

Manitoba Inter-Governmental Affairs: Planning District Conference 2000
Gimli Lakeview Resort: February 4th and 5th, 2000

Plenary Presentation: Saturday February 5th, 2000: Theme II:
Planning Challenges and Opportunities for the New Millennium

Hopes and Dreams: The Stuff of Planning – For a Good Time For a Long Time

Dr Ian Wight MCIP
Assistant Professor of City Planning and Environmental, Design
Faculty of Architecture, University of Manitoba
Tel 204 474-7051 Email <Ian_Wight@Umanitoba.CA>

Introduction: Partnering with Nature

Yesterday we focused on ‘enhancing partnerships’; today we shift to the broader context for all our partnering. My instructions were, in part, to provide a global perspective (possibly in part to balance, and complement, your own local or district perspectives). And as you’ll soon see, I have some big sprawling ideas to lay on you, in the order of hopes and dreams as the real ‘stuff’ of planning. But I will also be talking about a partnership, perhaps the key partnership, that we’ll need to achieve, if we are to continue having our current relatively good time, for a relatively long time. Right now it seems we can have one or the other, but not both.

And here we find our biggest challenge – because the big threat we face right now is that we as a species seem to have chosen a good time (at Nature’s expense) rather than choosing – and proactively planning - to be around for a long time. It is good long-term planning that will give us the opportunity to have both. Essentially, this means planning to partner, though perhaps on a grander scale than the partnerships you were contemplating yesterday. The scale is now global or, perhaps more meaningfully – planetary, as in Planet Earth. I will argue that the key partnership that will have to evolve

if we are to make it very far into this new Millennium will be the partnership between us and Nature in the context of our common home – Planet Earth. If we don't get this partnership right soon we could be doomed, because – as farming folks especially know all too well – Nature will have her way with us!

Planning a Good Time F/OR a Long Time

It is therefore a real challenge and opportunity that I have been given to introduce today's theme: 'Planning Challenges and Opportunities for the New Millennium'. Partly this means dealing with the possible essence of planning – which may be a rather strange, less-than-human, activity for many of you, but it also means engaging the very human traits of head-scratching and eyebrow-raising.

We know we are in the vicinity of a good challenge when we find ourselves scratching our heads vigorously. We know we're in the vicinity of a good opportunity when we find our eyebrows rising noticeably. This we know well from personal experience in ordinary circumstances, and it is relatively straightforward for us to act on this knowledge. This linking of knowledge and action is basic planning on a personal plane, and we should not lose sight of this.

But our planning context today is rather **extraordinary** – we have in fact not just a new year or a new decade or a new century, but **a new millennium** to exercise us as our frame of reference. We're talking much more than our own lifetimes, more than that of current generations, and certainly more than municipal councilor election time-frames. Are you up to some head-scratching and eyebrow-raising on a millennial scale? I hope so, and I dream so, because I sense these – hopes and dreams - are the very stuff of planning in a new millennium context.

Challenges connote head-scratching uncertainties, but throw in a new millennium – where the very sustainability of our home, Planet Earth, becomes an uncertainty - and the challenges take on the characteristics of deficiencies in the wisdom necessary to give a future generation the prospect of actually making it to the next century, never mind the

next millennium. I think in fact we will be challenged enough by a time-frame of a few generations; and in this respect we have some native wisdom to draw on. As Mike Nickerson reminds us in a small book laying out some guideposts for a sustainable future:

“There is a tradition within some societies, whenever decisions are being made, to consider the interests of the next seven generations. For the modern world to do the same would mark our passage to maturity... More than seven thousand generations have cared and toiled to make our lives possible... Surely we are obliged to find ways to allow for at least another seven generations... It is simply impossible to depend on non-sustainable ways for that long. If civilization is to exist seven generations from now, much will have changed” (Nickerson, 1993, 12).

In this context, eyebrow-raising opportunities are those that go beyond ‘business as usual’, to make some real headway towards fundamental (ecological rather than technological) sustainability, to make a difference – rather than more of the same. And as some wag has said, wisely: ‘If we don’t change direction, we’ll end up where we’re going’.

So – Where are we going? What is our current direction? Could we be heading over the proverbial cliff, for a fatal fall? I was stopped short in my own tracks recently when reading a book by Don Gayton, a Canadian author, now based in Nelson, BC, but with a good Prairies pedigree. His book – *Landscapes of the Interior* – is full of wonderful essays exploring our relationship to nature in a very accessible down-to-earth manner. In one of the closing essays - **Ethics of the Plateau** – the main concern is with sustainability, and Gayton conveys his sense of where we are going, and our current reality. He sees us residing on a metaphorical plateau, representing our high-level highly-extravagant use of natural resources – paying no heed to the now fast-looming edge/end of the plateau:

‘I seem to be standing now on a plateau, have taken up residence on it in fact. The skies are clear but the wind is sharp, faintly alien, and the sight of the great distances is not a comfort. There, drifting in the remotest parts of the horizon’s bluish haze, is the farthest edge of the plateau, the break in the curve of resources.

I don't want to be here. ... The wind carries with it a whiff of apocalypse'. (158-159)

Gayton confesses to an associated 'mortal fear', rooted in what he assesses as 'our inability to look across the plateau and confront the future'. For him, the issue is sustainability (in spite of what he calls 'the widespread co-opting and trivialization of the term'). Intriguingly, he first wonders: 'Can we sustain ourselves long enough to sort out our relationship with nature?' - a big **challenge** obviously, but then he points the way more definitively, by suggesting this involves finding 'a useful middle ground between science and the mystical?' (160). I actually interpret this as an **opportunity** of sorts, to respond to the challenge, if we are up to conceiving hopes and dreams - comparatively 'mystical' and **un**-scientific as they may seem - as the real stuff of planning. But first we have to make a more fundamental decision. As Gayton continues:

'The farthest edge of the resource plateau is the one I have no interest in exploring. A question hangs in the air above it: why, having seen the edge of this plateau, do we still consume natural resources at the current level of extravagance? Whether we consider our kind as part of or separate from nature, **it is time to decide whether our species is here for a good time, or a long time.**' (164)

A good time **OR** a long time – what is it to be? Because, as Gayton sees it, unless we find the will and the ability to confront the future, and to alter our extravagant ways in more sustainability-conscious directions, we won't be able to continue our current 'good' time for a 'long' time – such as seven generations! Planning, it seems to me, has a natural role to play here – if we can grow 'it' beyond the confines of applied science into the very stuff of our collective hopes and dreams, and if folks like yourself are up to the task. It's time to plan as if future life on Earth depended on it – because it well might. And this will require planning by all and sundry, but perhaps critically with leadership from the likes of yourselves – for this kind of seven generation planning is far too important to be left to professionals only. The challenge then is to achieve a planning that delivers a good time for a long time - community by community, place by place; and the opportunity to do so, in the context that most matters for us, is in this room (what a heartening turnout!) – in

your very presence, with open hearts and minds, if we can somehow galvanize our hopes and dreams into/onto our planning endeavors.

Re-Defining Planning –

From an ‘It’ done by ‘Them’ to a ‘We’ implicating ‘Us’:

What’s planning anyway? Is it simply about land and how it’s used and allocated, **or** is it about people and how they live and commune? Is planning only what the Planning Act says it is, **or** is it how a community makes something of itself – makes itself a great place, (like Gimli here, our host-town)? Is planning simply a matter of servicing private development proposals - of following (rather than leading) the real estate market, **or** is it a public enterprise delivering public (rather than private) goods in a proactive future-anticipating fashion? I’m obviously suggesting the latter in each case – but note that the alternative perspectives easily encompass the conventional perspectives; the operative strategy is one of transcending while including, rather than reducing an issue to a case of one approach or another.

And, getting a little more personal, could you have some conventional perspectives to ‘transcend’? Do you feel ‘included’ in the planning you experience? Or is planning something that is ‘beyond’ you – personally – i.e. as being more in the thrall of, and under the control and direction of, professionals and technocrats and bureaucrats? Is it too easy for you to feel on the ‘receiving’ end of planning – as a ‘put-upon’ plannee? Or can you conceive of yourself in an active planning mode, within a community, with fellow citizens, directly representing – and effectively manifesting - ‘community planning’? I would suggest – from my interpretation of the history of planning theory - that there is a definite trend in the basic philosophy of planning, one that favours a transcending of conventional perspectives, and a more inclusive outlook. And it’s all a case of changing ‘prepositions’ (how we ‘pre-position’ planning).

Prepositionally, planning has been steadily evolving from a ‘planning FOR’ disposition, with the planner cast as the expert and placed on a pedestal, to a ‘planning WITH’

disposition – planning with people, exchanging different types of necessary knowledge, with planner and plannee more on a par with one another. And I have a hunch that we could be in the throes of a further shift, in the direction of a ‘planning BY’ ‘pre-position’, as in planning, comparatively directly and in a highly participatory fashion, by folks themselves. This puts you – the true community planners – in the driving seat, while re-positioning your professional planners as resource persons, i.e. as being on tap rather than on top.

In moral philosophy terms this represents a shift from planning’s utilitarianism roots to embracing a future that values communitarianism. The major text on Canadian planning – *Planning Canadian Communities*, by Gerald Hodge – actually concludes with this kind of assessment, with Hodge summing up his sense of the planning challenge and opportunity as ‘redeeming and regenerating *community* planning’ (Hodge, 1998, 450). I would stress his emphasis on ‘community’ as the key pre-fix. This is your area of expertise; this is where you are ‘at home’. Are you up to this challenge, and up to capitalizing on the opportunity presented by this evolution of planning? (Given what I observed yesterday...) I’d think ‘Yes’, especially if you can also answer the following questions in the affirmative. Can you hope? Can you dream?

I’d like to suggest that the real ‘stuff’ of planning resides less in the likes of raw land and market signals than in hopes and dreams – planning as the organization of hope on a community basis, and as an exercise in collective dreaming that inspires communal – rather than individual - action. With this view, planning ceases to be just an ‘It’- out there, controlled by them – and becomes more of a ‘We’ where each of us – not as pure individuals, but as ‘persons-in-community’ – are morally bound together, to pursue our collective hopes and dreams. And it is in this light that I offer my sense of a few key challenges and opportunities, that you might want to embrace with your own hopes and dreams. They are challenges that have caused me a fair amount of head-scratching, and they are opportunities that were signaled by a distinct raising in my eye-brows when I first encountered them. And within them you’ll find a good indication of my own hopes and dreams about the course of planning in this new millennium.

Challenges: Re-Directions.

I see the challenges mainly in terms of re-directing efforts, from status quo or ‘business-as-usual’ positions, for example, to more change-embracing positions. They add up to a transformation agenda of sorts, with comparatively revolutionary overtones. But revolutions have much more political currency these days – we need look no further than the current Ontario and Alberta governments, and we are now in a fresh new millennium after all! However, the challenges in my estimation are less in the realm of the neo-classical economics that are driving the changes elsewhere, but more in the realm of ‘ecologies’. They are driven by an ecological logic – within an ecological world-view, that arches over current economic and environmental reference points.

The basic challenge is one of accumulating ecological wisdom – fast – before we fall off the edge of Gayton’s plateaux. And the accumulation of ecological wisdom is a natural role for new millennium planning, for – as Ken Wilber observes, in a 1996 book immodestly titled *A Brief History of Everything* – “the startling fact is that ecological wisdom does not consist in how to live in accord with nature; it consists in how to get subjects [i.e. folks like you and me] to agree on how to live in accord with nature” (Wilber, 1996, 292). How can we get a bead on the ecological? This is the first challenge – sorting out the essence of our relationship with nature.

From Environmental to Ecological: Most fundamentally, we have to sort out whether we are **part of** nature or **apart from** nature. The latter seems to best represent our current stance, and it seems to be one we’re fairly comfortable with; it suits our ego. Nature is reduced to ‘the environment’ – something separate from us. This highly utilitarian ‘environmental’ positioning has us independent of ‘the environment’, or in a managed relationship with the environment, or – most significantly – as being in a position (of dominion) ‘over’ the environment. In this ‘environment-out-there’ view, ‘ecological’ refers only to yet one more particular narrow field of science – cold, clinical, objective, flat. This is **not** the meaning of ‘ecological’ which I am promoting as part of this

particular challenge. Instead I want to give it a very subjective frame of reference – as personal as one’s ego.

Can you conceive of having an ‘eco’ that is as powerful as your ego, that is on a par with your ego? Because, if we can (eco-istically) conceive ourselves and the environment as one integrated life-system - where we are literally in it/nature together, making up an all-embracing ecosystem – then we will have entered the realm of the ecological. And this world-view will begin to re-direct our thinking, and decision-making, and action-taking in a fundamental – potentially planetary-life-saving – manner. The prospect of having a good time for a long time is opened up; we are no longer restricted to the probability of having a good time for only a short time. But how can this eco-philosophizing be grounded in current Manitoba reality? Another challenge emerges.

From Sustainable Growth to the Growth of Sustainability: Manitoba has had a comparatively long engagement with the ideal of sustainable development, following up the now seminal contribution of the 1987 Brundtland Commission report, *Our Common Future*. A form of ‘official’ sustainable development has taken root in many government circles, but it is fundamentally flawed from an ecological perspective, because of its equation with/limitation to ‘sustainable economic growth’.

The challenge will be to put this oxymoron behind us as our main public policy driver, and to shift the focus from sustainable growth to the ‘growth’ of sustainability. It can be argued that sustainability itself can be ‘developed’ from an essentially **technologically sustainable** reference point (the basis of current Manitoba policy) to an explicit **ecologically sustainable** reference point. Having a good time **for a long time** depends on us embracing the latter as our main goal sooner than later.

The critical distinction between the two forms of sustainability is particularly well-articulated by David Orr in his 1992 book, *Ecological Literacy*. Technological sustainability aims to sustain continued economic growth (quantitative expansion) by relying on technological ‘fixes’, cash investments and market signals to solve any

environmental problems that might emerge. This is actually a good thing; it is a major improvement on past **unsustainable** approaches. But it is only part of the intervention that Orr sees as necessary. He uses the analogy of Planet Earth as a heart attack victim: technological sustainability is about ‘stabilizing planetary vital signs’, while ecological sustainability is about developing alternatives to the practices that got us into trouble in the first place.

The two perspectives are partly complementary and successive, but their adherents have difficulty communicating with one another, and the challenge for folks like yourself is to be a bridge between them. And it won’t be easy to ‘grow’ sustainability into the ecological realm. Stabilizing vital signs can be done by hi-tech solutions – assuming the money is available to invest in the usually very expensive life-preserving technology. By contrast, achieving ecological sustainability requires revamped life-styles and more sensible ‘diets’ (read this as: lowered consumption, less meat, less fat, less oil etc). We are talking major behavior change, on a mass scale. No small challenge – I’m sure you’d agree. And it points to another challenge – mere communication and cooperation between the two camps may not be enough.

From Cooperation to Collaboration (Putting Partnership in Perspective): Embracing the ecological - rather than the merely environmental, and actively pursuing the growth of ecological sustainability - rather than the dubious notion of ‘sustainable growth’, generates another challenge – in how we mainly relate to one another in the public domain. We have often preferred to operate from a stance that highly values our autonomy, our independence – trying to maximize the ability to ‘do our own thing’. Unfortunately this denies the interdependency that is at the heart of an ecological world-view. We have to actively develop the way in which we fundamentally relate to one another – to levels more in line with an ecological perspective. This challenge can perhaps best be represented in the current Manitoba context as a need to aim for more than just more ‘cooperation’ with our neighbors; the actual need from an ecological sustainability perspective is more in the nature of collaboration – an almost unnatural act for many!

The distinction between cooperation and collaboration can be better comprehended in terms of a broader ‘ladder’, identifying different possible levels of interaction between otherwise autonomous entities. I first came across the idea in some research on how a couple of US regions – Portland, Oregon and Kansas City – have tried to get their acts together (Seltzer, 1995; Warm, 1995). The ladder can be used to rate the level of your inter-relating with your municipal neighbors or community partners. The lowest level of interaction has been characterized as ‘isolation’ – akin to an unrelated pack of ‘lone wolves’ going their own way. Real inter-relationships begin with simple communication, which might be no more than keeping one another informed of otherwise separate independent activities. Moving up the ladder areas may achieve coordination or cooperation between members, at least in some respects. This level of interaction, while increasingly common, is still well short of a fourth degree of interaction - collaboration, where a more fundamental ‘merger’ of interests may occur. Seltzer outlines collaboration as:

“A more fundamental merger of interests, where organizations recognize that taking action together, making several actions into one, can make it possible to achieve individual organizational objectives more efficiently, leveraging more out of the same net level of effort expended through coordination or cooperative efforts”.

The highest, fifth, degree of interaction is represented by ‘partnership’, and in this respect I am aware that - yesterday - the conference focus was on ‘building effective partnerships’. It is possible that some of the partnerships discussed would indeed rate as true ‘Partnership’ in terms of the ladder. Realize though that Seltzer would reserve the term ‘partnership’ to signify something more than - something beyond - collaboration (which in turn is something well beyond what is characterized as cooperation or communication). He defines partnership as: “The development of common objectives and a true merger of interests. Responsibility for the outcome, good and bad, is assigned to the partnership rather than to the individual collaborators”. This is akin to how an ecosystem operates; it is not necessarily how a business-style partnership would operate. The main planning challenge as I see it is to achieve ecosystem-like partnerships, as the

climax of a concerted effort to ‘grow’ the quality and level of inter-relating – in recognition of fundamental interdependencies. Getting to cooperation from communication may be enough of a challenge for some; moving from cooperation to collaboration will be their next challenge – with much head-scratching in-between! (But a neat little 1997 book by Ted Bernard and Jora Young could well provide relief: *The Ecology of Hope: Communities Collaborate for Sustainability*).

Opportunities: Re-Visions.

But enough of the challenges – what about the opportunities? Whereas the challenges featured strategic ‘re-directions’ of our efforts (with ecological sustainability in mind), the opportunities centre on ‘re-visions’ – revised visions of the future we intend, better attuned to our hopes and dreams, for a good time for a long time. They focus on choices we can make, if we have the courage, the wit, the wisdom, and the will. I am assuming we are not interested in actually making a choice **between** a good time **or** a long time, but if we don’t consciously plan - for seven generations or thereabouts – we may literally have ‘no choice’ on the matter! A first step might be to refine the possible essence of ‘a good time’ with ecological sustainability in mind i.e. as genuine progress (rather than ‘gross’ production and consumption levels). Similar opportunities exist to expand our current ‘capital budgeting’ perspective, and to better monitor our ‘ecological footprint’.

Genuine Progress vs Gross Production: An opportunity exists to put our planning on a more solid footing in terms of how we view, and literally ‘value’, economic growth. We currently worship the economy according to the measure of Gross Domestic Production (GDP), which generally delivers comforting constant growth – more and more in quantitative terms. So why don’t we have a stronger sense of progress in our personal and communal welfare? Mainly it has to do with the fact that we haven’t – until recently - measured **genuine** progress. A San Francisco-based organization – *Redefining Progress* – has developed the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) as an alternative to the misleading GDP. The GPI research - into the US situation this past century - indicates that around 1970 there was a reversal in our collective circumstances, and we have been on a steady downward slope ever since, showing GDP ‘growth’ to be highly illusionary. The GPI

provides an opportunity to re-direct our planning efforts towards more progressive positions – to underpin efforts to deliver a good time for a long time, for many more people and species.

Alternative/Comprehensive Capital ‘Budgeting’: Part of the explanation lies in taking a broader view of the capital that has pride of place in our reigning economic model. The only form of capital that has really mattered so far is finance capital, from within the money markets, where much happens – well-removed from real life - ‘on paper’. This narrow view of capital is being increasingly challenged by reference to two other equally important, if not more important, forms of capital: social capital and natural capital. ‘Gross production’ has continued to increase, by putting a perversely positive spin on what has been a serious decline in our social and natural capital. This should have triggered much more active consideration of distributional and ecological concerns – to arrest the associated social decline and environmental degradation, but the illusion of ongoing growth has been used to justify a reliance on ‘trickle-down economics’ to solve any social problems, and technological ‘fixes’ for any environmental problems. However, the emerging field of ecological economics is beginning to address the basic concerns through such techniques as life-cycle costing and full-cost accounting. The opportunity exists to develop a more comprehensive or more holistic capital budgeting approach - one that equally references social and natural forms of capital as well as conventional money market finance capital. ‘Triple-entry capital balance sheets’ could be to seven-generation planning what ‘double-entry book-keeping’ has been for conventional business planning.

Ecological Footprinting: The natural capital perspective can also be explored by another approach to measuring the collective impact of our highly consumptive life-styles on our planetary home. Ecological footprinting is based on an effort to measure the natural capacity of Planet Earth that is ‘appropriated’ to meet all our product and service needs, and to dispose of all the associated wastes, in the maintenance of our current life-styles (See the 1996 book by Mathis Wackernagel and Bill Rees, *Our Ecological Footprint: Reducing Human Impact on the Earth*). Research using this concept has indicated that we

will need at least three and perhaps as many as five more Planet Earths to support the rest of the world's population achieving the life-style that we in North America have become accustomed to. I acknowledge that this may be rated as more of a threat than an opportunity, but ecological footprinting, like the genuine progress indicator and alternative/comprehensive capital budgeting, is within our grasp if we are really up to embracing new millennium/seven-generation planning.

Conclusion: From Hog-Wild to Pig-Wise

A Possible Mascot for New Millennium Manitoba Planning?

Tonight may not quite be the Chinese New Year of 'The Pig', but – given the conference program and the Manitoba news headlines these days - there would appear to be a good chance that our event here will go down in the provincial planning annals as 'The Conference of the Pig'. Some outside observers might be excused for thinking that we've gone 'hog-wild', hoping to turn Manitoba into hog-heaven, dreaming of a pork-friendly planning system. Perhaps the bison is toast – or is that roast? - as the provincial symbol.

But, more seriously, perhaps we can usefully take some cues from the natural traits of pigs, as 'smart, clean and lean'. This was the perspective offered in last weekend's PBS Nature program, *The Joy of Pigs*. Can we become pig-wise - as in 'smart' about how we approach 'growth', 'clean' in our approach to back-end 'outputs', and 'lean' in our approach to front-end 'inputs'? The program notes (<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/pigs/smart.html>) indicate that pigs are some of the cleanest animals around, and are naturally lean, unless overfed by humans. Pigs are also pretty intelligent – smarter than any other domestic animal. We could do worse – when modeling an improved relationship with nature - than to model ourselves after pigs in their natural state. No sweat!

So – have a good time, but plan, so the good time lasts – by sustainable means - for a long time; for at least seven generations. And take your cues from your hopes and

dreams. These are the real stuff of the planning we will need to survive and thrive in this new millennium.

References:

Bernard, Ted and Young, Jora 1997. The Ecology of Hope: Communities Collaborate for Sustainability. New Society Publishers: Gabriola Island, BC.

Gayton, Don 1996. Landscapes of the Interior: Re-Explorations of Nature and the Human Spirit. New Society Publishers: Gabriola Island, BC.

Hodge, Gerald 1998. Planning Canadian Communities: An Introduction to the Principles, Practice and Participants. Third Edition. ITP Nelson.

Nickerson, Mike 1993. Planning for Seven Generations: Guideposts for a Sustainable Future. Voyageur Publishing; Hull, Quebec.

Orr, David 1992. Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World. State University of New York Press.

Wackernagel, Mathis and Rees, William 1996. Our Ecological Footprint: Reducing Human Impact on the Earth. New Society Publishers: Gabriola Island, BC.

Wilber, Ken 1996. A Brief History of Everything. Shambhala