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The Linden Oaks Community Emergency Services Station (CESS) at Fort Bragg is the first Army Military Construction (MILCON) project to achieve Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Platinum certification by the United States Green Building Council (USGBC).
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Participatory Planning at Army Installations

by Barry I. Gordon

At a recent Area Development Planning Practicum I noticed an attendee sitting at the side of the room unengaged in the current exercise. I approached him and asked if he had any questions or concerns that were holding him back from taking part in the activity. He responded, “No, I am just observing.” This is the same person that only “observed” in a previous workshop and then proceeded to punch holes in the process and the plan throughout the comment period. Why is it that some people feel that participation is only for “other” people and does not apply to them? Participatory planning is a transparent and open process that uses consensus building through the collaboration of ideals, values, objectives and input from stakeholders involved within a defined study area. Participation is a core attribute of democracy; without the right and opportunity to actively participate, there can be no talk of democracy. Participatory planning, as a method, has been used extensively in the design fields of landscape architecture, architecture, urban design, and planning due to its institutionalization in those fields at universities like Harvard, the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Oregon, and others. It is now much more common in military planning as well and has been applied in charrettes to varying degrees of success across the Army. At Fort Hood, 140 stakeholders participated in the preparation of the installation’s new planning vision. At Fort Sill, nearly 100 stakeholders participated. At U.S. Army Garrison Hawaii about 80 stakeholders participated. These stakeholders bring their expertise to the planning process.

There are two predominant process flows

Acronyms and Abbreviations

UFC	Unified Facilities Criteria
AT/FP	Anti-Terrorism/Force Protection
IMCOM	Installation Management Command
USACE	United States Army Corps of Engineers
ACSIM	Assistant Chief of Staff for Installation Management



IMCOM, U.S. Army Garrison-Hawaii, and mission personnel participate in a framework planning exercise at United States Army Garrison Hawaii’s Vision Workshop.

in planning. The first is the traditional model that uses a top-down planning/design approach. The top-down approach is restricted by what Mark Francis, author of *Proactive Practice: Visionary Thought and Participatory Action in Environmental Design*, calls “the culture of practice” which can be characterized as exclusive, project-oriented, and authoritarian. The second process flow uses participatory methods; a bottom-up process that takes the focus off the designer and client, and expands the process to include the actual users. This approach is problem-oriented and inclusive. It creates a collaborative process that unites and empowers its participants in a democratic way. At Army installations, the client – usually DPW staff and USACE representatives – opens up to allow the stakeholders that represent units from across the installation into the planning and design process.

The flow, whether traditional or

participatory, involves a process that is, hopefully, a means to an implementable plan. But, research shows that the traditional, top-down approach results in a planning document that is less implementable than the bottom-up, participatory model. Often literally collecting dust on a shelf – dead on arrival. Why is this? Is it the fault of the client not being able to effectively describe their dreams, hopes and desires? Is it the fault of the professional for not listening well enough, or the inability to translate those dreams successfully? Were cultural norms taken into consideration? This list can go on.

An important question to ask is, “what method of practice should be used for planning and design on military installations and is it appropriate for this project?” These are questions senior agency planners discussed while rewriting the Unified Facility Criteria for Installation ➤



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Master Planning. Additionally the same questions were addressed in the update of Army Regulation 210-20, Real Property Master Planning for Installations. In the January/February 2011 issue of the Public Works Digest, Kathryn J. Haught, master planner, Operations Directorate, OACSIM, stated that “the update accentuates process rather than end products.” This mode of practice engages the client - and a wider spectrum of users - to generate knowledge to inform the planning/design process in a transparent, collaborative, consensus-building process.

Participatory planning and the new Unified Facilities Criteria (UFC)

Chapter three of the new UFC, Master Planning Process and Products, clearly states that “the importance of stakeholder involvement cannot be overemphasized – it is essential for planners to get out of their office, walk the site in each area development plan district, and talk to users and stakeholders.” It also designates a section specifically for Stakeholder Involvement, stating who should be included and in what stages of the process they should be included.

The UFC emphasizes that planners have an obligation to reach out to all stakeholders throughout the process. Stakeholders should include DPW staff involved in any way with planning on an installation, including staff from Morale Welfare and Recreation, environmental, safety, training, emergency services (fire and police), AT/FP, privatized housing and lodging partners (accompanied and unaccompanied), installation leadership, tenants, units, private utility partners, retirees, reservists, spouses, and civilian and military staff who work, shop, recreate and train on the installation. Additional stakeholders include members of the Real Property Planning Board not included in the above categories and higher-level headquarters and echelons

with oversight of the installation, internal DOD stakeholders and external stakeholders are also important sources of information and input. These can include local municipalities, state governments, transportation agencies, other federal agencies, and federally recognized tribes.

The Professionals Role

The professional planner brings knowledge and experience to the planning and design process, but ultimately the professional wears two hats. One is as facilitator, guiding the overall process while remaining observant and vigilant over the collaboration and consensus building exercises; identifying, translating and evaluating the ideas generated through stakeholder dialogue. It is this role that allows the professional to invoke a sense of openness among the participants. The other is as documenter, collecting and interpreting knowledge. During planning workshops, a massive amount of information is produced that needs to be quickly and effectively sorted into broad groupings. A good documentation process can make the second step of process and design easier. Additionally, the professional must make user involvement meaningful and real, while remaining mindful of any obstacles that may block the equitable participation of all users. With this in mind, it is the responsibility of the professional to maintain effective communication in a collaborative environment, and to foster a transparent, consensus-building approach that allows for the participation of a broad group of stakeholders.

What Stakeholders Provides

By involving a broad stakeholder group there is an increased understanding of the issues by the participants and professionals. Stronger plans are developed and an increase in consensus can be achieved amongst the working group. Planning and implementing collaborative processes increases the ability to gain efficiencies in

functional uses and help meet current and future mission needs, optimize tenant and unit location and uses, and create high quality processes and products and equity amongst user groups.

Acclaimed architect, professor and author of *A Pattern Language*, Christopher Alexander noted two reasons for user participation: “First, participation is inherently good; it brings people together... in their world...involves them in their world...creates feeling between people and the world around them, because it is a world which they have helped to make. Second, the users know more about their needs than anyone else...so the process of participation tends to create places which are better adapted to human functions than those created by a centrally administered planning process.”

Better experiential knowledge and ownership of outcomes are additional benefits of a participatory planning process. Though possibly the most valued outcome is the relationships stakeholders leave the workshops with. Not just relationships with the DPW, but with IMCOM, USACE, other stakeholders. These long-term relationships and shared planning and design experience benefit the Service members, civilians, and families who currently work, live and recreate at our installations worldwide. Participation in the planning process benefits current users as well as future generations stationed at the installation. But, in order to receive these benefits it is imperative to step into the planning process and actively participate; because observation is not participation.

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