

Keys to a Successful Planning Process

What can be done to help the Amsterdam/Churchill community work together productively? The work is most satisfying and enduring if the community is ready to...

Trust democracy. They are willing to include everyone who has a stake in the outcome.

Exercise the muscle of citizenship. The truism that "if you don't use it you can lose it" applies to citizenship. Citizenship is in jeopardy because "representative democracy" asks very few people - usually just those elected to office -- to do the work of citizenship for the rest of us. To sustain democracy, *everyone* should have the opportunity to participate actively in the decisions that effect their lives.

Focus on the future. But not by avoiding the past. The challenge is to understand the past (including past mistakes) but not allow it to immobilize the group from moving forward.

Be inventive. Adapt approaches to fit your circumstances. Amsterdam/Churchill is a unique community; what worked in Gateway or Bozeman or Manhattan may not work.

Create a political mandate for change. Plans sit on shelves because while they may reflect the best advice experts can provide, they do not have a political mandate. If the Amsterdam/Churchill community planning process is going to be successful, there's going to have to be a lot of people behind it.

Understand that there are different types of power. An inclusive collaborative process will provide one kind of power - permission to act - but permission alone is insufficient. Other kinds of power, controlled by people who hold electoral office and who can allocate public and private resources, are critical to achieving what the citizens in a collaborative process say they want to do. In Amsterdam/Churchill, residents need to recognize that, for example, state officials have power over Churchill Road, County Commissioners have power over approval or denial or subdivisions... adopting effective policies will require an understanding of the different types of power at work in the community.

Another aspect of understanding power is reflected in the need to recognize who is NOT at the table, as well as who is. Everyone involved in this process knows people who should be involved but who are not. We need them.

Pay attention to implementation from the outset of a process. We gain nothing by being vague. As we talk about what Amsterdam/Churchill wants, we all need to take realistic stock of what the consequences of those goals are. It may mean an investment of time, energy, or money. It may mean increased land use regulations. Being realistic about what it will take to reach goals will save us a lot of time in the long run.