

HOW DO WE GO ABOUT CREATING FIREWISE COMMUNITIES?

**An 8 Step
Planning Model**



*Brought to you by the National Wildland/
Urban Interface Fire Program*

HOW TO UNDERSTAND YOUR COMMUNITY

The following 8-STEP planning model is descriptive of typical planning processes across the country. Although processes will vary from community to community, this model provides a basic overview of the procedural steps involved in community planning.

Getting Started?

The only way to ensure long-term commitment to FIREWISE Communities is for the general public to have a role in the planning process from the beginning. As you know, many plans aimed at solving fire problems haven't worked. You have heard all the reasons why they failed. A reason many plans fail is because they were imposed from the top down without enough participation from the people most affected by the plan.

A plan is a written statement of the facts, a review of alternatives, and recommendations on how to meet community goals and objectives. Anyone can prepare a plan — a report with recommendations on what should be done. But only by following a proper planning process can you determine what is best for your community and get others to agree on what to do.

The Process is the important issue.

The process is the key. Planning helps bring people together and opens discussion on the important issues. The act of working together gives the participants “ownership” in the product. There will be many people who will want to see what they worked on get implemented.

Implementation is easiest when the process reflects

- **BALANCED INTERESTS.** Long term success hinges on pulling together a broad range of interests. Assess your community. Who are the key players, the stakeholders, the decision-makers? Invite them to participate.
- **A FLEXIBLE AND COOPERATE ATMOSPHERE.** You will not always have agreement during the planning process. Be flexible. Replace conflict with accommodation. Find workable solutions by understanding each other's point of view.
- **CREATIVE ALTERNATIVES.** Making assumptions that the problem can be resolved with traditional approaches dooms the process to traditional methods, many of which fail in themselves or limit ideas which limits the success.

What Are Key Planning Principles?

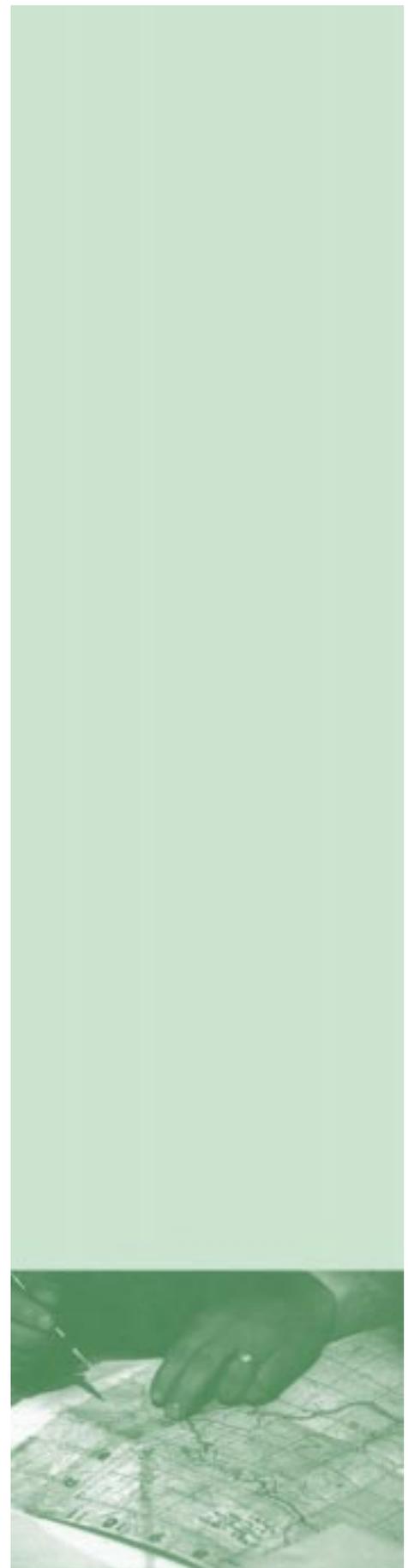
There are ten principles to consider before you start the local planning process. These are not rigid rules. Each community is different and each plan should reflect the desired future of the community. Only when the community has accepted the process will there be a willingness to volunteer to maintain the area as a FIREWISE community.

1. Provide purpose and impartiality. The leaders of the effort must have a clear sense of direction that allows for an outcome that is based on community goals. Organizations must also have the capability to implement plan recommendations.
2. Develop good coordination. The coordinator of the planning process must be experienced in negotiation and be able to bring together divergent interests in a fair and impartial manner.
3. Involve your worst enemies. The selection of planning group members must include a balance of representatives from all the affected local interests. Those interests who are the most likely to be negative about the efforts are as critical to the process as the supporters are.
4. Find common ground. Encourage planning group members to explain their interests, not to take positions.
5. Empower all interests. Recognize that the beginning of the process will focus on education. Technical matters must be clearly understood by all members of the group to enable them to become active participants in decision making.
6. Build consensus. The process must help build consensus among the planning group members. If there is no consensus on an issue, then find another way to resolve it. Unresolved issues rarely just go away.
7. Establish a process. The planning group needs to set ground rules and establish a decision-making process to be used in setting goals and in developing both short and long-term objectives.
8. Develop an action plan. Plan recommendations must be prioritized into a strategy or action plan for implementation that is attainable.
9. Reach out to the community. Community support can only be built through community outreach concerning the goals and objectives of the plan and through participation in volunteer projects.
10. Recognize community control. The organization or person overseeing the

STEP 1: Organizing the Planning Team

The planning process will succeed only if the right people and agencies are involved, at the right time.

The Planning Team is a small number of individuals that get the process started. The person who directs the planning process is called the “planning team leader.” Selecting that person is the crucial first step. The appointed leader must be officially designated as having the authority to develop the plan. He or she is responsible for completing the plan in a reasonable amount of time, facilitating its adoption, and monitoring its use.





In many communities, someone in the city or county planning department can fill the leadership role. In other communities, it could be the fire chief, the wildland/urban interface coordinator, the emergency manager, or a council member. While a consultant may provide valuable guidance, the person in charge should be a local resident or employee.

The planning group leader and members must keep open minds regarding the variety of possible alternatives. Different people will obviously bring their own expertise and preferences to the process. For example, plans implemented by engineers often favor structural measures, while plans prepared by emergency managers may be biased toward preparedness activities. Similarly, land use planners may orient a plan toward regulatory or land use measures.

People who will use the plan should be involved in the planning process. They need to understand what is expected of them and be willing to work toward implementation. Also, the leader will need technical support from engineers and other professionals who are more familiar with some of the FIREWISE measures.

Therefore, key individuals from all sectors of the community should participate in the planning process. Deciding which individuals to involve depends on the community's organization and the measures that will likely be reviewed and/or selected during the planning process.

Involve Key Agencies and Organizations

There are two reasons to involve government agencies and private organizations in your planning efforts.

First, you need to make sure that your efforts are not going to be in conflict with a government program or duplicate the efforts of another organization.

For example, state regional and federal forestry and fire agencies may be undertaking prescribed fire planning. While such planning initiatives may not address all local issues, they likely will thoroughly evaluate alternatives, which can save you a lot of work.

The second reason to involve outside agencies and organizations is to see if they can help. Help may be in the form of fire hazard data, technical information on various measures, guidance on regulatory requirements, advice and assistance in the planning effort, implementation of a recommended measure, and/or financial assistance to help you implement a recommended measure.

Help in organizing and conducting planning may be available from a local, regional or state planning agency or a private organization. If they can't help throughout the entire planning effort, they may be able to help by providing a facilitator for an all-day community input workshop.

Another source of assistance is a private consultant. Planning and engineering firms usually have personnel skilled in the various mitigation measures and the planning process.

Selecting Members

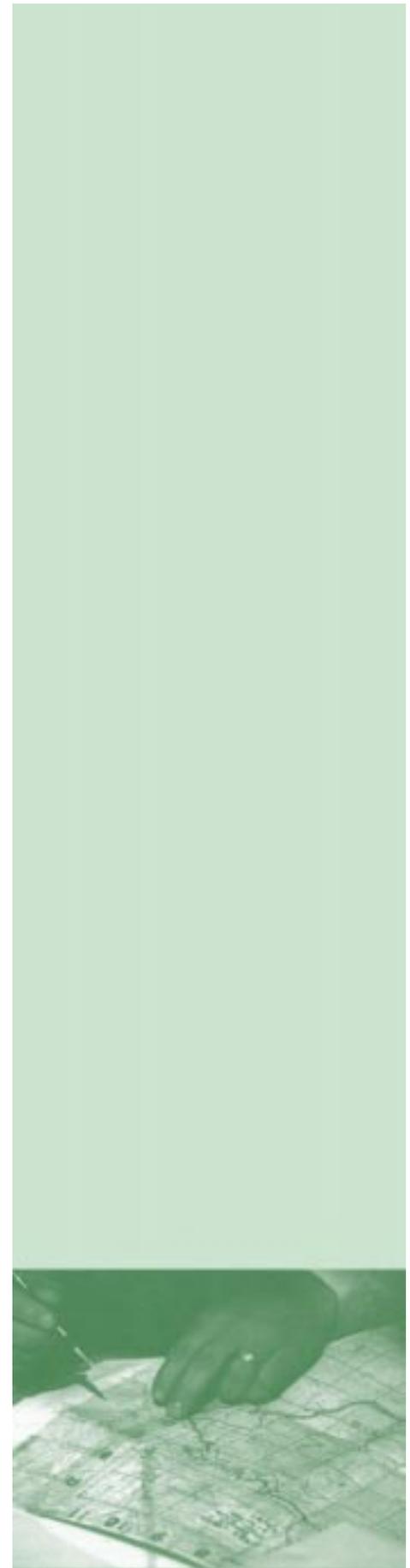
The variety of individuals to participate in the planning group may come from:

- Professional Planners and community planning boards
- Public Works Officials and Engineers
- Zoning and Code Enforcement Officials
- Public Information and Relations Specialists
- Park, Forest and Land Managers
- Elected and Appointed Officials
- Fire professionals and emergency managers
- Public Safety Officials
- Local fire protection councils or water district associations
- Federal Agencies that work with wildland fire and property owners (e.g., USDA Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, etc.)
- State Natural Resources Agencies
- Owners and renters of homes in fire prone areas
- Members of community or neighborhood associations
- Managers of key facilities, businesses, power stations, hospitals, and schools that could be affected by wildland/urban interface fires
- Farmers and others who affect forest and/or vegetation conditions
- Real estate agents, developers, lenders and others who affect the future of wildland/urban interface and fire prone areas
- Environmental Groups
- Insurance Industry Representatives
- and other groups and individuals who guide or impact community development

Levels of Involvement

The level of people's involvement depends on how much time they have available and how much the issues affect them. One of the most important things is that they are asked to participate, that they are offered a chance to have say in your planning work.

Remember, involvement does not mean that these people just sit on a committee or that they are expected to always support what the leader proposes. A good leader will make sure everyone is heard. You need them to make sure that proposals will be acceptable to the community.





Meetings

The head of the planning group should be chosen for his or her ability to inspire people to work together and get things done. Other members can provide administrative support, such as taking minutes and sending out meeting notices.

The First Meeting

At the first meeting, you should establish a planning timetable. Depending on deadlines, time constraints, and time available, meetings can be held once or twice a month.

Scheduling meetings should be done so as to include as many people as often as possible. One key threat to the planning process is that it starts to drag and become a bore. Nine months of monthly meetings with nothing to show but a draft piece of paper can discourage many members. It is important to maintain momentum throughout the process.

Task Groups

The planning group will likely need smaller groups to do more of the detail work that doesn't need to be discussed during the meetings of the main group. Usually the leader is given the power to name task groups and appoint their members. Determining who has a vote usually is not necessary, as issues are usually decided by consensus.

Consensus does not mean a majority vote. It means general agreement or something everyone can live with. One of your goals is to have various groups reach agreement on procedures, goals, issues and ways to implement them.

Field Trips!

Field trips are very educational and allow members to see the problems and examples of solutions first hand. Visits to fire prone sites, emergency operating centers, prescribed burn areas, communities which are FIREWISE, and similar locations give members a first-hand view of how group efforts to mitigate risk works. Such field trips often change the minds of those who are skeptical about some of the potential measures. It's always better to see an example of what you're trying to achieve than just talk about it!

Keeping Track of Progress of the Planning Effort

The planning effort should provide assignments, such as developing some recommendations in more detail, helping on the design and implementation of projects, and monitoring the progress in developing the plan. A periodic written progress report should be prepared by the planning group, since they wrote the plan and have a stake in seeing it used.

STEP 2: Assessing the Hazards

Hazards addressed by your plan are not just the wildfire and hazard zones or the area burned in the last fire. It should include all concerns raised by people and organizations involved in your effort.

First, identify the geographic area your plan will address. Is it your immediate neighborhood, a sub-division, the whole community, or every wildland/urban interface problem in the state or county? A written description and maps of the areas addressed by the plan will help focus the effort.

Identify the Assessment System to be Used

Refer to the *Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Hazard Assessment Methodology* guide and to NFPA 299 *Standard for the Protection of Life and Property from Wildfire*. The methods described in these are directed toward assessing the ability of a building to stand-alone *and survive* in the face of an approaching flame front *without* the intervention of fire fighters and equipment.

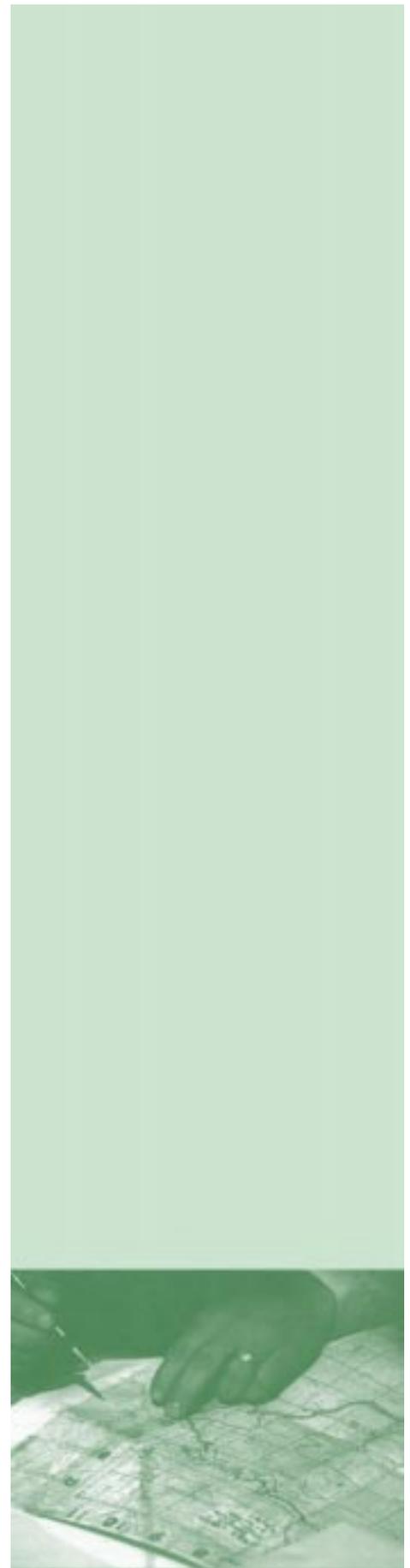
NFPA 299, *Standard for Protection of Life and Property from Wildfire* was first developed by the Forest and Rural Fire Protection Committee, following the tragic wildfires that resulted in the loss of 44 lives and 1,400 homes in the United States in 1985. Since its introduction, wildfires have continued to claim more lives and property each year. The most recent wildland/urban interface fire incidents, like the 1991 Oakland, CA, conflagration, the 1993 Laguna Beach, CA, and the 1996 Calabasas (Malibu, CA) fires, have demonstrably shown that fire fighters are often placed in dangerous situations due to inadequate planning and design of roadways, signs, water supplies, and other infrastructure considerations as well as the increasing population of residential areas encroaching into wildland areas.

This current edition includes a hazard assessment system, changes in the requirements for gate openings and the requirements allowing dead-end roads. These changes were made with regard to fire department access to fire areas as well as providing for resident evacuation.

The purpose of this standard is to provide criteria for fire agencies, land use planners, architects, developers, and local government for firewise development in areas that may be threatened by wildfire. It is hoped that the requirements set forth in this document will, first, help protect the lives of both residents and fire fighters when wildfires strike and, second, reduce property damage.

Protecting the lives of citizens and fire fighters is the primary consideration and puts much more emphasis on residents' personal responsibility for preventing and protecting one's property from wildfire than it has traditionally been in the past.

Whether you adapt an existing system or develop your own, the Hazard Assessment Process can produce a clearer understanding where hazardous areas exist, thereby resulting in improved public and fire fighter safety, reduced property loss, and a reduction in overall taxpayer suppression and rehabilitation costs.



Share Information

Data used in this assessment and the information derived from it might be useful in addressing other environmental and community development concerns. In such cases, sharing methods and information with state and local emergency managers, land use planners/managers, insurance professionals, banking and financial officers, real estate and development professionals, and hazard-related professionals will likely yield increased benefits.

Other Hazards

A good plan should also coordinate with other hazard mitigation plans including those for hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, ice storms, drought, floods, and “technological” hazards, such as releases from chemical plants and hazardous materials spills.

STEP 3: Defining the Problem

Getting agreement on a problem statement is the first step in improving community safety. The problem description is based on an aggregate assessment of hazards/risks in specific areas. Each problem description should reference or include a map(s) of the area of concern. These maps can be updated as more information becomes available. Each problem statement may also have a discussion of the impact of wildfire on a community.

How much time and effort is spent on collecting data depends on the time and resources available. However, the planning process should not be delayed while waiting for more data.

Large-scale, community-wide maps and general information are usually sufficient for a community-wide plan. Estimates may be sufficient for larger communities that may find it difficult and time consuming to locate *every* wildfire-susceptible structure or area.

Other Things to Consider

Wildland fire impacts more than trees and structures. Review the following items when defining the problem:

- Roads, bridges, and transportation facilities.

- Critical facilities affected (hospitals damaged or isolated, power plants, telephone facilities, etc.).

- Financial and tax base impacts.

- Fire protection measures in effect or under development

- Erosion and landslide measures.

- Undeveloped areas and wetlands which provide natural and beneficial functions.

- Personal considerations of loss, displacement, death and injury.

- Watershed loss and degradation of water supplies.

Sample Problem Statement

“The wildland/urban interface area in the Crows Branch development of Peachville includes 150 homes and 12 businesses. This is the area mapped as “Zone A”. There is limited access to this area due to narrow roads, extreme slope, and dense vegetation.”

The Future

A final topic that should be addressed is the future. Your problem should review expected changes to the interface area, especially the development potential of vacant land. It should also note the trends for redeveloping interface areas and increased fire frequencies as more people move in.

STEP 4: Setting Goals and Objectives

Up to now, the planning work has been relatively non-controversial. You have been talking to agencies and organizations and collecting and recording facts. Now comes the tough part, getting people to agree on what should be done.

Characteristics of Goals

Goals are general statements of direction, whereas objectives are more specific targets. Goal statements are:

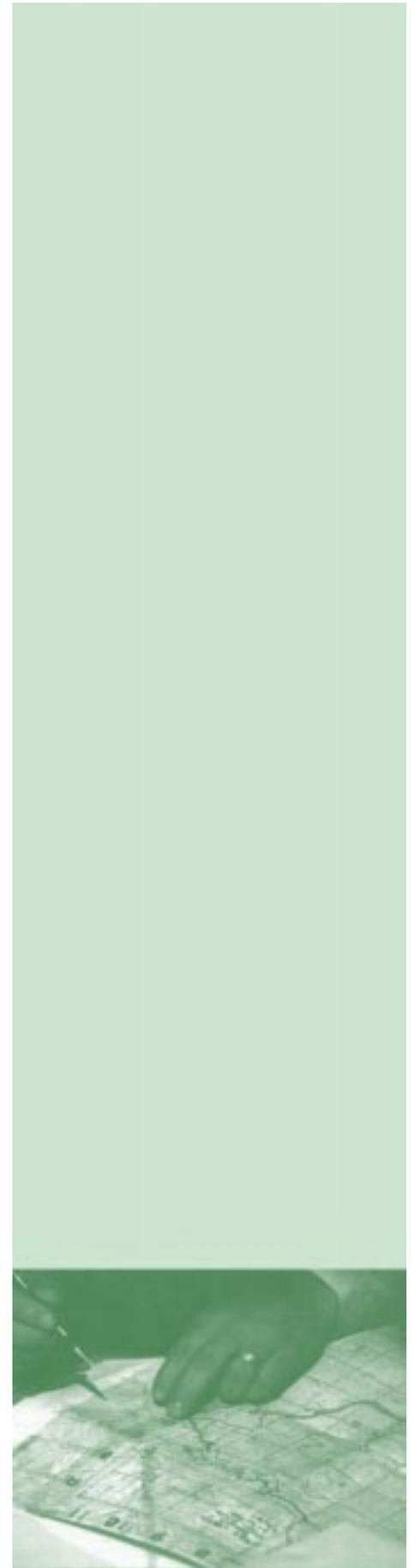
FUNDAMENTAL. The goal should reflect the basic desires of the community.

INCLUSIVE. The goal should include all aspects of public and private concerns about wildfire.

QUALITY ORIENTED. The goal should refer to quality, not quantity.

FUTURE ORIENTED. The situation referenced in the goal should be achievable sometime in the future.

TIME INDEPENDENT. The goal statement should not include a date for completion. The situation or condition reflected in the goal statement is future-oriented and not a scheduled event.



Consider this example:

To provide in-depth fire protection to homes and other buildings considered “key” to community survival.

Using the above characteristics of goals, we can see that this goal fulfills its qualification in that it is:

FUNDAMENTAL. Protecting community survival is a basic desire of the community.

INCLUSIVE. The goal doesn't specify that only public property is key to community well being. It includes public & private concerns.

QUALITY ORIENTED. The statement refers to quality of life, not quantity of “things” protected.

FUTURE ORIENTED. The beginning phrase... To provide... indicates the future.

TIME INDEPENDENT. The goal statement should not include a date for completion. The situation or condition reflected in the goal statement is future-oriented and not a scheduled event.

Characteristics of Objectives

Objectives lay out the course of future actions and are more specific than goals, but stop at defining how they are to be completed. Objectives do not specify how actions will be accomplished, but what is to be obtained. Other characteristics of objectives include:

- Action oriented.
- Represent a level of service (risk).
- Quantitative.
- Attainable within a specified time frame.

Consider these examples of objectives include:

Increase the community-wide use of FIREWISE landscaping 50% by 2005.

Reduce dangerous vegetation 40% by 2004.

Provide required water supplies for all new construction by 2010.

Improve emergency access and egress to 90% of interface area homes by 2006.

Coordinating Objectives with Other Plans

To be effective in the long run, the plan should be a true multi-objective approach. Your focus may be on wildland/urban interface fire, but it should be integrated into a complete hazard plan.

During the planning process, you should involve people with other interests and skills, such as recreation, water quality, economic development, and historic preservation. Some of them may have already prepared plans or written problem statements that they can give you to create a fully integrated hazard plan.

Reaching Agreement

It helps if goals are positive statements, something people can work towards, not negative statements that become hurdles or obstacles that must be surmounted before achieving. Where possible, settle on goals and objectives that support more than one interest.

Getting Consensus

It's often easy to reach agreement on overall goals, but it is not unusual to disagree on objectives that affect particular areas or individual properties. The extra time, however, spent on reaching consensus is well worth the investment, as it is usually vital to gaining agreement, cooperation and participation from all involved.

Generally, "agreement" means consensus or something everyone can live with. You should strive for unanimous support or at least agreement that no one will oppose a goal or objective statement. Short of this, you have to judge if your group must settle for a decision by majority vote.

You probably will have a good feel about whether agreeing on goals and objective statements will be difficult. If it does not appear to be too divisive, try this simple approach:

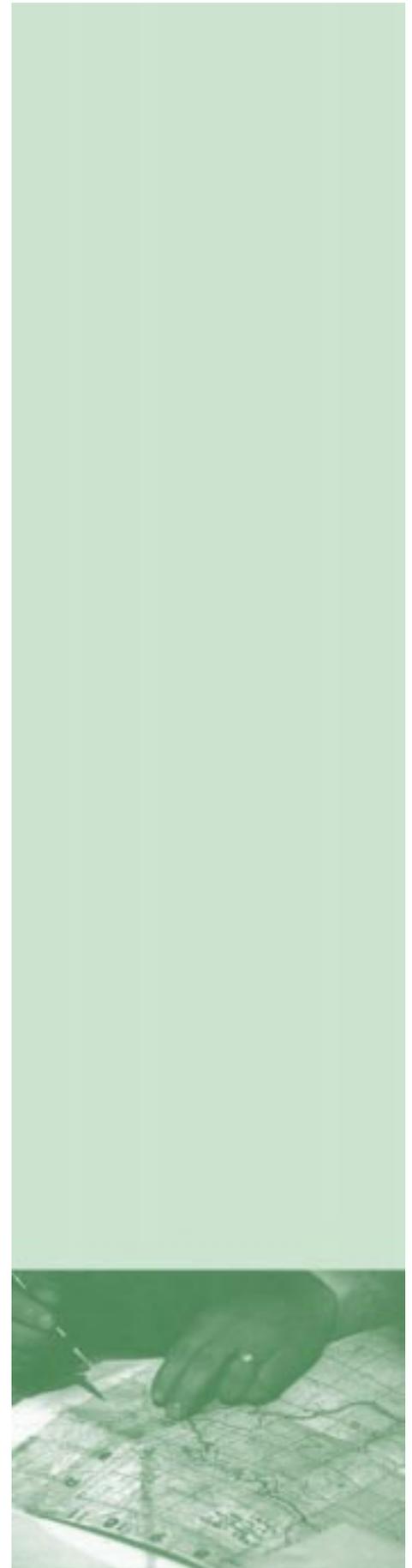
Coming to Agreement

When agreement is not forthcoming, try these ideas for gaining consensus:

- Have everyone write down their goals and objectives.
- Post them for all to see, combining those that are the same or similar.
- Restate them in summary form, using positive statements.
- Identify those that everyone can agree on and discuss what problem people have with the ones that are left.
- Pursue agreement if some words can be changed without affecting the intent.

If this approach doesn't work drop the more detailed statements and get consensus on the general goals.

Invite an experienced facilitator to help you move through a formal process of consensus building. You may want to line up a facilitator in advance so you do not lose your



Recommendations for the future. The plan should clearly identify

- a) what will be done,
- b) who will do it,
- c) when will it be completed, and
- d) how will it be financed.

The recommendations can be a list of projects and project assignments — the more specific, the better. The action plan may be a spreadsheet which lays out all of these activities and time frames in a chart.

A budget

The plan should explain how each recommendation is to be financed. If the recommendation is a change in policy or providing information through normal channels, there may not be an extra cost involved and could be noted as a part of normal operations. Refer to “Financial Review” file.

Funding Sources

While planning can be difficult, getting the recommendations on the ground is the true test of plan acceptance. Cooperate with local non-profit organizations, or establish one, if necessary. Tap the major stakeholders for support and make it important for them to help.

Sample Outline FIREWISE Community Development

A.	<i>Introduction</i>	E.1.3	<i>Responsible party(s)</i>
A.1	<i>Why the need for a plan?</i>	E.1.4	<i>Time frame for completion</i>
A.2	<i>How it was prepared?</i>	E.1.5	<i>Needs list/potential contributors</i>
A.3	<i>Who was involved in creating it?</i>	E.1.6	<i>Budget</i>
B.	<i>Problem Description</i>	E.2.	<i>Measure #2</i>
B.1	<i>Wildfire hazard areas</i>	E.2.1	<i>Description</i>
B.2	<i>Recreation needs</i>	E.2.2	<i>Objectives supported</i>
B.3	<i>Fish and wildlife needs</i>	E.2.3	<i>Responsible party(s)</i>
B.4	<i>Other hazard mitigation problems</i>	E.2.4	<i>Time frame for completion</i>
		E.2.5	<i>Needs list/potential contributors</i>
C.	<i>Goals and Objectives</i>	E.2.6	<i>Budget</i>
D.	<i>Alternative Measures</i>	F.	<i>Implementation and Evaluation</i>
		F.1	<i>Adoption</i>
E.	<i>Recommended Measures</i>	F.2	<i>Implementation schedule</i>
E.1	<i>Measure #1</i>	F.3	<i>Monitoring</i>
E.1.1	<i>Description</i>	F.4	<i>Evaluation and revision</i>
E.1.2	<i>Objectives supported</i>		

When developing the plan, make sure that the requirements of your plan do not conflict with other mitigation and community planning requirements. Use the following guidelines for reviewing the quality of your plan:

STEP 7: Adopting the Plan

Getting public acceptance is vital to reduce conflicts and build support for the plan's recommendations and eventual outcomes.

The draft plan should be made available for review by the residents and businesses who will be affected, appropriate community departments, interested organizations, state and federal agencies, and neighboring communities. It should be clearly stated that comments will be taken by a certain date before the draft will be finalized.

Public Meetings

After people have had several weeks to digest the plan, a public meeting or workshop should be held. A public meeting is usually a requirement for many funding programs.

A public *meeting* is not the same as a public *hearing*. State or local laws usually require a public hearing when a community is considering adopting or amending a land use plan or zoning ordinance. There are specific legal requirements for notifying the public and conducting such a hearing. These legal requirements need not be met for plans in most communities.

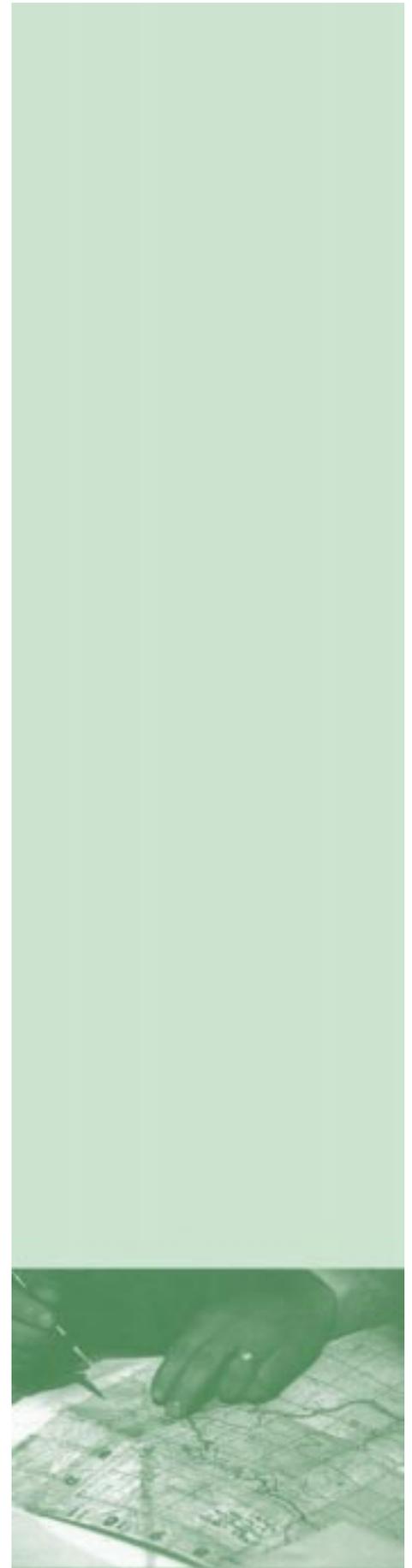
Public Notices

In preparing for a public meeting, adequate notice of the date, time and place must be given, and information about the plan should be distributed well in advance. Often the best notice is a flyer, brochure, local newspaper article and announcement. Each method should provide the same information (purpose, meeting date, time, location, etc.) and a summary of the plan explaining benefits to the community. Flyers and announcements should be delivered to all parties that may be affected. The notice should tell people where to obtain a copy of the draft plan for review before the meeting and how comments will be collected and published.

After the meeting, the planning group should make appropriate changes to the plan reflecting community input. To have a real impact the plan should be adopted by your governing board.

Support from others is always valuable. For example, a plan with recommendations on watershed management could go to the soil and water conservation district for a vote of adoption or support. The local wildland/urban interface specialist could endorse a plan with recommendations on reducing hazardous vegetation for wildfire mitigation. If planning group members were selected to represent a particular interest or organization, those organizations should pass a resolution or otherwise officially support the plan.

The city council may act more favorably to a plan that has the written support from the local Chamber of Commerce and neighborhood organizations. In large cities and counties, you may need to circulate the plan for approval from various department heads before it goes to the governing board.





Reaching the Community: Promoting Involvement

Adopting the plan is certainly not the last step in the planning process. Putting the plan into action and then evaluating and refining it follows. It's at this stage community support can make or break a great plan. Here is where it really pays off to obtain community support.

Involving the community is one of the best ways to gain support for a plan or any project. Building that support is usually achieved through a variety of outreach methods. Most should focus around explaining why this FIREWISE planning process is important and what are some of the benefits!

Ensure a tax base

Promote values

Gain a sense of place

Provides incentives

Every community and region has relative degrees of norms, behaviors and feelings. In planning any given outreach or campaign, an understanding of the norms, thoughts, feelings and behaviors helps ensure successful strategies. The planning work done to this point should help provide you with much of the research to understand your community values and attitudes. (*Refer to "Understanding How to Understand Your Community"*).

STEP 8: Evaluating and Revising

No plan is perfect. As implementation proceeds, flaws will be discovered and changes will be needed. Your plan should have a formal process to measure progress, assess how things are proceeding, and recommend needed changes.

A monitoring system helps ensure that participants don't forget their assignments or fall behind in working on them. This can be in the form of a checklist maintained by the planning group leader, or a more formal reporting system to a higher authority, such as the governing board or an oversight committee.

Your planning group should meet periodically to review progress and submit its recommendations to the agencies and organizations responsible for implementation. The period for review and revision depends on a number of factors. For example, individual programs that result from the plan may require monthly review; financial aspects may need quarterly review; legal aspects may require yearly review; and the resulting impact on development may require review every two to five years.

While a plan will usually produce the best and most efficient project, a community should be ready to act fast to take advantage of opportunities provided by unforeseen actions. Some include disasters, extra end-of-the-year money, or heightened public interest due to interface fires elsewhere. There may be a chance to make major changes quickly.

Evaluate the Plan Periodically

The key to successful implementation is that the individuals responsible for the various recommendations understand what is expected of them and they are willing to work toward implementing the plan. Thus, it is helpful to have people likely to be involved in implementation — such as representatives of local departments and other agencies — participate in the planning process. It is also helpful to clearly identify a person responsible for each recommendation. If you can, associate your recommendations with the plans and activities of the implementing agency or organization. For example, people responsible for specific recommendations could have the duties included in their job descriptions or annual performance plans.

