

PROFESSOR: Distinguished members of the city council-- good morning, and thank you for meeting with me.

As you know, we will be working with a municipal planning agency in the drafting of the new master plan for the city. I address you today because as a first step in the process, our team requires the council's full support in what we believe is the best planning framework to achieve the city's two primary objective-- economic development in the long term and short-term pollution reduction. We are aware that not just the city, but a different set of stakeholders must work together in order to counter the impacts of the regional wastewater treatment plant and the runoff from agricultural activities upstream that currently discourage investment in the city.

With this in mind, we propose a combination of community planning assisted by consensus building exercises as a pivot for design and implementation of the new plan. I will spend the next few minutes explaining how participation will enhance the value of the plan, highlight aspects of community building for this space, and conclude with a particular focus we will use for your city.

Having worked over 15 years in planning efforts and over 20 different cities, my experience has taught me that meaningful public participation is the seed of successful implementation. Many times I have seen sophisticated master plans neglecting this fact and as a result, waste of taxpayers' money because the community perceives the method as being unfair. When plans do not connect assessment and design with public will, this often ends up hindering economic development by giving way to social unrest and expensive delays in plans.

Money spent on a planning process instead of a planning report can truly be called investment in the public interest. Participation has a triple bottom line. It brings additional skills to the planning table, it provides alternative insights to diminish risk of economic failure, and generates learning and cooperation networks that transcend the plan itself.

We will pursue these benefits through a community planning exercise where a neutral body will map the main stakeholder groups surrounding our polluted river. Peers within the groups will choose a representative that will participate in having an informed discussion about the alternatives for environmental improvement of the city.

I am aware that public participation is not deeply ingrained in local institutional culture. In fact, initial conversations with the staff indicate some reserve. This is not unusual because of narrow and procedural applications of public presentation elsewhere have definitely set a poor precedent. In the absence of proper management, public hearings and consultations are often inefficient and only yield superficial discussions. Other times they are held hostage by the best organized groups.

With such references, I find it to be very understandable for any of you to take public participation with some degree of skepticism. In order to address these concerns, my team and I will combine community planning with consensus building exercises. In comparison to other strategies, this framework will use a mutual mediator that will add credibility and efficiency to the process.

Strive for plurality instead of statistical representativeness, which is not only expensive but also ensures that there is a level playing field preventing majority rules. The mediator will curate participating groups early in the process ensuring a fair voice that reflects your economic concerns and also that ensures that the rich, racial diversity of the city is represented at the table.

Finally, this framework will guarantee recommendations that are feasible because all will be required to be grounded on a technical expertise provided by an advisory committee. Due to little experience with participation in the city, the outline of the process we proposed is similar to the one we very successfully used in Hampton, Virginia, where there was emphasis in learning. Participants will be trained about river pollution, the implications of green investment, and different alternatives to promote economic development. This will enable full and detailed participation in the discussion on the proposed Will alternatives.

We are not asking you to give up authority in this matter. You remain the ultimate decision-makers to weigh these proposals on their merit. This exercise is for, and you will have an unprecedented insight to a range of the concerns of all of your constituents. I do request, however, your endorsement to a public commitment that considers the inclusion of the negotiated recommendations in the new plan.

I conclude by pointing out that this method is relatively inexpensive as compared to others. An assessment does not need much time or money. Furthermore, investment and consensus yields great legitimacy and trust. And with this, the greatest opportunity to achieve fair, efficient wise and stable commitments to come and go. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]