

**Local Citizen Participation:
Case Study of a Community Development Board**

by

Karen Sutton

University of South Florida

kesfoto@earthlink.net

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Citizen Participation in Local Government	4
Citizen Advisory Committees	9
Research and Data Methodology	13
Snapshot of a Community Development Board	14
Conclusion and Recommendations	22
Appendixes	25
References	29

INTRODUCTION

Citizen participation is critical to governmental managers and bureaucrats at all levels to ensure the government knows the intensity and need of issues that are facing and affecting the citizens (Burby, 2003; Glaser, Parker, and Payton, 2001; Irvin and Stansbury, 2004; King and Stivers, 1998; Santos and Chess, 2003). Active citizen participation helps ensure that the governmental decisions and policies reflect the public interest (Boris and Krehely, 2002; Brody, Godschalk and Burby, 2003). Citizen participation is necessary as well for decreasing citizens' doubts and distrust of the government.

On the local level, citizens meet and discuss issues with local governmental agencies more often than they do with state or federal representatives. Almost every member of a county or municipality has at least some contact with the public every day—from an informal telephone call or email to formal meetings or presentations to neighborhood action groups. Because of this steady contact with and sensitivity to citizens, formal cooperation has evolved since citizen participation was first mandated in the United States more than fifty years ago. Such strategies include school boards, advisory boards, public meetings, and focus groups.

Even though public input is meant for citizens to have a direct role in governmental decisions, many governmental agencies choose to exclude citizen participation. Many administrators claim citizen participation may be unproductive and costly because it disrupts the governmental routine, few citizens appear at meetings, and not many participants know a meeting's issues or rules. When governmental agencies must consult with citizens, the agencies usually arrange for a meeting after the agencies' policy/procedure/programs are nearly complete. At this point, the agencies are really only asking the public for political support (King and Stivers, 1998). Because this meeting is so late in the process, if the citizens disagree and they push hard for the policy/program/procedure to be changed the resulting actions could drain the agencies' resources. Thus, late or delayed citizen participation can be very expensive and very time consuming.

If citizens are involved in the decision-making process from the start, they are usually more supportive and proactive in helping the stakeholders to achieve the ultimate outcome of the government plan. Government agencies may discover that a person who from the start encourages dialogue, evaluates programs, and encourages change for the better may help much more than a person who does this late in the process (Goodsell, 1994). Thus, the social benefits of timely citizen involvement, which corresponds to the overall, long-range goals of citizen participation, are worthwhile to citizens and government.

In this paper, I examine local citizen participation by focusing on local citizen advisory committees and analyzing a specific advisory committee with decision-making authority in a mid-sized city (Clearwater, Florida). Named the Community Development Board (CDB), this advisory committee was formed in 1999 by consolidating the city's original four citizen development-oriented boards.

Based on the context of local citizen participation and public administration goals and practices, my questions focus on the committee's reaction to and influence on public participation and issues. Additional questions investigate the effect managerial, ethical, political, organizational, and financial variables have on the committee, citizens, and government. I explored this specific committee to determine if its current setup and procedures are beneficial or harmful to the local public.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

As local citizen participation has increased over the decades, general advantages and disadvantages to citizens and the government also grew ^(Irvin and Stansbury, 2004; King and Stivers, 1998). Advantages range from educating citizens about the pros and cons of an issue to improving policy and implementation to building commitment and stronger trust on both sides. After intense discussion and education, each side may understand each other's points and reasons and be able to move forward to a consensus about a potential result. Consequently, investment and commitment to public participation by all involved can help tremendously when creating and implementing local policy and laws.

Certain disadvantages of citizen participation include improper responses by government to attempted public participation. When governmental agencies or interest groups are against viewing any side of an issue that is opposite to theirs, they may not strive to educate, negotiate, or encourage citizen involvement. In these cases, it is even more necessary for governmental staff and citizens to be free from this kind of domination so they can truly participate for the good of the public.

Nevertheless, many local communities or governmental agencies only seek public input according to law and they only do so after public managers have defined the problems and identified solutions. Public managers feel that preparing material for citizen meetings is time-consuming, could delay any process of the agencies' anticipated program, dilute their own power, and incur administrative costs ^(Seasons, 2003). Because staff needs to prepare worksheets

and presentations for citizens at public meetings or seminars, they have less time to spend on other work projects which may be considered more important by a manager or elected official. Because citizens can comment at these hearings, they may cause disputes and thus push back or change a program that has been on track for months. Thus, the resulting drain could be from staff salaries, project work time, project implementation, project materials, and public support.

While each citizen has a right to be heard, government officials have difficulty determining which citizens know the issues, have experience that may help with observations and ideas, and represent the public as opposed to merely the politicians or special interests (Santos and Chess, 2003)

Nevertheless, the basic ethical principals of fairness, competence, and equal participation for all participants—citizens or governmental employees—are clearly necessary (Santos and Chess, 2003). Every person needs to be able to participate in an open discourse so collaboration and consensus building can evolve. Each person needs to know all the rules of the participation so discussion is on a level field. A quick and concise breakdown of the pros and cons of citizen participation just discussed is in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Advantages of Citizen Participation

Citizens may	Government may
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn from and inform government representatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn from and inform citizens
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persuade and clarify government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persuade citizens and build trust
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain skills by being an active citizen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain support on decisions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach consensus; achieve outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach consensus; achieve outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain some control over policy process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid costs of reconstructing programs when participation is early in the process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve better policy and solution decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve better policy and solution decisions

Table 2: Disadvantages of Citizen Participation

Citizens may	Government may
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consume time to learn about topics and present opinions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consume time and realize greater costs to staff, administration, and projects if participation is late in the process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel participation is pointless if their input is ignored 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See more hostility created toward government
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a worse policy decision if influenced by negative interests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lose control of decision-making • View negating or changing a decision as difficult or costly under active citizen opposition • Have smaller budget for carrying out actual projects after the costs of implementing

The quality of citizen participation is also affected by a number of variables ^(Brody et al.; Callahan, 2002; Lukensmeyer and Boyd, 2004; Santos and Chess, 2003). Some variables reflect managerial, organizational, ethical, political, and financial issues. Examples are below:

- *Form of local government:* Strong mayor type government is similar to a CEO in a corporation. It usually allows citizens very weak power when expressing opinions or needing information. This form is usually in larger cities like Jacksonville and Tampa. Council-manager type government has more people who are elected in the governing body, and is more open to citizen discussion of specific issues or neighborhoods because the elected officials represent a mix of individual districts or the city at-large and are more accessible to the public. It is used in most cities under 120,000 population.
- *Allocated resources for the group or agency:* When resources are low, some agencies enjoy citizen support and participation—from volunteers to administrative help. Yet other agencies do not want citizen participation when their resources are low, because public participation forums cost time and money. In addition, citizens may suggest changes that cause costs to increase.

- *Frequency of public meetings:* Regularly scheduled meetings that are well-publicized help citizens arrange their time to be able to attend. Regular meetings also indicate the commitment that government has to the process. Irregular or one-time meetings that are not well-advertised through fliers, notices, or mail may prevent people from being able to plan to attend or may dissuade them from thinking their ideas are important.
- *Citizen access to higher authorities:* The typical top-down managerial method of decision-making, in which the executives dictate decisions and then pass them down to the front-line operators, inhibits citizen participation. An effective bottom-up approach, in which the front-line operators pass ideas to the executive level, tends to be more accepting of the citizens who usually only meet with the agency's front-line operators
- *Clear goals of meetings or agency or group:* When a committee's members know its mission and goals and understand how each item on an agenda reflects those goals, the members help the citizens understand more clearly the reason or extent to consider such an agenda item. By meeting these goals, the committee or agency also helps its overall perception by the public.
- *Democratic appointment of citizen group's members:* Most local governments request interested citizens to fill out an application listing their background, interests, and possible conflicts. When there is an opening, the governing body reviews and selects a person. If no notice is placed in a newspaper to identify openings in the citizen participation organizations, some of the people who frequently are in citizen groups are selected again and again to participate. While repetitively selected participants can be viewed as more knowledgeable, they can also be viewed as providing limited input.
- *Extent of influence of the citizens on agency's decisions:* The respect and power the citizen receives from an agency dictates the extent to which citizens believe it is worth becoming involved.
- *Apathy among citizens:* Passive citizens tend to keep participation at a low level, since they do not see how their actions or opinions could be important or could change the direction of the government or policy.

- *Education and information among citizens:* Helping citizens learn about important issues can raise interest and more actively engage participation. Ignorance about an issue may not help a discussion, except to point out to the agency that education is clearly lacking and needs to be done on a far broader and deeper scale. Ignorance among citizens also can deter executives from encouraging citizen involvement. Unfortunately, the time for processing requests and fees for obtaining records can hinder citizens from learning about issues. As McMasters pointed out, “The more secretive a government, the more distant it becomes from its citizens and their wisdom, ingenuity and support. Further, when Americans are kept in the dark about the nation’s vulnerabilities and what leaders are doing to address them, public pressure for effective action fails to develop”^(2005:3P).

Because this paper focuses on Florida, a few Florida laws that attempt to encourage public education regarding government are noted as follows: In 1967, Florida established the Sunshine Law in Chapter 286 of Florida Statutes to protect the public’s right to attend meetings. In 1992, the Sunshine Amendment was enacted to ensure public access to local records. In 2003, Florida voters overwhelmingly ratified an amendment to make it more difficult for the State Legislature to grant exemptions to either of these laws^(Kallestad, 2003).

- *Diverse representation in the citizen’s group:* Representation on every facet of an issue or affected group is important for discussion of agenda items at an appropriate level of understanding. Some groups need to seek out disadvantaged, powerless, and deprived people because their experience and needs are part of the groups’ goals. Some reasons people resist becoming involved include lack of transportation, no access to computers/email, difficulty speaking the language, and fear to state opinions.

Because these variables can have a positive or negative effect on citizen participation, an agency needs to focus on which variables could encourage the greatest participation.

Types of citizen participation

Local citizen participation ranges from public meetings to advisory boards to protests to voting. Per one case study regarding citizen input in the planning process, the meeting types that Florida localities utilized most often to garner citizen input were formal public hearings (93%), followed by citizen advisory meetings (47%)^(Brody et al., 2003). Public hearings tend to give

administrators the greatest amount of control of which information is provided and how citizens participate, whereas advisory committees can be the most cost-effective.

Most often used. Local governments that use formal public hearings as their principal citizen participatory tool have found it tends to attain the least participation. For example, citizens aren't comfortable attending meetings that focus on the rules of participation rather than the citizen input. In addition, community members who don't have access to the rules or don't understand the process can be frustrated that their concerns are not truly listened to and feel the reason for the public meeting was not valid. As a result, fewer citizens would probably attend the meetings on the issue or on future issues. Even though public hearings are considered wasteful and worthless ^(Burby, 2003), Florida communities prefer to use public meetings when the law requires citizen involvement because of this low participation level. An attempt to avoid any difficulties or excess costs due to citizen involvement could also explain why the local governments usually place public meetings at the end of the decision-making process.

Deleted:

Most effective. The two-way exchange found in advisory committees and similar interactions tends to generate the highest level of citizen participation ^(Sewell and Coppock, 1977). While public hearings are usually broader than a specific topic and ought to attract more people, citizen advisory committees, which often focus on a specific interest, actually do attract higher participation and are more cost-effective than public hearings. Advisory committees also tend to have more information presented that represents a broader scope of the community. Like the public hearings, these committees usually meet regularly, are open to the public, and are open to different points of view. While these committees usually provide citizens with access to government and a meaningful role in the provision of services, the extent of the advisory committee's authoritative power affects whether citizens have influence on decision-making, administrators, and elected officials.

CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEES

“Use of advisory boards must be considered essential and attempts should be made to utilize them most effectively.” ^(McShane and Krause, 1995)

Appointing citizens to serve on public committees and provide their input to the government emerged more than a century ago. Within the past 50 years, citizens have chosen to become involved in local governments more than ever ^(King and Stivers, 1998). Thousands volunteer to work on advisory committees. Advisory committees tend to meet regularly, with procedures

that are usually easy to understand and encourage participation. Depending on procedures, the boards may offer citizens a way to communicate with public managers, elected officials, and bureaucrats, to discuss what citizens consider matter most, to talk about what services are redundant, to point out what services aren't needed, and to focus on what new issues need to be addressed.

The number of citizen applications for advisory groups varies with the amount of respect and power the citizen advisory committees are given ^(Callahan, 2002; King and Stivers, 1998). Below are three types of citizen advisory committees and corresponding power:

1. *No power*: Citizens think they influence the decision-making process because they are involved in the process—before or after decisions are made—even though their advisory committee has no actual power.
2. *Input after decisions*: Citizens assume a consultative role, where they are told about decisions after they have been made, or they attend meetings that are carefully constructed by public managers who receive input after a decision.
3. *Some authority*: Citizens enter into a shared-responsibility partnership with public managers where the citizens have some decision-making authority by providing input before and sometimes also after decisions.

One report examined the number of citizen advisory committees in New Jersey that exist with the above power types. A survey was distributed to citizens, city managers, and elected officials in 26 New Jersey cities of population between 25,000 and 60,000 ^(Callahan, 2002). Of the 415 recipients, 192 participants replied to indicate their advisory committees' decision-making authority. The responses ranked as follows:

1. Citizens have the opportunity to offer advice only (65%)
2. A shared-responsibility partnership exists between the citizens and the governing body or agency, which manage or resolve a service or issue together (19.7%)
3. Citizens participate by observing the process only (7.7%)
4. Citizens are given the opportunity to support governmental decisions already made (6.6%)
5. Citizens have authority over the decision (1.1%)

Because public officials and administrators don't like to give up power or change items without their consent, citizen advisory committees have been weighed down with problems. The same New Jersey survey revealed that citizens who participate on citizen advisory committees claimed that the committee members reflect the public viewpoint (39%), the elected officials' viewpoint (27%), or the expert/professional view or advice (23%). According to the survey, other difficulties that have beset committees are:

- Handpicked advisory committee members rubber-stamp any issues.
- Elected officials appoint the members who have their own particular agenda and the appointed committee members may be viewed as insiders.
- Members were recruited due to their experience or profession; this prevents citizens who may not have those qualifications, but do have other useful qualifications, from participating.
- Members' experience is found solely within a community's business leaders or within a conflicting field or profession.
- Members may not represent the community or the particular committee's topic or expertise.
- Members were recruited due to political influence, racial bias, or history of community service.

As a result, an ethical issue arises of whether the members of these boards are acting in favor of a community or in favor of their own interests or businesses. Even in seemingly altruistic volunteer committees, simple self-interest can be a motive for volunteers. "Volunteers are motivated by personal benefits that include the chance to learn or pursue personal interests as well as career advancement and enhanced prestige, power and recognition" (Helling, 1998, p. 223).

Obstacles to meaningful public participation are:

- Apathy, which prevents citizens from attending or being on a committee
- The time the board meets, which may be difficult for people who work
- Criteria for some committee memberships, which may require applicants to have specific professional experience as well as to be a citizen
- Not knowing if the committee exists just to exist or if it has a deeper purpose
- Procedural rules, which may make it difficult for citizens to know how and when to speak in meetings

- If the agency packs the committee with people whose opinions support the agency's ideology
- The bureaucratic and political process of being on a committee

While an advisory committee often cannot turn around some of the influences listed above, not all committees are weighed down by those influences. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of advisory committees often relies on the members' primary characteristics. A few are listed below:

- Experience in the committee's field
- Reading the necessary material and visiting the areas of issue before the meeting
- Not deciding one's vote before the committee's meeting
- Seeing the big picture instead of focusing on a single item
- Commitment to the committee's mission and goals

I have described various forms and characteristics of local citizen participation and highlighted citizen advisory meetings through which citizens can contribute to policies and programs. The research study I carried out focuses on a specific sector of citizen advisory committees: one that has appointed members and shared responsibility and decision-making power.

While universities and organizations have researched citizen participation, not much research has been done to examine this type of citizen advisory committee ^(McShane and Krause, 1995). Nor could I find any data on the reaction to this type of board by members, government workers, or citizens who are nonmembers.

Because I investigated one committee and the statistical information is scarce, I conducted a qualitative research report. My purpose is to determine how this specific advisory committee affects citizen participation and the evaluation of issues. My second purpose is to determine what issues occur regarding management, politics, ethics, and organization.

RESEARCH AND DATA METHODOLOGY

The city of Clearwater has a total of 17 citizen advisory committees. All but two of these committees offer advice only and have no decision-making power. The data for this report is based on the Community Development Board (CDB), one of two shared-responsibility citizen advisory boards with decision-making authority.

I do not present Clearwater as a typical or representative city. Nor do I present the CDB as a typical or representative shared-responsibility advisory committee. Future research on other committees may find participation for different reasons; thus, the findings I have attained cannot be generalized. Nevertheless, the results are important because they offer observation into this type of meeting within this type of governing body. The findings indicate that this type of advisory board can serve as a useful function for citizens, the committee members, and the government, but not for every issue that may be covered on the meeting agendas.

The CDB's eight members are appointed by the City Council. For a non-elected board, the CDB has great power and great responsibilities that is uncommon in this area. "It has the power to change the face of the city," stated one Council member. The CDB receives three types of applications for development. The committee makes final decisions on two types but the CDB makes advice-only recommendations to the City Council on the third application type.

Located on the west coast of Florida, Clearwater has a population of more than 110,000, and a council-manager form of government. At one point in its history, Clearwater was a small retirement community in a county with acres of undeveloped land and farms between other retirement communities. Over the decades, Clearwater and neighboring communities grew and developed most of the land in the county. Because the city had fewer open spaces and more need to redevelop, the city contracted a consultant to rewrite the entire Community Development Code in 1998 to aid in redevelopment and land use. The city consolidated the original four citizen development-oriented boards into the CDB, which was formed under the Planning Department and established as a City Council citizen advisory board. The now-defunct citizen boards were Planning and Zoning Board, Development Code of Adjustment Board, Historic Preservation Board, and Design Review Board.

I used qualitative research to delve into the insights of the respondents. Seven interviews with citizen participants were conducted in October and November 2004. At that time, two interviewees were members from the three-member City Council, two were current members of the eight-person CDB, one recently resigned from the CDB, another was in the city planning

department, and the last was a county employee and former president of a neighborhood association. Each interviewee was highly involved in local politics, development, community organizations, and/or the CDB. The names and positions of the interviewees are listed in Appendix A.

Interviews were semi-structured and consisted of a series of open-ended questions about the role of the CDB and citizen participation. Of particular interest were the responsibilities, the power, and the decision-making process of this advisory board. The interviewees were also asked general questions about advisory committees. The interviews ranged from 40 to 60 minutes. The interview questions are listed in Appendix B.

Interviewing people has many advantages. Through the interviews, I was able to clarify confusing questions and statements, observe facial expressions and reactions, decrease the number of "I don't know" answers, and have greater flexibility to expand the questions. While interviews are not economical to most research studies since they are time-consuming, asking the interviewees the same questions ensures consistency and understanding of an issue. In addition, an interviewer watches facial and body expressions so the interviewee responds openly and with less bias on a sensitive issue. Therefore, a face-to-face interview may be costly but it ensures honesty and reduces favoritism.

After interviewing each person, I prepared a chart in which each question was followed by the interviewee's answer. After all answers were entered, I looked for patterns of specific words and underlying meaning of answers and arranged them according to the specific study elements (similar to latent and content analysis in public administration research). The study elements are below:

- Organization
- Management
- Politics
- Ethics
- Finance
- Other

I read CDB meeting minutes, city documents, journal articles, newspaper articles and letters, and other data. I tried to attain actual statistics of attendance of the CDB members but that was not possible with lack of accessibility to the records.

SNAPSHOT OF A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BOARD

The CDB's current responsibilities are ^(Clearwater Advisory Boards and Agencies, 2004):

1. Handling matters related to planning & development
2. Conducting public hearings and deciding certain development requests that are not within discretion of city staff
3. Conducting design review
4. Evaluating historic applications
5. Reviewing requests for land use plan changes and rezonings
6. Serving as Local Planning Agency to review and advise the City Commission regarding the City's Comprehensive Plan

The Community Development Code lists the CDB's responsibilities and the three development approval levels ^(“Part I: Community Development Code,” 1999, Art. 4: Div. 1):

Level One approval involves those development proposals that are reviewed and approved by the city's professional staff. Level Two approvals are those development proposals that are more complex and involve the use of greater discretion by an appointed board accountable, through the appointment process, to the City Council. Level Three approvals are those approvals which state law requires action by the City Council because they involve issues of public policy in the first instance.

Therefore, Level One projects are subject to the planning department approval, but a “Level Two approval is granted by the community development board, based on recommendation by the” planning staff ^(“Part I: Community Development Code,” 1999, Art. 4: Div. 4, sec. 4-401). The CDB grants final decisions on Level Two applications. For Level Three, the CDB provides a “recommended order” to the City Council, which is required to “render a final approval” ^(“Part I: Community Development Code,” 1999, Art. 4: Div. 2, sec. 4-206).

Similar to other citizen advisory boards, the CDB was developed to help the City Council know what the citizens want and need. The CDB members who were interviewed believe the CDB reflects the community in its decisions. However, the reason for the CDB being developed

is disputed because of its power. One respondent claimed the CDB was designed to hear and respond to citizens during controversial issues and thus “take the heat off elected officials.”

Because the CDB has an uncommon amount of power in the city, I explored the specific member criteria and responsibilities of this citizen board to determine the effects of its decisions on the community.

Organization

Similar to other public administration institutions, the CDB’s organization is ostensibly designed so the committee runs efficiently and effectively and responds to the public and differences. The CDB’s organization and rules for its meetings is based on the new Code. The committee started out in 1998 as a seven-member committee that met each month and reviewed land use and development applications. Each member serves a maximum of two four-year terms. Because the CDB handles a variety of development applications, four board members must be residents and “qualified and experienced in the fields of architecture, planning, landscape architecture, engineering construction, planning & land use law and real estate” (Clearwater Advisory Boards and Agencies, 2004). The remaining members must only be residents.

Yet, like other public administration institutions, the CDB’s organization is not perfect.

CDB board members often have to miss meetings to attend business or recuse themselves from decisions because they are working on projects that come before the Board. One member recused himself five times in 18 months, while only about a third of the CDB’s past 17 meetings had full attendance (Headrick, 2001b). Therefore, the City Council agreed with the Planning Department’s request to add an alternative member to the CDB.

While the conflict between a member’s profession and responsibilities as a committee person varies in intensity, depending on the member’s profession, the City Council still agrees that members with these backgrounds are needed. When a member adds the committee’s workload to personal responsibilities, a member has quite a bit to deal with. Depending on the month, the responsibilities might be overwhelming. For example, during Fall 2004, each member needed about 10 hours to review material prior to each meeting and spent about six hours in each meeting, with 14 to 20 items on the agenda.

The process is that the CDB members receive a package from the Planning Department about a week before each meeting. They read all the material and visit the sites, but do not

discuss any of the items on the agenda with each other until they are in the meeting. “For a group that is appointed, they have too much to do. I feel decisions ought to be made by the City Council,” stated a participant.

With the current Code, one participant stated the CDB takes out the politics that occurred when the four original planning boards were operating. Now the CDB conducts quasi-judicial public hearings for an application, and no one is allowed to “engage in any ex parte communications ... in regard to [the] matter which is to be considered by the board or commission” (“Part I: Community Development Code,” 1999, Art. 4: Div 2, sec 4-206). Ex parte communication is off-the-record communication, between applicants or others and the CDB members, that may affect the merit or outcome of a current proceeding. If such communication occurs, it must be reported as soon as the meeting starts.

Even though the CDB public hearings are open to all people, the issues of fair and equal access that are stressed in most public organizations do not appear to be followed. Some city workers and citizens protest that the CDB members do not seem to listen to those who oppose their points of view on specific development projects or issues. The CDB is more complicated than other advisory boards at which citizens speak. For example, an attorney who usually represents a developer at the CDB meetings knows the proceedings, but a citizen may not know what to do to challenge evidence. While two participants declared the applications were discussed well through the process, another disagreed, “The process is wrong and the members don’t have access to citizens’ concerns.”

Committee members have also used their power or authority to inhibit the conversation of the applicants, citizens or others, and thus prevent meaningful discussion. This has occurred in other cities as well. For example, in two case studies, board members either didn’t follow or only loosely followed Roberts’ Rules of Order or other rules of procedure, which caused participants (in the audience or on the board) to complain of an imbalance of power (Santos and Chess, 2003).

Management

While a shared-responsibility advisory committee allows for the government and citizens to problem solve together, a difficulty is how the government thinks of the role of citizens with decision-making power. Some governing bodies view their own role as providing expertise and the public’s as providing feedback (King and Stivers, 1998). Yet in order for more citizens to accept governmental decisions, elected officials and public managers must realize citizens need to be more actively involved, which may include citizens actually making decisions as the CDB does.

For example, since the planning / development / redevelopment applications are predicated on the Community Development Code, having a variety of people, both with and without formal expertise, helps ensure the applications tie in with the total surroundings—the big picture. The CDB members discuss applications at the public meetings so the members who are professionals, and know about the timeframes of plans, the blueprints, and other issues, can help others to determine if the proposal is realistic versus the Code. Unfortunately, a Council member declared that when some applications don't offer enough supporting evidence, the applications are not aggressively challenged. This evidence is supposed to be examined prior to voting on the application.

The difference between the decisions the CDB makes that are final compared to those that are recommendations to City Council is large, due to the nature of the applications. The elected officials (the City Council members) only discuss Level Three applications, which include very complicated land use development and Local Planning Agency activities (e.g., annexations and rezoning). The majority of issues on the CDB agenda concern site plans and changes to the existing development code. Five of the seven interviewees provided an estimate of the breakdown (Table 3).

Table 3: CDB Decision Breakdown

Interviewee	Final Decisions on Applications	Recommendations to City Council
# 1	75%	25%
# 2	80%	20%
# 3	75%	25%
# 4	80%	20%
# 5	80%	20%

A former member claimed that the CDB provides a commitment for the city to maintain lifestyle and improve building development. A current member stated that the CDB makes the “right” decision, usually in line with the Planning Department’s recommendation.

Some people have complained in local newspapers, to each other, and to the City Council that the CDB is creating policy and protecting the elected officials instead of interpreting the Code. Plans that involve transportation or neighborhood changes engage a broad array of stakeholders, who are needed in the event problems crop up and who can “appreciate a problem and will work to see it solved” (Burby, 2003). Unfortunately, projects that don’t grab this amount of attention can create uncertainty and cause the technical experts (such as planners and elected officials) to put forward proposals that may stir the most negative reaction because fewer stakeholders are involved from the beginning. For example, at one CDB meeting, a member declared that, philosophically, a project should go forward (Sharockman, 2004a). However, a Council member said the CDB ought to interpret the code and not philosophize, which creates policy. Because of the resulting conflicts, the citizens supported the City Council’s decision that the CDB needs to undergo a training session to relearn the Code and legalities (Training program needed for development board, 2004).

Politics

Politics and economic development often influence decisions at all levels of government. Yet, as with most discussions, these issues find people on opposite sides. For example, two participants agreed that economic development is one factor of the application, compared to two other participants who stated all decisions are in favor of economic development. A participant added that the CDB is “too much chamber of commerce. The board is not looking long range.”

With regard to community development issues, CDB representation and how it occurs are critical. While some members attend to the issues with an eye toward residents’ interests, some do not. One resident claimed the City Council loads the committee with people who match the Council’s priorities. Nor does the CDB seem to include the community’s diversity of wealth, race, ethnicity, professions, gender, or other characteristics. A participant claimed the people on the city’s many advisory boards are the “usual suspects on the other boards.”

The study by McShane and Krause (1995) substantiates two non-CDB members who claimed some participants were selected due their political value. Some citizens also became members of the CDB and other committees to have a respected background in order to run for an elected office in the future. In fact, one CDB member resigned last year to be an elected member of the City Council. Descriptions of the current CDB members and some former members are included in Appendix C.

Public concerns have grown over planning decisions and who is involved. While Florida and other states have tried to enforce public participation through legislation, few planning vehicles for participation are marketed to the people. While the same opportunity may exist for key players and stakeholders to play participatory roles in a project, the work required to find and take advantage of the opportunity may be much greater than being an advisory committee member.

Ethics

As pointed out in several ethics guidelines, an organization's members should conduct themselves so as to maintain public confidence in their profession, their local government, and in their performance of the public trust. Members should conduct their official and personal affairs in such a manner as to give the clear impression that they cannot be improperly influenced in the performance of their official duties ^(ICMA guidelines, 2004).

Of the five current and former CDB members interviewed, each stated they initially joined the committee to offer community service, which supports research by McShane and Krause ⁽¹⁹⁹⁵⁾. "It's important to give back to the community," stated a CDB member. Another member added, "Most people are in the community for a long time and care for the community and the CDB is a way to serve." One Council member declared that when a CDB member made a decision based on factual evidence, he has great respect for the city, the citizens, and the process, but when a CDB member makes a decision based on personal interest, he has little respect for those elements.

Unfortunately, the prominent problem with members is conflicts with the businesses or special interests that come up at a meeting. Members recuse themselves regularly because businesses they represent are frequently before the CDB. "This [recusal] is not illegal, nor unethical; it's just not a smart way for the city to do business," stated a Council member. According to public administration guidelines, members who serve multiple roles should avoid participating in matters that create the appearance of a conflict of interest ^(ICMA guidelines, 2004). But Helling emphasized this difficulty when agencies appoint people to planning agencies: "getting a broad cross-section of citizens to participate in planning processes that do not affect them directly is challenging" ^(1998, p. 223). Nevertheless, another Council member stated at the end of a City Council meeting that the CDB is "being controlled by and for developers" ^(Headrick, 2001a). The professional background of current and some former CDB members are listed in Appendix C.

Finance

The CDB and Council state the CDB needs to include citizens from a variety of professions so they will competently evaluate projects. No CDB meeting minutes showed that the CDB explored how it evaluated projects to determine if they are appropriately financed. Effective and well-done financial management is revealed by accurately kept records and balance sheets that show reasonable costs ^(Wolf, 1999). And well-kept records could show the CDB members, city employees, and citizens that the organization is well managed and trustworthy.

While the agenda items at a CDB meeting range from expanding a house to building a resort hotel, all people—from citizens to committee members to bureaucrats—have the right to examine a contract with the city. If it affects city spending, analysts need to determine how and why a contract for a development project may have to reduce costs for other programs and services. Because the spending debate runs deep, the choices are difficult for achieving a better quality of life for all citizens.

Other variables that encourage or hinder CDB participation

For planning, Florida's state mandates require that local governments and state government provide a public hearing, newspaper advertisement of the hearing and basic information ^(Brody et al.). Because this publicity is usually so meager, the number of people who attend the public meetings depends on the project and the effect the issue has on the neighborhood. Sometimes the CDB meeting room is filled with 155 people, but the meetings average between 50 and 75 people.

Attendance also varies widely since the CDB meetings are at 2 P.M. The time is a common complaint since most people would have to take off from work. One CDB member was glad the CDB meetings are televised and expressed a wish that all of the city's advisory meetings were in order to reach people who can't get out of the house. Televising meetings, though, does not answer the concern about citizen input as a whole.

A Council member contends that frequently the number of people in the audience for or against an issue is why it wins, but claimed it ought not. Another Council member pointed out that people may bring up a concern that is not in the report or in the discussion but that may affect the issue's stakeholders. The need for fairness and competence and equal participation ought to be applied whether a person is for or against an issue. A participant agreed: "Citizen

input is important. I hope over the years people don't feel it is a waste of effort to express an opinion."

But strong citizen involvement, known as stakeholder support in governmental planning strategies, is a vital planning issue that will ensure agreement between government and the public about projects and ensure support from the public when needed. In addition, citizens possess ordinary knowledge that can help ensure plans reflect local conditions, values, and policies, which are relevant to those who benefit. If more surveys and talks with the public occurred—beyond the CDB meetings and other periodic public hearings on a project—both sides could explore the contribution a project may make to enhance quality of life ^(Seasons, 2003).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Having clear and strong citizen involvement has improved many projects throughout the United States. One of the key aspects is to overcome citizen apathy and disinterest by "crafting lively and engaging participation programs" ^(Brody et al., pp. 260-261). While participation can add time and cost at the beginning, the upfront investment can pay off. Citizens who are actively involved usually end up being more supportive of the outcome ^(Callahan, 2002).

Characteristics of the CDB exist, and are due to be part of its future procedures, that can encourage positive public perception:

- The City Council arranged for the CDB to meet on December 10, 2004, to have a training session on the Community Development Code. The session was to describe the history of the Code, the legalities, and how the Code should be applied. As a result, decisions may not be based on personal philosophy.
- City Council is taking a closer look at membership applications to ensure new members have less chance of conflict of interest.
- CDB reviews issues with the public and makes decisions based on members' experience in the field, which may help the City Council with time and expertise.
- Members have not been accused of ex parte communication.

However, the difficulties within the CDB may hinder positive perception of the CDB. These issues need to be addressed and resolved:

- The public hearing process rules need to be written in general language so they are easy for the public to understand and thus the public would be more willing to attend the hearings.
- The meeting time is good for the members and staff, but not so good for the public who work.
- The amount of work to prepare for the meeting limits the number of people who volunteer as members.
- The percentage of final decisions that rest with the CDB may upset the public since the CDB is appointed and not elected.
- Decisions that have been approved based on the CDB members' philosophy or personal interests, as opposed to the rules of the Code, are improper.
- The process for speaking at the meeting confuses the public, but not the side that has lawyers speaking.
- Meetings are only publicized in the classified sections of the newspaper and website. As a result, not many people know when and why the meetings occur.
- Most members have a growing number of conflicts with the project applications.

If the above issues are resolved, the CDB could be a strong, representative, and ethical organization. In addition, the more powerful decision-making boards, like CDB, may increase their effectiveness and community-wide support through these efforts:

- Communicate regularly and clearly to all members and citizens beyond ads and selected mailings by expanding contact through the media and Internet via interviews, press releases, and other activities.
- Have a democratic appointment process by announcing vacancies through media and Internet, with the Council reviewing all applications to the committee and interviewing candidates.
- Set up a seminar to train and educate citizens (members and non-members), staff, and government officials on rules, procedures, and codes, which many citizens and members declare are difficult to understand.

- Open the member criteria so all levels of knowledge are valued by the Council and CDB, not just specific fields or professions.
- Build trust by being open and honest about the items on the agenda and the members on the committee, so the public and city officials want to work together.
- Appreciate and recognize all people for participation and collaboration.
- Convert to a performance-based budget or performance measures to calculate the potential and actual benefits of projects.
- Create Ethics Guidelines to lead the CDB members.

Even though Florida law provides little information regarding the procedures for public participation in local planning events, the ultimate goals of citizen advisory committees keep the community informed on local government affairs; encourage communication between the citizens and all local government officers; emphasize friendly and courteous service to the public; and seek to improve the quality and image of public service.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWEES

- Cindy Tarapani, Planning Director, City of Clearwater (under whose department this advisory committee was formed)
- David Gildersleeve, CDB member
- Shirley Moran, CDB member
- Ed Hooper, former CDB member
- Carlen Petersen, City Council member and former CDB member
- Bill Jonson, City Council member
- David MacNamee, county worker and member of Clearwater Beach Association

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How are citizen advisory committees utilized?
2. What influence do citizen advisory committees have on the planning and decision-making process of local governments?
3. What variables influence the effectiveness of citizen advisory committees?
4. What obstacles prevent meaningful citizen participation from taking place?
5. Is the Community Development Board a citizen advisory board?
6. Is it like other citizen review boards in the city of Clearwater? Why?
7. When was the Community Development Board established?
8. What is its purpose? Has that changed over the years?
9. Has it evolved to a policy creator?
10. How many members? Has that changed over the years? Why is there an alternate member?
11. What are the criteria for members? Why? Has that changed over the years? Is it the same criteria for all? Do some members follow certain criteria?
12. What are term limits? Why?
13. How are they appointed to the Board? What is the process?
14. Is this process the same or different from other citizen advisory boards?
15. Why do members want to be on the Board?
16. How is the member attendance? What is the average member attendance?
17. Does the Board have a set of separate rules? Or are they part of the overall planning department rules?
18. Are responsibilities of the Board adequate or overwhelming for the members?
19. When does the board make authorizing decisions? When does the board make recommendations? Why?
20. What are Level Two and Level Three application responsibilities and issues?
21. Is there a limit on conflict of interest and number of times members recuse themselves?
22. Have any members been penalized for fraternizing with agencies on the agenda?

23. Why is the CDB also noted as part of the Local Planning Agency? What are LPA responsibilities? How are they different from the CDB?
24. Do the Board's votes reflect the needs of the community? Why?
25. Are decisions in favor of economic development?
26. Do you understand why some issues are passed?
27. Do agree with the votes? Why?
28. Do you trust that the CDB handles issues wisely? Why?
29. Do many people attend the CDB meetings? How many? When?
30. Have you attended any public hearings? Why?
31. What impression do you have of the CDB and individual members?

APPENDIX C: CURRENT AND FORMER CDB MEMBERS

The current board as of November 21, 2004, is as follows:

- David Gildersleeve—executive vice president for WadeTrim, which is an engineering and consulting firm with about 95% of its work in governmental agencies (personal communications, October 18, 2004)
- Daniel Dennehy—owner of Bay Queen and Edgewater motels on Clearwater Beach (Farrell, 2003) as well as Top Flight Development, which is creating a major condo project for Clearwater Beach (Scott, 2004)
- Alex Plisko—architect at Myers & Plisko (Headrick, 2001b)
- Shirley Moran—owner of Ask Shirley, assisted living facility consulting service (personal communications, October 19, 2004)
- Kathy Milam—corporate travel planner (Tarapani, personal communication, November 5, 2004)
- J.B. Johnson—was member of the City Council until June 2004 when he became a CDB member (Farrell, 2004)
- Dana K. Tallman—environmental engineer at PBS&J, and who has 17 years of engineering experience for governmental clients (St. Petersburg Times, 2004)
- Vacant chair

Former CDB members include:

- Ed Hooper—spokesman and lobbyist for developing projects, such as the Patel condo/resort project for Clearwater Beach (personal communications, November 4, 2004)
- Jerry Figurski—an attorney of Harrill and Figurski; he was the attorney for Pasco and Pinellas county governments and then became an attorney for developers (Leary, 2004)
- Edward Mazur, Jr.—president of Florida Design Consultants, which works on many projects that come to CDB agenda (Tarapani, personal communication, November 5, 2004)

REFERENCES

- Amrhein, S. (2002, April 20). County to reassess choice for analysis. *St. Petersburg Times*. Retrieved September 19, 2004, from <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/sptimes/115061150.html>.
- Boris, E. T., & Krehely, J. (2002). Civic participation and advocacy. In L. M. Salamon (Ed.), *The state of nonprofit America* (pp. 299-330). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.
- Brody, S.D., Godschalk, D.R., & Burby, R.J. (2003). Mandating citizen participation in plan making: six strategic planning choices. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 69, 245-264.
- Burby, R. (2003). Making plans that matter: citizen involvement and government action. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 69, 33-50. Retrieved April 15, 2004, from http://web6.infotrac.galegroup.com.proxy.usf.edu/itw/infomark/931/805/48473079w6/purl=rc1_EAIM_0_A96951495&dyn=21!xrn_3_0_A96951495?sw_aep=tamp59176.
- Callahan, K. (2002). The utilization and effectiveness of citizen advisory committees in the budget process of local governments. *Journal of Public Budgeting, Accounting & Financial Management*, 14, 295-319.
- City of Clearwater. Advisory Boards and Agencies. Retrieved September 16, 2004, from http://www.clearwater-fl.com/gov/depts/official_records/agency_board_list.asp.
- City of Clearwater Planning Department. Development Review Division. Retrieved September 16, 2004, from <http://www.clearwater-fl.com/gov/depts/planning/divisions/devreview/index.asp>.
- Clearwater City Commission. (n.d.) Agency Cover Memorandum. Retrieved September 16, 2004, from <http://www.clearwater-fl.com/gov/depts/planning/pdf/CCAgendaMemoPoolEligibilityAmend.pdf>.
- Cosdon, C. (2002, December 9). Foundation adds two appointments to board. *St. Petersburg Times*. Retrieved September 16, 2004 from <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/sptimes/259439161.html>.
- Digest (2004, November 12). Council fills one slot in community development. *St. Petersburg Times*, 1C.
- Farley, R. (2004, June 13). "Timeless" resort may rid Clearwater Beach of bargain label. *St. Petersburg Times*, 7B.
- Farrell, J. (2004, April 1). Controversy ends with a lovely tribute. Retrieved September 22, 2004, from <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/sptimes/598422211.html>.
- Farrell, J. (2003, October 19). Gray's news enlivens election. *St. Petersburg Times*. Retrieved September 16, 2004 from <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/sptimes/425337581.html>.

- Gailey, P. (2002, March 10). Public needs to speak out for open government. *St. Petersburg Times*. Retrieved March 7, 2005 from http://www.sptimes.com/2002/03/10/Columns/Public_needs_to_speak.shtml.
- Garris, A. M. (2001, June 18). Mayor should apologize to Commissioner Ed Hart [letter]. *St. Petersburg Times*. Retrieved September 19, 2004, from <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/sptimes/74240849.html>.
- Gerrish, M. (2001, June 13). Need more leaders like Hart who voice their opinions [letter]. *St. Petersburg Times*. Retrieved September 19, 2004, from <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/sptimes/74085760.html>.
- Glaser, M.A., Parker, L.E., & Payton S. (2001). The paradox between community and self-interest: local government, neighborhoods, and media. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 23, 87-102.
- Goodsell, C.T. (1994). *The Case for Bureaucracy: A Public Administration Polemic* (3rd ed.). New York: Chatham House Publishers.
- Harless, J. (2001). Local government environmental advisory boards. *Public Management*, 83, 20-25.
- Headrick, C. (2001a, June 9). Comment develops into end-of meeting sniping. *St. Petersburg Times*. Retrieved September 19, 2004, from <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/sptimes/73958888.html>.
- Headrick, C. (2001b, March 23). Commissioners start off light. *St. Petersburg Times*. Retrieved September 19, 2004, from <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/sptimes/70120132.html>.
- Headrick, C. (2001c, November 6). Incumbent loses key business supporters. *St. Petersburg Times*. Retrieved September 19, 2004, from <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/sptimes/88349944.html>.
- Headrick, C. (2000d, November 19). Talks build expectations, little else. *St. Petersburg Times*. Retrieved September 16, 2004, from <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/sptimes/64375298.html>.
- Helgfand, L. (2004, July 16) Builder resubmits plans, keeps design. *St. Petersburg Times*. Retrieved September 16, 2004, from <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/sptimes/665463861.html>.
- Helling, A. (1998). Employer-sponsored and self-sponsored participation in collaborative visioning: theory, evidence, and implications. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 34, 222-240.
- International City/County Management Association. ICMA Code Of Ethics With Guidelines. (Rev. July 2004). Retrieved November 29, 2004, from <http://www.icma.org/content/bc.asp?bcid=72&ssid1=43&ssid2=75&ssid3=196>
- Irvin, R.A., & Stansbury, J. (2004). Citizen participation in decision making: is it worth the effort? *Public Administration Review*, 64, 55-65.

- Kallestad, B. (2003, March 16). Florida newspapers, broadcasters unite in support for public records bills. Associated Press. Retrieved March 6, 2005 from <http://www.fsne.org/sunshine/sp.html>.
- King, C.S., & Stivers, C. (1998). *Government Is Us: Public Administration in an Anti-Government Era*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Leary, A. (2004, April 30). Port Richey officials keep plot twisting. *St. Petersburg Times*. Retrieved September 19, 2004, from <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/sptimes/627358171.html>.
- Lukensmeyer, C., & Boyd, A. (2004). Putting the “public” back in management: seven principles for planning meaningful citizen engagement [Electronic version]. *Public Management*, 86, 10-15.
- McMasters, P. (2005) Secrecy in an open society. *St. Petersburg Times* (March 13), 3P.
- McShane, M.D., & Krause, W. (Spring 1995). Community corrections advisory boards and commissions: decision-makers or decoration? *Public Administration Quarterly*, 19, 58-74.
- Meck, S., FAICP, ed. (2002). *Growing Smart legislative Guidebook: Model Statutes for Planning and the Management of Change*. Chicago, IL: American Planning Association.
- My Florida. (2004). Most frequently asked questions on Florida’s open government laws. Retrieved November 29, 2004, from <http://myfloridalegal.com/pages.nsf/4492d797dc0bd92f85256cb80055fb97/df6796c2c498743985256cc7000ad5cb!OpenDocument>
- Ordinance No. 7294-04. City of Clearwater (July 12, 2001). Increases density of hotel rooms and expands the time frame before another ordinance must be passed to continue to allow the increased density to be in effect on the Clearwater Beach.
- Part I: Community Development Code (Article 4). In *Community Development Code and Building and Development*, City of Clearwater. (1999). Retrieved September 19, 2004, from http://library2.municode.com/gateway.dll/FL2/florida2/9963?f=templates&fn=default.htm&npassword=13398&npassword=MCC&npassword=npac_credentialspresent=true&vid=default.
- Scott, M. (2004, July 25). 59-foot condos get go-ahead. *St. Petersburg Times*. Retrieved September 19, 2004, from <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/sptimes/669442821.html>.
- Seasons, M. (2003). Monitoring and evaluation in municipal planning: considering the realities. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 69, 430-441. Retrieved April 14, 2004, from http://web6.infotrac.galegroup.com.proxy.usf.edu/itw/infomark/931/805/48473079w6/purl=rc1_EAI_M_0_A110028324&dyn=3!xrn_15_0_A110028324?sw_aep=tamp59176.
- Sewell, W.R.D., & Coppock, J.T. (1997). *Public Participation in Planning*. London: John Wiley & Sons.

- Sharockman, A. (2004, August 17). Beach resort project too grand, staff says. *St. Petersburg Times*, 1.
- Sharockman, A. (2004, August 18). Hotelier chalks up victory with vote. *St. Petersburg Times*, 1.
- Silverman, R.M. (2003). Citizen's district councils in Detroit: the promise and limits of using planning advisory boards to promote citizen participation. *National Civic Review*, 92, 3-14.
- Steinle, D. (2004, June 27). Sellout or sensible move? *St. Petersburg Times*. Retrieved September 16, 2004 from <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/sptimes/655913261.html>.
- Therriault, R. and B. (2001, June 13). Public thinks Clearwater being run for benefit of developers [letter]. *St. Petersburg Times*. Retrieved September 19, 2004, from <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/sptimes/74085760.html>.
- Training program needed for development board [editorial], (2004, October 15). *St. Petersburg Times*. Retrieved November 8, 2004, from http://www.sptimes.com/2004/10/15/Northpinellas/Training_program_need.shtml
- Wagenfohr, C. (2004, August 26). CDB approves Markopoulos resort site plan. *Clearwater Gazette & Beach Views*. Retrieved September 16, 2004 from www.clearwatergazette.com/20040826/cdbmarkop.htm.
- Want to volunteer? Here's how to apply. (1992, February 18). *St. Petersburg Times*. Retrieved September 19, 2004, from <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/sptimes/54195817.html>
- Wolf, T. (1999). *Managing a Nonprofit Organization in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Wright, E. (2001, June 13). Officials comments touched raw nerve among colleagues [letter]. *St. Petersburg Times*. Retrieved September 19, 2004, from <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/sptimes/74085760.html>.