Inclusive Management: Planning "Green Grand Rapids"

Part B

Rachel's Analysis

Following some initial discussion with her staff about the four precedents and options for Green Grand Rapids, Rachel decides to share some additional insights about inclusive management. She realizes that inclusive management involves not only knowledge and skills in collaboration but a particular attitude towards collaboration. On the board, she tries to sketch out some of the key elements of an inclusive orientation:

- *Our actions are important.*

Rachel starts by acknowledging that it was hard to know what to do. The choices could be overwhelming. But, she argues, it is worth it for the team to take on the challenge and be thoughtful about actions and the effects they have. It is inevitable that their actions in any its

setting will have intended and unintended effects on the norms and rules for community engagement. The relationships among people, and among organizations, jurisdictions and sectors will all be affected.

- ***The relationships that we create are particularly important.***

Rachel writes down another point to emphasize it. Relationships – which create trust and networks for ongoing action – are particularly important. In Green Grand Rapids, she continues, how the process is designed, how the community is engaged, and how relationships are built within the community will have long-term implications. Those actions will affect environmental management and green space. They will also affect community expectations about governance, the future decision-making, and community-government relationships.

- ***Our actions always create resources, or make them available, as well as consume resources.***

As the Green Grand Rapids discussion continues, it is obvious that the level of effort to obtain inclusion has to be addressed. Rachel promotes looking at this as a process that *generates*, as well as *consumes*, resources. As she puts it, changing practices – in this case, to be more or less inclusive – changes how resources are consumed and generated. Political leaders, staff, and community watchdogs often wonder whether collaborative decision-making is more or less "efficient" than non-collaborative processes. Participation and inclusion certainly require resources, such as time and budgets, but they also produce fruitful resources, such as frameworks for motivating and coordinating ongoing action, a stronger knowledge base, relationships, and trust among participants. Even more concretely, Rachel points out, the Master Plan and zoning ordinance processes have demonstrated that putting substantial effort into inclusion pays off with quick and unproblematic approval by the Planning and City Commissions. Rachel tells the group that she believes they have been able to move on to more difficult and contentious issues, such as zoning, because their inclusive processes have built resources like commitment, trust, and knowledge to support the next task.

- ***Dichotomies are almost always false.***

Following on the idea that it is not necessarily true that one must make a choice between "efficiency" and "participation," Rachel argues that it is usually not true that one must make either/or choices. Instead, it is often true that an alternative combines both sides of the dichotomy. Looking for another example, she observes that another tradeoff that commonly comes up in discussions about participation is whether the process should seek "broad" or "deep" representation.

Rachel returns to the budgeting story to illustrate. The city had started by making an extra effort to seek broad participation. They designed a process to involve hundreds of people, give every household an equal chance of being asked for opinions in the phone survey, make sure every participant in the community meetings could vote, and adjust the results to be representative of the city's racial and ethnic demographics. However, it turned out that this kind of democratic, broad representation had not been a good way for residents to express their full range of knowledge and opinion about the budget. People were more satisfied with a smaller, hand-picked group of Advisors who engaged in a more deliberative process. It is important to remember, though, that this kind of participation was "deep" not only because the Advisors engaged in detailed, lengthy discussion, but because they started with a very broad

range of perspectives. The fact that the small group was so diverse in opinion that it had to wrestle through issues and consider them from many angles – with or without reaching consensus – was key to the community being able to trust their process and recommendations. In contrast, the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Parks and Recreation, in which everyone pretty much agreed that parks are important, was less inclusive according to the definition she had set up. Rachel muses that this was an example of being both less broad and less deep. The result was less internal debate, fewer new options for action, and less community engagement.

- ***Inclusion is about building a sense of community involvement that extends beyond the particular issue.***

Rachel explains her opinion that inclusion means creating relationships among individuals, across different issues, and into the future. In other words, inclusion has to be about both outcome and process. She tells her staff that she likes to think about community decision-making as a "50/50" undertaking. That is, 50 percent of the goal is the success of the process: the social dynamic and community wisdom about the topic that the participants can pass on to others and use. The other 50 percent is the great planning document or policy decision that the community gets at the end, which is a reference for remembering what we learned and that we can apply (Rachel, Aug 14, 2007). She points out that one of her greatest challenges is always to find something so interesting and compelling that a wide range of residents will want to attend a city meeting about it. Given the Indian Trails controversy, Green Grand Rapids does seem to be that sort of topic.

- ***There are no formulas for inclusion!***

Rachel tells the group that their discussion reminds her again that there is always more to learn, more perspectives to include, more problems to contend with, and more opportunities to build trust and community. The dynamics of inclusion are continuous. They require public managers not only to experiment with processes from one issue to the next, but also to be very flexible within a given process. It will therefore be important for Green Grand Rapids to be open to new features of the context.

One example of the need to be open concerns the issue of boundaries. Rachel explains that collaborative processes often appear to be started because people are intensely frustrated by institutional boundaries that they feel are getting in the way of addressing a problem. They hope that collaboration will break down those barriers, perhaps by enticing another organization to take on more responsibility, or by freeing up their own abilities to act. An inclusive process *should* help identify and assess the boundaries that are relevant to addressing a particular problem, but will not necessarily see all boundaries as obstacles. Some of these boundaries will be institutional; others will be based on such things as interest, information or expertise. Some of the boundaries will be helpful and others will cause problems. There is no way to predetermine which boundaries need to be addressed and in what ways. A thoughtful process should be open to transcending, changing *or* affirming these boundaries.

Additional Case Discussion Points (B)

Given this new input from Rachel, revisit your proposed process and consider the following:

1. Is your proposed process consistent with the 50/50 goal, or some other balance of goals for process and environmental planning outcomes? What kinds of long-term structures are you trying to produce or modify through this collaborative process, such as precedents for norms of community engagement, relationships among people and among organizations, jurisdictions and sectors? How will you do so?

2. How will your proposed process address community distrust from Indian Trails? Looking forward, how will your process encourage or inhibit future inclusion?

3. What resources will your proposed process consume and generate? How will you address concerns about efficiency? Do you think there is necessarily a trade-off between efficiency and engagement? Why or why not? How can you make best use of public resources and be most resourceful?

4. Looking at your proposed process map again, what changes would you suggest? How will you maintain flexibility and adjust the process in response to new issues or opportunities?

5. Thinking about your process as an opportunity to surface relevant boundaries, are there any changes that you want to make in whom you include and how you design the process?