

**Development by and for the Urban
Neighborhood**

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“When art is outlawed, only outlaws will have art.” ~ Joe Hobbs, Director, University of Oklahoma School of Art, 1974

“We Balinese have no art, we do everything the best we can.” ~ Balinese Chieftain being interviewed by British anthropologists, circa 1870

The Challenge:

- Neighborhoods are as unique as cats and come in many grades of cultures, some with deep histories with colorful personalities and architecture and some as bland as manufactured houses.
- If the purpose of your neighborhood association is to maintain the status quo, forget creative development of any sort. It is your enemy and you should confine your work to enforcing city codes and providing spectators for city-sponsored plans. If you want to celebrate your eccentricities, however, build a sense of community and contest the boundaries of city codes, and plans you might take on a series of projects that in their sum, years later, might be called “development from within.”
- There are no maps for this endeavor but only a compass made up of values. Here are some:

Where does a community project come from?

- Over your backyard fence. Two people talk and some chemistry takes place and grows to other conversations up and down the street and pretty soon it enters the dialog at the neighborhood association meeting as a side conversation but it wasn't on the agenda.
- Did you recognize the idea and give it a moment?
- Did it take off from there?
- Did it take over the meeting?

Let it go, so it can grow...

If it's truly a community project, it belongs to the community; it's not yours. As an organizer you can communicate, focus consensus when it evolves, and help form plans of action. But when anyone starts "owning" an effort, folks begin to have "other things to do." There is a simple evaluation for every community effort: were more folks involved when you finished than when you started? Are they ready for the next project? Did they create that one themselves?

Let it grow slowly; time is your friend

Unless you're speculating and your house is just an investment, you probably plan to hang around the neighborhood awhile. So if you're not planning to go anywhere, creative projects that take years are just fine; there's no rush. You can let a project idyll until the time is right and then proceed at the rate of energy your neighbors want to press. As long as you're adding people and interest, you're doing fine; after all, you're more than working on a project, you're creating a sense of community.

Involve everyone...

Everyone gets to play: young, old, rich and poor. There's an eight-year old in all of us who comes out when the creative juices are allowed. No idea is too absurd to consider and even the naysayers' cynicism is valuable. As a meeting facilitator, your job is make it safe for everyone to have their say and focus the energy forward. Everyone is important and every idea has merit.

The “B” Team Counts Most



Don't rely on anyone other than yourselves

- Kind of like lavender attracts butterflies, good projects attract angels. When you get going on a project rich in community, good folks crawl out of the woodwork to help out. The volunteers from outside your neighborhood may appreciate your efforts more than your own neighbors.
- If your group has an addiction to city support, get over it. The city is a bureaucracy made up of years of rule-making and legal constraints that can dampen creative community work. If your plan evolves around city support, you may have to be as creative in your politics as you are in your neighborhood.
- On that note, your own neighborhood association rules and organization structure may be your major obstacles: if you have to form a committee to report to a committee to approach the executive committee about putting something on the meeting for the general meeting, you may want to ask some tough questions: can this project happen within the constraints of the neighborhood association structure? Can it be otherwise done by some committed neighbors?











