



Assessing Public Participation in Redevelopment Projects: A Case Study of Tallahassee, Florida

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Background

The city of Tallahassee, Florida, expanded the penny sales tax in 2000 to raise money for infrastructure projects such as The Capital Cascades Trail Project. The Tallahassee-Leon County Planning Department drafted a four-phase sector plan using workshop meeting comments to address neighborhood concerns. Comments were organized into priority areas: 1) infrastructure, 2) land use/urban design, 3) neighborhood aesthetics/quality of life, 4) community safety, and 5) education. The entity responsible for this project, Blueprint Intergovernmental Agency (Blueprint), was recommended to follow this report as it claimed to represent a community vision. As the project evolved over the years, Blueprint adapted and revised the original plans to align with ongoing and future project needs. This led to the expanded use of eminent domain or the acquisition of private property in predominantly African American communities.

Research Question

What level of Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation does the Capital Cascades Trail Project achieve?

Methodology

The researcher evaluated the level of citizen participation using Arnstein's Ladder, which assesses the degree of public involvement in various government projects. The primary document used in this study is the 2004 Capital Cascades Sector Plan. This is a **one-hundred-plus page plan** that includes an appendix of public comments related to participatory workshops conducted in the pre-planning stages of the Capital Cascades Trail Project. The researcher used the categories of Arnstein's Ladder as major themes for logging the levels of participation. The researcher **conducted a content analysis** of participatory-related words in order to report counts of trends. To enhance the reliability of the research, a teammate and research mentor reviewed the results of the researcher's qualitative coding strategy. In addition to this plan, the researcher reviewed supplemental documents, meeting transcripts, notes, and public records.

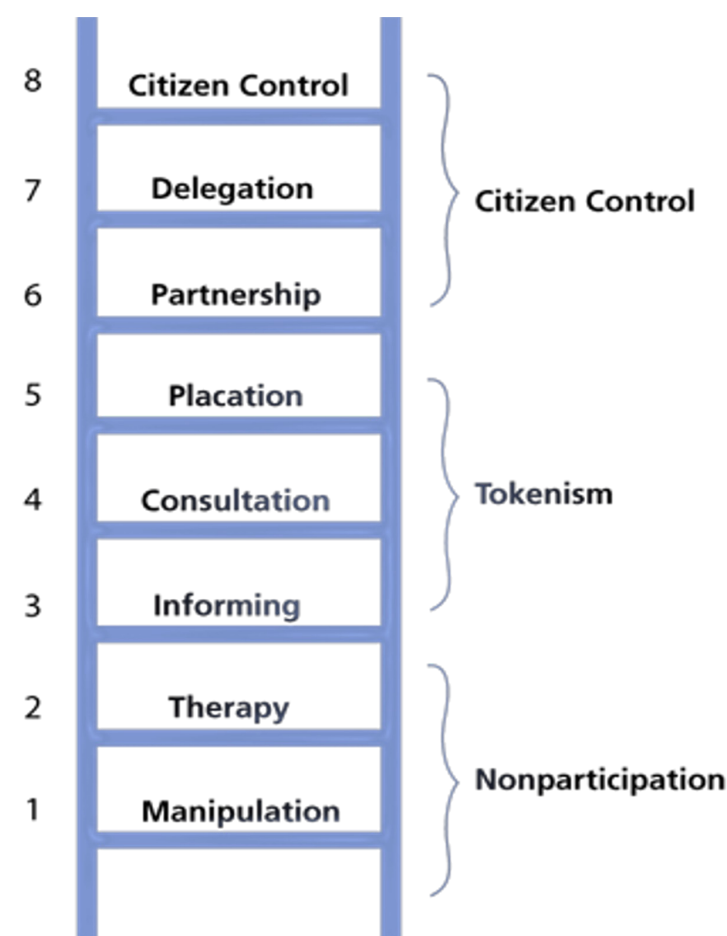


Figure 1: Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation

Findings

Pre-planning

Table #1: Blueprint held three workshop meetings between 2004-2005

	Meeting 1	Meeting 2	Meeting 3
Arnstein's Ladder	consultation	consultation	informing
Attendance	85	55	37
Feedback	225 comments	55 votes	N/A
Total residents potentially impacted	15,776		

Citizen's Priority Areas*

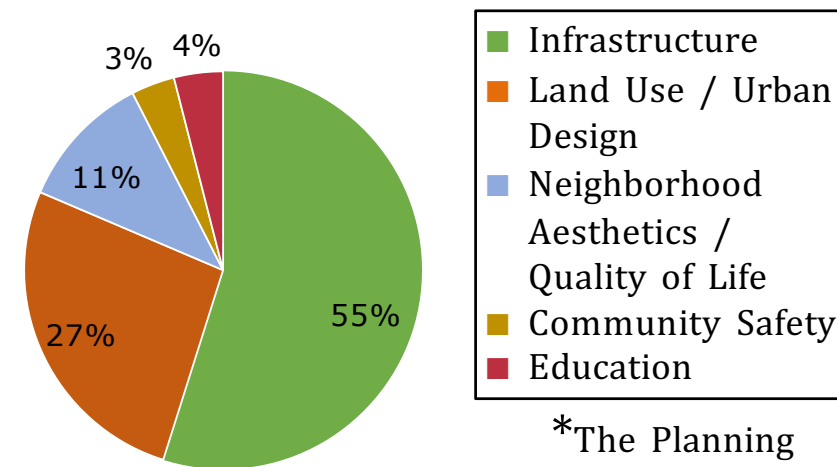


Figure 2: Citizen's Capital Cascades Trail priority areas from meeting 1

Planning Department's Priority Areas

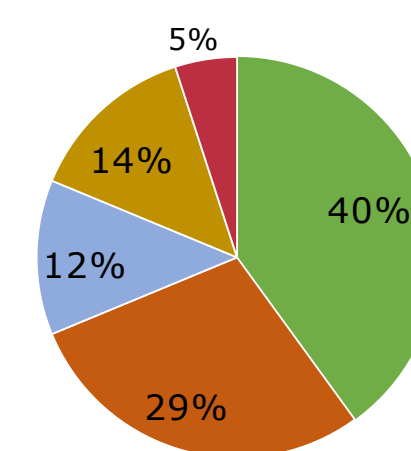


Figure 3: Planning Department's project recommendations following the meetings

*The Planning Department decided comment categories

Implementation

Phase 3 was subject to a realignment in 2016, which expanded the use of eminent domain and the stripping of a historic neighborhood. Prior to the final voting in April 2016, some public involvement took place in January 2016.

Table #2: Capital Cascades phase 3 under Arnstein's Ladder

Stage	Action
Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community engagement to build the History and Culture Trail in phase 3. Meetings with FAMU Department of History and Culture for the architectural design and development.
Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public meeting (42 attendees) Post-meeting phone call survey (25 responses, 10 from those directly impacted by the change and a 58% approval of changes). 12-years of Consultation: meeting with partners such as Florida A&M University, churches, and businesses.
Informing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tenants were notified of realignment through a mail information slip with project and meeting information (mailed to over 1200 and emailed to over 300). Outreach door-to-door procedure on impacted properties (half of tenants not at home).

Public meetings were led by FAMU Way Citizen's Advisory Committee, which served as community outreach and liaison between Blueprint and residents.

"Public engagement is two-way communication inclusive of all decision-makers and stakeholders. Each Blueprint project will have a customized Public Engagement Plan that is developed at the start of the project, and outreach activities and techniques will vary from project to project, as each project's outcome and stakeholder community character is unique." –Blueprint, 2000

The Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) was responsible for evaluating project implementation and providing active feedback to Blueprint on the degree of public engagement.

Table #3: Blueprint indicating their degree of fulfillment of CAC's feedback during phase 3

	Feedback
1	Maintain communication before the project and during project implementation (Complete)
2	Improve project awareness (Ongoing)
3	Uplift the role of the CAC as community liaisons and increase attendance to meetings (Complete)
4	Use clear language regarding project descriptions and stay away from technical language (Ongoing)
5	Verify community surveys (Complete)

Policy Recommendations

- The city of Tallahassee should push for more public participation by expanding each entity's delegation to represent more sectors of the population, namely African American community members.
- Blueprint should be mandated to follow CAC's recommendations, and their activities should receive oversight to ensure the fulfillment of each recommendation.
- Future projects should require that city planners use social impact assessments to address social justice concerns.
- Funding should be designated to train city planners in cultural competency and allocate resources to empower citizens to be actively engaged in community projects.

References



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