

**SUSTAINABLE PLANNING
IN POLO, ILLINOIS**

An Applied Thesis Project

Presented to the

Department of Geography

Western Illinois University

by

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June 20, 2002

Abstract

Economic hardship, increasing federal and state mandates, and exurban development, among other issues, have complicated matters for rural communities. A result is that many small towns and rural areas see an increasing need for comprehensive plans to better manage land use and economic resources. Polo, a community in northwestern Illinois, is one community that attempted to better control the forces affecting them by undertaking a number of planning and local development efforts. This research documents the role played by a Peace Corps Fellow graduate intern to facilitate the efforts made by community leaders in Polo to implement comprehensive planning, guided by the principles of sustainable development.

The methods, techniques, and data used throughout the project included: maximizing community participation in the multiple planning processes (recruiting participants and publicizing efforts); introducing new ideas and programs for local leaders to consider (educating); taking advantage of existing resources and expertise; conducting a community issues survey; consensus building; and advocating for sustainability in all endeavors. Wherever possible, goals and objectives from Polo's recent planning or visioning exercises were incorporated into any new effort.

The major finding from the internship was that community and project sustainability may fail when education and leadership are absent. Both are very important for sustainable community and economic development. Whether the community is assembling a plan or working on a project, education helps to raise public awareness, build consensus, and may provide solutions that work over the long-term. Capable leadership is necessary to help groups seek out and evaluate possible solutions, and

maintain group focus to achieve project or program goals. Another finding was that the resources and solutions for rural communities often already exist. The difficulty is in finding these programs or projects that may work for that community. Again, leadership is important, along with timeliness. Lastly, individuals or groups advocating for change can play a major role in shaping a rural community. Here, it is very important that those persons are knowledgeable and educated on those ideas or programs that they are advocating.