

# A Practical Guide to Creating Regional Change

*Edited by Philip Walsh*

## Introduction

The driving premise of a recent national effort on regional strategies was the belief that a community, like an individual, can acquire skills and tools that shelter and enrich the lives of its citizens. This was the assumption behind work begun in 1995 by Partners for Livable Communities, with the support from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The goal was to develop a model process for community-driven regional development strategies, a generic process that could be adapted to serve the needs of communities of varying size and complexity.

Partners for Livable Communities collaborated with eight urban regions over 18 months to design this model process composed of several distinct components. Those components are:

- the recognition of the need for regional strategies guided by a stewardship body;
- neighborhood-based public participation, community visioning, and goal setting;
- the aggregation of goals for regional improvement strategies;
- the on-going maintenance of the community effort; and
- the quantification of goals through the use of community benchmarks and indicators.

Over 50 community leaders from the eight participating communities were invited

to take part in a series of workshops to discuss each of the components of the process, study trends related to each component, and identify the manner in which these components can be integrated into a holistic process.

This collaborative effort has resulted in a four-step process for comprehensive community change at the regional level.

1. Forging a Regional Identity: The Role of a Stewardship Body
2. Public Participation: The Value of Neighborhood-Based Strategies
3. The Quantification of Goals: A Plan for Regional Change
4. Sustaining the Vision

This process is intended to be one that can be adapted as necessary to the specific needs and personality of any community. Notwithstanding, this process serves to provide a framework in which any community can proceed.

## Setting the Stage: The Need for Regional Collaboration

It takes work to make a community livable. In fact, one way to gauge the livability of a community is to observe how hard the people are working to maintain and improve it. But being willing isn't enough. This project shows that not only must the community take responsibility for its livability, it must have the *capacity* to maintain and

improve itself. It must have the authority to ensure its livability, and it must have—or have access to—a variety of resources with which to do the work. That is, the community must be empowered.

The level of empowerment in a community depends on things both tangible, such as time and money, and intangible, such as civic will and willing leadership. In our increasingly fragmented metropolitan regions, there is oftentimes a tremendous amount of local variability within the region with regard to these facets of empowerment. For instance, the wealthier suburbs often have more of both the tangible and intangible resources than the central cities, while the central cities possess a disproportionate amount of the problems.

Regions with great discrepancies in local resources are unstable places. This situation creates an environment that demands the development of working regional strategies for empowerment and action. However, going the regional route is a strategy fraught with unlimited complications and manifold potential conflicts. As Somerset County Chamber of Commerce Chairman James B. Ventantonio describes it, it is somewhat akin to wrestling a “multi-headed hydra.” But it is also absolutely critical to the whole concept of creating healthy and sustainable communities on a broad basis.

### **Events Beyond the Borders**

One of the central facts governing urban life these days is that a community’s health is inextricably bound up with events that transpire beyond its borders. It is important to note that there is no clear consensus on the definition of what constitutes a “region.” A region is rarely defined by formal political jurisdictions. “Problems go back and forth across boundaries,” says Bernard Navatto of the Somerset County Planning Board. “When it comes to creating problems or solving them, the boundaries we have created don’t exist.”

Indeed, adds Ann Coulter, executive director of the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission, “regionalism can be thought of as a creative way to deal with the limitations of political boundaries. Political entities are artificial boundaries that make regionalism important.” Given examples ranging from the centuries-old economic and historic ties that create the “Alpine Diamond” region in France, Switzerland, and Italy, to the more prosaic need for coordination that has driven towns in Somerset County, New Jersey, to cooperate with one another, it seems apparent that “region” has a floating definition that depends, in essence on the problem to be solved.

Vern Swaback, an architect in Scottsdale, Arizona, and chair of the Scottsdale community visioning effort, says that a regional identity is “a constructed, problems-solving, opportunity-seeking” device created by circumstance. “When we’re somewhat isolated and unaware of or unaffected by other areas,” he explains, “then we can define regionalism to be the smallest thing that we want it to be. When we are forced into global competition or even state competition, we then have to redefine ourselves in terms that are problem-solving opportunities.” Given the sense, then, that a region is what you make it, the problem becomes identifying the circumstances that make a regional approach appropriate, and the necessary steps in accomplishing the development of a functional regional identity.

### **A Regional Mindset**

Forging a sense of regional identity can be immensely difficult. Most communities are unaccustomed to thinking in those terms. Many, particularly in the case of those fortunate suburbs to which developers have gravitated, believe they are better off remaining apart. As Vern Swaback notes,

"It's somewhat difficult to get people to feel the flow of juice for a theoretically large area. It's much easier to appeal to something that is a little more parochial, be it a neighborhood or a city."

Even so, there are plenty of examples of places where a regional mindset has begun to take hold. The Denver area, for instance, has created a scientific and cultural facilities district to fund such amenities, and built its new baseball stadium, Coors Field, by creating a special district that takes in several counties in the metropolitan area. So, too, Cleveland was able to build Jacobs Field after Cuyahoga County residents passed a tax on alcohol and cigarettes. In Allegheny County, Three Rivers Stadium and Pittsburgh's parks, museums, zoo, and symphony all were able to benefit from an increase in the county's sales tax after city and county officials and business leaders, in an unprecedented united front, lobbied the state legislature to allow it.

These might all seem to be small steps, but they all help to establish the sense of community that is an essential part of any sort of regional structure. In fact, even something as mundane as investing in infrastructure can help to create that sense. There may be a major airport or rail system that is vital to the economy that needs regional investment in order to expand and improve it. Or there may be different forms of regional service agreements: fire, police, etc. All of these things begin to break down some of the little barriers that force people to think more in terms of a regional perspective.

Nonetheless, the most difficult issues on which to achieve a regional consensus are also the ones that are most crucial to the overall health of the metropolitan area. These issues include: avoiding sprawl, developing integrated housing, sharing taxes, consolidating government services, steering job development to cities as well as suburbs,



**Robert McNulty, president, Partners for Livable Communities, presenting at the Pittsburgh workshop.**

and deconcentrating race and poverty. Cities will live or die on this last issue in particular. "This concentration or poverty by race, neighborhood, and jurisdiction is not just the result of natural or free-market forces," says Tom Argust, commissioner of the Department of Community Development in Rochester, New York, "but very much the product of public policy reinforcing private prejudices. We have some consolidation of services with (Monroe) county. We have some tax-revenue sharing. But it doesn't amount to a hill of beans if we cannot deal with the issue of poverty and race and the concentration of such in our American communities."

### **A Tool and a State of Mind**

Robert McNulty, president of Partners for Livable Communities, suggests that regionalism is both a tool and a state of mind. "It is a tool," he says "to accumulate resources, political or economic, to solve a problem that you can't solve in your own community. If your community happens to be in the center of an urban area that doesn't have a lot of resources, then regionalism is a way to create wealth or create a political will to solve a problem that cannot be solved within that unit. If we can solve it in our neighborhood, we don't need to take

it to a regional level. At the same time, however, in order for regional thinking to have a chance of flourishing, especially if it is to be applied to such tangled issues as where people of different races and classes will live, work, and go to school, it needs to become a natural part of how residents think about resolving problems.”

Sometimes, people in a region do simply agree that collective action is crucial to their future. According to David Rusk, the Portland area, in particular, is a region “where people have not turned their back on the notion that individual goals in terms of quality of life must often be achieved through collective action.” Yet, Portland is obviously far more the exception than the rule. The challenge elsewhere is to find ways of making regionalism a habit of mind.

To some extent, the coercion of outside forces, federal clean air laws for instance or some larger economic or environmental crisis, sometimes leads to increased awareness. But more often, the leadership of a few committed individuals is crucial. “The region is formed on the power of persuasion,” says Jim Bray, a citizen activist from Noblesville, Indiana. Regionalism, in other words, must often start in the minds of a few who take responsibility for spreading it as an attractive idea.

### **Step One: Forging a Regional Identity: The Role of a Stewardship Body**

One characteristic that helps define a healthy community, one capable of handling the challenges of growth, change, and development, is the ability to manage and use the contributions of a wide range of community actors. Integral to the development of action on a regional agenda is the ability to come to some consensus with regard to strategies and policy creation. A stewardship body—a nonpartisan, apolitical entity

that draws from all sectors in the community—is an invaluable tool in this process, in that it can serve to create a forum for the interaction between leadership from across the region. It can transcend barriers of intra-community or intra-regional conflicts to promote the greater good over competing parochial interests.

A stewardship body must be a politically neutral entity that serves as a convener of people and an incubator of ideas. It must bring together people from across the political boundaries within the region and must represent the diversity of community actors, including individuals from institutions, government, citizens, industry, and philanthropy. It is an integral part of the regional change process, because it is a place where fragile initiatives can be nurtured and gain strength. As a region undertakes a process of collaboration and strategic planning, a stewardship body facilitates these functions by creating a forum for the articulation and transfer of ideas. It is the guardian of the community, facilitating growth, promoting healthy development, and solving problems when they arise.

On a more practical level, a stewardship body is the group that can initiate a program of civic involvement and public participation. In every community there is a group of men and women who, although they are not elected or appointed to the job, function as “trustees” of the community. These individuals must be drawn upon to create a stewardship body that can become an engine for regional change. They are often found among the leadership of civic institutions, government bodies, volunteer groups, cultural organizations, professions, and business. In the community, they play a collective role similar to their individual roles within their organizations: they can help the community prosper, help it recover from adversity, and help it take on new challenges.

### **Critical Nature of Selection**

In an effort to forge a regional identity among a disparate and potentially divided group of citizens, the formation of a stewardship body is an essential starting point. The selection of the individuals is critical; they must represent the diversity within the region in order to be able to claim any legitimacy. Once an appropriate group has been convened, the members can serve as ambassadors for any regionwide effort for change. One example of a particularly successful community stewardship body is Noblesville, Indiana.

Noblesville, a rapidly-growing town 20 miles outside of Indianapolis, serves as an excellent model of a town that was able to form just such a stewardship body. The impetus for the creation of Noblesville's stewardship body was an update of its master plan. "We were working off a 1980 master plan based on 1970s data," said Noblesville Mayor Mary Sue Rowland. It was time, she noted, for a thorough overhaul.

The Noblesville Planning Department, with a staff of eight, was the lead city department on the project. They recognized that a process that drew from the input of the community would be most valuable, so their first step was to identify key members of the community, the "trustees," to invite to participate as members of the Stewardship Committee, which would serve throughout the process as the predominant steering body.

### **The Broadest Possible Spectrum**

Sixty members of the community, representing the broadest possible spectrum of interests, from neighborhood groups, to business, to educational interests and religious organizations, came together on the committee. Its first order of business was visioning, a process that began with a lot of community visits. "We went out and visited as many individuals and organizations in the community as possible," said planning

department director Steve Huntley, "and we asked them two simple questions: 'What do you like about Noblesville; what don't you like?'"

This stewardship body served as the ambassadors for a large-scale community participation process. In all, Huntley estimates that more than 3,000 residents answered the questions over a six-month period, leaving the city with a stack of comments with which to develop a vision statement. To help with that process the city contracted with the Indiana University's Center for Urban Policy and the Environment. "Once we had all that information," said Huntley, "we lateralled it to the university to organize and analyze."

The Noblesville example is an excellent model because it demonstrates the power of a group of committed individuals in undertaking a process of change. The challenge of forming such a body on a regional level is a bit more complex, but the principle remains the same. The Noblesville stewardship body conducted a very hands-on public participation process. Such an effort becomes impractical, due to issues of scale, on a regional level. Thus, the regional stewardship body needs to be able to stimulate a similar public participation process that can be undertaken on a neighborhood scale across the region.

### **Step Two: Public Participation: The Value of Neighborhood-Based Strategies**

Visioning, explains Gianni Longo, of Urban Initiatives in New York, is the process of identifying a community's goals. "Are they all the goals a community can aspire to? No. They are the ones the community can share, the goals that many people can see themselves working together to reach." In recent years there has been an explosion of public participation processes across the country.

Communities, businesses, and governments alike are undertaking visioning and goalsetting programs. These efforts all have the common goal of increasing the likelihood of creating a successful future.

On the community level it is clear that visioning and goal setting is a valuable technique for breaking through what Gianni Longo calls the “privatization, isolation, passivity, and civic disengagement” that mark the modern era. Too many of our citizens, he says, “are relinquishing their responsibilities of citizenship and turning into frustrated, unhappy, critical, and disengaged taxpayers. We no longer call them citizens anymore; we call them taxpayers.”

In addition to re-engaging the citizenry, public participation efforts are a valuable tool for facilitating a process through which communities can act collectively to ensure that their neighbors remain healthy. Central cities must find ways to reach out to surrounding communities where the fastest growth and highest levels of private investment tend to be taking place. It seems clear that this cannot work on the basis of policies solely carried out by the community.

Through a process of community visioning that is undertaken at the neighborhood level, citizens can be encouraged to articulate a set of goals, hopes, and aspirations for their community that can serve to create a sense of commonality between different communities within the region. These goals can then be aggregated to form a comprehensive set of goals that can encompass the aspirations of the entire region. One community, Rochester, New York, has been particularly successful in this area.

In the beginning of the 1990s, Rochester, New York, undertook a community visioning and goal-setting process called “Goals for Greater Rochester.” Through this project, which was developed jointly by the city of Rochester and Monroe County, with the collaboration of the then-chairman of

Eastman Kodak, Kay Whitmere, a citizen’s committee was appointed to explore the future agenda of Rochester. Then, to solicit public input, special supplements and questionnaires were published in the local newspaper.

The questionnaire results were augmented by information from a direct-mail survey. Committees were assembled on specific issues and topics, and finally—on a day when the Buffalo Bills were playing for the AFC Divisional Championship just down the road—some 650 people gave up their seats at the football game and appeared at the civic center in Rochester to debate and decide priorities for change for Greater Rochester.

It sounds like a heartening demonstration of public participation. Unfortunately, the exercise of participation was so vast that the necessity of following up and creating an implementation agenda to begin realizing those goals and aspirations was completely forgotten. As a result, the lofty ideas and strategies that were offered sank with hardly a ripple back into the civic stew.

### **Citizen-Based Planning**

However, Rochester was committed to the idea of a comprehensive process of community change and was determined to learn from its failures. In 1994, the city was faced with the task of updating a 30-year old comprehensive plan. Rather than rely on the city planning department, they turned the job over to the citizens at the neighborhood level. They created the “Neighbors Building Neighborhoods” project through which the citizens were encouraged to undertake a process of articulating their own plans for the future. These plans were then to become the building blocks for the citywide comprehensive plan.

To begin with, the neighborhoods asked for the city’s help in figuring out how to plan, how to facilitate local planning meetings,

and how to meet their needs for hard information and technical expertise. The city obliged, laying out the groundwork for what continued throughout the planning process that, over its 18 months, replaced the mistrust of city government with a strong new sense of partnership. "It has built an awful lot of trust among people and a lot of trust between people in the neighborhoods and the city," said Planning Director Larry Stid.

It has also changed the way the city does business. City council members have started to press the departments to relate their own plans to the neighborhood plans. The mayor has told the department heads that their budget proposals should respond to the requests in these neighborhood plans. And, said Larry Stid, the city is using the mayor's clout and the neighborhood plans to approach Rochester's many social service organizations "and point out that they should not be running out trying to do their own planning process. The citizens have already said what they think those organizations ought to be doing."

### **From Distrustful to "Okay"**

Just as important, neighborhood leader Carol Schwartz said, the process has transformed its participants "from being cynical and distrustful to saying, "Okay, it really doesn't matter what the city does bottom line, because there are things that we can identify that we can do ourselves.'" That was, said Schwartz, "the greatest thing that happened—there is this sense of hope, people are less cynical and they are more involved as citizens."

In short, said Wade Norwood, a Rochester city council member, "I really believe that what we have been doing in Rochester is the last, best hope for Rochester, because we have reconnected people to government. We have restored people's ability to believe that they can express what is needed in their life and that they can effect change in their



**Wade Norwood, Rochester, N.Y., city council member, at the Pittsburgh workshop on community livability.**

environment." I think what we are talking about is the answer to how local governments should be built. They should be built in such a way that people feel as if they are in control of their lives, as if they are free to bond with their neighbors and attack the challenges that affect their government."

Thus, the value of public participation is twofold: it invigorates and empowers the citizenry; and it creates a blueprint for strategic action and policy creation. However, in the process of undertaking a regional plan for change, the public participation effort is an important vehicle for creating a common vision that can be aspired to by all the residents across the region. One strategy for the development of such a vision is to create a concrete set of actionable indicators that will permit government, business, and citizens to take independent action toward common goals.

### **Step Three: The Quantification of Goals: Benchmarks and Indicators**

Through the community visioning process undertaken in Noblesville, Indiana, citi-

## What Is Benchmarking?

In the course of Partners for Livable Communities' research and data collection on the role and utility of community benchmarks and indicators, it has become clear that there is a great deal of variability regarding definitions and usage of some very commonly used terms. In an effort to clarify what is meant by the terms benchmarks, indicators, and performance measures, Partners has identified four distinct types of indicator projects. While the distinctions between these types may be somewhat artificial and there is oftentimes significant overlap between types, the following typology is a useful starting point for the discussion of this issue.

### Four Definitions of Benchmarking

An analysis of many different benchmarking and indicator programs from around the country has identified the following categories:

- best practice measures;
- comparison/competitiveness measures;
- advocacy indicators; and
- visioning/goal-setting measures.

### Best Practices

The first category, borrowed from business, is simply the exercise of searching peer groups to find best practice examples of how most effectively to achieve a certain policy or output goal. Hampton,

Virginia, routinely searches out best practices when it is looking to improve how it does business or provides services. For example, human resources officials concerned about employee discipline have conducted a nationwide search for examples of effective discipline procedures.

### Comparison/ Competitiveness Measures

Many communities are concerned with how well they are achieving their goals, particularly in comparison with their peer communities. In this era of increased competitiveness, communities are anxious to identify how favorably they compare to those they perceive as their main competitors in many areas of performance, including business attraction and retention, education, and job preparedness.

Comparison/competitiveness measures are published at almost every level of governance, from the World Competitiveness Report which compares the economic competitiveness of nations, to programs undertaken at the state, regional, and local level. The Center for Economic Development publishes the "Economic Development Report Card for States" annually, rating the competitiveness of all 50 states on a wide variety of economic development variables. At a more parochial level, cities, counties, and regions across the country have developed different programs to rate their communities against their peer group in terms of competition. The University of

Pittsburgh has been commissioned to develop "Economic Benchmarks: Indices for the City of Pittsburgh," and the Citizens League Research Institute in Cleveland has developed the "Rating the Region" program which compares the Cleveland region with 24 peer communities on a wide number of variables.

### **Advocacy Benchmarks**

In the advocacy community, benchmarks have become commonly used as a method of demonstrating effectively the need for a particular policy course. The "Green Index," produced by Bob Hall and Mary Lee Kerr, is just one of many examples of such types of benchmarks.

### **Visioning/Goal-Setting**

Potentially, the most valuable type of community benchmarks or indicators

have become those programs that seek to quantify or operationalize the expressed desire of some group within the community. These programs may be the product of a long-term community visioning effort or they may be created by a small group of individuals within the community to set a course for future policy creation.

In recent years the number of communities undertaking this type of benchmarking program has increased dramatically. At the state level, Oregon has undertaken the most widely recognized program, although Minnesota and Utah are among the other states that have undertaken the process of creating a set of statewide indicators. At the community level, there are many examples of visioning and goal-setting programs, including the "Indicators for Sustainable Seattle," "Noblesville Benchmarks," and the "Quality Indicators for Progress," from Jacksonville, Florida.

zens offered abstract descriptions of the quality of life in their ideal city—for example, they wanted more spaces that were "people friendly" and that lent a "historic feeling." At the same time, they were concerned that housing was "getting out of reach of workers" and that there seemed to be a "lack of social awareness regarding persons in need." The stewardship body, with the technical assistance of the Indiana University Center for Urban Policy and the Environment, took these abstract sentiments and turned them into tangible and attainable goals: community benchmarks. The city government uses these benchmarks to set priorities and organize work plans; private citizens use them as they make small changes in their daily lives that, together, greatly impact the community as a whole.

In addition to Noblesville, benchmarks and indicators are at the center of community development efforts in places like Jacksonville, Florida, and Seattle, Washington. In these cities, indicators are the product of creative dialogues about livability—a set of small windows into a larger picture of how and where people live, how they work, and how they relate to one another.

Indicators address five important needs as a community works to improve its quality of life:

- the need to turn abstract community goals into concrete points for action;
- the need to take action through partnerships;
- the need for a common agenda that encourages decentralized leadership;
- the need to document progress; and

- the need to create a common agenda that transcends the class, ethnic, and jurisdictional boundaries that divide a region.

### **Bringing Diverse Players Together**

A key element in community building relies on bringing diverse players together to paint a more complete picture and reframe issues in ways that better describe or address underlying problems. One of the most important purposes indicators can serve is to highlight the interconnected nature of the elements of livability. The most effective indicators are ones that reflect and encourage collaboration.

Seattle, Washington had partnerships in mind when it undertook its “Sustainable Community” initiative. The city made it clear that it did not just want to rejuvenate existing municipal and social service structures; it wanted to improve them in ways that were more responsive to the future. Seattle considered information from different domains—figures on economic growth, numbers of children in poverty, and the supply of natural resources—and saw ways in which those numbers were integrally linked. Seattle now tracks “employment concentration,” or diversity within the local economy. This indicator raises awareness that if economic growth is fueled by only one key industry, a downturn can cause economic shocks, impact poverty levels, and decrease the community’s ability to adequately support environmental protection.

The Seattle initiative highlights the fact that government officials, social service providers, conservationists, and private citizens alike have a stake in the region’s economic diversity. Caring for the poor, for example, is not just about providing for immediate needs; it also entails preventing poverty in the future through greater economic security. By analyzing a variety of interconnected indicators, Seattle recognized that partner-

ships among diverse stakeholders were essential.

As Jim Bray, a community activist in Noblesville, Indiana, describes, a set of indicators “provides for simultaneous action by disparate groups toward a common goal.” The examples of Jacksonville and Seattle show that indicators can enrich decision-making processes by informing the public of goals and progress. The kind of decentralized leadership that makes community improvement work is not possible without information that is meaningful to a wide audience.

In 1989, the Oregon state legislature created the Oregon Progress Board, a non-governmental stewardship body charged with developing a 20-year strategic plan. The product, “Oregon Benchmarks: Setting Measurable Standards for Progress,” states its purpose simply: “Benchmarks are based on the premise that Oregon will have the best chance of achieving an attractive future if Oregonians agree on where we want to go and then join together to accomplish those goals. By keeping track of whether we are measuring up, we are most likely to sustain the focus and energy that will be required to bring our dreams to fruition.”

Oregon continues to work toward benchmarks laid out years earlier. The goals, pursued by citizens, businesses, and government agencies, have transcended changing political leadership. Documentation has helped to create permanence. Such a highly visible platform has given citizens a way to engage and make a difference; shared language has ensured that integrity and livelihood of collaborative efforts.

### **A Ripe Opportunity**

Many communities are seeing a ripe opportunity to use goal setting as a galvanizing force that also creates a checklist for measuring progress. In Jacksonville and Seattle, business leaders, social service

agencies, educators, and nonprofit organizations are finding enormous value in tangible measures that can support, inform, and sustain their work. Data collected and discussed in a community powerfully shapes perceptions of what is possible, ties together efforts over time, and turns citizens' eyes toward the future.

In a growing number of jurisdictions from Sacramento to New York City, city program managers are starting to tie dollars to outcome indicators. Their budgets are no longer based on what they spent last year, but instead on what they plan to achieve in the next 12 months. Funding agencies are also making this shift to performance data. Money is more tightly linked to systemwide coordination. As communities look for funding, they need to focus less on separate inputs to different players, and more on identifying target outcomes that rely on collaborations among partners. Linking dollars to performance measures is one way that funds can truly empower communities, by encouraging organized groups to give dollars to the programs that make the most sense given the unique partnerships and capacity-building opportunities within the community.

"Progress on broader things like action plans needs to be measurable," summed up Tom Argust, commissioner of the department of community development in Rochester, New York, at a special forum on "Benchmarks and Indicators" in October 1995. "One failure of our previous plan was that it looked nice up on the wall, but there was no way to tell if we were really on track. I don't want to fall into the same trap."

Finally, the quantification of goals is an important way to facilitate the creation of a regional identity that all members of the region can embrace and act upon. The challenge that Rochester, New York, is now facing is the development of a set of indicators that can capture adequately the diverse vi-

sions of the neighborhood plans created through the "Neighbors Building Neighborhoods" process, and successfully aggregating those efforts to create a comprehensive set of regional indicators.

A study of the numerous benchmark and indicator programs from around the country demonstrates that the perfect model has yet to be created. Nevertheless, as a tool for facilitating change and creating a regional will, a comprehensive set of benchmarks and indicators can be invaluable.

### **Step Four: Sustaining the Process: The Return of the Stewardship Body**

The final step in this process of regional change is to develop some mechanism for sustaining the effort over time. One of the major threats to the success of a regional change effort is that, by its very essence, it must look far ahead. It is difficult to sustain momentum when elected officials change every few years, when the gypsies of public management come and go, when recession and inflation are both felt within a decade, and when the typical corporate executive is rotated in and out of a community in an average of three years. The only way to insure that such a process can be continued over time is to institutionalize the leadership. This means returning to the trustees of the community and turning the stewardship body into an institutional public-private entity that will be around longer than the politicians and the corporate CEOs. It is this stewardship body that will keep the citizenry engaged in the process of change, and that will renew the process as times and opportunities change.

One of the original stewardship bodies to be created was the Greater Indianapolis Progress Committee (GIP-C). It was created in the mid-1960s as an effort to guide the city out of a sort of civic torpor. The com-

mittee, which still exists, is made up of about 150 people, appointed by the mayor from a wide range of constituencies. Over the decades, it has helped the city deal with urban renewal, worked to create a university campus within the city's bounds, revitalized the city's center, eased the transition to school desegregation and pushed Indianapolis into becoming a national center for amateur sports. Such an organization is critical to the success of a regional change process. It must be able to harness the civic energy invested in the change process and make that process last over time.

## **Conclusion**

The hope of a better future compels people and communities to act innovatively and inventively. Although no one city has demonstrated that there is a concrete and replicable process that can be used to create the desired tomorrow, many community efforts are demonstrating the type of innovation necessary to create a sense of community for the 21st century. Partners for

Livable Communities' collaborative effort has demonstrated that citizen effort and government collaboration offer the opportunity to create new forms of citizenship and governance that empower a community to take the necessary steps for successful community change. Although the process of change outlined above is not a roadmap, it offers insight into the steps that a group of committed citizens can take to create the future that they can envision for their community. ■

**Philip Walsh** is a program officer at Partners for Livable Communities. Partners for Livable Communities is a nonprofit community development organization based in Washington, D.C. Partners is dedicated to improving community livability and quality of life through a process of building the capacity of citizens, elected officials, and government representatives to take comprehensive and collaborative action in their communities.

Portions of this article were originally printed in *Governing Magazine* in a Partners' insert in February 1997. Segments of this article were written by Rob Gurwitt and Clint Page. The author would like to thank them for their important contributions to this effort.