



From the Director's Desk

Slow and Fast Thinking on a Public Board

Were you on a Town Board that made decisions, hundreds or perhaps thousands of them including those many decisions-within-a-decision? If you remained in town, have you encountered impacts from your decisions? Some decisions I recollect vividly—that vote on the leash law after 3 packed public hearings. Others leave me wondering “well...how did we get here?”

Having so many decisions means that a premium is put on the drive to keep things moving. Another, less appreciated useful skill is the ability to slow-think at the right times. Before electronic packets and meetings, as the agenda moved from one topic to the next the cues were there to see. It was easy to look over and see who was thumbing through their notes or flipping through the binder to sticky noted pages. Those were signals that it might be time to down shift, and in today's therapy parlance—to provide space-- to conceptualize how what is presented next, what was tonight “on paper” might translate later in brick & mortar for residents. This is especially true with land use decisions which are less-reversible than legislative matters. A board can always walk back a vote on the leash law. Buildings and roads cannot be un-built.



How does a deliberative group focus on what matters? With a major Planned Use Development (PUD) there are hundreds of moving parts; to equally, carefully deliberate each sentence on each page of a massive binder is unwieldy. It is often cited to “stay in your lane,” meaning that an effective board knows which matters are the purview of staff (adherence to zoning and code, signage), or the Planning Commission (landscaping and architecture), and where “the meat” of their part of the consideration is. These are the decisions that define why a board of citizens exists to review such matters at all. That is one thing.

It is amazing how much time is wasted rearranging the deck chairs in meetings. Boards may not see that a discussion has been captured by pet peeves, like how many trees belong in the landscaping, while it is happening. Too often such wasted time means that other issues that will really matter to those who will inhabit those places under consideration later get glossed over. In the context of meetings, I like to think of it as understanding what requires “slow” consideration and what should merely get “fast” consideration—those hobgoblins of inconsequence which seem to keep undisciplined boards up late into the night are too often the wrong type. I am loosely borrowing these terms with apologies to Daniel Kahneman, who wrote a bestseller Thinking Fast and Slow.

Looking back on certain land use decisions which I now inhabit in the town where I served long ago, some questions I've asked myself include: Why didn't we understand that a certain residential intersection would be so busy? Why did we spend so much time debating those highway intersections which were meant to take all that traffic, and do so very well now? Why didn't we put street parking alongside that elementary school? Why didn't we plan for path connections with small bridges across the creek to a future development now under construction? When we negotiated an amendment to allow a partnership between two hospitals to create a medical campus, why didn't we preserve a legal mechanism for the town to be able to motivate the parties if they decided to just not work together anymore leaving acres of strategically placed land vacant? Why were we so afraid of more density in the commercial core? It pleased the crowd to shave density by 10% or more, but did it impact anyone's livability, and was it a

missed opportunity? Today, businesses could benefit from more residents nearby to activate the spaces and make them more viable?

The answer to many of those questions is this: to consider such a change might have cost somebody money, or it would have cost the board time. In some cases, we didn't slow down to realize what should have mattered. There may be no more valuable resource for a board than how it utilizes the few hours each month that it has together in front of the public. Is half of the meeting spent reviewing who was quoted in the minutes and getting detailed explanations for certain expenditures in the bill schedule, or debating "boiler plate" language in legal documents?

Given all of the many time-pitfalls, I have observed that certain board members, usually The Mayor, can be eager to move business along. Those of us leading meetings acquire a critical skillset of closing down discussion rather than encouraging it. Of course, there needs to be a balance, and an understanding of when to shift gears. The recognition of the different importance of topics is important because it should signal when the topics should receive "fast" consideration, and also when others deserve "slow" consideration.

--continued at the end of the newsletter--

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Vintage Program Specialist Lead. Amanda Rems-Moon received her Certificate of Completion for the Home Modification for the Aging Network Training Program in March!

This program is a partnership with the University of Southern California's Leonard Davis School of Gerontology and the Fall Prevention Center of Excellence

It is designed to provide professionals with the skills and knowledge to maximize older adults' ability to age in place by increasing the availability and awareness of home modifications at the local, state, and national levels.

Even more exciting, due to a partnership with the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging and the Administration for Community Living, Amanda was able to receive this prestigious certification without incurring any additional cost for Vintage.

Look for a new Home Modification Pilot Program coming to Grand County in ' summer 2021.



Colorado Association of Area Agencies on Aging

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A new report, [Colorado Area Agencies on Aging At Work for Older Adults](#), describes the innovative ways Colorado's Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) leveraged their expertise and deep community connections to address the growing needs of older adults as the COVID-19 pandemic struck.

The report highlights the results of a survey conducted by the Colorado Association of Area Agencies on Aging (c4a) in September 2020 to deepen its understanding of how its members are responding to older adults needs during the COVID-19 pandemic in their communities—and to learn what their needs might be moving forward, as

these vital local agencies, along with the nation, grapple with the immediate and long-term effects of the new coronavirus on the population it has hit the hardest. The survey results indicate that needs of older adults are growing, with 100 percent of Colorado AAAs reporting an increase in the demand for home delivered meals as well as increases in requests for most other services.

Reflecting the growing needs of older adults and caregivers in their communities:

- 88 percent of AAAs have transitioned group meal program participants to receive home-delivered meals or provided these congregate meal program participants with grab-and-go meals that allow older adults to pick up needed nutrition in the form of groceries and prepared meals.
- 75 percent of AAAs have seen an increase in demand for in-home services
- Formed new partnerships by working with non-traditional partners such as restaurants to provide meals to older adults or community groups to provide hygiene and other critical supplies to older adults in need
- 50 percent of AAAs are seeing the negative health effects of social isolation and are addressing this issue through new and updated programs and services.
- 100 percent of AAAs are concerned that internet access, either due to cost of the service or the availability of internet service, will be a challenge for their agency and their community partners

The report illustrates the need for additional federal support that these local agencies will need as they continue to serve older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic. “Despite several rounds of emergency federal funding released earlier this year, this report makes clear that AAAs and their state and local partners will need an infusion of additional federal resources in order to maintain these services to older adults for the duration of the pandemic, as well support in transforming aging services to reflect the new realities of older adults and their caregivers,” said Amy E. Gotwals, n4a Chief, Public Policy and External Affairs.

About the Colorado Association of Area Agencies on Aging

The Colorado Association of Area Agencies on Aging (c4a) is a 501(c)(3) membership association representing Colorado’s national network of 16 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs). The mission of c4a is to provide leadership, advocacy, and a voice for the aging network in Colorado. <http://www.c4a-colorado.org>

Slow and Fast Thinking.. continued



We can see which individual board members think fast or slow, but we do not often flag topics for one type of thinking or another. What if meeting facilitators—mayors and board chairs—did more of that? A bit of an aside about facilitating a board here: we don’t often cultivate the full brain-power of a collective board because often we are fencing off the tendencies of certain board members, or for that matter, the public. I’ve seen some facilitators who are obsessive clock-watchers. There is a time for that. It is easy to miss this opportunity: people tend to support what they help to create. When they participate in discussion they have buy-in, and discussion buys time for slow thinking in which

important questions can rise to the surface.

Being sure key topics get the deserved time is much more important than another mistaken urge – reaching consensus. On important policy matters which have no right answer – it is a sign of an unhealthy board when consensus is often and easily reached. Individuals are elected to think for themselves, and for those who cannot be present, not to avoid disagreement. How much effort is pulling toward consensus worth? It depends. Getting from a “no” to an “ok” can take time. Cultivating consideration is a skill. Drawing out those whose thinking isn’t happening fast enough is a skill. Seeing an opportunity for alignment, and being inclusive with the deliberative process (which can tend to veer into opposing camps) is a skill. Those who become agile can run a meeting that is both “productive” (meaning fast to most) and thoughtful (honoring the slow). A classic successful outcome from a meeting run that way is the sentiment, “I didn’t agree with everything, but I was heard, and I understood the decision.”

So how does a board decide what gets “slow” treatment? Good decisions by a board ‘doing its’ job can take the kind of pondering that requires reading ahead and giving people the space to ponder. Most town business doesn’t. Any good meeting has information, discussion and deliberation—all of which requires facilitation skill to navigate. The challenge is identifying and weighting topics. That starts with those who build packets providing great information, then requires those who receive a packet scanning the agenda immediately and understanding how much preparation time should be set aside prior to the meeting. In some cases, those with lots of questions should ask some of them of staff before the meeting. One marker could be for the person running the meeting to think ahead about those key topics that should REQUIRE full participation in discussion. That is when slow time should be offered.

In spite of recent sentiment against professionalism at the federal level, one pitfall of board members is providing far too much deference to experts. Expertise has its place. Board members should neither be cowed by it, or hostile to it. Citizen elected board members are not there to replace experts, they are intended to represent the interests of citizens. In a packet, some things are in there because they need to

be – the geologic report. Others are there to provide data that is a factual base for decisions which have no “scientific” answer – how much traffic is going to be too much in that neighborhood? All too often I’ve seen board members with years of valuable experience simply delegate away their work to staff or to the “experts” on the very most important decisions. Good meeting facilitators help board members see this. They also don’t accept avoidance as an acceptable behavior. I’ve seen board members listen and vote without ever uttering a word through hours of testimony, leaving their peers and the public to wonder at their intent. On important matters this is unacceptable. The public deserves to understand the “why” behind a vote. Being elected means you owe the public your thoughts. I think it is useful to get a taste of important discussions into the minutes for future reference.

Of course, the success of all of this has a pre-requisite. Preparation. Board members who are verbal processors who don’t read ahead can be extraordinary time wasters. Not having pondered important matters before a meeting can be painfully obvious to others. I’ve seen board members crippled by indecision. These are people who should have done some thinking ahead, anticipated the challenge, perhaps even let the Mayor know before the meeting. I am not defending indecisiveness here. That kind of muddling through the public process is what developers dread. It drives other board members and staff mad. It is a source of much of the “red-tape” that gives town boards a bad name, and only frustrates the public. On the other hand, board members who do their homework, list talking points, and think ahead about worthwhile questions are invaluable.

Those who have the discipline to practice preparation are ready for slow thinking when it matters. When a board can be steered to think ahead to the livability of a plan, that is to say, how the traffic, the parks, the pedestrian connectivity and the legal delegations of duty will be experienced years later usually their deliberations will lead to better outcomes.

We've Launched!
Our new website is up and running -- check it out. Get to know us better.
NWCCOG.ORG

Next Council Meeting - Thursday, May 27, 2021

Full Council & EDD Board Meeting

Location: Zoom Conference Call, On-site location TBD

Time: 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Primary Agenda Items: Review/Acceptance of 2020 Audit