



Section 3: Civic Engagement and Social Capital

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The challenge of all master plans is to create a vision of the future that addresses both physical characteristics and social desires of the community. In Basalt we are endeavoring to create a compact urban form with emphasis on mixed-use development that is pedestrian and transit-oriented. One of the outcomes that the Town is striving for is social: to maintain its small-town character and its diversity of people, both residents and workers. Clearly, the intent is to keep Basalt from becoming stratified to the point that the Town loses its ability to function as a community.

The Master Plan presents many ideas designed to further the Town's ability to become more diverse and self-sufficient. This section of the Master Plan will focus on what makes a diverse and self-sufficient town active in solving its many problems. In other words, what can we do in the Master Plan to enhance the civic engagement of our community?

3.2 GOVERNANCE

Recent research in the field of government concludes that the performance of government and other social institutions is powerfully influenced by citizen engagement in community affairs or social capital. To demonstrate citizen engagement we can use the following model of governance:

Societal demands → *political interaction* → *government* → *policy choice* → *implementation*²

² *Making Democracy Work*, Putnam, Robert D., Princeton University Press, (1993).



Stated in another way: the Council/Town receive input from their social environment and produce output to respond to that environment. For example, parents seek recreation programs for their children and they voice their desires to the Council members and other Town officials. The government deliberates and acts to create a larger recreation program and build a swimming pool.

The above model of governance illustrates a “horizontal” relationship of reciprocity and cooperation, not a “vertical” relationship of dependency and authority. Clearly, the Town of Basalt functions in the horizontal relationship sphere. Scholars point out that our most successful communities function in the horizontal relationship sphere.

What allows a community to function effectively in the horizontal relationship sphere? Research shows that the answer lies in the community’s store of “social capital”. “Social capital enhances the benefits of investment in physical and human capital,” says Robert Putnam, noted political scientist and Dillon Professor of International Affairs at Harvard University. Given the above information, what constitutes social capital and how can our Master Plan address the issue of social capital?

3.3 WHAT IS SOCIAL CAPITAL?

Putnam states that social capital means features of social life – networks, norms, and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives. Examples of social capital can include bowling leagues, soccer clubs, swimming clubs, sewing groups, book clubs, Chamber of Commerce, sports groups in general, arts groups, music groups, theater groups, technical groups, professional organizations, etc. These groups create networks of citizens that come together for some mutual interest and they, in turn, create a network of citizens that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit and the benefit of the community. These networks not only help each other, they also create norms of behavior and trust that carry beyond personal relationships and can cross over from one group to another. These networks are self-starting, self-sustaining and self-enforcing. Experience shows that government creation of these groups is not effective.

3.4 FACILITATING SOCIAL CAPITAL

What can government do to facilitate social capital? Maintaining and enhancing diversity and self-sufficiency in the community; creating public spaces for citizens to interact (parks, trails, swimming pool, community centers, libraries, and cultural facilities); organizing land use in a manner so that people interact with each other (pedestrian-oriented vs. auto oriented development patterns, requiring a mix of land uses rather than requiring segregated land use patterns); permitting, encouraging and/or preserving informal gathering places (Two Rivers, Café Bernard, Basalt Bistro,



Taqueria, the bench outside of Café Bernard's, Post Office, movie theaters, the playing fields and open space around the middle and elementary schools, etc.); and facilitating a diversity of housing types and housing costs. Additionally, the Council members can educate their staff on the concept of social capital and its importance. Building a relationship of trust and cooperation between Town employees and the people we serve will build social capital.



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“The street café provides a unique setting, special to cities: a place where people can sit lazily, legitimately, be on view, and watch the world go by.”



A Pattern Language; Alexander, Ishikawa, Silverstein with Jacobson Fiksdahl-King and Angel, Oxford University Press (1977)



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