APA
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PLANNING TOOLS | BEST PRACTICES | LAW | HISTORY | RESOURCE FINDER
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Participatory Budgeting and Planning

PLANNING TOOLS

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING STARTED IN PORTO ALEGRE, BRAZIL, IN 1989. Today, participatory budgeting constitutes 20 percent of that city's total municipal budget process and involves 50,000 individuals, including the city's poorest residents.

What is the value of this approach to planning? Is it more important for planning decisions to be right or fair? Expertise and inclusiveness are often set up as conflicting ideals: Relying more on technical analysis to prioritize community needs and budget for improvements is supposed to give residents less influence in those decisions.

New methods of decision making at the local level, however, are undermining this perceived conflict. Participatory budgeting has the potential to help planners and planning commissions both make more informed decisions around infrastructure and also engage disenfranchised residents in the process.

At its core, PB is a process in which community residents determine how to allocate part of a public budget. It is not a chaotic free-for-all or a one-time consultation. An annual "cycle" of PB typically includes a structured sequence of meetings for needs assessment, project development, and voting. At all stages, ordinary residents—depending on the rules, residents do not need to be U.S. citizens or of voting age—participate. Participants deliberate over the state of their neighborhoods, proposing creative solutions for the problems they have identified and working in issue committees (e.g., safety, transportation, placemaking) to research the cost and feasibility of their proposals. Projects may be vetted by municipal staff before they go to the vote to ensure that they are eligible for public funds, but after the ballots have been cast, municipalities are required to implement those projects that receive the most votes.

PB proliferates

There are more than 1,200 participatory budgets around the world, most of which are at the local level and govern funding for neighborhood-based capital improvements. The U.S. is the laggard: The first instance of PB occurred in 2009 when Chicago alderman Joe Moore invited residents of his ward to decide how to spend $1 million in discretionary capital funds. This process was replicated and expanded in New York City in 2011 when four council members adopted PB to allocate over $6 million. PB processes have been undertaken on a municipality-wide basis in cities such as Vallejo, California, and for school budgets in San Jose and Chicago.

COURTESY PBNYC.ORG

In 2011, New York City adopted PB to allocate over $6 million for neighborhood-based capital improvements.

PB turns the traditional plan-then-implement process on its head as it starts with a pot of money and then seeks good ideas for how to use it. The guarantee of funding encourages not only participation but also proposals for a variety of projects that are feasible and funding-eligible. PB can also be a more robust form of civic engagement than design charrettes, online surveys, or civic crowdfunding campaigns. It does not involve recording preferences (likes "right swipes" on a phone) or asking for small donations for popular projects, but instead brings residents together to discover, refine, and discuss their preferences in what are often tense and cash-starved environments.

PB also serves as a vehicle for popular education as residents learn more about conditions in their neighborhoods, the budgeting process, and the services that government can and cannot provide. Pushing beyond politics and rhetoric, this process appears to increase the public's trust and confidence in city government as residents come to empathize with officials who must make investment decisions in uncertain conditions and balance demands for funding from different geographies and constituencies.

Chicago residents voted to improve pedestrian safety through the participatory budget by authorizing a refuge island in the street, like the one pictured here.

PHOTO BY CAROLYN TORMA

Some guidelines

To produce these atypical benefits, PB can require more up-front investment and facilitation than other engagement methods. A first step is getting elected officials (mayors and council members) to sign on. They may need to be persuaded by a community organization or university institute, which initiates the idea and offers to provide technical assistance and facilitate the process. For example, in order to expand the PB process from one to four wards, the Great Cities Institute at the University of Illinois at Chicago took the lead.

Although PB takes away some of their authority, new council members may be more open to championing PB than incumbents as it is a good way to get to know their constituents. Once they are elected, representatives need to devote a sufficient amount of staff time and resources to the process in order to ensure high participation and better representation by individuals who have not previously participated in community affairs. Those elected officials with more discretionary funding and those in cities with more flexible budgets may be more likely to gravitate toward PB.

Even the most committed deliberative democrats worry that ignorance and apathy will keep a bottom-up process like PB from being representative, fair, or forward-thinking. Because the quality of the process (and selected projects) is only as good as the people involved, targeted outreach efforts need to be directed toward engaging those who do not traditionally participate in electoral politics.

When focusing on individuals who are not normally eligible to vote (undocumented immigrants, youth), using mobile assemblies or voting stations that bring PB to strategic locations such as those with high foot traffic (transit stations) and membership (churches, schools) can help. Email blasts and online surveys tend to reach "the usual suspects," supporters and opponents of elected officials and not the vast majority of people in the middle who are less predisposed toward activism. In contrast to such forms of top-down mobilization, knocking on doors, leafleting at school report card pick-ups, and partnering with a high-capacity, community-based organization can reach more marginalized populations.

PB projects have the potential to support and improve the quality of more comprehensive planning strategies.

Participation in budget decisions should not be limited to infrastructure spending. The singular focus on bricks and mortar may have an off-putting effect on residents and community organizations, which are interested in mobilizing for matters other than physical planning. Some of the more creative proposals have come from program budgets that permit the use of public funds for services and programs. In Chicago, a community organization named Blocks Together lobbied its alderman to commit $2 million in tax increment financing funds toward a PB process in 2014–15. While the winning projects did include a skate park and roof-top public garden, other funds will go toward job training programs (in hair braiding and culinary arts) and a microloan program for small businesses.

PB is not intended to supplant other, less deliberative forms of evaluation, budgeting, or community engagement. Different decision-making models can coexist and complement each other. For example, engineering-based models for scheduling street repairs can benefit from data collected by PB participants that tags the locations of a neighborhood's worst potholes. PB participants can use participatory mapping and charrettes to conduct needs assessments. While conventional capital improvement dollars can be used for scheduled maintenance, PB funds can be used to rectify unanticipated problems or propose unique solutions to mitigate such problems in the future. Although the PB projects are relatively small and focused on specific sites, they have the potential to support and improve the quality of more comprehensive planning strategies.

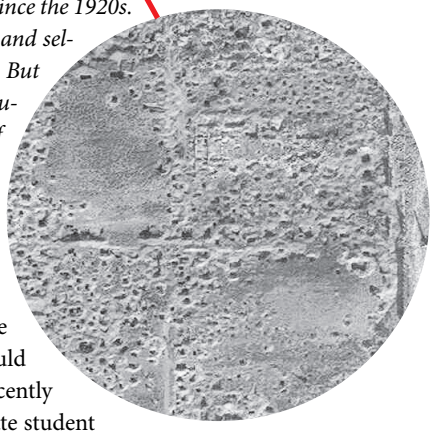
—Rachel Weber

Weber is an associate professor in the Urban Planning and Policy Department and a faculty fellow at the Great Cities Institute at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Heritage Under Threat: The World's Oldest Cities

BEST PRACTICES

Historic preservation has been an integral part of planning since the 1920s. Most often the focus is on buildings or archaeological sites, and seldom do we consider an entire city worthy of preservation. But what of the world's oldest cities? They represent a major evolution in human development and are the physical record of this remarkable step in building communities. We asked Geoff Emberling, an archaeologist of urban development, to tell us how upheavals are affecting the world's legacy of ancient cities.



This satellite image of the Greek and later Roman city of Apamea in western Syria, with its long, colonnaded street, shows the pits made by extensive looting in 2011 and 2012.

NEARLY 6,000 YEARS AGO, THE WORLD'S FIRST CITIES WERE BUILT in Mesopotamia, in what is now Iraq and northeastern Syria. One of these cities was Uruk—the city of the semi-legendary King Gilgamesh that would be a major center in the region for thousands of years. Another, more recently identified as a first city, is Tell Brak in Syria, where I worked as a graduate student archaeologist and then director of excavations from 1992 to 2004.

The term "city" sometimes gets used in a broad sense, and earlier settlements like Jericho in the West Bank or Çatalhöyük in Turkey are sometimes called cities. Jane Jacobs, in her 1969 book *The Economy of Cities*, proposed that the first cities were built before the development of agriculture, which happened in the Middle East more than 10,000 years ago, when (as archaeology has shown) settlements were small villages.

The first cities of Mesopotamia represented a hugely significant step in human history, termed the "Urban Revolution" by the Marxist archaeologist V. Gordon Childe in 1950. These cities—unlike the smaller settlements of earlier times—had populations much too large for inhabitants to walk each day to their fields and back. Thus, in order for settlements to grow to be cities, citizens had to specialize—some in agriculture, some in herding, some in construction, some in manufacturing. And this didn't happen by accident. One of the ways in which people were differentiated in these

ASOR CHI AND DIGITAL GLOBE

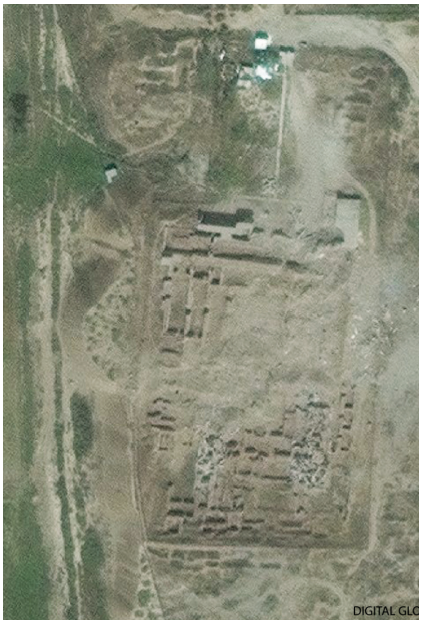
cities was hierarchical: Some became kings and administrators, others were workers, and a significant number of them were slaves.

Because these cities required food from their countryside, they had a significant impact on their landscape—the urban created the rural. Irrigation canals were built to facilitate more intensive food production, and the urban elite would later establish rural estates with their own herds, farms, and granaries.

Even more important than these individual changes were the processes set in motion by the growth of cities—Mesopotamia became an urban civilization. Social differentiation continued, with wealth increasingly being concentrated in the hands of the kings and large temple institutions that were built. Technology also advanced significantly, with a rapid expansion of mass production in the form of wheel-made ceramics, the invention of writing, the development of newly sophisticated art, and even the invention of the wheel (which was not immediately that useful because there were no roads). And the scale of transformation of the landscape continued to increase. While herds of the early rulers of Uruk numbered perhaps 5,000 sheep, by the time of the Third Dynasty of Ur over a thousand years later, urban governments were managing flocks of half a million animals.

With the arrival of the transcontinental empires of the first millennium BC—Assyria (900–612 BC), Babylonia (612–539 BC), and Persia (539–331 BC)—the cities of the Middle East grew larger and larger. The Assyrian capital city of Nineveh, mentioned in the Bible as a symbol of evil in the world, may have had 150,000 inhabitants. And Babylon, to which the elite of Jerusalem were deported, could have been as large as 200,000. The urban tradition continued with an influx of Greek settlers in the wake of Alexander the Great's conquest of Persia, the establishment of an empire by his general Seleukos after Alexander's death, and the later conflicts of the Roman empire with the Parthian and Sasanian dynasties based in Iran. While cities continued to be thriving sources of innovation, the collision of these empires also introduced different ideas of urban planning—particularly the idea of a grid centered on a main straight street—that would leave a mark on cities across the region.

After centuries of habitation, these ancient cities became tall mounds dotting the flat landscape of Mesopotamia, and were eventually abandoned. And these mounds have been the focus of archaeological work since the middle of the 19th century, when Mesopotamian civilization began to be rediscovered.



This satellite image of the Assyrian palace at Nimrud shows its destruction by bulldozer.

While we know the outlines of the story of the world's first cities, there is still a lot that we don't know. The early excavators focused on monumental structures at the centers of these cities: palaces, temples, terraces, ziggurats, and sometimes royal burials (as in the renowned Royal Cemetery of Ur in southern Iraq, discovered in the 1920s, or in the tombs of Assyrian queens discovered under the palace at Nimrud in the 1980s). These structures are huge, and it takes a great deal of time, effort, and funds to excavate them. There have thus been very few excavations of neighborhoods that would show us how these cities were organized and (perhaps) planned. And there are entire cities yet to be excavated.

This entire archaeological heritage has been under threat over the past 35 years, with the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, the 1991 Gulf War, the 2003 invasion of Iraq and its aftermath, and most recently the Syrian civil war beginning in 2011. Warfare itself is not usually destructive of unexcavated archaeological sites, although areas mined during the Iran-Iraq war will remain off-limits to archaeologists for some time. Much more damaging is the looting of archaeological sites that has come with political instability in the region (and, it must be said, unregulated agricultural and construction activities that can obliterate sites by leveling ground). Sites in southern Iraq were extensively looted from about 2000 to 2005—begun before the U.S. invasion of Iraq as Iraqis looked for ways to generate foreign currency, and continuing beyond the invasion until laws were passed in the U.S. and Britain to outlaw the purchase of Iraqi antiquities.

The looting of an archaeological site is a violent act that destroys the ancient structures and contexts in which objects have been discarded. The sites themselves may come to look like lunar landscapes. We had seen damage of this kind to sites in southern Iraq, and this has been repeated in the Syrian civil war as different factions attempt to raise funds for their activities. Most recently, the self-proclaimed Islamic State has used looting of archaeological sites and particularly destruction of ancient images found at those sites as political instruments to shock (and also to recruit). Museums have also been targets. Among the most unbelievable acts was the destruction of the Assyrian palace at Nimrud by lining its walls with strings of barrel bombs.

Archaeologists are monitoring current threats, sometimes at great personal risk. But given the dangerous conditions, we cannot do more at the moment.

—Geoff Emberling

Emberling is a research scientist at the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, and a lecturer in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at the University of Michigan.

Ending (or Avoiding) 'Commission Wars'

LAW

MOST PLANNING COMMISSIONERS GET ALONG VERY WELL. They discuss and work out their differences in a civil and professional way. On other commissions, members regularly fight before, during, and after meetings—creating a "commission wars" environment. While you can't change the composition of your commission, you can institute practices to head off some of these problems before they turn your boardroom into a war zone.

Meeting agendas

The first battle is often over the agenda. Because most state open meetings laws require a meeting agenda to identify items that require a vote and that the agenda be posted and distributed prior to the meeting, whoever controls the agenda wields considerable power. Battles can sometimes occur when other commissioners find they cannot get their proposals on the agenda.

A commission might consider adopting a policy that allows a minimum number of commissioners to request that their items be placed on an agenda. The policy might limit the number of items that can be added to each meeting, or place other restrictions. Such policies ensure that commissioners can bring an issue to the commission for public discussion, allowing a variety of voices on the commission to be heard.

Parliamentary procedures 101

Commissioners need to be able to raise issues, participate in discussions and debate, make motions, and ultimately vote on matters on the agenda. These issues are generally covered by the parliamentary procedures that govern how meetings are conducted. Some commissions use Robert's Rules of Order; others adopt their own local meeting procedures. When enforced consistently and fairly, these procedures can help reduce battles.

Parliamentary procedures provide definitive ground rules for commissioner conduct so commission business can proceed. The rules do not have to complicate a meeting but instead can simplify it. If you choose to develop your own local procedures, make sure they are consistent with state open meetings laws. Also, be careful not to suppress the ability of commissioners to make motions or express their views on agenda items presented for final action.

A commission already at war might consider, at a minimum, a few practical rules:

- Where commissioners frequently interrupt other commissioners, a commission might establish a rule that commissioners can only speak when recognized by the chair.
- To establish reasonable limits on discussion of agenda items, a commission might adopt a rule that each commissioner has three or five minutes to present his or her position before the discussion moves to another commissioner or to a vote.
- Another rule could provide that no commissioner is permitted to speak a second time on an item until all other commissioners have had an opportunity to speak.

For these procedures to be effective, it is important that the rules be enforced fairly and equally.

The minutes

If there is already conflict on a commission, disputes about the form and content of the minutes are not uncommon. Some commissioners want to make sure their remarks have been accurately recorded. Others who wish they had made snappier or more pertinent remarks at the last meeting may want the minutes to be changed to reflect their retroactive brilliance.

Problems relating to minutes often boil down to who prepares them and who approves them. Although a staff member may be responsible for preparing the minutes, final approval generally belongs to a majority of the commission. If a commissioner cannot convince a majority of the commission to include his or her changes, the only recourse is a written letter expressing disagreement. The letter becomes a public record, but will only be adopted as part of the minutes if a majority of the commission agrees.

Leaking confidential discussions

It is fairly rare that a plan commission needs to go into closed or executive session to discuss a particular matter. However, there may be certain occasions where confidential discussions are appropriate and legally permissible, provided the commission has complied with the procedural requirements of applicable open meetings laws. Commissioners should be free to discuss these permitted topics without concern that their discussions will be shared outside of the closed session. Leaking the content of these closed sessions can be harmful—consider the negative impact to the government or commission's position in defending a lawsuit if its litigation strategies are shared with the opposing party.

In considering local policies to govern the conduct of commissioners, a commission might consider adopting a policy banning any discussion of confidential matters outside a closed session. Penal-

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ties for violating the policy might include a fine or public censure of a member. In rare instances, a commission might have to seek a court-ordered injunction to prevent future disclosures.

Members of the public

Sometimes, the battle at a commission meeting is not between the commissioners, but instead involves members of the public who attend the meeting. These members may be dissatisfied with the commission's actions on a particular agenda item, or with a specific development application or proposal. In situations where the commission is required to conduct a public hearing, members of the public are likely to have certain due process rights to express their opinions on a matter. These rights may include the right to testify for or against an application, the right to submit written evidence, and the right to cross-examine witnesses, depending on the specific rights granted by state statute or local ordinance.

These due process rights are not limitless, however. A commission can generally establish rules and procedures to ensure that members of the public exercise these rights in a manner that is not disruptive to the meeting and does not interfere with the proceedings. It is important to remember that a public hearing has many purposes, including providing (1) the applicant an opportunity to present his or her development proposal, (2) members of the public an opportunity to express their opinions about the application, and (3) commissioners with sufficient information about the application to determine whether it meets the standards for granting approval.

Conclusion

In commission wars, the ultimate winners and losers are not determined by points scored during meetings. Effective commissions need to find a way to get past individual differences and disagreements and act in the interests of the people and the community they serve.

—Julie A. Tappendorf

Tappendorf is an equity partner in Ancel Glink in Chicago.

The corner of Pitt and Rivington Streets on the Lower East Side of New York in 1915.

HISTORY

FINDING THE CROSSWALK. Before cars and trucks dominated America's roads, the urban street was a very diverse place. The street was a place used by pedestrians to socialize, sell goods, and commute among horse-drawn carriages. That all changed shortly after automobiles began to gain traction as the main form of transportation in cities of the early 20th century. As car speeds increased, so did fatal accidents with pedestrians. In some communities like Cincinnati, residents called for slower speed limits and governors that would be built into the car to prevent high speeds. The auto industry and car clubs were quick to respond in the 1920s and '30s with anti-jaywalking campaigns, ultimately leading to a shift in society's views of what is an appropriate use of a street. While the modern planning profession is embracing concepts such as "complete streets," which consider a variety of modes of transportation and users, the car is still king of the road and jaywalking can still land pedestrians a hefty fine.

—Ben Leitschuh

Leitschuh is APA's education associate.

RESOURCE FINDER

Participatory budgeting has been a successful citizen engagement tool all over the world. The process is gaining steam in the U.S., and New York, Chicago, and St. Louis have all had success as early adopters. Is PB right for your community?

APA PUBLICATIONS

Giving Residents a Say in City Spending
Planning March 2014.
planning.org/planning/2014/mar/news.htm

WEB RESOURCES

Participatory Budgeting Project
participatorybudgeting.org

"Real Money, Real Power"—An overview of Participatory Budgeting
vimeo.com/107121298

—Ben Leitschuh