



**Creating My Hometown:  
An Exercise in Land Use Decision Making**

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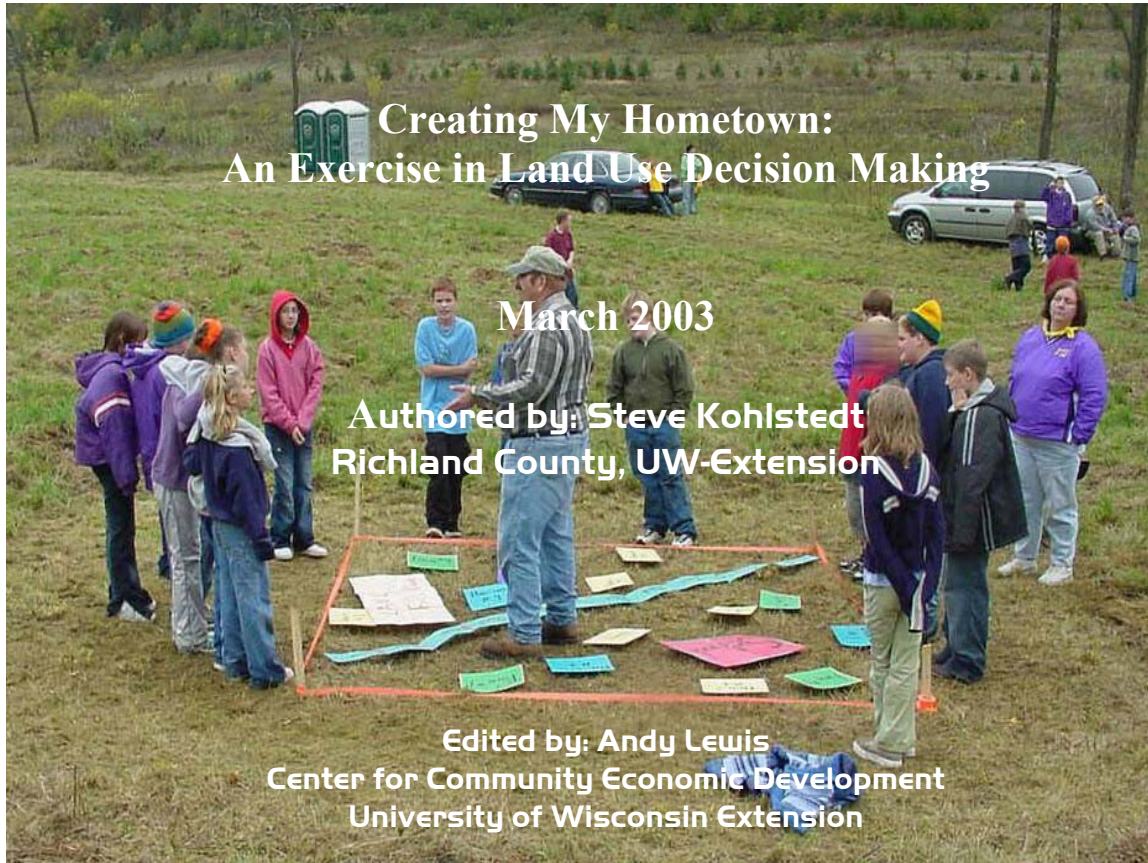


**March 2003  
A Report  
From:**



**The Center for Community Economic Development  
610 Langdon Street  
Madison, WI 53703-1104**

**Staff Paper 03.1**



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This report summarizes an activity that has been used by Steve Kohlstedt for over twenty years to help foster awareness of complex land use issues and conflicts with diverse audiences. This activity was first shared with the faculty and staff of Extension in 1995 and has gone through several revisions. This report is intended to provide formal instructions on how to conduct this role-playing exercise.

**Abstract:**

This activity is a hands-on learning activity that can be used to foster awareness of land use issues and conflicts, for a wide range of audiences. Through this role-playing exercise, participants will make land use decisions and provide a rationale for those decisions. At the conclusion of the exercise, participants will have an improved understanding of the complexity of land use decisions.

**Introduction:**

This exercise has been conducted with children, college students, and local elected decisions makers. The exercise is designed for a group of 18 to 25 individuals and takes about 40-45 minutes to complete.

All participants play a role and are actively engaged in the process. In this exercise the group is introduced to a 10' x 10' area that they are told represents 10 square miles of undeveloped land. Furthermore, they are told that the area will soon be experiencing rapid growth and development. Let the role-playing begin!

A designated facilitator asks or appoints different participants to make land use decisions. The first decision maker is asked where a major road should be placed and to provide a rationale for the location that is selected. That decision is followed by the placement of different land uses, such as agriculture, residential, commercial, institutional, industrial, and governmental. As the decisions become more complex, more probing questions are asked which will reveal potential land-use conflicts and the complexity of land use planning.

**Objectives:**

1. Provide a hands-on decision making exercise in land use development for the participants.
2. Enhance the knowledge of participants concerning land use conflicts by allowing them to role-play and make their own decisions.
3. Increase the understanding of conflicts in society that arise with land use planning by requesting each participant's decision to be explained.
4. Encourage the participants to understand that land use conflicts will continue to arise and that someday the participants might find themselves in a decision-making role.

**Materials Check List:**

- 4 flags, stakes or chairs
- 40-45 feet of rope, ribbon or twine
- 1 cardboard "road" (6" x 12')
- 4 cardboard or wood "farms" (8 ½" x 11")
- 6 cardboard or wood "houses" (8 ½" x 11")
- 5 cardboard or wood "businesses" (8 ½" x 11")

- 1 cardboard or wood “school” (17" x 22")
- 1 cardboard or wood “factory” (36" x 32")
- 1 cardboard or wood “highway shop, land fill site or county office building” (36" x 32")

**Steps in the Exercise:**

1. Lay out an area 10' x 10' using the rope, ribbon or twine. Use the stakes, flags or chairs to make the area square. This designated space represents the 10 square mile planning area.

2. Introduce the participants to the exercise by indicating that it is an interactive activity, which means that they do all the work and you ask all the questions! Further indicate that everyone will get an opportunity to participate by taking on a specific planning role, either by appointment or by volunteering. Tell them that the roped off area represents 10 square miles of undeveloped land and that they will be responsible for all the planning in this area.



3. Select 3 (or less, depending on the size of your group) volunteers to be “transportation engineers.” Give them the task of locating the “road” anywhere in the 10 square miles, as long as it is one straight line. (Remember: Engineers like straight roads!) Once the road is placed, each engineer will be asked questions, such as:



- “Why did you locate there?”
- “What weight limitations does the road have?” and “Will that accommodate tractors?”
- “What’s the speed limit?”
- “How many cars a day uses it?”

Once this is done indicate to the group that they have just dealt with a **Transportation Use**. Other transportation uses could include airports, railroads, bicycle trails, or the location of a bus depot. *For a younger group of participants, you could use the exercise for career development by asking questions related to salary and*

*education like, “How much does an engineer who works for the department of*

*transportation make on an annual basis?” or “How many years did you go to school to get your degree?” or “Where did you go to get your degree?”*



4. In this step, ask for 4 volunteers and give them the task of locating their “farm” someplace in this same 10 square mile area. Once this is done, ask the “farmers” a variety of questions, such as, “What type of farm do you have?” “How many animals do you have?” or “How many acres do you own?” “What crops do you raise?” “What are your average production levels per acre?” *You could get very creative with the questions. For example, if a participant indicated they had a “pig” farm, you could ask if it is a feeder operation, a farrowing operation, a farrow-to-finishing operation, or a finishing operation.* This will give the participants a very real sense of how complex-farming operations can be. It is also important to point out that many times decision-makers are not intimately familiar with all aspects of the land use decisions that they need to regulate. The participants who are role playing as farmers will typically identify Dairy, Beef, Swine, Crops, or Vegetables as being their primary focus. To conclude this discussion, explain to the group that though these are different enterprises they are all **Agricultural Uses**. *For a younger group of participants, you could use the exercise for career development by asking questions related to salary like, “How much does a farmer make on an annual basis?”*
  
5. Now select or appoint 4 to 6 volunteers to be homeowners. Instruct them to place their \$250,000 homes someplace in the 10 square miles (*the price should be high enough to reflect upper scale homes in your area*). They can place their dwellings anywhere except on the road or in the area already designated as agricultural. After the homes are placed in the area, you can ask questions such as:
  - “Why did you locate here?”
  - “What type of occupation do you have to be able to pay for this house?”
  - “Do you need to get to work everyday?”

Some potential responses could include:

- “I located here because I want to”
- “To live close to a farm”
- “To be able to recreate on my land”
- “To have privacy”
- “To be close to my work”
- “To be close to my neighbor or friend”

After each person has shared their reason, you can share your observations about potential sprawling development; potential difficulties in providing public services such as garbage pickup, snow removal, road maintenance, emergency services, or police protection. Discuss the high cost of providing these services to residents located through out the plated area. Indicate that the participants have now dealt with **Residential Use**.

6. Next select 4 to 5 participants to be “entrepreneurs” or business people. Allow the participants to place their businesses anywhere in the ten square miles (except on the road, farms or homes). After the businesses are placed in the area, ask the participants, questions like:

- “What type of business is it?”
- “Why did you locate here?”

Potential responses could include:

- “Advertising reasons”
- “Easy access”
- “The land was cheap”
- “Nice mix of homes”
- “The service was needed here”

At this point, ask several homeowners if they “like” where this business is located and “why”. You may want to do the same with a farm or two. Indicate that this is a **Commercial Use** and emphasize the potential conflict between uses that may have been indicated. *For a younger group of participants you may want to incorporate the questions of salary and education to expand their career knowledge base.*

7. Now appoint or select 2 or 3 participants to be newly elected members of the school board. Emphasize that their first responsibility is to find a location for a new school. They are allowed to place the school anywhere in the ten square miles but not on a business, a home, a farm or the road. After the school has been located, ask a combination of the following questions:

- “Why did you place the school there?”
- “What type of school is it?”

- “How many students do you have?”
- “How many teachers do you employ?”

Possible responses could include:

- “We wanted to locate it close to the road for transporting students”
- “We wanted it to be close to homes where students live”
- “This was close to the middle of the area”
- “The land was cheap”
- “It was located close to teachers or services”

Ask a business or two if they like where the school is located. Do the same for the homeowners and farmers. At this point some very distinct conflict generally occurs. Explain that all schools are **Institutional Uses**. Other institutional uses could include prisons, colleges or asylums. *For a younger group of participants you may want to incorporate the questions related to salary and education, but focus on the teachers because the participants are role-playing as volunteer school board members. You could inquire about base salary for teachers and the educational requirements that are necessary for the teachers they hire.*

8. Next select 3 to 4 participants to be on the Board of Directors of a start-up industry, which plans to locate in the ten square mile area. Instruct the board that they can place the factory anywhere in the ten square miles but not on the road, homes, businesses or the school. Once the factory is located, ask different board members questions like:

- “What products are they producing?”
- “Why did they select this location?”
- “How many people do they employ?”

Possible responses could include:

- “The location is close to a major road”
- “There is room for expansion”
- “The land was cheap”
- “There wasn’t much development in this area”
- “The location was close to the labor supply”

Now ask two farmers, homeowners, business people or school board members if they like where this factory is located. This generally creates a tremendous amount of conflict, and you may have to cut off the discussion and move on. Explain that they have just dealt with an **Industrial Use** and that citing these types of uses can be very controversial. *At this point in the exercise (if you have time) you could add a different set of questions for the board of directors such as:*

- “Are your employees unionized?”
- “What is your base salary per hour?”
- “Do you have smoke stacks?”
- “How many?”
- “Do they have EPA approved scrubbers?”
- “Do you have wells?”
- “How many?”
- “Are they high capacity wells?”

9. Now select 4 to 6 participants to be members of a county board committee. They could be a highway, property, or solid waste committee, depending on the type of structure to be placed. Identify their task as one of locating a public service (this could be a solid waste land fill site, a new highway shop, or new county office building). This group can place this use on a farm, home, or business, but no other land uses. At this point in the process there is very little space open and usually a house or farm or business needs to be covered, or replaced by this public use. If this occurs, you need to explain that local units of government have the power of “Eminent Domain”, which allows them to condemn private property and pay “fair market” value for the property, if its use change better serves society. Next you ask the county board members, “Why did you locate it there?” Possible responses could include:

- “Proximity to road”
- “Open space”
- “Cheap land”
- “Least amount of development”
- “It was the only place left to develop”

Ask representatives from the different land uses if they agree where this land use was located. Generally there is considerable disagreement and conflict with this land use. Explain that this is a **Governmental/Public Use** and it is often very controversial.



10. If time permits, you may want to ask, “Do you feel this was an organized approach to addressing development?” The answer is usually “NO”. You can



further the discussion with another question like, “But isn’t this the way that development usually occurs in your area?” The answer is usually “YES”. Now you can ask the question, “If we wanted to look at a development plan that has less controversy, where would we start first?” Generally, the group starts with roads and work their way back from more controversial to less controversial land uses. In other words they think about how conflict in land use planning could be reduced. *At this point, for more mature audiences the exercise is completed with a discussion on how comprehensive land use planning is an important tool for minimizing conflict and serving the broad interests of the public.*

11. If your audience is a younger group of participants, you may want to introduce a couple of other land use concepts, such as forestry and recreation. These could also be substituted for farms if your region doesn’t have many agricultural uses. They could also be incorporated at the end of the activity as other types of “open” space land uses and explain why. At the close of the session you can ask the students to identify the different land uses that were discussed. They would be: Transportation, Agricultural, Residential, Commercial, Institutional, Industrial, Governmental, Forestry, and Recreational. This generally concludes the session but feel free to ad-lib.

#### **A sampling of testimonials from people who have participated, or used the activity:**

- Carol Feyen, Assistant Professor of Sociology, UW-Platteville... “Overall, I really enjoyed the exercise just as it is and the students by-in-large did too.” The presentation was given to her Senior Rural Sociology class and her Introductory Sociology class.
- The following comments are from several sixth grade teachers, who have taken part in the exercise ... “Excellent job involving every student, both actively and mentally”; “Your ability to stretch their thinking is fantastic”; “You were given challenges with both abnormal crops of this area and also with all millionaires living in the area. You accepted these student’s decisions, with humor and content, you continued the high quality flow of information and decision making discussion about land use issues”; “The activity went well. Each student took part in all aspects. By engaging all of the students, they had a stake in the activity and its outcome”; “Each year, after returning to school, the students rate the day’s activities. This exercise is always at, or near the top of their list. It has a ‘fun’ factor that they enjoy”; ”This exercise made the kids think and relate to several different issues and to think about how decisions affect different people.”
- Tim Kane, Ashland County Community Resource Development Agent: “Just a short note to thank you for your land use development hands-on decision making exercise. I shared it with my colleagues at our August 16<sup>th</sup> Northern District CRD Agent Land Use Planning and Zoning in-service at Lac du Flambeau...Your hands-on exercise is a very creative method of teaching land use principles.”

- Greg Wise, Associate Professor, shared comments from a graduate class, where he used the exercise to demonstrate role-playing techniques. “A good ‘basic’ orientation tool for people to begin to think about community planning.”... “Great way to approach new ideas and complications of development.”... “This exercise left a lasting impression; I feel it is very appropriate for adults. They would get a kick out of it and yet walk away with a greater understanding of the process and the people involved.”... “I think this is a wonderful idea for adults - very enjoyable - good dialogue.”... “Engaging each participant in the learning activity is very helpful.”... “This is a great tool for all learners.”... “I think the procedure was effective in showing how haphazard planning has been/can be and shows conflicting interests.”... “Exercise was excellent.”... “I thought the role playing was very engaging.”
- Glenn Bowles, Assistant Professor and Land Use Education Specialist, UW-Stevens Point, “Last December you gave me an educational land use presentation guide...Well I took it back to the classroom and had my first go at it on Thursday. We were discussing NIMBYs and LULUs for a class of juniors and seniors on Integrated Resource Management. Attached is my write up of the methods I used. As you can see, I adapted your outline, with some modifications. I will eventually put a discussion and possibly some pertinent literature citations in the future.”

