

How Planners Trick You

Did You Know:

- The city already has a plan for your neighborhood, you will only get to decide the minor details like what color to paint the row houses, condos and apartments that the city plans. Perhaps where some of them are located, but not whether or not to have them. They might improve a park or two, but not much else.
- The process is designed to make you *think* your neighborhood is actually making the decisions. Try saying NO to something the city really wants like a big apartment or bubble curbs.
- Many city employees and employees of companies that do business with the city are at tonight's meeting. They will pretend to be your neighbors and will make suggestions to mold your neighborhood to the city's plan.
- City planning is NOT a SCIENCE, instead it is based on multiple, dubious, assumptions about **how people should live, without regard to how people want to live**. Your neighborhood is about to become a social experiment.
- Urban renewal funds include transportation upgrades. These funds will be taken for light rail if light rail is contemplated, otherwise they will be spent on wide sidewalks, street trees and bubble curbs instead of paving your unpaved neighborhood streets. Or adding sidewalks where there are none.
- Neighborhood advisory committees claim to represent the neighborhood, but are usually dominated by city employees and companies that do business with the city.

The City's plan

The city's plan is pretty much the same throughout the whole city:

- Put 30-50% more people in the neighborhood by encouraging giant apartment buildings, row houses and other high density development.
- Improve "walkability" at the expense of "drivability"
- Add bike paths to main streets instead of secondary streets.
- Widen sidewalks and add trees.
- Add center medians, with trees.
- Easier pedestrian crossing.

What they don't mention

The tradeoffs

- Those wide sidewalks and medians require space that is only available by removing "on street" parking and driving lanes. This means more traffic congestion. Both of which will destroy small businesses in the area.
- Increased congestion WILL cause people to cut through your neighborhood.
- More people with their cars, means more pollution.
- Increased congestion means even more pollution.
- Increased congestion takes your time away from your family.
- Parking behind businesses is more prone to muggers & rapists.
- Bubble curbs and speed bumps slow emergency vehicles, actually causing deaths.

The Cost

They never mention costs. Street "improvements" are very expensive and money might be better spent:

- Reducing traffic congestion in anticipation of 30-50% more traffic from all of those new residents.
- Paving the unpaved streets.
- Adding sidewalks where there are none.
- Trees require watering. They fill the streets and sidewalks with leaves every fall. These cause traffic accidents and slippery sidewalks which are a particular hazard to older people.

Fight the Tricks

They don't tell you about the process, so you are always disoriented. Here it is:

- They have a series of meetings to gather information and input. These include neighborhood walks, meetings with various groups, business associations, neighborhood associations etc to gather neighborhood opinions.
- They then go away and create their vision for your neighborhood, trying to

describe their plan in terms gathered from your neighborhood.

- More meetings to modify the minor elements, but not the important stuff like whether or not high rise (stack & pack) apartments are desired. They are coming - you get to advise on the color and siding materials.
- Urban renewal districts form advisory committees composed of people from the neighborhood (allegedly). The city will try to load these with city sympathizers.

Know the enemy

It is not unusual to have far more city people, than neighborhood people in meetings. Always ask: “**How many people here work for the City or a company that does business with the city**”. These are the people who will advance the city’s agenda by mentioning things that the residents don’t want. **This is a very important item – don’t let them fool you.**

The usual procedure is to ask people what they like and dislike about the neighborhood, what are the problems. There will be much probing for details, but no mention of tradeoffs. These statements are recorded on giant post-it notes and later turned into a plan. Speak up – be sure that the tradeoffs are recorded on those post-its - they are the only record of what was said.

- If you don’t want big apartments, speak up!
- When they ask what color to paint the giant apartments, be outspoken that the real problem is the size not the color. Same for the building’s appearance.
- If speed bumps come up, mention that they slow emergency vehicles (one study showed that speed bumps kill 37 people for every life they save.)
- When they talk about helping pedestrians cross the street, mention that extended curbs **should not** include bus stops which causes busses to block traffic.
- Ask if people will be less safe standing close to oncoming traffic on extended curbs.
- Ask about costs. Are there better ways to spend the money.
- They will ask business groups if they want more customers. Ask if those new apartments will bring more competitors. (The answer is YES)
- Complain about the removal of parking.
- Complain about the removal of driving lanes.
- Remember, more people on the same roads = more congestion.
- When they talk of new buildings reflecting the local character of the neighborhood, they mean that the oversized apartments will be the same color with similar looking outside materials and decorations. They will still be four or five story monsters next to your home or the next to the one story buildings that predominate the area.
- Videotape all city promises – they will lie to you to get their way.

If you don’t speak up, your neighborhood plan will be the city’s scheme, not your Plan.

If You Really Care About Your Neighborhood

Organize a true neighborhood group to figure out what you want and what you don't want. Be sure your "don't want" list makes it to the record. For instance you might not want increased congestion, speed bumps, bike paths on the main street, loss of parking and bus stops in the middle of traffic.

- If you appear to be a group, they will try to separate you into smaller groups at meetings to dilute your power, insist on staying together. **DO NOT BE AFRAID TO SAY NO** to them. After all it's your neighborhood, not theirs!
- When advisory committees are formed, be sure that **ALL** of the voting members are from your neighborhood. Normally, these working committees that "represent" the neighborhoods are loaded with city employees or employees of companies that do business with the city (These people tend to be very active in the neighborhood to promote their employer's agenda and thus the city's agenda) This will be very contentious and will require persistence and maybe even multiple calls to city hall. Be prepared to become a real pest to each and every city commissioner. These committees are only advisory, with the PDC overruling them at will.
- If you doubt this, ask the people in Lents about the Rose development. Portland's PDC overrode the neighborhood committee by claiming the committee wasn't representative of the neighborhood. As if bureaucrats in city hall are representative!
- Why not ask tonight's PDC people about Lents and Rose development?
- Try to get real power, not just advisory.
- Go the library and look at books on neighborhood political action. Consider Donald Trump's "Art of the Deal" -- it mentions a lot of tricks he used against neighborhood residents.

Some Facts

- Most of Russelville, The commons, Pearl District and Riverfront development get special property tax breaks and pay little/no property tax for 10 years, while schools, fire and police get shortchanged or we make up the difference in higher taxes .
- Sometimes the builders even get land from PDC at big discount, while we make up the difference. The new high density apartments in your neighborhood will get these 10 years breaks while you have to make up the difference.
- The little guy doesn't matter: PDC is proposing the city spend about \$200 million in infrastructure cost to enable the North Macadam development while little people have to pay "system development fees" to move a Pizza parlor across the street (Beautiful Pizza on Belmont St.).
- For examples of the kind of development pushed by the city take a look at:
 - Russelville (S.E. 102nd, 1 block South of Burnside)
 - The Commons (60th & Glisin, that Moscow style apartment building abutting Banfield on the south side.)
 - Pearl District
 - River Front Development.