


GALLATIN COUNTY

MEMO

To: Amsterdam Rural Fire Department
From: Warren Vaughan, Chris Scott, Planning Department 
Date: March 29, 2007
Re: Planning Process Thoughts

As the Amsterdam Rural Fire Department Board of Trustees begins to talk about planning in the area, we thought you might benefit from some thoughts and ideas the Planning Department has found helpful over the past few years regarding process. We think it would be helpful to think about these points and work them into your own discussion as you move forward, though the process you follow will be up to you.

Much of this process will be driven by a core working group. This working group can consist of the Board of Trustees, or it can consist of any other community members who volunteer. Regardless of who ends up on the working committee, please understand it will entail a lot of time and effort. Community planning can be a rewarding process, but you will have to work very closely with a lot of people to ensure you make it through the rough spots. Some of the groups in Gallatin County have taken as much as 3 ½ years to finish. Remember- when it comes to community planning, the way you go about the process will be as important as your final product!

Over the past few years, several planning processes and zoning districts have formed in Gallatin County. The following represent some common themes from successful groups.

- 1) *Begin by establishing your community vision.* In our experience, groups of people around the county and the region have been successful when they begin their planning process by developing a vision for what they want their community to be in the future. All future discussion and work will be based on this idea. What is important to the people in Amsterdam/Churchill? What would they like to change? What should stay the same? What makes Amsterdam/Churchill a good place to live and what would make it better (or worse)? The community planning process can take time as questions (like property rights!) are addressed; focusing on points of agreement can prepare the community for more difficult work ahead. As an example, we've included Vision Statements from Clark County, Idaho and Madison County, Montana.

- 2) *Develop that vision by designing a public process that includes the opinions of as many people as possible.* This can be done through visioning workshops, surveys, a website, booths set up at events- you name it. The point is to engage as many people and be as open and transparent as possible. It's important to note the vision will be the community's; the working group will help guide the discussion.
- 3) *Gather as much information as possible to understand the community.* Once that central framework, or vision, is established, it's helpful to gather information that allows you to really understand your community. How many people live within the Amsterdam/Churchill planning boundary? How much land is involved? How many of those people are new? How many students are at the school and how much space do they have? How many volunteers are at the fire department, what kind of situations are they regularly involved in, and what are their needs? What's going on with the roads? These are just a few questions we've thought of - you will come up with many more. We can help you with data gathering if you would like.
- 4) *Develop policies addressing how the community will grow and change.* The number one rule when writing a neighborhood plan and policy is that you need to have a strong, realistic foundation on which everything is based. This consists of two things: 1) community values and how people want to grow (the vision), and 2) the natural and infrastructure capabilities of the area (good information). With this foundation, you can ask the big questions: Amsterdam/Churchill will undoubtedly grow - how can this happen while still ensuring it remains a good place to live? There are a lot of tools out there, such as regulations, infrastructure improvements, grants, etc... which you can use. In our experience, bringing different tools and alternatives to the community throughout the process via workshops is the best way to continue gathering input on what will, or won't, work for Amsterdam/Churchill.
- 5) *Local leadership.* The key to all of this is going to be local leaders - that means the members of the working group, and others in the Amsterdam/Churchill community. This is your neighborhood. We will help you as much as we can by gathering data, providing technical advice, connecting you with people who have been through this before, and keeping you in touch with larger happenings of County policy that might relate to you. The County Planning Department is your resource, but the working group and community will be the driving force behind this.

Over the next several months, the process will likely be one of going to the community to gather and/or present information, taking feedback back to the working group, presenting results and alternatives to the larger community, bringing those results back to the working group, and so on. It will take some time and effort, so enjoy the community conversation!