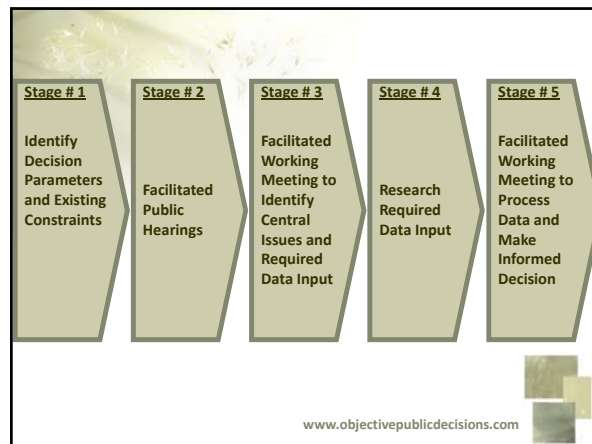


How You Can Disarm Contentious Public Policy Debate

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Save the Hospital!

Context: The small town of Roosevelt has been home to the historic Ted apartments, formally the Theodore Roosevelt Hospital for 80 years. The community is proud of this building and its unique service as a hospital in the 20's and 30's. The site and structure are privately owned. The owners have found that it is no longer financially feasible to continue to upgrade the deteriorating structure and pay for costs for maintenance of the old building. They also do not want to invest in retrofitting it to meet current building standards in this earthquake-prone region. They have proposed to rebuild on the site.

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Working with an award-winning architect and general contractor they have submitted an application for a new condominium development with ground floor retail and restaurants. The design will incorporate historically accurate features to complement the surrounding buildings, views of the mountains and sound as well as dedicating 10% of the units for low and moderate-income residents. The planning commission must recommend approval or denial of a revision to the land use plan and zoning from residential to commercial before this application can proceed to grading and building permits.

(Stage 1) Staff prepared a briefing document for the public and commission that included

1. A clarification of the specific decision to be made: recommendation of approval or denial of a revision to the land use plan and zoning.
2. Explanation of the constraints that must be taken into account. These include

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- Town ordinance requirements for how hearings shall be conducted as well as state statutes must be met.
- SEPA review must be conducted and the appeal period closed prior to any hearings.
- Any change in the land use plan must maintain a minimum number of housing units to be consistent with GMA housing targets.

(Stage 2) Many in the community were upset about this proposal so the hearing was held in the high school cafeteria to accommodate the expected crowds. Citizen testimony was passionate and weighted heavily in opposition to the revision.

(Stage 3) Staff compiled the results of the public hearing. The Commission reviewed this, as well as the original briefing document to identify the issues central to their decision.

Definition of 'Central Issues'—Central issues are issues that are at the heart of the controversy and directly relevant to the decision. Central issues may be value-based or data-based.

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Group Instructions

THINK: Review the available information and consider which items of information are most strong and reliable and relevant to the decision. Circle 1 or 2.

LISTEN—Take turns describing, in a couple of sentences, the 1 or 2 items of information you believe are most strong, reliable and relevant.

DISCUSS—Talk about which information your *group* believes is most strong, reliable and relevant. (State your position and inquire about other positions.)

DECIDE—Would your group recommend approval or denial of the revision? Be prepared to report your decision and rationale.

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- What happened in your small group that was noteworthy?
- What was the meaning to you?
- What will you do with what you learned from this experience?

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The diagram consists of five chevron-shaped boxes pointing right, each representing a stage in the decision-making process:

- Stage # 1**: Identify Decision Parameters and Existing Constraints
- Stage # 2**: Facilitated Public Hearings
- Stage # 3**: Facilitated Working Meeting to Identify Central Issues and Required Data Input
- Stage # 4**: Research Required Data Input
- Stage # 5**: Facilitated Working Meeting to Process Data and Make an Informed Decision

➤ **Data-Driven**—Clear focus on strong, reliable data relevant to issues central to the decision

➤ **Documentable**—Visible and recordable decision path ensures transparency

➤ **Defensible**—Data orientation and documentable path increase defensibility, if challenged

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What did you notice?

- People piggybacking on others' interesting ideas
- Tendency to focus on emotional aspects
- 1st discussion—all had a different important fact—bridged later
- Did not have an emotional discussion
- People need differing levels of information
- Needed time to interpret facts—not enough facts—created facts to cover missing
- Respectful of each other—listening, accepting not everyone had same opinion
- Asked follow up questions
- Compared what we did and didn't know

Meaning

- We focused on construction level components of project first and actual decision later
- Had discomfort in now knowing the facts—difficult making a decision
- As we listened to others, shifted my opinion
- Recognize it was a zoning/comp plan but there were far reaching consequences—do nothing torn down later
- Danger in deciding long range issues mixed up with construction issues
- Personalities—council members with specific political agendas—asking for more data

Learning

- Focus on central issues
- Help frame decisions like judge's instructions to jury
- Once central issue framed do thorough data collection
- Get clear direction from PC re. what data is *really* being asked for
- Keep them on point (away from peripherals)
- Peripheral-based decision provides basis for later comp plan update