

## **Land Use and Community Development in a Rural (Swedish) Setting:**

### **A Profile of Goran Cars**

Edited by John Forester\*

Dept. of City and Regional Planning

Cornell University

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This case takes place in a small town in the middle of Sweden called Tallberg. Tallberg is unique because it has a very old built environment—at least 150 years. There are lots of old traditional buildings that are well preserved. It's also very special because it has seven hotels. It's one of the major resorts for conferences and for people who are going on extended weekend trips. It's in the Midlands region of Sweden.

Many of Tallberg's buildings are very typical of the time when they were constructed. It's the closest you can come to seeing a museum of housing: it contains mostly rural and small town construction.

I got involved because the municipality had tried for a very long time to make a development plan. But every attempt to make a plan had been blocked by one or more stakeholders opposing that plan, and what had happened was that over the years you could see both illegal construction, ill-thought out constructions, and you could see sprawl. So all major stakeholders agreed, "We need a comprehensive development plan for this village."

I was called up by Tallberg's city planner. She said she had heard me talking about conflict resolution in urban planning, and she thought that I was the kind of person they needed.

I said, "What do you mean?"

She said, "You talked about conflict resolution, and we have had a conflict here. The moment anyone does anything, it's like pushing a button: Someone will say, "NO!" to anything

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that is proposed. So no one here can come up with a proposal that will be accepted by everyone. So, we need someone to come in from the outside, someone who'll say, "This is what you should do—this could make sense, in order to get these parties to listen and to get them together."

I wanted to know exactly what she wanted. She said he wanted someone who could handle a process that led eventually to a plan that could be adopted and implemented.

I said that I didn't want to go there if she had a hidden agenda that she wanted me to put forward certain projects or whatever. I wanted this to be an open mandate. She told me that there was no hidden agenda and there was no hidden agenda. She said that there were amongst all the stakeholders, issues that were so crucial to them that if those interests were not met, they would not agree to the plan.

The stakeholders included, first of all, the municipality. The second stakeholder group was the hotels. The third group of stakeholders was the "second house" owners, a big group of people from Stockholm and Gothenburg: filthy rich people who had second homes up in that village, and they turned out to be a very powerful group. The fourth group consisted of people living in the town.

The municipality saw a need for housing, especially affordable housing, because it had seven hotels, and it was very obvious that they needed to employ a lot of people, and these people were commuting from far away in order to be able to work.

Well, more and more, the municipality also said, "This is a very economically successful town. It's in a region that is really deteriorating, that is facing real problems of de-industrialization so nothing should be done to harm economic growth in this place."

The municipality also wanted to maintain the historic and cultural values of the town.

The hotel owners wanted a plan that was flexible in allowing them to make additions that they needed to their facilities—new restaurants or rooms or anything. They were also very keen on affordable housing, because they had a problem recruiting staff.

But the second homeowners—they wanted absolutely nothing done. As one lady said to me, "The best thing you could do would be to change the surface of the roads."

I said, "Why?"

"I don't like asphalt," she said, "and it would be best if we had gravel." But she wanted no expansion of hotels, no new construction, no housing, no nothing!

The permanent residents were concerned with maintaining the atmosphere of the town. They wanted to preserve the town and maintain its economic development. One major concern of theirs—because they realized that the hotels needed to expand—was that traffic was a major problem. Also, they were very keen on maintaining and developing public space. In this very small town public spaces were often green places.

There is one place, called “Midsummer’s Place” which is a green spot, a green hill, and if you are in that spot you can overlook the lake and you have a fantastic view, and that is a green space that everyone take for granted. But it was a public space that was privately owned by one of the hotels. In Sweden, as long as you haven’t begun construction on a site, it’s open to the public. As long as there isn’t a building on the site, it’s free for anyone to walk there. So even though this place was owned by a hotel, because it was unobstructed, it was public space. There was no construction on it, and it had been owned by that hotel for two hundred years.

When I got the call, I said, “I want to handle it in the following way. I want to meet the politicians of this town, and I don’t want to meet random politicians—I want to meet the leading politicians.”

I wanted to really hear what their interests were, but also I wanted to figure out the framework within which should this process take place: Were there any definite objections: “No, this will not take place.”

What I got as a response was that, “You cannot come up with a plan that will cost the municipality substantial sums of money.” That was a firm line I must not cross. They were very firm in maintaining historic preservation values. They were very firm on not harming economic activities, and they supported affordable housing. So there were four things—but besides those, no constraints. They said, “We will follow the recommendations, and there are no hidden agendas.”

I didn’t believe them. I double-checked and double-checked. I checked throughout the project. As soon as something came up, I went to the mayor of the city—who was a good person that I trusted. I’d say, “OK, this idea came up today are there any problems?”

And he would say, “No if you can build consensus around that, we can live with it.”

I trusted the major because when I first said, “What are the real constraints? Are there any constraints here?” he started squirming.

He immediately said, “Yes, I have no hidden agendas, but I have a number of things I find very important, and a few things I cannot accept,” and he immediately put them on the table.

I came to trust him not because he was direct, because that could be a tactic. But more because—I had known a little bit about him before I came. I knew what he had done previously. I knew about his political ambitions, etc.

When I asked him questions about his political ambitions, I could see if he gave a correct answer on tough issues, such as “Are you planning for more affordable housing in other parts of the municipality?”

I knew they weren’t, because it was too expensive, but by raising questions I could see if he lied. If he said, “Yes, we must surely do that,” I would know this guy was a liar. But instead of saying that, “we must do that,” he would say, “Ah, that’s a tough question—I don’t like the question, because it is embarrassing: no we can’t afford to build affordable housing in that part of town.”

When having conversations like that it’s very important that you behave in such a way that you don’t show how knowledgeable you are. You ask questions, you look surprised when they answer. The only reason for raising the question is very often to see whether the answer is the one you know is right. It’s testing—I know the answer and I’m testing if the person is lying or not, or hiding things. The mayor didn’t lie and I came to trust him.

I started with the politicians for two purposes. First, I wanted to know what they actually wanted and to see what kind of constraints there were. The other thing was that I wanted them committed, because if they were not on board at the start of the process, it all goes down the drain—because the politicians would later say, “Well it’s a nice proposal, we need to think about this—but something else is more urgent.”

Once you set something going, you need to follow through, so I wanted them committed. So I asked them upfront, “If someone comes up with a proposal, are you willing to back it?”

They said, “Yes,” and I was satisfied that they were committed. You never know with politicians, but I was fairly satisfied.

The next step was to spend two days up in the town talking to each and every individual hotel owner. I would ask them, “What do you see as the main problems? What are the main problems you would like to solve with a development plan? What are the possibilities you can see for this town, the general possibilities, and what are your own interests in the development of the town?” So, these were questions about problems, the potential of the town, and their interests.

But many of them were not honest. I could see that because I knew their history—I had been studying this municipality. When I got the job, the planner said, “We have been working for thirty years trying to get a detailed plan, and we’ve never been successful.”

Coming to the town, it was obvious that lots of constructions were new, so it was very obvious that something was going on. When you don’t have a plan guiding development, you take your own initiatives and that means calling someone up, trying to get a building permit, wheeling and dealing. So, of course, those hotel owners have their own private plans, and I believe they said to themselves, “Why should I reveal my private plan to this guy who claims that he is going to make a nice development plan, when no one’s been successful in that?”

But meetings were productive. I knew what resources they had. I knew what land they owned, how successful their business was. I knew their business plans and their investment plans. That was part of my preparation—I learned about their financial situation and about their plans for expansion before we met. As the conversation went on, I showed that I knew their business very well, without bragging about it. I showed that I was a knowledgeable person and that I knew a lot about their business.

They opened up much more after hearing what I knew. I knew that some of them had plans, because previously they had turned in plans for their own proposals, which had been turned down.

So I would say to them, “You own this piece of land here? Wouldn’t it be very natural to expand your business with a car park or restaurant?”

That opened up everyone, “OH! You hit the really important issue here. Of course that would be the thing to do, but no one understands how great this idea is.”

So when I first confronted them, they weren’t quite honest. Were they posturing? Exactly: They thought that some jerk was coming from Stockholm to try to get the plan adopted.

At first they treated me as if I was just ignorant. I was not an important person—yet one more person talking to them about something that had never been successful. So some of them had only scheduled 15 minutes for a talk, and when they came to meet me, they said, “Can you wait here?” and went and talked to someone else.

I handled that by showing them what I knew, and then as the conversation went on, they became more and more interested, and said, “I have to tell you what I’m going to do here. Let me tell you

about this process.” I said that I’ve done this before, and I can more or less guarantee that within a short period of time, you will have an adopted plan.

They said, “No, you’ll never be able to get anyone on board.”

I said, “I don’t want everyone on board, I just want the ones who are committed on board, so anyone who won’t be on board can leave.”

Of course I was lying: It would be a disaster if people left. But by saying that to the people I was interviewing—that “The ones that don’t want to, need not be involved”—they got the impression that I was capable of getting everyone important on board. So no one could say, “No” to that train going away making a detailed plan and be the only one left behind? So they wanted to be on board, and said, “Of course, I will be part of that process—obviously I want to.” There was no chance to say, “No.”

So I had described the process, and I had said, “After talking to you, I will talk to a number of other stakeholders in detail. And after that, I will go home and make some preparations and in 2 months time, we’ll have a three day event here.”

When they first heard that I was going to meet all the other stakeholders, I gave them the impression that these other stakeholders were more or less on board. I described the process in detail, and I described it in a way to convince them that I was capable of getting to a successful outcome. In that situation, they couldn’t say, “No”—there was no chance of them saying “No.”

If they had said, “No,” then other people would be making the detailed plan for that town, and they wouldn’t in any way be able to influence it. If I was as capable as I said and got all the stakeholders on board, they could never—as one individual actor—stop the process. They realized that not being in the process would most likely leave them in a very awkward situation. So they all said, “I need to be there.”

Next, I systematically talked to other stakeholder groups. So I met representatives of the second homeowners. I met representatives of organizations representing residents of the town. We had long discussions but on the same principles as the hotel owners.

I asked them about their interests—the same questions as I asked the hotel owners: “What do you think as the problems, the potentials for the town, and what are your interest in this?”

I talked to everybody—I really tried to, it was so important. It is much better to waste an hour talking to a group that turns out to be a waste talking to than skipping a group that later

turns out to be an important group. To me it was very important to get to all the possible stakeholder groups.

After talking to the groups, I concluded with two meetings open to everyone—in the assembly place in the town. I talked to the general public to inform them of what was going to happen, and also to have the possibility to discuss what they saw as problems. This was all done in 2 or 3 days. All these interviews with hotels owners, stakeholders and concluding the last day I had this public meeting.

At this point in I had a feeling that there would most likely be a successful outcome. There were a few things that would be problematic to handle, and there were obviously very different interests. But these interests could be weighed and combined in various ways—so that stakeholders would be happy with the outcome, and see the outcome as much better than the existing situation.

At first, the reason that the hotel owners, for instance, were so uninterested was because they assumed that I didn't have a chance. But as I talked to them, as I said, "I've done this several times before, and I've been successful," as I described the process, that I had all stakeholders on board, I'm not sure I convinced them, but I convinced them, at least so they thought, "We can't be left outside here."

The secondary homeowners also realized that things were going to change. They realized that they had positions and interests that could never ever be completely satisfied. In the past what they had done was to create resistance, but now they knew that things would change. If you asked the stakeholders at that stage, "Would something happen?" they would say, "Chances are, maybe, 30%." But 30% is enough to engage.

After the public meeting, I went to the media. I think the media is an extraordinarily good resource. I went to the local newspaper. I went to the local radio station, to the local TV, and told them, "Something absolutely extraordinary is going to happen in this town."

The newspaper guy said, "This town is a messy town—nothing happens. This town is a hopeless town. This is a very, very problematic town, because as soon as somebody tries to do something, it goes down the drain. So we can't write any feature about plans in this town, because they will never be realized—that's the only thing we know for sure."

I said, “I have all the stakeholders on board, all of them, and they all say that the present situation is awful, and we can’t go on like this anymore without thinking—through a development plan. We need such a plan.”

The newspaper guy asked, “Is this true?” Is this really true?”

“It is,” I said, “and we’re going to have a workshop. Here are the dates when the workshop will be, and I hope you come to the workshop—and hope that you write about this town.” So he was excited, and he wrote about it.

I also went to the radio as well. My purpose was just to get the stakeholders in Tallberg to understand that something was really going to happen—and to get the politicians to realize they had made a commitment now. So the politicians were thinking, “This guy was not just talking to me—he went to the media and said that the politicians had promised that this plan will have a high priority when it comes to implementation. That’s what I said to the newspaperman. So the publicity mattered enormously, because when the publicity was out, it became prestigious for politicians to do what they obviously had promised, because I had said that the politicians had promised this and this and that, to be committed to the process and to be committed to prioritizing implementation.

So the workshop started with me briefly describing how the process would work and with a 15-minute speech about the basics of “consensus” and consensus-building processes. In the speech I explained how to talk to each other, meaning: talking about your own interests, your own ideas, not saying, “That person is always very stupid,” and instead talking about your own interests, your own ideas, and discussing issues, not persons.

To people in this kind of town, this was absolutely new stuff. Then I had, I think, seven or eight presentations of people that I considered to be good representatives of various interests. Based on the interviews with stakeholders, I had picked out seven people to present the different perspectives, the different stakeholders. So we had one guy, of course, from the hotel, one guy from retail services, one housing guy, one environmentalist, etc. etc.

In choosing a person, the absolutely most important thing is that the person was trusted by his constituency. That is the most important thing. Second, I tried to look for a person who was reasonably intellectually sharp but, more important, was committed to what he was doing. I wanted them to say, “This is really the interest of the hotels,” “This is really what we see as environmental concerns,” or “This is really what we see as housing.”



I had this team of people working with me. I had an architect, an economist, and I had a land surveyor, and after lunch on the first day, they had to start drafting principles. The principles were things like, “The plan must realize there is a need for housing—especially affordable housing,” “The plan must recognize that we have historic culture, built values here that must not be ruined,” “We have a successful economic business climate here for hotels that must not in any way be damaged.”

I had made a draft of the principles before the meeting, so the team was finalizing that draft based on the presentations. While I was then finalizing that together in one management group, the audience sat and listened to other examples of outsiders coming from other cities just like Tallberg. Everyone had thought that Tallberg was unique, “There’s nothing like our town.” But they realized then that there are other towns in Sweden that are concerned over the same issues.

I invited three outsiders that day to describe cities similar to Tallberg. I was looking for places that had in many ways as possible the same problems as Tallberg. Each outsider had 30-minutes plus time for questions. That took most of the afternoon. There was an audience of 50 or 60 people.

In the early evening I presented my principles. I demanded that all the stakeholders had to be there, and I encouraged the press to come. It was an open meeting—had been announced as an open meeting for anyone who wanted to come.

After presenting the principles, I heard the arguments. I let the debate go on for a certain amount of time, to really find out where the differences were and what kind of differences of opinion there were. This was still during the early evening of the first day. I was trying to see which principles we could get acceptance for immediately, and which ones we could see wouldn’t work.

There was always someone yelling, and I would say, “Uhp, uhp, uhp—you forgot something: our first basic rule—we don’t yell in this room. We’re here to talk. We’re friends living in the same town. This is our town,” and that works.

What I was trying to do was to see on what substantive issues I would really have a problem in coming to some sort of solution that everyone could live with. It’s not a question of making everyone happy all the time, but we had to come to a solution that they could live with. So for some of the issues at stake, I could see, “No problem,”—we could go on.

For example on the housing issue, “no problem:” it was very clearly accepted that we needed housing. It was a question of number and location. The second homeowners were against it, and they realized that they could not just say, “No.” Everyone else said, “Yes.” They could not say a firm, “No.” So they thought they would be more smart to push for low numbers and location.

Another issue that was rather uncomplicated was the issues if preserving the built environment. Everyone wanted that, and of course it is costly, but the hotels realized, “Why the hell do we have seven hotels in this little town? Of course, it’s because it’s a very special little town—if it wouldn’t have our special, old and nice built environment, it would just be normal town”—but it was historic. That was what really made this town different.

A more difficult issue was the expansion plans that the hotels had—to have this principle of flexible additions, rather substantive additions. They wanted together to build a very huge assembly hall for five hundred guests. That was major, major thing in that little town.

It was still the evening of the first day and I let them discuss this. I wanted the hotel owners to respond to my idea, and they said,

“We think this is OK—this principle you have about expansion is OK,”

Some residents said, “No, we don’t like that.”

I said, “I hear what you say, buy why don’t you like that?” and they came up, sometimes, with nonsense arguments, and then I’d say, “No, that’s not really an argument. What’s the real problem here?”

Then we’d eventually come to what was really the problem. The problem could be that residents would say, “It would generate enormous new traffic,”—a hall for five hundred people means five hundred cars going back and forth. And of course, other comments were that it was such a huge structure that it would be very dominant in a small-scale environment. There were things like that.

That evening, I had a list of six or seven principles, and some of them were discussed for two minutes, or five to ten minutes, and others were discussed for thirty minutes—but not more than thirty minutes. The idea was to get a sense of where I would have problems—if there were anything that was absolutely out of the question and where I could make some modifications and combine principles, mixing them together or relating them to each other. For example, it was obvious that preservation of this historic environment would be much easier if the hotel was told,

“If you were willing to try to take on the preservation of these structures, you could also be allowed to build an extension.”

I ended the evening by saying, “Thanks you very much, everybody—I think this was one of the most constructive meetings I’ve ever attended. Coming this far in one day is remarkable.”

They nodded, but they were still uncertain, because there were still substantive issues over which people disagreed, and they didn’t know how they would be handled. So that was issue of day 2.

Knowing we’d have all that to face the next day, I made the agenda for the morning. In the morning I got up, and I made personal interviews with the stakeholders.

After the discussion we had the previous evening about principles, I could see that the likely traffic from the proposed assembly hall was a large problem. That was not an issue I had foreseen. So I needed to go to this group of residents and town environmentalist who so firmly objected to the assembly hall because of the traffic. I talked to their representative and said that,

“Yesterday evening, you said that you didn’t want the concert hall,” and when I asked you, “Why not?” you said, “We have a concern about traffic safety and noise. Now I want to discuss with you if there’s anything way possible that you can imagine, or figure out, how we could improve that traffic situation in general? I’m not specifically talking about the assembly hall because the assembly hall is just an idea that somebody suggested—I’m talking about the general situation traffic.”

These meetings were a follow-up to the evening’s meeting. Everybody was coming back together at 1 o’clock. So the morning was spent by me interviewing people, and having done that, a few of them were brought together to see whether they come to some type of solution, whether they could negotiate some sort of agreement that they both could live with.

An example of these agreements was the Midsummer’s Place I mentioned. It was so obviously important, so extremely important to residents and the second-homeowners, and it was also a valuable piece of land to that hotel owner. So there was a negotiation on the second day in the morning between the hotel owner in question and the municipality, who happened to own another piece of land, a bigger piece of land but not quite that valuable, —to see whether they can make a land swap—the municipality would become the owners of this Midsummer’s Place and the hotel owners would get the land owned by the municipality.

In parallel to doing this, I had my management group engaging with two groups of stakeholders. Each group consisted of representatives of several groups. Each group with the help of my team now started to draft a plan according to the principles. They tried to give each plan more detail than was in the principles, so based on the discussion we had the night, before they were to draft solutions or ideas.

What they started producing in the morning were rough sketches, and the point of having two groups was that I wanted to make this a creative thing. I wanted different ideas about how to solve the same situation, the same problem.

In the afternoon I had experts talking about things that has been identified as concerns. So when someone said, “We would have a lot of cars if you build this assembly hall,” and the hotel owners said, “No, no they will all take the bus,” it was very good to have a traffic consultant. Who, as an outsider, could legitimate answers to the questions.

On the second afternoon, then, we’re going around listening to these experts. I wanted to raise the issues that I find crucial with the expert, to have the outsider provide something that people find trustworthy. I appoint the experts, and this is a weak point in my design. Because I don’t know before hand what kind of expertise I will need, I can only make assumptions. After the first brainstorming session in the evening, an issue can be raised as a problem and I might not have any expert on hand who could handle it.

After the experts, we had once again an open meeting, a very open meeting where the sketches were presented. This happened in the late afternoon or early evening of the second day.

I make it a point that when you have these presentations of a very sketchy draft, the presentations are to be made by the group that worked with it. They should all be at the podium. You should see all these stakeholders, and they should show what they have done.

The workshop was located as centrally as possible, so this was held in the middle of the town. The team and experts help me, but I want to do all the talking myself. It is so important that the same person talks to all the stakeholders, because what I am trying to do is knit them together. And I can’t do that if someone else on the team is talking with another stakeholder.

I think of myself as the process manager, but I don’t use those words. “Process manager” sounds stupid in Swedish. Instead, I would say, “I’m the chairman of this session,” which is more conventional. To say “process manger” sounds like you’re putting yourself on a high horse. But wWhat I’m doing is trying to steer this process so that we can come up with a good

outcome—in such a way that we get an outcome that all parties can live with, and hopefully all parties also see as much more preferable to the current conditions—and realizing how important process is, I don't want to underline that I'm the process leader. They're responsible for the process. They should take responsibility for the process. That's what I'm saying on the first day, the very first time we meet: "You own this process, you must take responsibility," so it's much better for me to be the "chairman of the session."

After the groups present their sketches based on the previous day's principles, I lead an open discussion. Of course, many people are unhappy at this point. What do I hear? Basically, when they're not happy, they say, "This is really bad!"

I ask, "Why is it bad?"

I try to understand as much detail as possible in what they see as problematic. Very often, when people don't like things, their argument for not liking it doesn't make sense. It doesn't make sense to say, "Traffic is bad."

It doesn't make sense, because I don't know why they don't want more traffic—what is the problem with more traffic in itself? What is the problem? Is it because of pollution levels? Is it because of safety, noise, or what is it? Or is there something underlying here? Do they not want any more visitors? When you want to make a plan, you must know what lies behind the statement that a person is making. So the more I get them to reveal their real preferences, their real ambitions, the better it is. What I do is try to deliberately confront people, or ideas, with each other in a gentle nice way.

On the second evening some things were considered clear and obvious. The good place for a hotel expansion, where we wanted the new retail store, and what were good places for housing. So many pieces fell into place, especially when you saw that these two alternatives—from these two groups—were fairly similar: "OK, here we have something—here's something we can go forward with—this is uncomplicated."

Then, we still had a few messy things. I still had this messy question of the Midsummer's Place, where the hotel owner definitely was not interested in the land swap, so that was a problem still hanging there. Some people said, "This should be a place for commercial development, but the residents were crying out, "No, never, never." So I had everything from issues that were very easy to handle to a couple of major conflicts. Now I don't go to sleep.

After that second open meeting, I first had a meeting with the politicians. Briefly I met the politicians just to see that they were still on board, that no political complications—something that it was absolutely politically impossible—had occurred.

Next, I had a meeting with the hotel owner. I asked him what options he saw: “What future do you see for this Midsummer ‘s Place? What are the possible outcomes? It could be a green area, a hotel, or it could be something else. What do you think is likely to happen?”

I made it very obvious to him that he would not have his hotel, or he could not develop or build on that piece of land, because of public opinion: “You’d never ever get the building permit. The politicians giving you a building permit would be dead, given the resistance amongst everyone.”

I just wanted to see if it was feasible to get him to change his position—and it was. So the third day started just like the second day—continued negotiations and discussions with stakeholders. The most important discussion was with the municipality and hotel owner of the Midsummer place, and they eventually came to an agreement, saying, “Yes, yes, we can agree to make a land swap.” There were a still a few details to be resolved: how much land, timing etc. But this was more of a practical problem.

Parallel to me doing this, the management group and their stakeholder representative were working to draft a final plan. In the case of Tallberg I didn’t sketch two alternative plans. We divided it up, because housing was such a sensitive issue—what kind of housing where it should go, etc. etc. So one group had the major responsibility to sketch a draft plan for housing, and the other group was ore concerned with other issues. The groups worked on the final draft on the second day’s evening—some of them worked all night and all morning on the third day.

At 2 o’clock in the third day, there was a new public meeting, and then the grand plan was presented. I presented the final plan. I said to the audience.

“On the first day we agreed on a number of important principles, and these are the principles. On the second day, yesterday, we discussed the principles, and these were the major problems we had to take care of—the problems we had to solve. Here are the things we’ve decided, and here is the plan.”

I then used the principles. I went back to the first principle, housing. There was a debate, of course, and people had comments, but not more than marginal comments. The politicians and the hotel people, all of them were there: 150-200 people total. No one important said, “No, no.”

All the important guys had comments that were not more than marginal. They would say, “One could consider perhaps...” and then make a very detailed comment—like whether there should be 2 story or 3 story buildings, close to the railroad stations, etc. By “important” I mean representative of the economic interest of the stakeholders, or someone who really was seen as a representative for a group of people. It’s a catastrophe if you don’t have acceptance among the important stakeholders.

Of course you can have an intense debate, because there’s always this guy raising his hand saying,

“This is the worst crap I’ve seen in my life.”

I said, “Why?”

And the he said, “There is going to be a hotel built right outside my back yard!”

Or somebody says, “I think we should ban all cars. I think it would be better if we all parked our cars at the railroad station and rode public bikes—no cars whatsoever.”

But besides from that—a few people, 2 or 3 extremes—there was a major acceptance of the plan. I closed the meeting by really encouraging them and saying it has been a tremendous process—and that they could not sit down now, relax, and think that things would run by themselves.

Because the historic properties in the built environment were so important, everyone agreed on the principle that new additions, new construction, must be in harmony with the old building style. But how the hell were they going to decide in each and every project?

Well, or course, you could create a little group of people who’re the “building code committee,” who together try to develop more detailed principles about materials and colors, whatever. They needed to try together to develop some kind of building code, but also to assess various construction projects that would be proposed. This was not something decided at that time, but something that would keep momentum in the process when it came to implementation. That was the idea.

So having said that, I gave the floor to the Mayor of the city, and he said, “This is great. This is great. There is a political consensus here, and this is what we will go for—and formally, we have to make a plan. That means you have to make the plan and you have to put it on display, and we will make the plan this summer, and we’ll put it on display in the fall, and we hope to have an adopted plan according to the principles proposed this December.”

I was very relieved. One very obvious lesson to me was: the more you know, the easier it becomes to realize potentials. It's very much a question of listening to what people really need. The more issues that you can realize or understand are important to the stakeholders, the larger are your chances of satisfying issues important to them.

The hotel people had two very important priorities: one was preservation, and the other was affordable housing, along with expansion. Of course expansion was obvious, but could you imagine that the hotel owner, on his list of priorities, could have number two be affordable housing? So I was surprised, and the lesson was that you have to be very attentive interviewing people, listening to them and talking to them. If I had not realized what their needs were, what their interests were, I would have missed this opportunity.

This all takes a bit of preparation reading about them, looking at their plans, if they have a home page, etc. Then it's just a question of time. You need to create an atmosphere, when you meet them, so that they realize that you're a serious and knowledgeable person, and that you're able to make things happen. That opens them up, and the more you can create this atmosphere that says, "I'm doing something important. We're going to have a process here that will be extremely important to you," the more you can create that atmosphere, that's understanding, the easier it is to get these hotel people, or any stakeholder, to open up and talk about what is not just considered their primary interest.

They must never believe that I'm the representative of one of the stakeholders, that because municipality hired me that I'm just running their errands. I state that I am absolutely neutral in this conflict. No one can dictate anything, and no one has made any demand in terms of outcome on me. My only interest is to come to try to find a solution that all parties think is a good solution, and by "good" meaning that it's preferable to the status quo.

People's interests also change. I mean this is a learning process. The hotels want a good relation to the people living in the village for obvious reasons. Traffic is no problem whatsoever to the hotels: roads are good and fine. But traffic safety was a real concern for residents—and the hotel owners made this their concern, "Yes, this is important."

So they came to see this as an important issue. Residents, of course, argued that it was not only residents who walked in the village: "What do your hotel guests do in the evenings? Of course they go out walking, and walking in this dense traffic without pavement is ridiculous. They need to have paved sidewalks here."



So both sides learned something. Most importantly, they learned as they started listening to other parties. Just the fact that residents said, “This is important to us,” made the hotel owners listen. You can understand how much fun this is. You would love it. It’s wonderful, every time when you eventually come to this day when everything’s done, and you’re saying, “Now it’s done!”

So they usually congratulate each other—some hug and kiss each other. Often there is a big dinner together and at least going out drinking a few beers together.