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Community Visioning and Corridor Planning: Experiences from Lincoln City, Oregon

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Like many communities, the small coastal town of Lincoln City, Oregon, has conducted several community visioning and planning processes. For its latest effort, however, Lincoln City took a new approach. Unlike previous processes, this one included an international design team that came to town for a five-day community visioning process. This *PAS Memo* provides background on Lincoln City's previous visioning efforts and describes the unique approach it took for the Cutler District, offering recommendations for others about to embark on a similar process.

About Lincoln City, Oregon

Lincoln City is located in Oregon along the West Coast, where the 45th parallel meets the Pacific Ocean. Both 680-acre Devils Lake and the Coast Mountain Range lie to the east. Stretching along eight miles of sandy beaches, Lincoln City is composed of six distinct coastal communities bisected by State Highway 101. The unique configuration of the city is analogous to a "string of pearls," the most southern of which is the Cutler District located along the south end of the Siletz Bay. The city enjoys a healthy tourist economy, and the majority of area jobs are in that industry. The area has also become a popular retirement destination, with its moderate climate and rural surroundings. Lincoln City's resident population is 7,437 but swells to roughly 30,000 in the peak tourism months of July and August.

Lincoln City Urban Renewal Agency

The Lincoln City Urban Renewal Agency is a separate governmental agency of the City of Lincoln City, Oregon, and was established in 1988 with the mission to eliminate blight and depreciating property values, attract job-producing investments, and improve the area's visual quality. It is funded through tax-increment financing (TIF) tied to the increase in property values within the urban renewal district boundary since the TIF's formation. The 25-year urban renewal program will sunset in 2014 when no further tax increment can be collected, although projects can continue with residual money.

Past Vision Plans

Lincoln City Urban Renewal has worked with the community in recent years to create new visions for the districts of Taft, OceanLake, Nelscott, and, most recently, Cutler City. Each of these previous visioning efforts has been very successful in guiding current and future development and redevelopment.

In 1999, the Taft District was the first selected to participate in the Urban Renewal Plan and Program to establish a community vision. The OceanLake District Vision Plan was then conducted in 2001, followed by the Nelscott District in 2006. All three projects relied heavily upon public involvement and outreach, beginning with a week-long visioning process that included numerous design workshops, community walks, interviews, and focus groups. There were also follow-up public workshops and meetings, project information centers, project websites, newsletters, and the development of distinct district logos. Past visioning efforts in Lincoln City have been nationally recognized for community involvement.



Map of Lincoln City, Oregon, showing the 'String of Pearls'. Photo Lincoln City Urban Renewal Agency.

Project teams included national experts in downtown revitalization and economic development, as well as local and regional professionals who knew the area's history, people, and possibilities. The synergy resulting from these teams led to the development of a high level of trust and comfort for local residents and decision makers, as well as state agencies, the media, local businesses, and civic groups. This helped to nurture partnerships and instill a sense of ownership in the planning process.

A New Approach

Although contracted consultants led the Taft and OceanLake vision processes, Lincoln City Urban Renewal took a new and different approach for the Nelscott District. This was in part to have greater control of the process in house and also to involve a greater variety and number of professionals in the vision development. A national call for participation was sent out to more than 65 professionals ranging from urban planners and architects to hydrologists and developers; the response was overwhelmingly positive. A multidisciplinary team of 16 professionals from across the country was then formed — and nicknamed the "Dream Team."

All team members came to Lincoln City pro bono for seven days. They bonded quickly and set out to meet with community members and other stakeholders to create a vision for the future of the small coastal community of the Nelscott District. The week-long process included more than 20 meetings with area businesses, residents, property owners, public agencies, and other stakeholders. A formal plan, the Nelscott District Community Vision Plan, was created and projects designed by the team and the Nelscott community are under way. Recently completed projects include Scott Plaza, which created an inviting public gathering space among existing businesses, and Wallace Reef Access, which made several needed improvements to a beach access area. This process proved so successful that a similar model was used as the foundation for the next visioning process in the Cutler District.

Cutler District Community Vision and Corridor Plan

Primarily a residential neighborhood with longstanding commercial establishments along Highway 101, Cutler is the most recent "pearl" on the list for Lincoln City Urban Renewal. This district serves as the southern gateway entering or departing Lincoln City. Historically called Cutler City, the district has long been known for its strong community spirit, peaceful Siletz Bay, and its lush gardens. It was once even dubbed the "Wild Rhododendron Capital of the Oregon Coast." In past years, the Cutler community has come together to build its first fishing dock at Gibbs Point, worked to protect homes from harsh winter storms by constructing sea walls and dikes, repaired streets by bringing in gravel from nearby Drift Creek, and even built a community hall for neighborhood meetings and special events. The Cutler District is a hidden pearl, rich with character and charm.



A view of the Cutler District. Photo City of Lincoln City.

The Cutler District Dream Team

Lincoln City Urban Renewal staff began to handpick professionals from a variety of disciplines, based on success with the Nelscott District process. Several previous Nelscott team members were invited, and three were able to participate. A new core design team of 10 professionals was assembled with backgrounds in architecture, urban design, land use planning, environmental planning, landscape architecture, engineering, illustration, and transportation planning / engineering. This core group formed the foundation of an international dream team.

An International Approach

With the success of the pro bono approach in the Nelscott District, Lincoln City Urban Renewal staff decided to take that concept to the next level. This time, in addition to bringing in a core design team from around the United States, they set out to find the best of the best from around the world. After contacting several organizations, staff connected with the Urban Land Institute (ULI) and the International Society of City and Regional Planners (ISOCARP). Through these organizations, an Urban Planning Advisory Team (UPAT) was created to come to Lincoln City's Cutler District to participate in part of the five-day visioning process. The nine-member UPAT consisted of both practitioners and academics from around the world. The urban renewal agency assisted with UPAT members' travel expenses, but like other team members, their time was pro bono.

To maximize the contributions brought by an international perspective, a call for participation was put out to invite two more ISOCARP members to join the core design team for the entire five days of vision building. After many applications were reviewed, the candidates were selected, and Lincoln City Urban Renewal was on its way to creating a design team that would bring national and international professional experience to the Cutler community.



Experiential Learning

To further expand this exciting opportunity, Lincoln City Urban Renewal staff decided to extend the invitation to four graduate students from the Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) Program. Administered by the University of Oregon in Eugene, Oregon, RARE is supported through grants from the Corporation for National and Community Service (AmeriCorps), Oregon Department of Transportation, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Oregon Economic and Community Development Department, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and other agencies. RARE participants are placed in a rural, underserved community in Oregon to work for 11 months on specific projects and gain experience towards their graduate education. Typically, RARE participants come from a variety of backgrounds, such as land use planning, economic development, or environmental studies, and are using their time to explore these areas in depth before completing their graduate programs.

Local Support

A support team of local residents and business owners was also formed. Some had worked on the previous urban renewal vision plans; others were key city staff such as the city manager and directors of planning and community development, public works, and parks and recreation.

Efforts were made to include as much of the community as possible in the visioning process. Local businesses provided additional support and services such as photo documentation and videography. Cutler District restaurants provided catering while local vacation rentals were used to house the visiting design team members and provide a place for the "Community Design Garage." The public meetings and the community design workshop were held at Cutler City Community Hall (now Pacific Baptist Church), in an effort to link the district's past with its future.

A Highway Runs Through It

As the event planning for the Cutler District visioning process progressed, it evolved into something more comprehensive than those conducted in previous districts. Because the Cutler District is the southern gateway into Lincoln City, this visioning process would also include a gateway and corridor plan. State Highway 101, which runs along the Oregon coast through Lincoln City, is owned and operated by Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT). Therefore, it was essential early on to create collaboration between ODOT staff and transportation planners and engineers to collectively work on possible designs for an improved southern gateway into Lincoln City with enhancements to the business corridor and an effective entrance to the Cutler District.



Engaging the Community

Cutler District residents came out in force with the anticipation of the visioning process. When an announcement of the upcoming process was mailed out to each property owner (over 300 in total, many of whom are second home owners), more than 100 community members responded requesting to be added to an e-mail opt-in list. This would provide opportunities to get involved in the process and distribute information on upcoming public meetings. Several residents signed up to be a "host home," which allowed them to host a member of the design team for an hour discussion on topics of their choosing.

Touching base with the community prior to the vision charrette gave the design team upfront information about residents' concerns and wishes. This information was gleaned at a community issues and values meeting at Cutler Community Hall several weeks before the five-day visioning event began. During this meeting, a list of community characteristics to be preserved, enhanced, and optimized was created. People voted on their highest concerns with sticker-dots so that a ranking of priority items could be determined. A focus meeting for property and business owners along the highway created a separate list of items needing attention in that area of Cutler. This helped the design team quickly understand where its energy should be focused during its working time and the community charrette, and allowed the team to hit the ground running.



Community members place dots on issues of highest concern at a community meeting. Photo Alison Nelson.

Ranked List of Community Issues

1. Access onto Highway 101
2. Unimproved Bay Access
3. Animal Control, Law and Zoning Enforcement
4. Preservation of Remaining Green Spaces
5. Lack of Pedestrian and Bike Ways
6. Traffic Speeds
7. Blind Intersections Due to Foliage
8. Tsunami Evacuation
9. Redevelopment of Vacant Parcel on Bayfront
10. Invasive Plant Species
11. Lack of Signage to Preserve and Display History
12. Playground in Need of Improvements and Restroom
13. Community Image
14. No Designated Parking at the Wetlands Park and Trails
15. A BayWalk Connection Between Cutler and Taft
16. Desire for a Neighborhood Association
17. Parking at Galley Bay Access Points
18. Gateway into/out of Cutler District on Highway 101
19. Community Emergency Center
20. Storm Drainage in Problem Locations
21. Construct SW Keel Avenue
22. Economic Development Incentives

The Cutler Community Vision Process

On the first evening of the five-day visioning process, the core design team arrived for a traditional beach barbeque and a history talk by the North Lincoln County Historical Museum's director. Over the following days, the team toured the Cutler District and Lincoln City, met with community stakeholders and city officials, visited host homes, and participated in a four-hour community design workshop. Each evening the team brainstormed design concepts and refined potential projects in light of the increasing levels of information gleaned from conversations with the community and stakeholders. The visioning process culminated in a vision plan presentation to the Lincoln City Urban Renewal Agency (City Council) and the Cutler District community. Following the presentation was a community celebration, complete with conceptual renderings from the Cutler District design team and catering at the new Lincoln City Culinary Center.



Community members discuss concerns in the Cutler District during a community workshop. Photo Nils Eddy.



Community members view renderings of ideas for the Cutler District. Photo Alison Nelson.

Cutler District Vision Statement: A Place of Natural Beauty

Tucked away on a hidden peninsula of land in Siletz Bay, is a place of natural beauty with soaring eagles, native flora, and unique wetlands. Preserving this natural environment will require focusing on improving the natural residential beauty, permanent beach and wetland access and safer pedestrian and bike trails.

Image

Community members draft a vision statement for the Cutler District during a community workshop. Photo Lincoln City Urban Renewal Agency.



Lessons Learned

The success of the Cutler District Community Vision and Corridor Plan can be contributed to several factors. First, because of experience with three previous visioning processes, the community had a great surface understanding of the vision process and how its participation was essential to shaping the vision. Second, lead consultants in the Taft and OceanLake processes served as exemplary models in directing true community immersion and building confidence among local citizens, city officials, and staff. Lastly, urban renewal staff was fully supported in its "out of the box" approach to envisioning a new Cutler City.

The following list of recommendations is provided for those interested in planning this rewarding approach to establishing a community vision. It is by no means exhaustive and should be tailored to the individual context and end goals.

1. *Start Early* — The event planning process leading up to a successful community vision charrette can take 6-12 months. This varies with the particular nature of the community and charrette goals. In the case of the Cutler District, informal conversations began about a year in advance to scout out possible food reservations, accommodations, and meeting locations.
2. *Explore the History* — Conducting some historical research on the area was very helpful; this information was woven into the process and conceptual designs. A copy of the Historic Context Statement for Cutler may be downloaded from www.HistoricCutler.org.
3. *Preliminary Meetings* — Meeting with stakeholders early on is valuable to give everyone a running start prior to the charrette. Public meetings should convey process-related information about everyone's roles and contributions to maximize the benefits of the charrette. This also provides an opportunity for the public to ask questions ahead of time, freeing up more of the schedule to work on problem solving and vision-building. They can also increase public awareness, demystify the planning process, and build trust among community members and within the citizen-government relationship.

Cutler District Community Vision & Corridor Plan

April / May, 2008



Community Participation Schedule

April 11, 2008 7:00-8:30pm	Community Information Meeting Pacific Baptist Church (Community Hall)
April 25, 2008 7:00-8:30pm	Community Values and Issues Meeting Pacific Baptist Church (Community Hall)
May 9, 2008 2:00-4:00pm	One on One Stakeholders Meetings Locations to be Determined
2:00-3:00pm	Open Public Input & Information Design Studio – 6415 SW Ebb Avenue
4:00-5:30pm	Host Home Visits by Design Team Sign Up to be Included
May 10, 2008 8:30-11:30am	One on One Stakeholders Meetings Locations to be Determined
1:00-5:00pm	Community Design Workshop Pacific Baptist Church (Community Hall)
May 11, 2008 4:30-5:30pm	Community Open House Design Studio – 6415 SW Ebb Avenue
May 12, 2008 6:30-7:00pm	Community Vision Presentation City Hall Council Chambers
7:00-8:30pm	Community Reception and Celebration Pacific Coast Culinary Center for the Arts

Community Pitches in to Build Fishing Dock-1931

Citizens Erected Community Hall-1936

Community Raises Money for Street Improvements-1945

The Cutler District.....**Naturally**

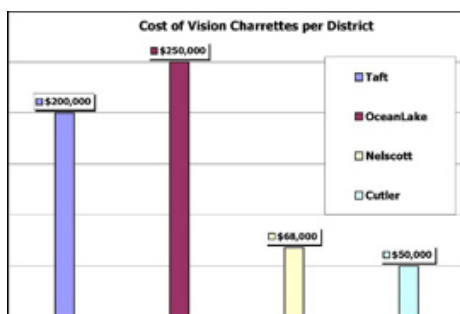
The schedule of community meetings for the Cutler District visioning process. Courtesy Lincoln City Urban Renewal Agency.

4. *Make Local Connections* — To strengthen the local economy and resources, incorporate local businesses and services like local chapters of professional organizations, activities for spouses and children who may accompany the design team members, food, and accommodations. This also adds a context-specific character to the overall event. For example, after the five-day visioning process, the design team members had the opportunity to visit the Lincoln City Glass Foundry and blow their own glass float.
5. *Track As You Go* — It's crucial to keep a log of the time invested by community members and public officials for each facet of the vision process. This allows a more accurate gauge of the effectiveness of the pro bono nature of the event.

Cutler District Community Vision Plan - Log of Hours								
Date	Event / Day	Public Hours	Consultant / Design Team Hours	ISOCARP - Int'l Team	Outside Agency Hours	Elected Officials	City Staff Hours	Totals
3/17/2008	Hey 101 Design Workshop - Kick off Meeting (9-12)	0	6 (2 people)	0	15 (5 people)	0	9 (3 people)	30 Hours
4/2/2008	Staff Pizza Info Meeting (12-1)	0	0	0	0	1 (1 person)	14 (14 people)	15 Hours
4/11/2008	Community Info Meeting (7-6-45)	22.75 (13 people)	0	0	0	3.5 (2 people)	7 (4 people)	33.25 Hours
4/14/2008	Hey 101 Design Workshop Meeting #2 (9-11)	0	4 (2 people)	0	10 (5 people)	0	6 (3 people)	20 Hours
4/25/2008	Community Issues/Values (7-9)	134 (57 people)	0	0	0	6 (3 people)	8 (4 people)	128 Hours
4/30/2008	Hey 101 Design Workshop - Public Meeting (11-1)	11 (5 people)	4 (2 people)	0	0	0	6 (3 people)	21 Hours
5/9/2008	Charrette - Day 1 (12 hrs)	0	145 (12 people x12; 1 person x1)	24 (2 people)	1 (1 person)	2 (2 people)	52 (4 people x12; 4 people x1)	224 Hours
5/10/2008	Charrette - Day 2 (8 hrs)	23 (23 people x1)	128 (16 people)	16 (2 people)	1 (1 person x1)	0	32 (5 people x1; 1 person x3; 3 people x8)	200 Hours
5/10/2008	Public Workshop (1-5)	136 (29 people)	64 (16 people)	8 (2 people)	4 (1 person)	12 (3 people)	28 (7 people)	232 Hours
5/11/2008	Charrette - Day 3 (8 hrs)	20 (20 people x1)	128 (16 people)	80 (10 people)	0	2 (2 people)	40 (3 people x12; 1 person x4)	270 Hours
5/12/2008	Charrette - Day 4 (8 hrs)	0	120 (15 people)	80 (10 people)	6 (2 people x3)	0	26 (3 people x8; 1 person x2)	232 Hours
Totals		306.75	599	208	37	26.5	228	1405.25

A log of hours for the Cutler District Community Vision Plan process indicates the investment of time by community members, staff, volunteers, and other participants. Courtesy Lincoln City Urban Renewal Agency.

6. *Visual Depiction of Design Concepts* — Illustrators with quick and accurate ability are crucial to creating strong communication of design concepts to stakeholders and the community at large. Take advantage of opportunities to post sketches, line drawings, collages, photos, and renderings of initial, developing, and finalized concepts of projects. During the Cutler visioning process, images were posted in the "Design Garage" where people could stop by most hours of the day. These images provided the catalyst for discussion and community feedback as concepts evolved, helping the design team know it was on the right track.
7. *Visual Documentation of the Process and Report* — A visual account of the vision process should not be overlooked. Photos and video footage can be used for initial marketing of the event and for creating retrospective materials for websites, print, and television media. These elements should be incorporated into the final vision document, or report, which carries the vision forward to implementation. The Cutler District Community Vision and Corridor Plan document may be downloaded from the Urban Renewal Department page of the City of Lincoln City website at www.LincolnCity.org.
8. *Dream Big* — The budget should not be a limiting factor and the scale of the project or issue being addressed should not be a hurdle. There is an opportunity for community resources to come together and solve problems or make plans for desired improvements. When creating a shared vision, dream big! See the bar graph for the Lincoln City Urban Renewal Vision Charrette Costs Per District; as the collective experience increased from Taft to Cutler, the overall cost decreased.



Graph indicating the costs for the vision plan processes for each district. Courtesy Lincoln City Urban Renewal Agency.



Design team members create their own Lincoln City souvenirs before heading home. Photo Nils Eddy.

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About the Authors

Kurt Olsen is the Director of Lincoln City Urban Renewal Agency, former president of the Association of Oregon Redevelopment Agencies, and recipient of the American Planning Association Planner of the Year Award — 2006 Oregon Chapter.

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Alexandra Roberts Bullock was the former redevelopment coordinator for Lincoln City Urban Renewal as a 2007-2008 RARE Participant during the Cutler District Community Charrette. She is a member of the American Planning Association and is currently pursuing graduate work at Portland State University.

Resources

City of Lincoln City: www.LincolnCity.org

Cutler District: www.HistoricCutler.org

International Society of City and Regional Planners: www.isocarp.org

National Charrette Institute (NCI): www.charretteinstitute.org

Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) Program: <http://rare.uoregon.edu>