

**DIALOGUE AT THE GRASSROOTS: UNDERSTANDING COMMUNICATIONS IN A  
BOTTOM-UP APPROACH URBAN DEVELOPMENT PROJECT**

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## ABSTRACT

Developers, architects, and elected officials may experience opposition within a community when new projects are proposed in its neighbourhood, which often leads to disharmony. This action-oriented research project examines the communication process in a bottom-up approach to a Western Canadian building venture. The literature on relevant communication theories and concepts, with emphasis on dialogue, communicative action, and groupthink, is reviewed. It is hoped that the sense to be made of this research, which identifies communication weaknesses in the project's community advisory committee meetings, will facilitate future developers and community members working together in similar, bottom-up-approach projects. By extrapolation, learning exists for all who work on committees and aspire to a more effective communication process.

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Thanks to the Ivy House Hotel\* Project Team and the members of the Community Advisory Committee, especially those who gave of their time to be interviewed, either in person or by mail; thanks for expressing yourselves so openly and honestly. A special thanks to Ian and Janet Easton\* who so generously allowed me to use their hotel to conduct this research project. I sincerely hope that no participants will be offended by any of my reporting, which I have made every attempt to remain rigidly true to. I trust that you will extract knowledge and awareness, as I have, that will be useful in future community projects.

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\* Pseudonyms have been used to preserve the confidentiality of interviewees.

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## CHAPTER ONE

## STUDY BACKGROUND

*The Opportunity: Oh no, not another committee!*

After many years working on committees, I had become acutely aware of how the nature and style of a committee's communication process could have a significant impact on the outcome of its work. Too often, committee work was mere debate, with no preceding dialogue to establish a framework and shared language, and no build-up of mutual trust and understanding to help establish parameters for negotiation and decision-making. Where a committee should have had the advantage of a diversity of viewpoints, too often, many I served on were arenas for procrastination and unsatisfactory compromise. Charles Kettering, the inventor of the electrical ignition system, must have had similar experiences on committees: "If you want to kill any idea in the world today," he quipped, "get a committee working on it" (Quotable Online, n.d., ¶ 5).

In June of 2004, I found myself on a committee once again when asked to represent residents in my condominium on a Community Advisory Committee (CAC), which was being formed to help determine the outcome of a project in my neighbourhood—it would be a liberal, bottom-up approach to private development in a neighbourhood not known for embracing change. I saw here an intriguing opportunity as a participant to observe the committee communication process first-hand, and to report observations and deductions in a definitive case study. This could have significant benefit to other developers and community groups undergoing similar building projects. The CAC work would require participants to communicate closely, but how they communicated could affect the project outcome. With insight into communication theories and the importance of dialogue, committee members universally might apply the information revealed in this research project to achieve more efficient communication, which in turn should lead to more effective committee deliberations.

Project Background: *The Ivy House Hotel has to go.*

Because of the sensitive nature of this project, throughout the narrative that follows I have used pseudonyms for all persons, places, and events, although in most cases anonymity was not requested.

In the early part of the 20th Century, the Ivy House Hotel was built in a quiet residential suburb in Western Canada. Over the years it changed hands; but in the seventies it was purchased by the Easton family who presently own it. Changes and additions were made at various times to increase the number of guest rooms, to expand and improve the dining and food preparation facilities, to make better use of the stunning mountain and sea views, and to accommodate a variety of waterfront activities. In time, it was determined that the aging hotel would need to undergo extensive seismic upgrading and renovations in order to ensure a sustainable future as a hotel that could be used by both able and handicapped guests. This would be costly, and, according to the owners and experts in the field, it would not be cost effective. The gracious old hotel would need to be demolished and a new hotel erected in its place.

The alternative to a hotel was to build condominiums for which the property was appropriately zoned. However, the Eastons stated openly that they preferred to remain in the hotel business rather than to sell to developers who could tear the hotel down and build more multi-unit housing buildings, several of which already existed in the area. Well-advertised meetings held at the hotel determined that there was a definite community preference for keeping a hotel on the site. The Eastons had several criteria that they needed to fulfil, though. These included a minimum number of hotel rooms and strata title units; an 80% room inventory with either full or partial ocean views; a five-star amenity package; a meeting space to accommodate up to 150; seaside mineral pools; increased visual impact from the street; outdoor public spaces; a marine facility; certain food and beverage facilities including keeping *The Doggy*, a revered

neighbourhood drinking spot; architecture that would mesh with the area's history; underground parking and services; a building that would meet seismic and handicap codes; and a minimum 100,000 square feet of building that would incorporate food, accommodation, and spa services. A new hotel would mean new zoning—a change from the present *grandfathered in* hotel zoning. Before work could begin, zoning changes and building plans would need the approval of the local Ivy Harbour Municipal Council.

The Eastons were familiar with an architectural firm whose market-oriented philosophy had won the praises of the development community. They met with Thomas Caret, chairman of the internationally-reputed architecture and planning practice, The Caret Group, to discuss the options that might be open to them. The Caret Group offices were located in a large city nearby. The range of work the firm specialized in included urban design, industrial and commercial projects, housing, and master planning. For approximately 30 years, its designers had worked on more than 50,000 housing units on five continents, on such projects as ownership and vacation condominiums, and hotel projects, several of which had received awards. The company used computers as design, technical, and communication aids, which was, in part, the reason for their considerable success. As well, they had been engaged by both private and public sector clients in preparing and presenting information to obtain funding or to assist in the marketing of designs. They understood well that ultimately it is the consumer who determines the success of a building's design. But it was the Caret Group's practice of incorporating stakeholder workshops into the design process that initially had appealed to the Eastons. They knew it would not be an easy process to persuade the Ivy House regular clients and neighbours that change was necessary; many of them were elderly and had grown up with the much-loved stately old hotel as part of their community. The median age of the approximately 18,000 Ivy Harbour residents was

48, with 38% of the population being over the age of 55, compared to only 23% of residents aged over 55 in the whole province (Statistics Canada, 2001).

The Eastons planned two community meetings. Newspaper advertisements and personal letters invited both neighbours and other interested citizens to meet the Project Team at a pre-launch presentation. The agenda included several key issues including:

- Why there was a need for change, and why now.
- Why the change would involve the removal of the existing building.
- Why the community would be involved in the planning process.

The first public information meeting was held June 30, 2004 at the Ivy House Hotel.

Approximately 35 citizens either put their names forward or were nominated to be part of the Community Advisory Committee (CAC). These were people interested in guiding the design process by participating in a three-day workshop led by Thomas Caret, and subsequent meetings for the next five months. From the names put forward, a 17-member Advisory Committee was formed. At first, Easton thought a large group would be appropriate, but Thomas Caret convinced him to keep the group smaller. The final say as to who was on the committee was at the discretion of the developers. According to Ian Easton, they “specifically watched for individuals who had a broad interest in the future of the community” (personal communication, May 19, 2005). They were especially interested in people with known concerns about change on the hotel site, and saw the members’ roles as “advising as to perspectives they were aware of in the community.” It was also hoped that they would “believe in the outcome of the process, and give support to, or at least offer advice toward obtaining community support, with respect to the design outcomes.” As Thomas Caret explained: “We tried to get representatives of the different constituencies and of the neighbouring properties” (personal communication, May 20, 2005). Easton believed that the majority of the CAC members chosen had enough local information and

expertise to make valid decisions on the proposal. Thomas Caret saw the CAC as people who would have “insight into the feelings of the community and would be able to comment, not just personally, but from the point of view of the constituency they represented” (personal communication). When asked if he doubted the wisdom of involving the public in the development phase of the project, Easton said he found it “unnerving to have outsiders determining to a great degree our personal business destiny” but that he “liked the sense of community that emerged” (personal communication, May 19, 2005).

The Ivy House Hotel project appeared to illustrate a commitment from the developers to account fully to the community and a willingness to involve the advisory committee in each step of the redevelopment. The architect had experience creating stakeholder advisory workshops, a concept which the hotel owners enthusiastically supported—they had witnessed other local development proposals, where the community was not included, falter. At no time did I, as a participant, observe committee members openly questioning the sincerity of the developers, although some may have doubted the authenticity of the process at the beginning.

The project’s further progress is revealed in the research methodology chapter, Chapter 3, and through the interviews that comprise part of the research study results in Chapter 4. The Ivy House Hotel project’s outcome to this date, June 2005, is outlined in Chapter 6.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *Definitions and Theories.*

To understand the communication process experienced by the groups of actors in the Ivy House Hotel development venture, a review of the literature on Dialogue, Groups, Communicative Action, and Groupthink was conducted. As well, a brief review of the literature on neighbourhood and civic involvement in urban planning and the NIMBY syndrome added further understanding to the complex communication process in this project.

*Groups.* This thesis is concerned primarily with the communication within a particular group; therefore the concept of what constitutes what is and what is not a group needs defining. A group is popularly considered to be a collection of people. A more scholarly approach is taken by Rothwell (2003) who defines a group as “a system of three or more individuals who are focused on achieving a common purpose and who influence and are influenced by each other” (as cited in Dainton & Zelle, 2005, p. 152). Rothwell (2003) believes that groups are inescapable because they are essential to our society. He feels that as so much of our life revolves around groups, learning to communicate competently in this arena maximises the benefits of group participation for ourselves and others, which he describes as “a worthwhile and practical goal” (p. 3). Dainton & Zelle (2005) describe how a group’s structure and its patterns of communication typically emerge through interaction. Brown (2000) defines a group as existing when two or more people define themselves as members of it and when its existence is recognized by at least one other. Most groups can simply be characterized as “a collection of people bound together by some common experience or purpose, or who are interrelated in a micro-social structure, or who interact with one another” (p. 4). The CAC was focused on achieving the common goal of providing useful input into the design of a new hotel. By

interacting with each other, influencing each other, and being influenced by each other as it will be shown they were, they fit both Dainton and Zelle's and Rothwell's definitions and criteria.

*Dialogue.* Usually when people come together and form a group it is for a predetermined purpose, either to be entertained or to accomplish a task. If such a group of people is invited to give their time and attention to a task that has no apparent goal and is not being led in any detectable direction, it may quickly find itself experiencing a great deal of frustration. This can lead to the desire on the part of some, either to break up the group or to attempt to take control and give it direction. These sentiments on group problems were reflected by Bohm, Factor, and Garrett (1991) in their discussion about the purpose of dialogue. They wanted to expose dialogue as a way of "exploring the roots of the many crises that face humanity today" (§ 1). They felt dialogue enabled inquiry into, and understanding of, the sorts of processes that fragment and interfere with real communication between individuals, nations, and even different parts of the same organization. Part of the process of dialogue and what sustains it, they posited, is that previously unacknowledged purposes will reveal themselves, strong feelings will be exposed, fixed positions may be taken, and polarization will often result. Bohm, Factor, and Garrett go on to suggest that not only do these characteristics sustain dialogue, but they are what keeps it constantly extending creatively into new domains.

Communication within groups can be transformed by dialogue. It represents a way to look at how groups of people think, make decisions and choices, and how they learn together. Different from *discussion*, dialogue tends to bring people together in new ways. In his slim and engaging treatise *On Dialogue*, physicist and philosopher, David Bohm (2004), expresses these sentiments. He illustrates the meaning of *discussion* by comparing it to a ping pong game, "where people are batting the ideas back and forth and the object of the game is to win or to get points for yourself" (p. 7). In dialogue, however, nobody is trying to win. Rather than winning

points, whenever any mistake is made, everybody gains. Bohm sees dialogue as a common participation in which we are not playing a game against each other, but rather, with each other. Its intention is not to evoke argument, but to focus on what causes barriers to communication. It seeks to establish a means for people to discover and analyze the prejudices and presumptions that influence their beliefs and feelings, and to openly share their realizations. Kaminski (2005) describes dialogue as a tool that supports the diversity of group members. The differences between people's messages become *clear* rather than *wrong*. Each group member has a unique experience to bring to the table—through dialogue their talents and reflections are shared and valued as part of the uniqueness of the group (¶ 8).

Understanding the nature of dialogue can help transform assumptions about what constitutes open and honest communication, or *good* conversation. These assumptions, according to Isaacs (1999) include “confusions and inner contradictions in values like openness, beliefs about how we must structure and manage conversations, and the role of the facilitator” (p. 330). Isaacs identifies practical applications for dialogue, which he believes begin from within. He invites the reader to ask the question: “How successful am I at listening to and speaking with myself?” (p. 79). To accomplish dialogue effectively, Isaacs identifies four key building blocks: “listening, respecting, suspending, and voicing” (p. 79) that correspond to what he determines are the counterbalancing principles of dialogue: “participation, coherence, awareness, and unfolding” (p. 81).

Social scientist, Daniel Yankelovich (2001), describes three core requirements of dialogue: an acceptance of equality between the parties, an attempt at listening with empathy, and a willingness to reveal any assumptions. He reinforces the distinction Isaacs (1999) makes between debate and dialogue—Isaacs describes unproductive or controlled discussion devolving

frequently into debate—by underscoring debate's combative nature and dialogue's collaborative spirit. Yankelovich lists *15 Strategies for Dialogue* he has deduced from observing successful dialogue, which include tips for gaining and maintaining trust and for clarifying communication barriers. He has also devised *10 Potholes of the Mind* that make the “road to dialogue difficult to travel” (p. 130) which include holding back, listening without hearing, showboating, having a pet preoccupation, and scoring debating points. These *potholes* identify prejudicial or unfocused behaviours that negatively impact on dialogue. (See Appendix G for Yankelovich’s *Strategies* and *Potholes*.)

Ellinor and Gerard (1998) have also put a practical face to dialogue, and propose strategies designed to help bring its principles and values to one’s daily work in order to foster powerful conversations that will create and sustain collaborative partnerships. They consider two essentials for dialogue: creating a safe environment where all can speak their truths, and shifting towards sharing responsibility and information. They propose that leaders’ “attitudes and behaviour will be the single most powerful support or obstacle to fostering dialogue” (p. 173). These observations are quite relevant to the CAC, as its purpose was to create collaborative relationships for the purpose of assisting the Project Team in designing a suitable plan for the new hotel. Successful collaborative relationships require a keen awareness and understanding of the processes that influence effective communication. Information sharing and proactive listening by all parties help create a secure and safe meeting environment, where, instead of precipitating argument, participants help reveal what causes barriers to communications—and in the end, everyone gains.

*Communicative action.* Famed German philosopher and social theorist, Jürgen Habermas (1976/1979), argues strongly for dialogue. He has developed the thesis “that anyone acting communicatively must, in performing any speech action, raise universal validity claims and

suppose that they can be vindicated” (p. 2). In order to reach understanding, Habermas posits, a person “cannot avoid raising the following—and indeed precisely the following—validity claims. He claims to be:

- (a) *Uttering* something understandably;
- (b) Giving the hearer *something* to understand;
- (c) Making *himself* thereby understandable; and
- (d) Coming to an understanding *with another person*” (p. 2).

Only as long as participants in dialogue suppose that the validity claims they reciprocally raise are justified, according to Habermas (1976/1979), can communicative action continue undisturbed—the goal of coming to an understanding is to bring about an agreement that terminates in reciprocal understanding, shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accord with one another. He suggests further that the agreement is based on recognition of the corresponding validity claims of comprehensibility, truth, truthfulness, and rightness. It is this communicative action—“the capacity for people to work through disagreements to achieve effective solutions to problems” (Stringer, 1999, p. 32)—that brings about positive change. Habermas (1981/1984) describes two general rules: that there is no manipulation involved in the communication, and that the validity of what is communicated is open to question. These rules, he suggests, enable the communicative actions to be controlled by speech acts that are evaluated on the basis of better arguments related to at least three validity claims:

1. That the statement made is true; . . .
2. That the speech act is right with respect to the existing normative context . . . and
3. That the manifest intention of the speaker is meant as it is expressed (p. 99).

Johnson (1991) explains Habermas's theory thus: communicative action is not merely conversation—it is discourse, debate, argument, all of which must work towards a consensus. “Communicative action is goal oriented, aimed toward reaching understanding. . . . According to Habermas, it draws its force from consent” (p. 188). Interaction takes place on the basis of an already achieved common grounding of the situation, and there is a real wish to understand the other side of the communication. If it is to be effective communication, Habermas's ideal situation needs four fundamental conditions to be met, those of understanding, truth, sincerity and appropriateness (Stringer, 1999). Stringer provides examples where these four conditions are often not met:

- (a) There is a complexity of language, whether intended or otherwise—this can lead to a lack of *understanding*.
- (b) *Truth* becomes questionable when attempts are made to persuade or deceive—when people think they have been tricked or duped, they are often unable to work harmoniously with those they feel have cheated them.
- (c) When there is a lack of *sincerity*; for example, when leaders and other communicators merely go through the actions or have different agendas to their stated intentions, communication will be ineffective.
- (d) When the speaker's style or manner of communicating is culturally *inappropriate*, effective communication is jeopardized.

Keeping in mind that effective communication was an essential part of the CAC process, the results will show that some of these conditions, in particular the difficulty of obtaining important information and a lack of clarity on the CAC's *raison d'etre*, were brought into question by individual members of the CAC.

*Groupthink*. In contrast to rational communicative action is a concept known as *groupthink*. It was first introduced by Yale social psychologist, Irving Janis (1972), who defined it as “a dysfunctional way of deliberating that group members use when their desire for unanimity overrides their motivation to assess all available plans of action” (as cited in Dainton & Zelle, 2005, p. 163). It is the psychological drive for consensus at any cost, that suppresses disagreement and prevents the appraisal of alternatives in cohesive, decision-making groups:

When groups “go along to get along” the end result of the decision-making process is likely to be less effective than if group members question the information at hand, being careful to look at the problem from a variety of perspectives. (Dainton & Zelle, 2005, p. 164)

It was the intended purpose of the CAC to provide a variety of perspectives in the hotel project and hopefully, avoid the "go along to get along" syndrome.

Janis (1982) has identified such instances as the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Vietnam War, and the bombing of Pearl Harbour as resulting from groupthink—occasions when collective presumptions were so strong that mechanisms established to guard against and challenge groupthink were not used. In more recent events, *CBC News Online* (July 9, 2004), quotes Pat Roberts, the Republican chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, thus: “The intelligence community suffered from ‘collective group think’ in reaching the unwarranted conclusion that Iraq was actively pursuing nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programs” (¶ 4).

Although one may presume that high-cohesive groups would be more effective than low-cohesive groups in making the right decision and in achieving their goals, it is this very solidarity, according to Janis (1982), which causes their mental process to get stuck:

The more amiability and esprit de corps among members of a policy-making in-group, the greater is the danger that independent critical thinking will be replaced by groupthink. . . . The social constraint consists of the members' strong wish to preserve the harmony of the group, which inclines them to avoid creating any discordant arguments or schisms (as cited in Griffin, 1997, ¶ 10).

Social psychologist, Kurt Lewin, ranks as one of the founders of group dynamics, a concept he studied in the 1940s (Janis, 1982). Lewin emphasized the importance of cohesiveness. He found that when group cohesiveness is high, members express positive feelings about attending meetings and carrying out the tasks of the group. However, as Janis explains, while Lewin emphasized the need for “fact-finding and objective appraisal of alternatives” (p. 4) to determine whether a group's goals would be achieved, he was “most interested in the positive effects of group cohesiveness and did not investigate instances when members of cohesive groups make gross errors and fail to correct their shared misjudgements” (p. 4). Groups such as the CAC can be friends and neighbours in life, but to guard against making poor decisions and to achieve effective communication, they need to understand that they do not have to reach outright consensus—individual critical thinking does not imply that friendships will be damaged.

As well as cohesiveness, there are two other antecedent conditions to groupthink—necessary, but not sufficient conditions. These are: structural flaws and situational characteristics (Janis, 1982, as cited in Dainton & Zelle, 2005). One such structural flaw is group insulation—how the group is isolated or disconnected from the larger world. Janis's second structural flaw is biased leadership—the leader's mind is made up, and because of the power differences, group members may defer to the leader. During deliberations, the group's leader may be quite sincere in asking for honest opinions—it is not a case of deliberately trying to get the group to tell him what he wants to hear. Nor are the group members necessarily transformed into sycophants or

cheerleaders. They are not afraid to speak their minds. Nevertheless, according to Janis (1982), ever-so-subtle pressures, which the leader may apply inadvertently, prevent a group member “from fully exercising his critical powers and from openly expressing doubts when most others in the group appear to have reached a consensus” (p. 3). Janis’s third structural flaw is a lack of procedural norms. If no process is in place for decision-making, vital steps may be missed resulting in wrong decisions. His final structural flaw is homogeneity—if the group members are similar in backgrounds, beliefs, or values, they are less likely to challenge other members. The third antecedent condition, which Janis describes as situational characteristics, may manifest itself as high stress caused by time—pressure to make a decision quickly, or external pressures such as those imposed by people or organizations with influence. Moral dilemmas and either-or demands, such as, if you do not make this decision now then this less-attractive alternative will be the only viable answer, are further examples of situational characteristics.

Janis (2003, ¶ 2) lists eight symptoms indicative of concurrence-seeking—when group loyalty causes members to slip into a groupthink mentality: 1) the illusion of invulnerability creating excessive optimism and risk-taking; 2) collective efforts to rationalize in order to discount warnings that could lead to reconsidering a decision; 3) a belief in the group’s inherent morality, leading members to disregard the moral consequences of their decisions; 4) stereotyping, where other groups are looked upon poorly; 5) pressures toward uniformity on members who express arguments against the mainstream, making clear that this type of dissent is contrary to what is expected; 6) self-censorship—when in doubt, group members tend to say nothing so as not to *rock the boat*; 7) the shared illusion of unanimity—some group members perceive that consensus has been reached, and, although this is not the case, their silence is interpreted as consent; 8) self-appointed mindguards—members who self-censor so that any information they perceive to be troublesome to the leaders is withheld, even when they know this

information may be vital to the final group decision—they don't want to ruin the shared complacency about the effectiveness and morality of their decisions.

Like individuals, all groups have shortcomings. They can bring out the worst as well as the best in man. Janis (1982) describes how German philosopher Nietzsche (who eventually went mad), went so far as to say that “madness is the exception in individuals but the rule in groups” (p. 3). Group madness is rare, of course, and is usually confined to circumstances of extreme crisis. Much more frequent are “instances of mindless conformity and collective misjudgement of serious risks, which are collectively laughed off in a clubby atmosphere of relaxed conviviality” (Janis, 1982, p. 3), in other words, groupthink.

In her autobiography, Hillary Rodham Clinton (2003) touched on the undesirability of groupthink: "In a rarefied environment like the White House, I don't think you can afford to surround yourself with people whose temperaments and views are always in synch. The meetings might run on schedule, but easy consensus can lead over time to poor decisions" (p. 289). This suggests that if groups become familiar with Janis's groupthink concept, they will make better-informed decisions. As the research data in Chapter Four will show, some CAC members recognised a groupthink mentality in their meetings, which they believed were characterized by uncritical acceptance and conformity to prevailing points of view.

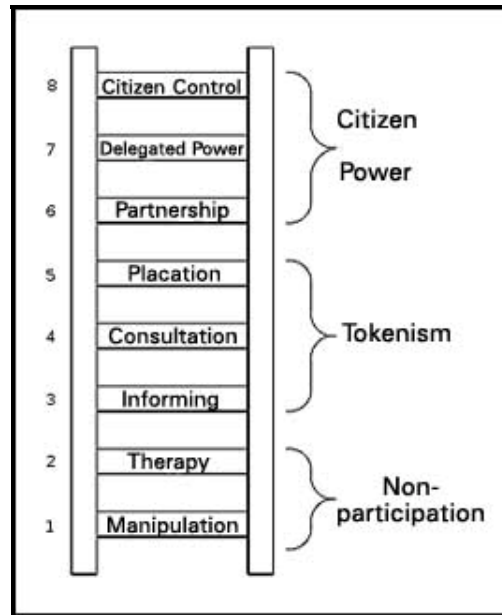
Experienced management consultants put mechanisms in place to avoid groupthink. One such method is to place responsibility for a decision in the hands of one person, who can turn to others for advice when in doubt. Another method is to appoint someone “to play *devil's advocate* and to challenge the group, looking for false inferences and overlooked information” (Hilleard, 2004, ¶ 7). For example, if an individual member of the group takes the role of disagreeing with suggestions presented, this then gives other members more courage to find problems or flaws with the suggestions, and to come up with alternate plans to circumvent these problems. This

reduces the stigma associated with being the first to assume a negative stance. Practical applications of Hilleard's groupthink avoidance mechanisms are discussed further in the recommendations outlined in Chapter Five.

*Citizen participation in neighbourhood planning.* Too often, major decisions affecting communities are made from some distant, centralized government or corporate office. Before the upsurge in community activism in the 1950s and 1960s, when grassroots citizens gained some control over the urban renewal process, relocations had had devastating effects on communities (Peterman, 2000). Gans (1982) described how the destruction of Boston's West End neighbourhood "exacted social and psychological losses. The clearance destroyed not only the buildings, but also a functioning social system" (p. 362). Eventually governments were forced to include citizens in the planning process, until, in 1966, the United States passed the Model Cities Act to require that maximum feasible citizen participation would become the norm in urban renewal programs (Peterman, 2000). But just how much control do citizens, such as the participants on the Ivy House CAC, really have in their communities, and is this real control, or just a sham?

Sherry Arnstein (1969) laid out "a typology of eight levels of citizen participation in the form of a ladder" (as cited in Peterman, 2000, p. 39). As shown in Figure 1, the bottom rungs depict non-participation—i.e. instances where the decisions have already been made. Arnstein describes citizens being "placed on rubberstamp advisory committees or advisory boards for the express purpose of 'educating' them or engineering their support" (¶ 13). Instead of genuine citizen participation, there is a distortion of participation into a public relations vehicle by those who hold power. Arnstein's middle rungs depict tokenism—no matter how involved the community appears to be in the decision making, it is really a charade, as "no serious efforts are made to incorporate the will of the community into the process" (Peterman, 2000, p. 40). In other

words, citizens are heard but not heeded. The emphasis is placed on “a one-way flow of information - from officials to citizens - with no channel provided for feedback and no power for negotiation” (Arnstein, 1969, ¶ 25). The top three rungs signify partnership, delegated power, and citizen control, where real empowerment occurs.



*Figure 1.* Ladder of Citizen Participation (Lithgow, n.d.).

Arnstein (1969) sees a critical difference between the empty ritual of participation and that of having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process. Peterman (2000) has pointed out, that “empowerment or control, brought about through community organization, seems to be a necessary requirement . . . to bring about neighbourhood-driven community development” (p. 38).

McInroy (2004) sees bottom-up approaches, including solutions shaped by local people, unlike top-down solutions shaped by professionals, as being “the key means by which the delivery of policies . . . can be successful” (p. 33). Kaufman (1997), in writing on the strengths and weaknesses and the limits and potential of communities in Central America, combines

events on the ground with theory that helps in understanding the nuances of grassroots' participation and power. "Participation" he writes, "is a broad and often vague concept. It can refer to everything from voting to . . . participating in a neighbourhood committee that has power to direct a process of local change" (p. 6). But the fundamental aspect in any analysis of participation, according to Kaufman, is not to get lost in the myriad different organizations and activities. The key question is "whether these organizations constitute meaningful participatory institutions of empowerment" (p. 7), a question asked by several participants concerning the CAC's role, as will be shown in Chapter Four.

While Arnstein (1969), Kaufman (1997), and McNroy (2004) advocate the advantages of a bottom-up approach and insist that local knowledge must never be underestimated, some authors have more confidence in a top-down process within transparent and accountable programs. Nevill (2004) believes time is saved when proper planning and funding and established objectives and guidelines are provided, and that a bottom-up approach wastes resources by reinventing wheels. An ECOTEC and Notre Europe Seminar (March, 2004) report paints a critical picture of working with community representatives. The report cites a study done by Britain's Economic and Social Research Council that found that community involvement can actually become a barrier to development because of "extreme positions, conflicting political agendas, clashing cultures and the diverging objectives of certain self-interested groups" (Jouen, 2004, p. 36). Simon Danczuk (as cited in ECOTEC, 2004), the director of a social research consultancy specializing in community engagement, believes community groups need to be stable and their skills need to be sufficient to deliver the necessary goods. Questions that should be asked when a group or board is being formed, according to Danczuk, should include: "Does the group have the necessary staying power? Does it have credibility within? If personalities come on board, how do you balance different interests?" (p. 42). In the hotel project, Ian Easton

explained how he “specifically watched for individuals who had a broad interest in the future of the community” (personal communication, May 19, 2005) when forming the CAC. Thomas Caret described how they “tried to get representatives of the different constituencies and representatives of the neighbouring properties” (personal communication, May 20, 2005). One CAC member, Anne Crowther, who was concerned the hotel’s historical value would be forgotten, felt “the fact that three people belonging to heritage societies were included was a good sign right from the beginning” (personal communication, March 16, 2005).

While some scholars such as Jouen (2004) may believe that carefully constructed organizational structures and plans are important, others, such as Nevill (2004), believe that “achieving the ‘top-down bottom up’ balance must extend beyond structure” (§ 18)—to rely on either side alone will inevitably get an unsatisfactory result, maybe even disaster. Not only should both approaches be complimentary, says Nevill, but they “should be used judiciously to support each other” (§ 17).

*The NIMBY syndrome.* Discussion of citizens’ participation in urban building projects often leads to a discussion of NIMBY, an acronym for Not In My Back Yard, which refers to opposition by local residents to the construction of intrusive facilities. More formally, NIMBY refers to “the protectionist attitudes of and oppositional tactics adopted by community groups facing an unwelcome development in their neighbourhood” (Dear, 1992, § 4). Citizens may be concerned with increased traffic due to high density housing units, obstructed views, or loss of open spaces. Such opposition typically comes from homeowners who fear that such developments will cause the resale value of their real estate to fall. As Dear explains, the NIMBY syndrome gained prominence in the 1970s as concern arose among researchers and the popular press that citizens could routinely and most often successfully oppose facilities such as hazardous waste disposals. The name may be new, but the syndrome is far from new. In 1898, in

“A Historical Address on Our Canadian Institutions for the Insane,” T. W. Burgess, in describing opposition by neighbours to the erection of a new asylum, spoke of “a public nuisance . . . a source of injury and damage to them, decreasing the value of their property” (as cited in Dear, 1992, ¶ 7). In its early usage, the NIMBY syndrome characterized citizens as (a) overly emotional, uninformed, and unscientific in their opposition to these facilities, (b) motivated by narrow, selfish interests; and (c) obstructing policies that would provide for the collective good (McAvoy, 1999, p. 3). However, recent studies challenge these characteristics. McAvoy quotes Gerrard (1995) who argues that citizen participation is justified, particularly concerning such instances as the location of hazardous waste facilities, where fairness must prevail. McAvoy sees the recent NIMBY literature as “a defence of democratic decision-making on the grounds that citizens are not wholly selfish and parochial and that their participation in the process may even help them see the need for such facilities” (p. 4).

Bretherton and Dowling (n.d.) cite Yarzebinsky (1992) who describes communities becoming increasingly aware of the adverse effects of development, leading to NIMBY sentiments becoming more and more prevalent. Bretherton and Dowling also cite authors Connor (1988), Endries (1989), Kiser (1992), O’Hare (1992), Schlossberg (1993) and Young (1990), who have given advice on how to effectively deal with NIMBY groups in order to smooth the progress of development approval. Their methods include public consultation and dissemination of relevant information to the community as early as possible; developing risk-management programs; encouraging dialogue; recognising the sincerity of the community stance; adopting a flexible approach for dealing with individuals and local groups; and monitoring community views. More pro-active methods include nurturing trust and confidence between the developer and the community by actively involving community members in the process; offering financial contributions to the immediate community; guaranteeing retention of property values for

neighbours; and facilitating information exchange by using multi-disciplinary economic developers to work as intermediaries between the project developers and the community. In short, Bretherton and Dowling believe the literature suggests that in order to soften the NIMBY syndrome as much as possible, businesses should “go beyond the legal disclosure requirements of the planning process, and actively incorporate the community from the very beginning of the project” (¶ 6), which was what the majority of CAC members understood was the intended reason for their formation, as will be shown in the data in Chapter Four.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### *A Qualitative Approach*

This research project was conducted in an effort to reach better understanding of the communications within the CAC so that future similar undertakings might learn from the process. Therefore, a qualitative research approach, which was not only interpretative and inductive, and, because I was a member of the CAC, also participatory and observational, was chosen. A qualitative method “eschews the use of numbers and uses verbal descriptions of communicative phenomena” (Dainton & Zelle, 2005, p. 17) while studying the details of meaning making. A detailed or *thick* description of the communicative interactions are provided in the research results in the following chapter so that readers can judge for themselves whether and how the analysis is relevant to them (Baxter & Babbie, 2004).

#### *A Phenomenological Approach.*

The approach was also phenomenological in that I took what was presented to me and tried to extract the kernel of what I experienced to make sense of the whole experience in broader terms. I had often observed how communication processes affected meeting outcomes, and here was an opportunity to delve in through dialogue to the essence of this process and try to understand the experience. Heidegger (1953/1962) describes phenomenology as the study of structures of experience, or consciousness; its central notion is the identification that experience is the basis of knowledge. He claims that phenomenology should make manifest what is hidden in ordinary, everyday experience. He argues that the lifeworld (everyday life) is peripherally present in any thought or activity we undertake, yet whenever we attempt to explain this world conceptually, we seem to forget our active participation within it. According to Heidegger, phenomenology “signifies primarily a methodological conception. This expression does not

characterize the *what* of the objects of philosophical research as subject matter, but rather the *how* of that research” (p. 50). Van Manen (1997) argues the phenomenological method “requires an ability to be reflective, insightful, sensitive to language, and constantly open to experience” (¶ 4). In choosing a phenomenological approach, I have adhered to these principles.

#### *Participant Observation.*

This research technique is used “to study social situations or organizations from an insider’s perspective” (Rubin, Rubin & Piele, 2000, p. 206) and was my primary research methodology. The members of the CAC were asked individually if they would participate in group interviews, which would make further meaning of the interactive meeting process. The end result is an analytic description of the communication process that moves from specific observations to generalizations. As I was able to take part in the discussions both during the meetings and when interviewing the participants subsequent to the meetings, I could take note of the interactions between the various members as they grew to know each other, which aided in the analysis of the process. As the term *participant observation* implies, I was a participating member of an existing group, and was therefore recognized by the other members as non-threatening—I was one of them. My position meant that I could “gain insight into the obligations, constraints, motivations, and emotions that members experience . . . a prerequisite to making effective claims about communication” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 4). Only by living the experience and then describing and interpreting its significance, could I make that experience useful to a reader.

#### *The CAC Workshops.*

The first discussions were held during a three-day workshop from July 27 to 29, with subsequent meetings held August 28, October 8, October 18, November 8, and November 18, followed by a post mortem meeting after the Council decision on December 13. Meeting dates

were announced by the hotel's Director of Communications, Louisa Kamal, by mailed letter. On one occasion, several dates were presented so that one could be chosen that suited the majority. All workshops and meetings were led by the developers, Ian and Janet Easton, and the architect, Thomas Caret. Other members of the Project Team who attended were the hotel manager, Barry Klute, the financial advisor, Vince Knight, an architect from the Caret Group, Juan Antonio Rosado, and the communications director, Louisa Kamal, who attended as an observer to report on the activities and decisions. A handout we CAC members received at the first workshop outlined the committee workshops' purpose, that being: "to integrate the various needs of the owners and those of the Ivy Harbour Community in order to reach an acceptable concept for the future Ivy House Hotel building, which would be presented to council by a united workshop team" (I. Easton, personal communication, July 27, 2004). Each participant was required to agree to several *Goals and Expectations*, which were:

1. To listen to and balance the needs of every individual and group represented in the workshop to reach an acceptable outcome.
2. To realise it was a team effort, and that its success required each to participate as a team player.
3. To understand that no one person would be permitted to dominate the discussion, and that as a group and as individuals, everyone's right to voice their concerns, suggestions, passions, and ideas, even if there was disagreement, would be respected.
4. To always respond with courtesy and respect and to conduct themselves in a professional manner.
5. To acknowledge that it would be a give and take process—that sacrifices would be required of all, but wherever possible, all would strive to meet compromise with the aim

of reaching a solution that would be acceptable for the whole group, not just individuals (I. Easton, personal communication, July 27, 2004).

The developers, in order to preserve the integrity of the workshop process, reserved the right to remove any participant who was unwilling to adhere to their goals and expectations. This was not necessary, however, as all members agreed to and complied with these conditions.

Prior to the meetings, members were asked by the developers to give permission to reveal their name, the group they represented, any past experience that may pertain to their participation, photo releases, and quoted statements for purposes of issuing news releases to keep the public informed. They were also asked to be willing to be available to the media for comment if requested. Everyone agreed to these stipulations. I was approached once by the media, as were others, and we were quoted accurately in various reports. The editor of the local newspaper wrote an editorial in favour of the proposal, and other articles had an upbeat tone.

#### *Post-Workshop Meetings*

The meetings were held as roundtable discussions at a long table in a room that is part of the hotel complex. They were always cordial. In all cases, I noted at least 85% attendance. The Eastons were most hospitable, generously providing dinner with wine, or light snacks and beverages for each session. Discussions included feedback from the community on interior space, exterior character, and on the waterfront development. The developers kept the committee up to date via personal communications and newsletters, always cordially thanking members for their time spent and for the different perspectives presented. Undertakings were promised that all the points raised during the meetings would be dealt with—the CAC members were given a strong feeling that the design proposal that would be brought before Council was something they owned personally. Reminders were sprinkled throughout mailings about the financial constraints the developers would need to respect in order to create a functional, creative building. Concerns

by some CAC members that the height of the building was problematic resulted in maps being distributed so that members could suggest photography locations to give a better idea of the scale of the building with respect to the surrounding buildings. In October, committee members were advised that discussions were underway with the Municipal Council concerning the rezoning issue. One of the final meetings was with a landscape architect, Frank Thomson of Odyssey North Group, who provided drawings which incorporated several of the stated wishes of committee members, and depicted an expansion of the existing waterfront dock. Always, the communications were upbeat and friendly—there was a feeling that change was in the air, and that we, the CAC, were part of what would be making local history.

#### *Data Collection Methods*

Rubin et al. (2000) cite four basic qualitative data-collection methods: “personal interviews, telephone interviews, mail questionnaires, and self-administered surveys” (p. 201). I used all four methods in my empirical data collection obtained two to five months after the last CAC meeting in December, 2004. Of the nine men and five women participants in the case study, nine were face-to-face interviews, two were conducted by telephone, and three submitted written answers to questions. See Appendix A for a breakdown of methods used for each participant.

*The personal interviews.* I found the personal interview method, both individual and small group, the most effective way to reveal the *why* and *how come* questions I felt needed to be answered. They allowed one-on-one, in-depth exploration with excellent flexibility for follow-up to understand better the prevailing attitudes of participants. My first in-person interviewee was the hotel’s Director of Communications, Louisa Kamal; I interviewed her at the hotel on February 16, 2005. Two weeks later I held triad and dyad interviews with the CAC members. Prior to the interviews, participants received (either by fax, regular mail or e-mail) a Letter of

Consent (Appendix D) to sign, a Demographics Survey Form (Appendix E) to fill in, and Sample Questions (Appendix F) so that they might have a chance to consider the material.

The first six CAC-member interviews took place on February 28, two months following the final CAC meeting, in two sets of triads, in the same room where the meetings had been held.

*Data collection tools.* Data were collected in the interviews both through my own observations using a tape recorder and pen and paper, and through the notes of the participants. The research technique using triads had participants randomly grouped into three, using a *pick a number* system. I explained the process to the group before they split into their smaller groups: one would be the interviewer, one the interviewee, and one the observer/ recorder. A timer was used, and, after eight minutes, I instructed the two triads to change roles. By rotating roles, everyone had a turn at asking, answering, and observing/ recording. This research tool gave participants an opportunity to share their experiences with the communication process, and also offered a safe environment in which to share the emotional impact of those experiences through dialogue. Senge (1994) provides three basic conditions necessary for dialogue:

1. All participants must *suspend* their assumptions, literally to hold them "as if suspended before us"
2. All participants must regard one another as colleagues
3. There must be a 'facilitator' who 'holds the context' of dialogue. (p. 243)

I instructed the participants to respect these conditions. I explained that the questions were provided as a guide only, but they were to expand their questions only if they needed to clarify the interviewee's answers. It was explained further that this would produce a deeper understanding of what the process meant to the interviewee. I asked that they keep to the topics specified in the questions and reminded them that I was not so interested in their opinions about the end result of the CAC deliberations and how the project would be finalized, but rather, I

wanted to hear of their experience of the process. If they disagreed with their interviewee's comments, I asked them to remember their role and simply remain curious. I further explained that in order to ensure that both recorder and interviewer understood the interviewee's answers accurately, I would give them a minute or so to read back what had been recorded. I asked them to change anything that the interviewee did not feel was accurate. My primary goal, I reiterated, was to promote understanding by discovering the meaning of the process for them, the participants. I asked that they respect each other's privacy, and keep the information within their triads.

The Demographics Survey Form (Appendix E) requested the participant's name and a pseudonym if they wished. As well, it requested their phone number and e-mail address, their gender, age category, location from the hotel, whether they were a hotel client, how they became interested in the project, and whether they had taken part in a community advisory project of this kind before—and if so what other projects they had been involved in. They were also asked to sign a waiver contained in the Consent Letter (Appendix D).

The interview questions specifically asked for the members' experiences of being involved in the Ivy House Hotel project. They covered their reasons for becoming involved, what their role was in the project, and to what extent they participated. Questions also dealt with what aspects of the project process kept them engaged, what aspects they found of particular interest, and what didn't work particularly well for them. They were also asked to detail what they would recommend to the organizers if the project were to begin afresh—what would they keep the same, do more of, and do less of. Finally, they were asked if they would be involved in a similar community project again, and why or why not. Following the interview/ interviewee/ observe-record process, both groups came together for a final discussion.

The dyad interviews were held at my home because a scheduling difficulty prevented Anne Crowther and Jane Staunton from attending the triad meeting. The same procedure was followed as for the triads, with the one difference being that I was the observer /recorder. I did not notice any less depth of discussion compared to the triads; on the contrary, Anne and Jane considered the communication process profoundly. The main difference was that I was more involved in the discussion than I had been with the triads.

*Telephone interviews and written questionnaires.* One CAC member, Dr. Madeleine Heistermann, was interviewed by telephone, as was the Project Team architect, Thomas Caret. The developer, Ian Easton, submitted a set of answers to specific questions e-mailed to him. Two CAC members, unable to attend the personal interviews, delivered written answers to the same questions developed for the triad and dyad interviews.

*Ethical Considerations.*

I was aware throughout the process of my obligations towards ethical research, and had explained to each participant that all precautions would be taken to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. One participant was unwilling to take part because of a perceived “too many pieces of paper to sign.” She had asked for the information to be faxed, and, as I wanted to save her the trouble of making copies for her records, I faxed the three documents twice. This would have been avoided, I believe, had I met face-to-face and explained the necessity of these documents for ethical purposes and the university’s requirements. Another member did not wish to take part in interviews with other members because of “things said” at the post mortem meeting that resulted in his feeling uncomfortable. Another member offered to answer questions by e-mail, but failed to do so, despite a reminder. Another person when contacted by phone made the comment: “Interesting thought,” but failed to respond to my e-mail.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESEARCH STUDY RESULTS

#### *Concerns Revealed During CAC Meeting Discussions*

The initial meeting revealed several concerns such as: neighbours' apprehensiveness about the possibility of a large-scale waterfront development diminishing their existing views; noise pollution including that from extra vehicles as well as exhaust fans, industrial machinery, and music; light pollution; the height and style of the building; street congestion; the blending in of the architecture with the existing Ivy Harbour style and charm; sensitivity towards Native history in the area; directions for the area's future; the high residential versus low commercial concentration mix; increased green space and symmetry with surrounding nature; maintaining the hotel's cozy feeling, keeping in mind that it was the *living room of the community*; maintaining sea views from the street; using on-site materials; and what was designated the "Four Ps"—privacy, peace & quiet, property value, and pollution. As well, members wanted an assurance that the hotel would benefit the whole community.

#### *The Workshops: Building With Blocks*

The second meeting day was a workshop—a decidedly hands-on approach with participants working in teams to *construct* a building on a scale map, using wooden blocks that they were instructed equalled the proposed mass of the building. The architectural team was in attendance and appeared most agreeable with the results. Some teams produced tall buildings, while some sprawled their blocks down the length of the grounds. After the workshops, an evaluation sheet to help the developers "determine the best way to continue through the re-development process" (L. Kamal, personal communication, July 29, 2004) was passed out. It garnered such general feedback as whether the workshops were successful or not; whether

members had adequate opportunity to present their views; whether the process was of value, and if so, what was most appreciated; if not, what would have made it of value; whether members felt their suggestions were heard and their validity considered; how members would like to see community involvement incorporated in the upcoming months of the re-development process; and whether members were satisfied with the overall outcome of the workshop. Although the specific results of this survey could not be located, according to Louisa Kamal, the majority of members were extremely positive about the success of the workshops—they felt their voices were being heard and that it was a valuable process. Before this 3-day session was completed, the architects produced a concept sketch that appeared to meet the majority of the CAC members' desires and the developers' needs.

#### *The CAC Demographics*

Most members had not taken part in a community advisory committee before, at least not one where citizen participation in neighbourhood planning occurred in a seemingly bottom-up approach. The committee included architects, gardeners, Ivy Harbour Tourism Committee and Heritage Foundation representatives, long-time hotel clients, neighbours, and individual citizens. If there was one unifying trait, it was a love of living in Ivy Harbour. Appendix B shows the breakdown of the CAC interviewees' demographics.

#### *Themes Emerging from the Interviews*

This post-meeting interviewing was the exciting stage, as, by bringing together the immediate experiences of the participants in an open atmosphere where input from each could challenge and stimulate the other, a remarkably vital and creative learning environment occurred. As Lewin found in his 1946 research in leadership and group dynamics, I discovered that learning was “best facilitated in an environment where there is dialectic tension and conflict between immediate, concrete experience and analytic detachment” (Smith, 2001, ¶ 25). As some

participants disagreed with what others believed occurred in the meetings, this led to lively discussion. My task, as a community-based action researcher, was “to develop a context in which individuals and groups with divergent perceptions and interpretations can formulate a construction of their situation that makes sense to them all” (Stringer, 1999, p. 45).

*CAC members’ perceived roles.* Most saw their roles as that of critiquing or designing the building. Some felt that they were there to maintain the harmony of the hotel with the community and to keep the mass and height of the building down, although others felt that most had not expressed this at the meetings—the implication was that this perceived role was arrived at only after the Council had discussed the height aspect at the Ivy Harbour Municipal meetings. Some saw their role as simply one of communicating to the public the developments taking place. Most felt the committee needed better terms of reference. As Jane Staunton expressed it: “We should have sat down early and discussed our mission statement to determine what we were trying to achieve.” One of the most commonly expressed thoughts was that there was not enough debate and that what the committee did deliberate on had no bearing on the Council decision. As Alexander Morgan noted: “Everyone was too polite—there should have been more *push and pull*.” Some believed the committee was not a good cross-section of the community. “There were way too many neighbours,” was Peter Modest’s comment. Alexander Morgan took one of the more negative stances. He wondered whether we were there “just to rubber stamp the process and make it look good.”

*CAC perceptions of the Project Team.* There was wide variation in how members perceived the intentions and actions of the architect and developers. While most enjoyed the presentations and workshops, some believed the architect’s role was to “smooth-talk the committee members” and found him too theatrical. Some felt he had a preconceived idea to

present his ideas as CAC ideas. I asked Thomas Caret about this. He refuted it, and explained how the workshop should work ideally:

Initially the ideal design criteria is brought forward by all—members and owners. A neighbour might say: We have three major concerns—views, traffic noise, property values, for example. The same goes for the owners—we need to make so much profit, certain density, etc. Everything is on the table. Then there's the matter of balancing the views. What I was trying for was not only feedback, but to develop some sort of consensus and also some credibility and a sense of trust.

He explained how when the criteria started changing from the owner's perspective—i.e. in the amount of building mass they wanted, “it created a problem in terms of the process. When the number of square feet increased, we should have started again with a different number of building blocks.” Some CAC members felt that the architect as an outsider did not understand the neighbourhood well enough, whereas others, such as Anne Crowther, felt he and his team had made an effort to walk around the community to get to know it. Contrary to what some members believed, Caret was adamant that the building blocks workshop was a major influence on the design—“this idea of a village character, we did not come to the table with that; it was all because of the blocks.” He admitted he did not understand the Council workings. He assumed the Council would be excited about the committee process and was baffled as to why there was no acknowledgement. “It's the first town I've worked in in 30 years where a council actually votes on whether a project should proceed before it starts—and voting was taking place without any public input.” He believes the committee system to be “absolutely a good process,” but this was the first time it had not worked. “It's an unusual place here,” he said.

The CAC felt overwhelmingly that the Eastons were sincere in engaging the community, but some, especially Jane Staunton, felt that they did not give the committee full information;

some, like Alexander Morgan, felt they listened to the neighbours too much. Peter Modest thought they should have used a local architect, as, in retrospect, the Council appeared to favour this, and that they should have met with the planning committee early on. He also felt they misunderstood what the public really wanted on the site. Some members believed that as there appeared to be no follow-through on suggestions, the Project Team did not appear to listen to them.

*Personal observations.* The most interesting observation during the interviews was that there were wide differences between what was said, or, more significantly, what was not said by some members in the official meetings, and the positions they took during the interviews. The principal *bone of contention* was the height of the building. Some members were adamant that they had tried to keep the building height down while the majority believed those feelings had not been expressed by more than one or two people during the meetings. In the Council deliberations on whether the project could proceed or not, the main concern was over the height of the building, which may have influenced the opinions of interviewees when they met with me following the Council meetings. Most interviewees expressed that the process itself was an admirable one, but that it had become, in Alexander Morgan's words "lost." Several people wondered about the reasons for the CAC's existence. Despite early thoughts of citizen empowerment, they would have placed this project on the bottom to middle rungs of Arnstein's (1969) *Ladder of Citizen Participation*—perhaps closer to the *Tokenism* middle-rung section.

#### *The Committee Members: Their Stories*

*Alexander Morgan.* Alexander, who has a B.A. in Urban Geography, lives a short distance from the hotel which he sometimes uses; he is recently retired. He was one of the members who spoke directly during the meetings. He expressed misgivings about the process which he felt "got lost from the beginning." Although he thought that both the architect, Thomas

Caret, and the Eastons were genuinely interested in seeing that a good process come out of the meetings, Caret's method, which he described as "just a little too smooth" made him nervous. He felt that to have a voice of dissention was taken too personally, and that there was a cheerleader mentality present to the extent he felt "we were all expected to be on the same team." However, he found the process interesting. He thought more diverse representation, with fewer neighbours and members knowing what their roles were, would have helped steer the process better. His observation on high-cohesiveness is a characteristic that leads, as Janis (1982) suggests, to the danger that independent critical thinking will be replaced by groupthink. Like other members, Alexander found that the steps from working with blocks to the design proposal happened too fast; he was annoyed that it appeared we were there "just to rubber stamp the process and make it look good." From this observation, he seems to place the committee's empowerment standing close to the bottom rungs, *Informing* and *Manipulation*, of Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation. Alexander made special note of the fact that what he was hearing in the interviews I was conducting "did not come off in the deliberations, where it seemed everyone was in agreement"—he was obliquely identifying a classic case of groupthink. He expressed his advocacy of community involvement: "You get a better product," he said, "but only if all points of view are heard."

*Peter Modest.* Peter is 65 and has a background in hotel financing; he also has a keen interest in architecture. As a Director of Ivy Harbour Tourism, he was asked to join the CAC as a representative of the Board. He was concerned that a tall hotel would be suggested and felt his role was "to keep the building height down." His interviewer, Charlie Markham, expressed doubt that he had voiced his opinion on building height in the meetings. Peter felt that he had "at the appropriate times," and that it was always his major concern. It appears that the barriers to communication identified here could have been eased by engaging in dialogue, as Bohm (2004)

advocates, which would have established a means for the members to openly analyze the presumptions that appear to have influenced their beliefs. Peter questioned the consultative process and wondered, considering the amount of input from the committee, whether it was there “simply for window dressing.” He also thought the process did not work as he felt the architect seemed not to listen at crucial times. He expressed concern that the developers had used an architect from outside the area—one who was not familiar with the conditions in Ivy Harbour, who didn’t know “what would fly” with the Council. He felt that if the project were to begin again, he would keep the committee aspect of it but have everyone completely familiar with the local conditions, in particular, knowing what would be acceptable to Council. He also believed that the developers had “put the cart before the horse” in not meeting with the municipal planning committee before the CAC meetings began, as, had the committee known the parameters, it could have held the Project Team to these. He felt that the architect had a pre-conceived idea that would make the process appear to be the committee’s idea, and he was convincing enough to sway Ian Easton, who was carried away “by the grandiosity of the building,” but, in fact, was “breaking the benchmark of what is feasible.” He also felt the committee was too large and was “overloaded with neighbours.”

*Charlie Markham.* Charlie was keen to keep a hotel on the site. His father had built the original hotel, and, as he had lived in the hotel, he had a special affinity for it. However, he realised it would need to be replaced soon. He felt he had been “spellbound” by the architect, a situation that using an outside facilitator may have alleviated. He felt that keeping the neighbours happy seemed to be the main agenda of the developers, rather than listening to the whole committee’s opinions. Although he liked the format, he wondered what the real role of the committee was and thought its existence had little bearing on the Council’s decision—another opinion that places the committee empowerment position close to the bottom rung of Arnstein’s

Ladder of Citizen Participation. Charlie felt the committee process, generally, was a good opportunity for community members to express their points of view, but thought they should not expect to reach consensus.

*Jeremy Pinkerton.* Jeremy is an older man who lives a short distance from the hotel. He asked to join the committee as he was interested in making sure Ivy Harbour did not lose its only hotel, in particular *The Doggy* pub. He saw his role on the committee as making suggestions and asking questions—no more. He thought some committee members dealt too much with minor details such as the size of the hotel rooms and thought that next time there should be more planning before presenting the proposal to Council. He would not take part again in a similar community project, as it was just this particular hotel that kept him interested.

*Jim Gaudion.* Jim is a young architect who spends half the year working in Ivy Harbour and the other half in New York. He lives a short distance from the hotel which he occasionally uses. His particular interest is architectural suitability and quality. He was previously involved on a similar project with the New York City Zoning Committee and admits he came into the process with a cynical attitude; however he left with an understanding that the Eastons were very sincere in wanting to engage the community and were not using the committee as “window dressing.” He was fascinated by the massing models, but, like Alexander Morgan, thought that the building style appeared “way too early in the game.” He felt that the developers erred in presenting only one, very elaborate, developed proposal to Council. Had they gone in with multiple massing ideas and asked Council whether they could *live* with any of those ideas, it might have been a more sensible approach. He felt the process, despite having enjoyed it, was too focussed on building style. “Somehow we jumped from multiple, very different massing options to this presumed consensus represented by the preliminary sketch.” This was the point, he felt, when the process started to “go off the rails.”

*Monica Perder.* Monica is a woman in her fifties who lives within walking distance of the hotel. She has a particular affection for the Tudor-style architecture of the present hotel, and loves to visit *The Doggy* pub. She felt the committee was listened to, enjoyed the model-building process, and found the main architect particularly interesting. She saw the committee process as being valid, and did not see any problem until the end, when she realised the committee did not represent the same community as the Council did. If the committee were to begin work again, she would investigate the Council process early to determine the parameters, as she believed the committee “did not have a handle” on what Council would permit.

*Anne Crowther.* Anne, a woman in her sixties who lives a little over a kilometre from the hotel, has worked as an architectural, cultural, and natural heritage artist throughout Canada and abroad. She was impressed that developers would offer this degree of community involvement and was keen to take part in the discussions. She had recently attended neighbourhood consultation meetings with developers and architects concerning two multi-dwelling developments in Ivy Harbour. Her experience there was that with community input the developers became much more responsive to neighbourhood issues. She felt it was important to communicate to the neighbourhood the nature of the development taking place. Like Monica Perder, Anne felt that the committee should have had an information meeting with the planning department to find out what would be acceptable, particularly with regard to building height. She explained: “Those of us who have been fighting developers for decades were blown over by what was called a blank sheet of paper. Assumptions were in place, such as the new building had to be twice the size of the existing hotel.” She questioned whether she had made her points too strongly at the meetings. This was disputed by her interviewer, Jane Staunton, who felt Anne made some excellent suggestions “but like other parts of the process downfall, nothing was coming back out of the suggestions tendered—there was just no follow through.” Anne saw the

process as almost a scare tactic—the impression that the hotel would fail if it were not of a certain size. However, she is a believer in compromise stating that “if one’s concept of a better way cannot be part of a solution, you have to try to have some input into what might work.” She felt that just knowing there was something to strive for and trying to adapt to changes as they occurred kept her going. The more interesting part of the process, for Anne, was that some committee members did not say what they were thinking: “Not that we were muzzled, but there was something going on that seemed to be rather powerful.” She felt the Eastons “did it out of the goodness of their hearts,” but the idea of treating us to a Christmas Dinner and Theatre experience, plus a hotel stay over the wintertime, although received with delight, she later thought could be construed as an incentive to agreeing with the direction they preferred, rather than as a token of gratitude. She felt that the meetings held over a meal with wine, although nicely done, may have exerted some pressure. In general, she thought that the process, if properly modified, could be useful, especially in an instance where developments are becoming increasingly large and international, and threatening communities to the point where locals have no say at all in their community’s future development. But, she felt, there should be no free meals—the concept of being gently pressured, whether one is aware of it or not, is then avoided.

Anne commented on a letter that was circulated by CAC members for signatures of support. It would be presented to Council before their decision-making meeting. She felt pressure had been put on her to sign it, as comments such as “it will look bad if there is a dissenting voice” had been made. This comment underscored for me that the committee was indeed engaged in a psychological drive for consensus at any cost, and had become victims of groupthink. Jane reminded Anne that others, who were initially positive about the proposal, changed their minds *after* the Council meeting when they understood better just how big the building would be, which was an overriding problem with everyone on the Committee—

“nobody was sitting down and figuring out how big it was, and people who did understand, didn’t say much.”

Anne wondered if the process could be adapted so that developers around the world would see the advantages of using a mediator or a facilitator. Even though the committee was invited to make comments, people generally did not feel free to make the very comments that should have been forthcoming. She expressed gratitude to the Eastons for being willing to take the risk of consulting with a community group, especially one with such diverse backgrounds, as they had no way of knowing which way the tide would turn. She quoted from a book *Better Not Bigger* by Evan Fodor where it is described how councils are often a mouthpiece for developers. She felt that it was a good sign when developers like the Eastons come along and recognise the importance of consulting with citizens, and who could see that the decisions should not be just between developers and the Council. The committee’s problem, she thought, was that “enough of us did not speak out to identify to the Eastons that a considerable component of the CAC felt just as the Council did when they made their decision.” This suggests that two of Janis’s (1982) structural flaws were in place—there was a disconnect from the larger world, and there were power differences between the committee and its leaders. However, Anne thought the concept of the advisory committee generally, especially one of such creative structure, was a good one.

From a structural point of view, Anne identified a situation that could have been avoided through effective communicative action and dialogue: she felt that some of the meetings were held just to advise the committee of conclusions that had been reached, with no “listening atmosphere,” whereas all of the meetings should have had “more give and take.” However, she particularly liked the roundtable set-up. “It ties in with my native friends who, in a gathering, always gather around in a circle. Nobody ever turns their back on anyone; they speak one at a time, and wouldn’t dream of interrupting.”

*Jane Staunton.* Jane is a middle-aged woman who lives close to the hotel but rarely uses it. She, of all the CAC members, expressed her opposition to the bulk and height of the building strongly at the meetings. She had been asked to represent the Ivy Harbour Heritage Foundation, but felt that based on what was reported in the newspaper, advocating for heritage was eliminated, so she decided to act as a community representative at large. She found the meetings became negative and more trying for her as time went on; she felt others were not supporting her. As a chartered accountant, there was no logic to the meetings for her. Her interviewer, Anne Crowther, reminded her that she was appreciated for being so straightforward and that it was a pity the meetings were not more heated so she may have been listened to more. Jane enjoyed the diversity of the group, and her interest in architecture and neighbourhood change in general kept her quite engaged in the whole process. As well, the process itself interested her—“as an idea, the CAC was excellent.” She liked the concept of trying to get a picture of the whole site project by using the blocks, but felt that the architect’s mind was made up beforehand. Her opinion highlights Ellinor and Gerard’s (1998) single-most powerful support or obstacle to fostering dialogue—leaders’ attitudes and behaviour. Although she enjoyed the presentation styles of both Thomas Caret and Ian Easton, she thought they were “sales people” and could manipulate the committee. She referred to Anne “getting lip service” on the historical perspectives she had put forward. Also, there were some things she felt that were not stated clearly, such as the issues of whether the building would be designed as Time Share, strata, or for condominium use. “There were differences between what the committee understood of this and what was presented to Council,” she said. She felt she couldn’t get straight answers to a lot of her questions and that the committee was being fed limited information. These factors, and that she felt the committee was being *used* to support the project, were the most negative parts of the process for her. She felt that a survey identifying that the majority of Ivy harbour residents wanted to keep a hotel, did

not, as Ian Easton seemed to her to believe, mean it should be replaced by a new, large one. “He presumed that ‘yes’ meant yes to anything,” she said. She also doubted that the architect had spent enough time in trying to understand the neighbourhood. Anne challenged Jane on this point, stating that Thomas Caret had made an effort to walk around the community, even to asking CAC members to suggest photographic sightlines. Jane’s rebuttal was that this was an afterthought after the process had begun and that he had not recognised Ivy Harbour as the residential area it is. She expressed surprise that Ian Easton would have “spent a large sum of money” without giving clearer direction to the architect on the idiosyncrasies of Ivy Harbour and its Council.

Jane sees the workings of this advisory committee as having damaged credibility for the next group. For one, committee members had not realised just how big the building was going to be, not until the Council meeting, which to her was another flaw in the process. “There needed to be some hard comparisons of size,” she said. She also felt there was misinformation given out about the actual number of stories, until it was admitted at the Council meeting that we were dealing with a nine-storey building. She felt strongly that the committee was not given enough information, and even that there was a certain amount of misinformation, stating: “If you didn’t ask the right questions, you didn’t find out the information.”

Jane was an advocate of using a facilitator at the initial meeting to ascertain what the community was really looking for. She revealed that one Council member expressed the concern that they could not understand how so many bright people “got snowed.” This hit a raw nerve with me and I explained how I had liked the look of the proposed building, and could imagine living beside it—but I had to admit I did not understand fully the size of the building. She put this down to “manipulative architectural drawings,” however this was vehemently denied by Thomas Caret when I interviewed him.

Jane's biggest concern was the lack of information for a committee that was supposed to *advise*. I asked her if she trusted the process. Her reply was a definite *no*, explaining that "the lack of information and the slickness ruined it—they formed a group for the wrong purpose." She viewed community services a necessity. Previously she had received a lot of satisfaction from helping to influence things—almost like putting her stamp on a project—but she felt this could have been a much more effective process. "The developers got what they thought they wanted out of the committee," she said, "but they got nothing when they went to Council. Every penny they spent was wasted."

*Madeleine Heistermann*. I interviewed Dr. Heistermann on the telephone. She lives in a nearby city, but owns an apartment next to the hotel. She was hoping to renovate and move to it within the next year or so. Her view looks onto the existing hotel's garden and she was most concerned about detrimental effects to her views and property value. She has an interdisciplinary PhD in Architecture and Urban Planning Education and has taught courses on the built environment, but is now retired. She became interested in the hotel proposal after reading a newspaper article, and asked Ian Easton if she could join the CAC. "Alarm bells went off right away," she said. "I thought I would be impacted and wanted to have a voice first-hand." She felt she participated "probably as much as they allowed participation." With her keen interest in architecture, the design of the building was of particular concern. She found the proposed design far too busy with "too many turrets," but the process itself she found to be really enjoyable. She spoke of public participation and how *trendy* it is becoming, especially in architectural planning. She has been involved with this type of process since the eighties and saw two reasons for the Eastons using the process—one was a sincere attempt to ascertain community response, and the other was for public relations. She believes that the CAC had no input into the design—"we were mere observers"—yet another opinion placing the CAC at the very bottom of Arnstein's (1969)

Ladder of Citizen Participation. In general, she felt the committee was good for public relations and probably better than nothing, but did not help in any way. From her observations, only two members, Jane Staunton and Alexander Morgan, appeared to be against the design presented. She felt the Project Team should have been more up front with the CAC and less theatrical, and could have dispensed a little with the appreciation pleasantries. A more pragmatic, straightforward approach with less rhetoric would have gone down more favourably with her. Despite the fact that she felt the Eastons were generous in their behaviour, she thought they were skilled *PR* workers. She mentioned her appreciation for the wining and dining, the free night's accommodation, and the dinner theatre, yet she had trouble deciphering what was sincere. She would definitely take part in a similar planning process, even if just as an observer. However, she noted, when you are wined and dined and treated so well, as we are all human it is a bit difficult to speak out against a project, "especially when the cheese cake, the croissants, and the peanut butter cookies are so good." Dr. Heistermann felt that, ultimately, the design produced by the Project Team was nothing similar to anything the CAC did with the blocks. "One got the impression that we were really working on the design, but this was obviously not so." She was quite sure that the CAC, despite its silence, did not wholeheartedly approve of the design.

*Jag Mamaka.* Jag lives next to the hotel and is a regular client. He is retired, but has had similar committee experience on industrial projects in other provinces. His desire was to see the construction of a world-class hotel and marine resort in Ivy Harbour's future. He was not able to attend interviews, but gave a brief written report on his experience with the CAC. He thought great respect was shown to the committee members by the Eastons, no matter what their points of view were, and he was most enamoured of the process.

*Anthony Egerton.* Anthony has a special interest in the public accountability of owner-developers to the community. He has published a book and several articles and documents on

public accountability. He saw in the hotel proposal a good opportunity to apply basic accountability approaches to better inform stakeholders about the proposal. He had never taken part in a project of this kind before, but he applauded the hotel owners and the initial architect for setting up the CAC. In his role on the committee, he felt he tried to police equity among stakeholders with respect to the proposal impact, and to critique the design along with other CAC members, although he was not so concerned with the proposed building mass as much as others were. He advised the hotel owners on creating a public *Equity Statement*, an idea the Eastons readily accepted, setting out who would gain and how, and who would bear the costs and risks of the proposal were it to go ahead. This document was part of the information package presented to Councillors before the decision-making meeting, a package that, in the architect's opinion, was not acknowledged by Council. What kept Anthony engaged in the project was the aspect of how the hotel owners should account to the community for what they proposed. He had earned a doctoral minor in social psychology in the early 1970s, and what he found of particular interest was observing how people either changed or held firm on their initial positions, either from beliefs and attitudes or from self-interest. What didn't work for him personally was that he did not notice any dysfunctional aspects in the committee process as a communication exchange—it was not until after the Ivy Harbour Council rejected the proposal that some of the shortcomings emerged. For example, he felt the mayor and councillors' attitudes could have been uncovered and discussed thoroughly during the committee process. If he were to take part in the committee again, which he would eagerly join, he would want the structure of the meetings to be *strictly business* with no hospitality aspects, admitting, though, that this would be difficult for hoteliers not to offer. In his writings, Egerton has proposed that in city council development application approvals, councillors could make it a rule not to decide contentious property development

applications without a publicly-challenged equity statement, which would be audited by city staff for fairness in assessing the proposal's affect on the community and the environment.

*Further discussions.* Some of the more interesting revelations were unearthed during the discussions after the triad interviews. Jim Gaudion commented: "If we hadn't had this discussion it would never have occurred to me that there was this consensus problem, which, the more I think about it, was a very big problem." Alexander Morgan expressed he had no idea so many people on the committee were concerned with the height of the building. Jim felt the interview session clarified for him that the design progression was unusual:

Somehow we went from having six completely different massing ideas made of little blocks to a kind of hybrid consensus represented by the concept sketch the next day. Maybe I just didn't think about it at the time, but in retrospect, that seems odd. There were a lot of massing ideas that never got pursued. Somehow we were down to one massing idea the next morning and after that it was a freight train.

Discussion on the role of the Council and whether the CAC would be asked to be involved again became quite lively. Jim Gaudion suggested that if we were consulted again, we should be mindful to be more critical next time. Peter Modest offered that the CAC could be asked to "tweak it—and that will be it." Cynicism was palpable at that final discussion, much of it directed towards Council. Jeremy Pinkerton spoke of how some developers, in an effort to ward off NIMBY, were offering sums of money or attributes to the community such as boulevards, and yet were still being turned down by Councils. He wondered why any council would pass something the first time. "I hope they're confronted with a whole bunch of hotels," was his final comment.

*Louisa Kamal.* I interviewed Louisa Kamal at the hotel about two weeks before interviewing the CAC members. A woman in her late twenties, Louisa is the Director of

Communications for the Ivy House Hotel. She has a B.A. in English and a post-degree Certificate in Public Relations and has been employed by Ian and Janet Easton for approximately two years. When she first knew of the project, she suggested to Ian he would need to have a communication plan established to cover such things as reputation and media management, and to ensure that the correct message would be delivered to the public. Louisa believed completely that the advisory committee process was a good one. She described how there had been constant dialogue between Ian, the rest of the Project Team, and herself. They looked to her for her wisdom on the communications end of things, but all decisions were made as a group and they were all in agreement that things were proceeding smoothly. I enquired on how the CAC idea was spawned, asking whether it was a case of the owner feeling the new hotel idea *would not fly* without a community process, or because he was a community-minded person. Louisa explained that it was probably both: “Ian is a community person—he’s a really fair, good guy. He went to the neighbours right off the bat. I don’t think it was purely as a Good Samaritan, but I don’t think it was purely to get ends met either.”

I asked Louisa to move forward to now and look back on the process and suggest what she thought could have been done differently, if anything. She replied that nothing had struck her yet, despite having thought about it a lot. She couldn’t pinpoint any way the team had failed. She felt they had done a good job as a group, and that everyone on the CAC was so committed. Both the CAC and the Project Team had pulled their weight—there was such synergy. The whole process was about communications, she felt. There was constant dialogue with the community, the team had a good relationship with the local media, and they were actively collecting collateral materials with which to inform the public. She thought they had every stakeholder identified, with tools or strategies in place to reach them, and she could not think of anything, from a communications perspective, that would have improved the outcome. The developers had

tried at each step to bring the Council members in to the process, even if just to keep them informed. Newsletters were sent out, and occasionally the mayor would come to meet Ian Easton over lunch. Although invited to the public meetings, no councillors came. Louisa put this down to their trying to remain objective “as is their responsibility to the community.” When questioned further as to what the developers might have done differently, Louisa said it was tempting to say that perhaps, considering the high approval rate and overwhelming support they had from the community for the project based on surveys they had administered, even though they had already asked the community to share their thoughts with Council, perhaps they could have pushed that more, because they “just didn’t have enough vocal support when the time came.” But she really wondered if that would have made a difference. She explained:

On the evening the decision was made, there was a room full of supporters, even though we had not recruited people to come out and support us. It was electric in there. People got up on our behalf who we had never met before. They applauded the presentation.

Community support was obvious.

She wondered how a council, knowing it had a room full of people against the decision they were about to make—one that would have a huge bearing on the future of the community—could just arbitrarily say “We’ll chop off its head.” But, she tendered, that was the power we give our representatives. I asked her if she would repeat the process if she had to start from scratch. She was adamant that she would, as she fully believed that although it was not the easy or the cheap thing to do, it was the *right* thing to do. She felt proud to have been part of the process and to work for an employer who could see the value in the process. As well, the experience and the relationships formed were so valuable, without question she would do it again.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*Sensemaking: Extracting Meaning from the Research.*

What can we learn from the communication processes experienced in the Ivy House Hotel Community Advisory Committee deliberations and the discussions that followed? A key area to focus on lies in that twilight zone between debate and dialogue. From the data gathered in the interviews, what appears to have been missing for most CAC members was healthy debate and rich dialogue. With debate, conflicting views could have been articulated more fully, and the strengths and weaknesses of differing positions would have been shown in sharper focus thus enabling clearer judgments to be made. With richer dialogue, committee members would have understood better the differing beliefs, backgrounds, perspectives, interests, traditions, and values of their fellow members, thus establishing a common ground from which to make these judgments. The real key is in determining which comes first, debate or dialogue, and there can only be one answer—dialogue must always precede debate if effective decision-making is the goal. With effective dialogue initially, a shared language and framework would have been established, and mutual trust and understanding would have been built. As Bohm, Factor, and Garrett (1991) noted, only when group members learn to listen to each other will any kind of dialogue start, resulting in feelings being exposed and creative new domains reached. If dialogue had occurred first, members like Charlie Markham would not have had cause to challenge others, like Peter Modest, on what was believed to have been said. Several members expressed the idea of using a facilitator to lead the meetings, at least initially, to discover the committee's role and identify and measure the members' personal investments. I believe, too, that a facilitator, especially one with specific communication skills, would be an asset. Considering Habermas's (1976/1979) communicative action theory, in which he states that there must be an already

achieved common grounding for interaction to take place, and that there must be a real wish to understand the other side of the communication, a qualified communications facilitator may have been appropriate to shepherd us through the beginning phase.

Was there too much desire for unanimity and reaching consensus on the part of the committee members? And was it a case, as Janis (1982) described, of ever-so-subtle pressures from the leadership, inadvertent or otherwise, that may have prevented some CAC members from exercising their critical thinking powers and openly expressing the doubt they felt? In other words, was it a classic example of *groupthink*? If so, and I believe the data indicates that it was, how could it have been avoided? Hilleard (2004) offers mechanisms to avoid groupthink. One method that may have been useful in this CAC case is that of appointing someone, possibly the facilitator had there been one, to play devil's advocate—someone who would challenge the committee to look for false inferences and request missing information. So too, clarity of roles and responsibilities would have helped avoid any semblance of purposeless work that some members believed, in retrospect, they were engaged in. Every CAC member should have had a clear understanding of what they were there for and what their responsibility was. As well, they, and the developers, needed to be accountable to their roles and responsibilities. As noted by Samuel (2001), if an organization is to be held accountable, it must recognize dysfunctional communication habits and develop habits that promote greater levels of trust and high performance.

This brings us to the potential-for-effectiveness level of the CAC. Was there real power that might have affected the outcome of the process? Was there ownership of the process? Or was it empty ritual? At the beginning of the project, most members believed, as I did, they would have considerable input into the outcome of the project. They had been informed by the developers that they would be part of a united workshop team who would be presenting to

Council with the Project Team, an acceptable concept for the future Ivy House Hotel building. By the end of the project, most members felt differently—they did not see it as the *bottom-up* process they originally believed it to represent. The question for the CAC remains, as Kaufman (1997) asked, did the committee constitute “a meaningful participatory institution of empowerment” (p. 7) or was it an example of simple tokenism? The data shows that most believed that they would be making a difference—they would be “putting a stamp” as Jane Staunton said, on a community development. They were informed by Ian Easton in a letter sent early July, 2004, headed: *The Same Book - Next Chapter* that they would be “community representatives participating . . . to deliver a community sensitive plan for the future of the Hotel.” We all believed this would be the case. I still believe it could have been the case—I do not believe it was intended as tokenism, nor do I believe that any CAC member would have taken part if they thought this was the case. With more effective communication, the results may have been entirely different.

#### *A Checklist for the Future*

The following points constitute a checklist of recommendations were the CAC to be formed again. They are based on areas for improvement and change identified by participants during the data collection and are directed respectively and respectfully to the Project Team, the CAC members, and a facilitator.

The Project Team must:

- listen to and consider openly all points of view
- give participants full freedom to dissent
- distribute all relevant materials before the first committee meeting
- distribute and discuss all survey results obtained from questionnaires completed by committee members

- inform committee members on a regular basis of any parallel deliberations taking place
- be transparent and upfront in all their dealings with committee members
- not offer incentives, other than what would be normally polite

The CAC members must:

- have no conflict of interest
- construct and agree to a values and vision statement
- be familiar with the workings of consequential boards and councils
- agree that it is not necessary to reach consensus
- speak their minds
- actively listen to and endeavour to comprehend other points of view
- not pressure others to change their minds
- endeavour to see the big picture of how their decisions will affect the whole community, rather than focus on individual interests

The facilitator must work with the CAC and the Project Team to:

- keep groups as small as is practical, yet retain diversity
- verify members' interests and identify roles
- organize a preliminary meeting to charter the group's agreed way for working together for the duration of the meetings (See Team Charter, Appendix G)
- break committee into smaller groups for specific discussions
- appoint a spokesperson to report each small group's findings
- encourage rich dialogue to reveal pertinent background information and individual understandings
- encourage more give and take and more tough debate

In summary, rich dialogue followed by healthy debate is necessary for effective communication to take place. This is more easily achieved if a facilitator with specific communications skills guides the deliberations from the outset. Messages would be clearer, roles would be defined, and a more useful, purposeful outcome would result. Many of the pitfalls of ineffective communication, such as those the CAC and its Project Team experienced, would be avoided.

## CHAPTER SIX

## “THE NEXT CHAPTER”: The Hotel Project Progress

After an Application for Development was made to the Ivy Harbour Director of Building and Planning, the public process began. A presentation was made to Council, which many of the CAC members attended. The result was that Council deferred making a decision on whether to allow the project to proceed through to the approval process, and requested more information on why the present hotel could not be renovated, and why it needed to be as large as the proposal indicated. The developers responded that the height of the proposed hotel was in keeping with other buildings in the immediate area and that a smaller hotel was not a viable option. Council requested three new reports:

1. A structural engineer’s report on the condition of the existing hotel
2. A quantity surveyor’s report on the costs involved in renovating the existing hotel, and
3. An Estimate of Prospective Investment Value Report from the accountants

The engineer’s report confirmed, as in an earlier report, that the cost of upgrading the hotel to code was insurmountable, and that part of the building could not be upgraded. An equity statement, which set out the risks and benefits for all stakeholders if either a new resort hotel or condominiums would be built, was also prepared and became part of the package presented to Council at the second Council meeting.

A letter from the developers to CAC members assured them that the only way of maintaining a viable hotel on the site was one “reflecting the densities of the vision we created together” (L. Kamal, personal communication, December 9, 2004). CAC members were invited to the Municipal Hall to attend the important second Council meeting that would either make or break the project. Prior to this meeting, Anthony Egerton and I composed a letter to Council, outlining the work that the CAC had undertaken in conjunction with the developers which

indicated CAC support for the project, but no agreement could be reached by CAC members on the wording and tone of a letter that all members would be willing to sign, so it was not delivered. At the second meeting, the Ivy Harbour Municipal Council rejected the proposal. The vision for the developers of “a world class hotel” on the existing boutique hotel site was quashed. The Mayor and Councillors made it clear by a unanimous vote that the proposal was unacceptable. The Mayor made the point that while there appeared to be interest and support for a hotel in its present location, he questioned the proposal’s fit with the context of the neighbourhood and region, stating that it was too much building for the site. Some of the CAC members were concerned that the Council had ignored their input. As well, Thomas Caret felt that, judging by the questions asked at the second presentation, Council did not recognise the materials, which “involved a lot of homework” that the Project Team had brought back to them. “It was obviously a done deal,” he said. “They didn’t even acknowledge that the public had been involved.” The developers were emotionally drained but resolved to accept the decision and move on to the next step—that of redesigning their future vision while accommodating the concerns of councillors and others that the proposal was too big for the site. A new architect, one who lives in the community, began working with Ian Easton. The CAC has not been asked to participate in the new design process. When the local architect was employed, Anne Crowther felt strongly that the CAC should still be part of the deliberations. Thomas Caret offered to associate with the local architect but was turned down. According to Ian Easton in an interview in a local newspaper, after the new proposal is unveiled in mid-June, the CAC will be given an opportunity to comment on the revamped project. Whether CAC members will choose to become involved again remains to be seen.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## LESSONS LEARNED

*Conducting Research as a Participant Observer.*

One of the questions I reflect on is whether greater theoretical sensitivity would have made a difference to my research approach. Had I completed the literature review before joining the committee, I may have been more aware of groupthink pitfalls; I may have understood better the power of dialogue in collaborative undertakings; and I may have been able to guide committee members towards more effective communicative action. On the other hand, a more sensitive theoretical approach could well have biased my observations. Baxter & Babbie (2004) take a middle-of-the-road position with participant observation research: “The point is to enter the field open-minded but not empty-headed,” (p. 305) they suggest. I believe their succinct description fits approximately where my position was. However, when listening to the interview tapes, I observed that my feelings were occasionally projected into the conversation, which, although a valid situation in this type of research, may have influenced my interpretation of some of the data. The learning here for a participant-observer is to avoid leading questions, to listen actively, and to insightfully balance the “observer” part of the role. My “insider” role had helped establish trust and respect and a feeling of harmony and good rapport, which enabled me to unearth richly detailed insights into what CAC members experienced. The research produced, for me, a holistic understanding of the process we had all participated in. Several participants relayed to me that the interview sessions had produced similar experiences for them—they could now see “the big picture” that the committee process was about.

*Observations on the interview process.*

The depth interviews with Louisa, Thomas, and Madeleine, and the triad and dyad focus interviews with eight CAC members, produced a much deeper understanding than the three

written submissions. The triad and dyad interviews were the most productive, as they gave an opportunity to observe interaction between the parties, and, as well, elicited recollections that may have been missed in individual depth interviews. I could, and did, delve deeper after the dyad and triad interviews. They provided a safe environment where people could be themselves and not feel intimidated by the act of “being interviewed.” Although initially I did observe some shyness, all interviewees relaxed as the interactions progressed. One area where I noticed reticence was when members were asked to take notes. Two people did not trust their ability to write down quickly what they heard and asked me to do this instead. If I were to repeat this process, I would not ask people to take notes, but would give them the opportunity to do so if they wished. I would use a tape recorder for *each* triad, as the simple addition of mood and tone I collected from the table where I had placed my recorder produced much richer data.

I was delighted that so many of the CAC members were willing to take part in the interview process. They thanked me afterwards and some even commented that they found the interview meetings cathartic. Although I attempted to have 100% participation, not having input from all members could have affected the calibre of the data. However, the initial shaping I planned for the case study with the help of my advisor, Dr. Jim Force, I believe was excellent, and I would not have changed anything major.

*Looking Back, Looking Forward.*

When the CAC meetings began in July, 2004, there was no doubt in my mind that this bottom-up approach was going to be a state-of-the-art development process that would have a profound influence on the future of my neighbourhood; however, this was not to be the case. Perhaps if the results of the written survey conducted partway through the committee sessions had been returned to participants, we would have had clearer insight into how people were feeling. Perhaps a second survey needed to be completed later in the deliberations and the results

distributed. These results may have identified a lack of consensus, which was not readily obvious. I would strongly recommend that future committees do this. It was not until Anthony Egerton informed me he could not get full support for the letter we had initiated to present to Council, that I fully understood that several CAC members were opposed to what the developers were proposing. This emphasised the need for an improved communication process as I have outlined in the recommendations in Chapter Five. These suggestions, particularly those on transparency, rich dialogue, and freedom to dissent, must be followed if similar committees are to have any useful purpose. That said, I believe the sentiments of the developers in forming the committee were sincere, and that the hotel project really could have been a case of a community empowered to decide the future of its neighbourhood.

*Implications for Communications Professionals.*

One reason I chose to study Applied Communications at Royal Roads University was a desire to become a skilled communicator. Communication touches every area of our lives, yet there are relatively few who understand how to create, manage, consume, and distribute information efficiently and effectively. The communication process highlighted in this research project was a Technicolor illustration of this fact. It revealed the complexities of communication, and the need, in our increasingly communications-based world, for proficient, non-partisan communication professionals to intervene as facilitators when important deliberations take place.

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APPENDIX A  
Participants in the Case Study and Interview Methodology

	Name	Interview Date	Structure Used	Location	Shared with:
<b>Community Advisory Committee Members</b>	Jim	Feb. 28	Triad	Ivy House Hotel	Monica & Jeremy
	Peter	Feb. 28	Triad	Ivy House Hotel	Alexander & Charlie
	Alexander	Feb. 28	Triad	Ivy House Hotel	Peter & Charlie
	Anthony	May 6	Written Answers	Hand delivered	n/a
	Jag	March 16	Written Answers	Hand delivered	n/a
	Jeremy	Feb. 28	Triad	Ivy House Hotel	Monica & Jim
	Charlie	Feb. 28	Triad	Ivy House Hotel	Alexander & Peter
	Madeleine	March 8	Telephone	Telephone	n/a
	Monica	Feb. 28	Triad	Ivy House Hotel	Jeremy & Jim
	Anne	March 7	Dyad	My home	Jane
	Jane	March 7	Dyad	My home	Anne
<b>Project Team</b>	Louisa	Feb. 16	Personal	Ivy House Hotel	n/a
	Thomas	May 20	Telephone	Telephone	n/a
	Ian	May 19	Written Answers	E-mail	n/a

## APPENDIX B

## Demographic Breakdown of CAC Members Interviewed

Name	Age	Distance from Hotel	Interest	Hotel User
Jim	30-54	1-5 km	Architectural	Sometimes
Peter	65+	1-5 km	Tourism rep. Financial, Architecture	Sometimes
Alexander	55-65	1-5 km	Community Involvement	Sometimes
Anthony	65+	Less than 1 km	Special interest in accountability	Often
Jag	65+	Next Door	Future of hotel	Often
Jeremy	65+	1-5 km	Future of hotel	Sometimes
Charlie	65+	1-5 km	Son of original owner. Future of hotel	Often
Madeleine	65+	Next Door	Architectural, losing views	Sometimes
Monica	55-65	Less than 1 km	Historical, Heritage Foundation rep.	Often
Anne	65+	1-5 km	Heritage / Architecture / Community	Sometimes
Jane	55-65	Less than 1 km	Heritage, Community	Rarely

## APPENDIX C

### Themes derived from the interviews with CAC members

#### **Main reason for taking part:**

- Interest in heritage and architecture
- Fondness for facility - to ensure a hotel would remain on the site
- Asked to join as representative for an association
- Community service
- Worried about losing views
- An interest in the community involvement process
- Accountability issues

#### **Perceived role:**

- To critique and design
- To keep the mass and height of building in keeping with neighbourhood
- Maintain harmony of hotel with community
- Communicate to the public the nature of developments
- Maintain the heritage aspect of the hotel
- Make fellow members aware of the archaeological history of the area
- Ensure public access to the waterfront
- Assure equity with respect to community impact

#### **Comments by members on the architect's role:**

- Was there to smooth-talk the committee members
- Was too theatrical
- Did not understand local Council workings
- Did not use CAC input - had mind made up already
- Preconceived idea to present his ideas as CAC ideas
- Should have presented more massing models to Council
- Took time to get to know the neighbourhood

#### **Comments by members on developers' attitudes to CAC:**

- Did not give CAC full information
- Were sincere
- Listened to the neighbours too much
- Not interested in the CAC's opinions
- Listened to the CAC sincerely
- Sincere in engaging the community
- Very appreciative
- Were very generous
- Presented to Council prematurely
- Confused the CAC on the hotel or condo issue
- Used the CAC for PR
- Misinformed the CAC on the cost of the project

**Comments on the Developers in general:**

- Were given wrong information by Council or did not understand workings of Council
- Should have used a local architect
- Appeared to not fully understand the financial complexities
- Should have met with the Planning Committee first
- Were carried away with the grandiosity of a large hotel
- Misunderstood what the public really wanted on the site
- Should have informed the architect better about the idiosyncrasies of the community

**Comments on the meeting process:**

- Project Team ran the show
- Was entertaining and interesting
- It was set up to fail
- Too much focus on style

**Comments on CAC members by CAC members:**

- Did not express adequately what they thought
- Presumed consensus was required and had a cheerleader mentality
- Too many neighbours—not a cross-section of community—and too large
- Were unaware of the planning board parameters
- Did not debate enough - too much presumed consensus
- Needed better terms of reference
- Everyone was too polite - not enough hard debate
- CAC members did not understand their role
- Were there to rubberstamp the project and were mere observers, hence not useful
- Deliberations had no bearing on Council's decision

**Comments on the design process progress:**

- Building blocks workshop not used effectively
- Design evolved too fast
- Misinformation on the real number of stories
- CAC needed better comparisons to understand size of building
- Too large a gap between the building blocks process and eventual proposal
- Building blocks not a fair way to deal with what could be done on the site

**What kept members engaged:**

- The building blocks workshop
- The interplay between the architect and the CAC
- Observing some members' cynicism
- How the project would be financed
- The process of community involvement itself
- The diversity of the group
- A belief in compromise and not wanting to give up
- An involvement with neighbourhood change
- The aspect of how the developers would be accountable to the community

**Main failures of the process:**

- More than one massing solution should have been presented to Council
- The committee had no bearing on keeping the height of the building down
- The CAC did not represent the same community as the Council did.
- Too many assumptions were in place to allow for thorough debate
- There was no follow-through on suggestions
- Dysfunctionality of the group noticed after the council decision
- No mission statement
- The group was formed for the wrong idea - to sell to community
- No debate - not argumentative enough
- A lack of information and slickness ruined the process

**Suggestions for change:**

- Familiarize CAC on the workings of Planning Board, Council, and history of the community plan
- Listen to all points of view and encourage members to speak their minds
- Have smaller groups with more diversity of community involvement
- No free meals
- Use a mediator or a facilitator
- Restrict members with possible conflict of interest
- Instruct group not to expect to reach consensus
- Encourage members not to pressure others to change ideas
- Encourage more give and take—more tough debate
- Encourage members to see the big picture—the whole community, not individual interests
- Allow the group to have discussion alone to find out more about each other before involving the Project Team
- Give members more freedom to dissent
- Establish minimums on the mix of CAC members
- Distribute all vital materials before the process begins
- Divide the main group into smaller groups for discussion on the day's events
- Elect a spokesman for each smaller group to report to main group
- Structure the meeting to be strictly business with no meals and wine.

**Suggestions for what to keep the same:**

- Definitely have a CAC working openly with the owners and architect
- The meals and wine make for pleasant discussions
- Use the round-table set up
- Have the consecutive multi-day meetings so people get to know each other

## APPENDIX D

### Letter of Consent

February 10, 2005

Dear:

I am candidate for the Master of Arts in Applied Communication at Royal Roads University in Victoria, British Columbia. In order to complete this degree, I shall be producing a thesis.

I shall be asking the question: When stakeholders are closely involved in the planning of a community-use building project, what effects do communication processes have on the outcome? Theorists have suggested that positive change originates from communicative action—the capacity for people to work through disagreements to achieve effective solutions to problems. I shall be examining these theories and how they relate to a bottom-up approach to community-use building planning. As part of the process, I shall be describing the details of the hotel project, but my main objective is to examine the dialogue and the communication strategies involved.

As part of the research to complete this project, I shall be conducting a series of interviews with the key people who have been associated with the Ivy House Hotel project, should they agree to participate. I would also like to conduct a separate group discussion with the members of the Community Advisory Committee. This would take the form of small group discussions followed during the same session by a whole-group discussion. I do not believe the meeting would take more than two hours. I shall provide a list of questions (attached here) that could be used as a guideline for discussion within the groups. The hotel has kindly allowed me to use the Oak Room on February 28<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 P.M. for this purpose. If this date does not suit enough CAC members, I may have to reschedule.

Anonymity for all, as well as the non-disclosure of the name of the hotel project will be assured to the best of my ability, and all records will be kept confidential. I shall have sole access to any recorded materials or other data that may identify you. Pseudonyms (of your choice) will be used in the reportage. Only you and I will know your identity. Your name will not appear in any documentation, and the project will be identified only as being in Western Canada. Tapes, if used, will be destroyed within six months of completion of my thesis. The purpose is not to expose unrest or divisiveness, but to make sense of the process of communication between the parties during the project-planning period. At the end of the research reporting, others planning a similar building project may read the thesis to contemplate whether they might benefit by applying the methodology or not.

If any person involved in the project does not wish to take part for any reason, their identity or identities will not be revealed to other members. Also, any person may withdraw at any time during the process. Should you have any questions before the meeting that may affect your

willingness to participate, please contact me using the address, telephone, or e-mail information below.

The completed thesis will be available to be circulated for scholarly purposes and will be submitted to the Royal Roads University Thesis Office for university records, and for further transmittal to the National Library of Canada. As author, I shall own copyright. All participants who request a copy of the thesis shall be provided with one, either electronically or by mail.

Should you wish to verify the authenticity of the research project, you may contact:

The Faculty Thesis Coordinator, Dr. Jayne Rodgers, Department of Applied Communication, Royal Roads University, 2005 Sooke Road, Victoria, BC, V9B 5Y2, Canada.

or

The Faculty Director: Dr. Mari Peepre, Professor and Director, Applied Communication Programs, Royal Roads University

If you are willing to participate, please sign both copies of this letter, and return one copy to me for my records. If you have notified me by e-mail or phone of your intention to participate, it will suffice to bring your signed copy and the attached Information Sheet on February 28<sup>th</sup>.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Tricia Timmermans

---

I agree to take part in the thesis project as described by Tricia Timmermans, according to the parameters outlined above.

Signature: .....

Print Name: .....

Address: .....

Telephone number:.....

E-mail address: .....

Signature of researcher: .....

APPENDIX E

DEMOGRAPHICS SURVEY FORM

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Please tick  $\checkmark$  one box only

Gender:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Male	Female		
Age category:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Under 30	30-54	55-65	65+
Location From hotel:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Immediate Neighbour	Less than 1 km	1 – 5 km	Outside the area
Hotel User	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never

What is your special interest in the project?

---

How did you become interested in the project?

---

Have you taken part in a community advisory project of this kind before, and if so what other projects have you been involved in?

---

## APPENDIX F

## SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Dear Community Advisory Committee member:

The following are questions to help start discussion within your group. One person will act as interviewer, one as interviewee, and one will observe and take notes. I shall let you know when to change roles. By rotating roles everyone will have a turn at asking, answering, and writing. You should be able to get through each set of questions in about five to eight minutes. Don't be afraid to ask questions to clarify your interviewee's answers. This will produce a deeper understanding of what the process meant to them. Please ask only the questions specified, and any you may need for clarification. Keep in mind that I'm not so interested in your opinion about how things turned out; rather, I want to hear of your experience of the project. If you disagree with your interviewee's comments, please remember your role, and simply remain curious. In order to ensure that both recorder and interviewer have understood the interviewee's answers accurately, I shall give you a minute to read back what has been recorded. Please change anything that the interviewee does not feel is accurate. My primary goal is to promote understanding by discovering the meaning of the process for you, the participants. I ask that you respect everyone's privacy, and keep the information within your group.

Tell us about your experience of being involved in this project.

How did you get involved?

What was your role? In what ways, or to what extent, did you participate?

What aspects of the project process kept you engaged?

What aspects of the project process did you find of particular interest?

What aspects of the project process didn't work particularly well for you?

If the project was to begin afresh today, what would you recommend the organizers

1. keep the same.
2. do more of.
3. do less of.

And finally, would you be involved in a similar community project again?

Why or why not?

## APPENDIX G

From *The Magic of Dialogue: Transforming Conflict into Cooperation*  
by Daniel Yankelovich

### Fifteen Strategies for Dialogue

1. Err on the side of including people who disagree.
2. Initiate dialogue through a gesture of empathy.
3. Check for the presence of all three core requirements of dialogue—equality, emphatic listening, and surfacing assumptions non-judgmentally—and learn how to introduce the missing ones.
4. Minimize the level of mistrust before pursuing practical objectives.
5. Keep dialogue and decision making compartmentalized.
6. Focus on common interests, not divisive ones.
7. Use specific cases to raise general issues.
8. Bring forth your own assumptions before speculating on those of others.
9. Clarify assumptions before speculating on those of others.
10. Where applicable, identify mistrust as the real source of misunderstandings.
11. Expose all scripts to a reality check
12. Focus on conflicts between value systems, not people.
13. Be sure trust exists before addressing transference distortions.
14. When appropriate, express the emotions that accompany strongly held values.
15. Encourage relationships in order to humanize transactions.

### Ten Potholes of the Mind

1. Holding back.
2. Being locked into a box.
3. Prematurely moving to action.
4. Listening without hearing.
5. Starting at different points.
6. Showboating.
7. Scoring Debating Points.
8. Contrarianism.
9. Having a Pet Preoccupation.
10. Aria Singing.

## APPENDIX H

## THE TEAM CHARTER

The following Team Charter is based on work done by organizational change guru, Bob Chartier. The key to this charter is that it offers practical tools and information to effect change from the inside, and is applicable to the kinds of deliberations the CAC members and the Ivy House Hotel Project Team were engaged in. It is an agreement between team members to set achievable values and standards that define a way of working together for the duration of their meetings. Its purpose is to build team spirit and enthusiasm for the group's purpose, and to set goals by which progress can be measured. It is a vital link between the team's vision and the practical work of getting things done.

**How it works:**

Members hold a one- or two-day meeting with a facilitator to plan how they will work for the duration of their time together. The facilitator has the team focus on its: Mission Statement, values, work standards, code of conduct, roles and responsibilities, protocols (information about meetings, how decisions will be made, how disagreements will be handled), individual skills, and team improvement goals.

Each subject is brainstormed until consensus is arrived at. This brainstorming will produce the *Team Charter*. A designated person or a volunteer will print this charter and laminate a copy for each team member to keep in the front of their committee binders.

During this focus meeting, dates are chosen for when the first half-day checkup will be done (depending on the frequency of meetings) to discover whether the team is on track with their agreed-on *Team Charter*. A later date will be chosen for a second checkup meeting to focus on: things to stop doing, things to continue doing, and things to start doing. If possible, these focus and checkup meetings are held with the same facilitator.

By involving all members in this critical activity, the group will evolve into one that bases its actions on principles and teamwork. The *Team Charter* is a tool that makes the team responsible for coming to grips with the group's work ethics, values, and strategic goals.

For more information go to:

[http://www.managers-gestionnaires.gc.ca/cafe-exchange/tools/toolkit/vision\\_e.shtml#charter](http://www.managers-gestionnaires.gc.ca/cafe-exchange/tools/toolkit/vision_e.shtml#charter)