements of Progress

Does the Tri-Valley measure the efficacy of all of its efforts? Despite the initiative’s emphasis on measuring progress, the website does not contain a committee-specific list of indicators used to assess progress. Instead, overall committee efforts are checked for efficiency and effectiveness; but specific, individual actions are not.

Committees

Housing

The Housing Committee has committed to re-surveying municipalities’ affordable housing statuses every year to assess progress on state-wide requirements for affordable housing, which are stated in the municipalities’ General Plans. This annual effort is easily quantified and provides frequent, regular, and accessible-to-the-public assessments of progress.

Some of their other efforts, such as endorsing and publicly supporting developments which conform to their smart growth requirements are also quantifiable. Since, however, the measures are new and are not easily comparable to past developments’ performance, it is unclear whether this measure represents progress for the region.
Agricultural and Open Space

While the Agriculture and Open Space Committee, which includes the Water Task Force, has made remarkable progress with the “Working Landscape Plan,” as well as with lobbying to get it integrated into and adopted as part of Alameda County’s and Livermore’s General Plans, the regional results of these efforts are not easily quantified. Some of its other efforts, such as advocating for completing regional trails and for preserving 70% of the region’s land from urban development, are more easily quantified.

Economic Vitality

The Tri-Valley Business Council is just what its title says: a group of leaders concerned with and working for business interests in the Tri-Valley region. The Economic Vitality Committee sponsors the most quantitative indicators of the region’s progress of all the committees. The Economic Indicators Report (2004) analyzes the unemployment rate, types of businesses, types of jobs, education levels, surrounding regions’ economic statuses, etc.; and the Committee sponsors a number of other economic analysis reports on the region. To date, the region’s economic indicators have shown that the region is economically healthy, and the successful efforts of the other committees should help to maintain that progress. Currently, the Economic Vitality Committee’s role is limited to keeping an eye on the indicators rather than performing particular actions; and they are doing that quite well.

Regional Mobility

The Regional Mobility committee has produced a regional transportation map, which has helped them coordinate transportation advocacy priorities with other transportation-related organizations such as the Tri-Valley Transportation Council and the Solutions on Sunol (SOS) Coalition. In addition, the Committee also represents Tri-Valley interests in the Regional Transportation Initiative, a collaborative effort that includes private sector leaders, 16 economic development
organizations, and the Bay Area Council, and whose goal is to develop a 30-year strategic plan to improve Bay Area mobility. All of the Tri-Valley transportation initiatives have been included in the draft version of the plan.

Long-range transportation planning is just that: long-range. While Tri-Valley interests continue to be represented, there are no quantitative measurements of progress because there has been no tangible progress.

Education

The Education committee continues to have both student and business participants for their internship program, which includes a working internship as well as instruction in professionalism. They also see continuing interest from students and businesses in the Tri-Valley Career Pathways career-selection mentoring program. Additionally, the science fair that the committee promotes and sponsors continues to produce individuals and student teams that are nationally competitive in science.

The Tri-Valley Business Council currently is not using quantitative indicators for the Education category of Vision 2010. Should the Council choose to use quantitative measures in the future, however, some suggestions include the following data: education levels of age-cohort segments of the population; unemployment rates and education levels, by age; percent of various types of jobs; median incomes by age; etc.

While the Council is making a continuing effort in the educational arena, this issue does not appear to be their top priority. Depending on housing prices, affordable housing demand, in-commuting patterns, and age-related out-migration, priorities may change in the future.
Overall

If they were easily available, the combination of the economic, housing, and agricultural and open space indicators, regardless of how quantitative they are, could provide region residents with a snapshot of changes in the region’s quality of life. The implementation efforts do seem to be goal-appropriate, which helps maintain the project’s credibility; measuring progress would provide even more.

Funding

The Tri-Valley Vision 2010 program receives annual funding from each municipality and county in the region. The president of the Tri-Valley Business Council, Tom O’Malley, presents the efforts, results, and measures of progress each year to the funding entities.

Assessment

Process

At the start of the visioning initiative effort, the goal was to maintain and, if possible, improve the region’s quality of life and economic vitality. In addition to specifying the purpose of the initiative, the consulting company Collaborative Economics ensured that the number of people tasked with the creation of the vision statements was representative as well as organized into productive-sized sub-groups. Also, the Council and the consultants expected tangible, actionable recommendations rather than vague statements about potentially unattainable goals. These three problems – lack of a unifying goal, the involvement of too many people to easily manage, and production of vague vision statements – were all blamed in the failures of Atlanta’s Vision 2020 and Phoenix’s Valley Vision 2020 initiatives.

It is unclear what, if any, conflict resolution techniques were used in the groups.
Regarding the second and third selected groups – the group that helped to fine-tune the visioning statements and develop the values goals, and the group that responded to the initiative-assessment survey, respectively – the lack of representation of any characteristic other than location could have severely hampered the outcome of the visioning initiative. It is possible that a bad outcome was averted because the region is relatively small and probably homogenous; regardless, this problem is one that other regions should avoid.

**Implementation and Measures of Progress**

The Vision 2010 project is prominent on the Tri-Valley Business Council website, and a number of Council-related items link to projects and/or reports on the Vision 2010 section of the site. The Council’s mission statement even references Vision 2010. It is clear that Vision 2010 is a major priority for the Council and that the vision that it represents is uppermost in the minds of active Council members.

While the vision statements, values, and accomplishments are easy to find on the website, for the most part, measures of progress require searching, if they are available at all. An annual or bi-annual report on undertaken and ongoing efforts, as well as the progress made on these actions, would help the public to be more aware of Vision 2010-inspired improvements. The newsletters released once or twice a year are not specific enough to fill this need.

**Overall Assessment**

In the author’s opinion, this visioning effort is an unmitigated success. The vision statements are clear, the values and their explanations are accessible and succinct, the committees are active, and they make progress in and/or achieve their aspirations, which support both the vision statements and the values.
The region’s population is relatively small, and government is correspondingly small. This ongoing implementation effort is staffed primarily by volunteers. Citizen commitment is paramount: if citizens are apathetic, there is no supporting structure to pick up the slack, and goals do not get accomplished. It is clear, therefore, by the committees’ continuing actions that the region’s citizens fully support Vision 2010.

With their emphasis on affordable housing, education, and long-range transportation planning, Tri-Valley Vision 2010 has overcome fears espoused in the literature about business-led coalitions (Harvard Law Review, 2005; Kanter, 2000) and their potential lack of focus on social equity issues and long-term issues. Other authors (Hershberg, 2001; Raufer, 2001; Rusk, 2000; Richmond, 2000) have supported business-led regional coalitions for many of the regions that Tri-Valley Vision 2010 has been successful: it is in business’ self-interest to maintain an educated workforce, affordable housing for their employees, and an overall good quality of life. These objectives are especially important for regions surrounded by areas that are competitive in these arenas.

The most important factor in this initiative’s success, however, is that Vision 2010 was conceived by and is being implemented by business people. Successful business people are used to creating achievable goals, determining tasks, and delivering results. The parts of Vision 2010 that are successful – which is nearly all of them – are explicit examples of good business practice. In this author’s opinion, more visioning initiatives would be successful if business-savvy people were part of the organizational and implementation processes.
REFERENCES


