

Want a community that works for all? Ask the citizens!

People, organizations, and government can make a real difference when they are united by a common goal: To make the community work for everyone. When all kinds of people work together to create a community plan, everyone benefits.

In Portsmouth, N.H., Pittsburgh, Pa., and Decatur, Ga., public planning is democracy in action: Everyday people have a say about how to create a better life for everyone in their community. We've captured some highlights here. Please see our website for full stories on these inspiring planning efforts.

Portsmouth, N.H.—Over the last decade, some 1,200 people have taken part in public deliberation about the future of their city. Portsmouth Listens started as an effort to address one problem. Now, the people of Portsmouth expect to have a voice in public decisions, tackling issues ranging from bullying to strategic community planning. Staffed entirely by volunteers, Portsmouth Listens shows that public engagement processes do not have to be 'owned' by government. In fact, these efforts may be more effective and sustainable when they are jointly owned and supported by a broad range of leaders and community organizations.

Oakland Neighborhood, Pittsburgh, Pa.—Oakland 2025 is engaging members of the community in dialogue and action about the future of the diverse neighborhood of 21,000 residents, and an additional 100,000 employees who work there each day. People met in dialogue as a first step in the process to identify issues, create a shared vision and establish immediate action steps. Ideas from the project will guide the drafting of a master plan for the neighborhood.



Residents of the Oakland neighborhood in Pittsburgh, Pa., are enthusiastic about participating in the Oakland 2025 strategic plan during the kickoff in March. (Courtesy: Meghan Sullivan)

In time, the Oakland plan may inform the city of Pittsburgh's comprehensive plan.

Decatur, Ga.—In 1998, at the urging of a local citizen group, the city launched an effort to recruit a broad cross section of residents to decide how to build community and find common ground for solving conflicts. The Decatur Roundtables involved more than 400 citizens in this city of 18,000 people. Those public conversations laid the foundation for a planning process to create a 10-year plan. Over 80 percent of that plan has been carried out. Inspired by that success, 700 people participated in the 2010 Roundtables and came up with 7,894 ideas for a new strategic plan!

FROM THE DIRECTOR

BY MARTHA L. McCOY



We need civility—and more

These days, we see differences of opinion

degenerating into shouting matches and, sometimes, into violence. As we head into the next presidential election season, the rhetoric is already heating up. Understandably, some people believe that lack of civility is the main problem facing our democracy.

Lack of civility *is* important, but it is a symptom of a deeper problem. It shows us deficits in our democracy. We urgently need processes built into our communities that bring out the best in us—opportunities to have a voice, to listen, to make sense of information, to build relationships, to deal with inequities, to make decisions and solve problems together, and to hold each other accountable.

In this issue you will read about such opportunities created by citizens in the private and nonprofit sectors, in collaboration with local governments. In these cases and many others, hundreds—sometimes

thousands—of people from all backgrounds and views have found common ground, in spite of real differences. Using a structured process, with facilitation and ground rules, they have been able to hear each other, tackle the challenges of racial and socioeconomic disparities, work through contentious issues, and work with their elected officials. They are creating inclusive, ongoing, honest, *and* civil ways to participate in public life. And they are creating stronger communities.

This is a critical moment for our democracy, and for democracies throughout the world. We face serious challenges. To deal with them, we need civility—and so much more. There are many examples of hope and change that we can learn from and build on.

COMMUNITY VOICES



WILSON



TABOR



CUNNINGHAM

What happens when people have a voice in community decisions?

“In the past, people have been frustrated with the lack of participation in planning processes. Now, we are giving people a chance to create, for themselves, what they want to see happen in their neighborhood. This will become a community-wide effort—an opportunity for people to lead the change they want to see happen. They will be able to take action, right away, to improve their neighborhood. And they will be able to provide input to the Oakland 2025 master plan.”

— WANDA WILSON, executive director, Oakland Planning & Development Corp., Pittsburgh, Pa.

“Over time, Portsmouth Listens has built confidence in citizens *and* elected officials that community dialogue gets the best answers to difficult problems.

That confidence is like political capital—it only grows if re-invested in the community. Recently, we tackled the question of how to balance the tax burden with vital city services. Given the scenes at state capitals in Wisconsin and Ohio, we’re pleased that Portsmouth residents could deliberate in a thoughtful way and decide what was right on such a tough question.”

— JOHN TABOR, publisher, Seacoast Newspapers, and co-chair of *Portsmouth Listens*, Portsmouth, N.H.

“Now that we have created an awareness of what civic engagement is, it has become a part of our community DNA. Citizens have the expectation that they will be asked to be involved and city officials expect the staff to invite the community. I trust the process, but even with our experience, it is hard work.”

— KECIA CUNNINGHAM, city commissioner, Decatur, Ga., and facilitator in the 1998 Decatur Roundtables.

New Yorkers & Faith Leaders Push to Add 'Food Justice' to City Plan

Last fall, 150 New Yorkers attended the Food Faith and Health Disparities Summit in Harlem. Cosponsored by NY Faith & Justice, Faith Leaders for Environmental Justice, and The Riverside Church, the summit gave participants the opportunity to engage in dialogue about the intersection between food justice and personal faith.

Disparities in food access and health outcomes are widespread throughout the city. Estimates indicate that 3 million New Yorkers are affected. In South Bronx, Northern Manhattan, South Queens, and Central Brooklyn there are no supermarkets within walking distance.

Six action teams formed at the summit to address concerns about food and health. Three teams center on policy issues: the Farm Bill, Healthy Food Incentives, and Living Wages for Food Workers. The others are community focused: Food and Voter Education, Business Outreach, and Community Engagement.



Using a faith lens, New Yorkers consider different approaches for explaining food and health disparities.
Courtesy: NY Faith & Justice

After the summit, community leaders sent a memorandum to the Mayor's Office. They recommended including food policy in PlaNYC2030, the city's 25-year plan for urban sustainability. The memorandum points to goals that arose from the dialogues: eliminating hunger, putting an end to health disparities, increasing access to healthy food, providing education about nutrition, increasing local and sustainable food production, ensuring fair pay and

working conditions for food workers, and getting more residents involved in making decisions on food policy. The memorandum also includes strategies for tracking progress on meeting goals. The mayor's office has responded positively to the memorandum; city leaders are open to learning more from the summit.

"Access to food, healthy food, is a moral issue. Teachings from the world's diverse religious traditions call upon us all to work together for equity and justice."

Memorandum to NYC Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability, November 2010

Tips for Successful Community Planning

Build Trust Up Front—Residents need to 'own' the planning process. Help people understand how community planning works and how they can help.

Involve Everyone—Invite *everyone* who lives or works in the community. A broad-based steering group leading the effort will encourage diverse participation. Keep inviting skeptics into the process.

Hold Facilitated Dialogues—Use discussion materials that reflect community concerns and hopes. Trained facilitators and guidelines for the dialogue can lead to more productive conversations.

Follow Up—Bring dialogue participants together for updates on the community plan; welcome their feedback. Lack of follow-up with residents is the most common community planning error!

Get the Word Out—Use media and technology to inform the community. (Newspapers, bulletin boards, announcements during community meetings, information sessions, websites, and social media)

Help Build Social Capital—Community-planning dialogues lead to good ideas and build relationships, which help move action ideas forward.

Remember to visit Everyday Democracy on
 Facebook, Twitter and YouTube

ANNOUNCEMENTS



Goodbye—and hello—to Sally Campbell

In June, we say goodbye to **Sarah “Sally” Campbell**, who is retiring from our full-time staff. Happily for all of us, we will still be able to call on Sally’s wisdom and experience in her new capacity as senior associate.

Since the early 1990s, Sally has been at the heart of our work, helping people find ways to work together to solve community problems. She has served Everyday Democracy in several capacities: deputy director, director of community assistance, and director of training and leadership development. An expert on training and group-process design, she has developed trainings and tools for community work on issues including youth development, interfaith dialogue, education reform, poverty reduction, and early childhood development. And she has written and/or contributed to most of our publications. Sally also has played a key role in

developing and working with national partners. We wish Sally the very best in her “retirement,” and look forward to working with her far into the future.

Farewell to Nick Connell

This summer, we’ll also bid adieu to Program Associate **Nick Connell**, who leaves us to go to Chicago where his wife, Sabrina, will continue her graduate studies. For many people, Nick is the voice of Everyday Democracy, answering questions and providing advice to first-time callers and email inquiries. In his six years with us, Nick has been the administrative assistant to Executive Director Martha McCoy, and assistant to members of the community assistance team and our senior associates. Nick has brought positive energy to this work—coaching communities, conducting trainings, and always striving for racial equity in our democracy. We wish him well.



Focus On Everyday Democracy

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Everyday Democracy is a national organization that helps local communities find ways for all kinds of people to think, talk and work together to solve problems. We work with neighborhoods, cities and towns, regions, and states, helping them pay particular attention to how racism and

ethnic differences affect the problems they address.

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Ideas & Tools for Community Change

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