

Activate: Conference for Leadership Developers

"Bring it on down to Muni-Sim!"

Using a Municipal Simulation in a Leadership Program

*Teresa M. Kelly
David E. Waters*

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I. Introduction.

- A. David E. Waters and Teresa M. Kelly
- B. Leadership Northeast Program

II. Competencies and Objectives.

- A. Manage Self: What are your strengths, vulnerabilities, and triggers? Who are you and how do you work in a group? Or, in a community?
- B. Key Objective: Understand and appreciate the styles of leadership that you can bring to any situation. Learn the difference between adaptive and technical leadership and recognize those opportunities when one path may accomplish more than the other.

III. How Do We Get There?

- A. Set Participants in their Community. Using a Timeline, the group shares *how they first came to their community, establishing everyone has a place and a story. Sharing individual stories begins building the foundation for exploring the leadership competencies.*
- B. Aspirations for the community and concerns for the future: *Identifying needs, and getting to the existential question: Who are we as a community? Where are we aligned as to our future? Where do we have different visions?*
- C. Adaptive and Technical Leadership: *Using a cartoon, the group explores the distinctions between adaptive and technical work.*
- D. Manage Self: Understanding leadership styles through personality assessment: *Using the Myers Briggs assessment tool the individuals explore their strengths, vulnerabilities and triggers identifying contrasting leadership styles. With group activities they are immersed in the competency components experimenting with engaging others for a collective purpose.*

IV. Incorporating a Municipal Simulation.

The Municipal Simulation creates an immersive experience for participants, providing them with a leadership challenge where they can experience and practice core principles and competencies in real time. They can take risks and step out of their comfort zones and learn about engaging systems and processes and each other.

Scenario:

You live in the City of Northeastville, Kansas. Northeastville is a small community, an inner ring suburb of Big City, Kansas. Northeastville is built primarily along either side of Main Street, with cross streets of First Street through Sixth Street. Northeastville is primarily made of single-family residential homes. However, there are commercial properties along Main Street, together with multi-family units. A significant amount of property is also used for tax-exempt purposes, such as City Hall, an elementary school, and the Northeastville Church. There is green space on the Church property which residents use, unofficially, as a small park, and to walk their dogs.

The Northeastville Church has operated almost since the founding of Northeastville 75 years ago. Unfortunately, the congregation has aged, and the Church has been forced to close. It currently sits vacant, and unused, though neighbors continue to use the green space. The Church, needing to pay off certain debts, has put the property on the market for sale. Among the leading potential purchasers is Developer Co., which would like to develop the property into apartments with first-floor retail/restaurant spaces. This would require that the property be rezoned.

Identify the Stakeholders:

We have spent time identifying one's place in a community and discussing shared or differing values in that community. With this, we break the community up into segments/stakeholders, with an eye toward fomenting possible disagreement, both within any one group, and among the groups themselves.

There are four (4) identified stakeholder groups in this simulation:

- (1) Developer;
- (2) Northeastville Residents;
- (3) Business Community; and
- (4) Elected Officials.

The characteristics and interests of these groups may be fairly summarized as follows:

- (1) **Developer:** The Developer's primary motivation is to make a profit and believes that the higher levels of density are needed to obtain an appropriate return on investment. The Developer feels strongly that it has important private property rights that should be respected and may be fairly laissez-faire regarding what others may or may not do with their own properties. However, the Developer believes that, with nearby commercial uses and multi-family uses, the project is in line with the character of the neighborhood along Main Street, and that it will be a boon to Northeastville. A "win-win" situation. The Developer does not plan significant green space but believes that green space can be added to the City's municipal complex property, to serve that need, if the City wants it.
- (2) **Northeastville Residents:** Citizens may be for or against the project, and discussion should reflect differences of opinion. Some believe that, while the Church was consistent with a single-family neighborhood, the multi-family/retail project would intrude on the character of the neighborhood, and such projects should not be located North of Main Street. Other residents disagree, pointing to the existing Commercial property at First and Main. Some are worried about allowing renters in an established owner-occupied area. Residents on the South side of Main may take exception to implications that living near commercial or multi-family areas—as they do—are not desirable. Multi-family residents may not appreciate being seen as "transient" and believe that density is both important and attractive to younger professionals.

There may be concern that, if this project does not go through, the property will sit vacant and become blighted. Some residents may want the City to take a more active role in the transaction between the Church and the Developer, or perhaps even buy the Church property so as to keep the unofficial dog-walking park. Others worry about costs of acquiring property, what that might mean for other city services, and keeping taxes as low as possible.

- (3) **Business Community:** The Business Community is made up of Owners of Commercial Properties and Businesses in Northeastville. The Business Community will be primarily interested in how this will affect local businesses. Bringing in new residents may mean more customers, and bringing in new businesses may revitalize the corridor, which the businesses there see as primarily suitable for more intense uses. If the project is approved, some commercial property owners expect that their property values will increase, allowing them to either sell for higher prices, or demand higher rents from more financially stable tenants. However, some smaller businesses may be concerned about increased competition, or about being driven out by "small business gentrification."
- (4) **Elected Officials:** Being elected officials for the entire City—not just one part—the City Council must weigh many different perspectives. The Elected Officials must consider the desires of its residents, but also the needs of its businesses. There are land use and zoning factors to consider. New housing and business options may attract certain new residents but may risk causing other existing residents to move away. The Elected Officials must also consider the proposal from a budget perspective. There will likely be increased sales tax revenues and utility franchise fees with the project. The property will no longer be tax-exempt and will generate property tax revenues. The Elected Officials would also like to be able to provide more programming and park services and keeping the unofficial dog park may benefit residents (and allow the City to not have to find or develop separate property). The City could consider attempting to purchase the property itself. However, the City would likely need to raise its mill levy by a not-insignificant amount in order to finance the acquisition.

Each stakeholder group will be provided with a packet of relevant information:

(1) Developer Packet:

- Scenario Summary (for Developer)
- Map of Northeastville and Project Rendering
- Questions for Discussion

(2) Residents Packet:

- Scenario Summary (for Residents)
- Map of Northeastville and Project Rendering
- Questions for Discussion

(3) Business Community Packet:

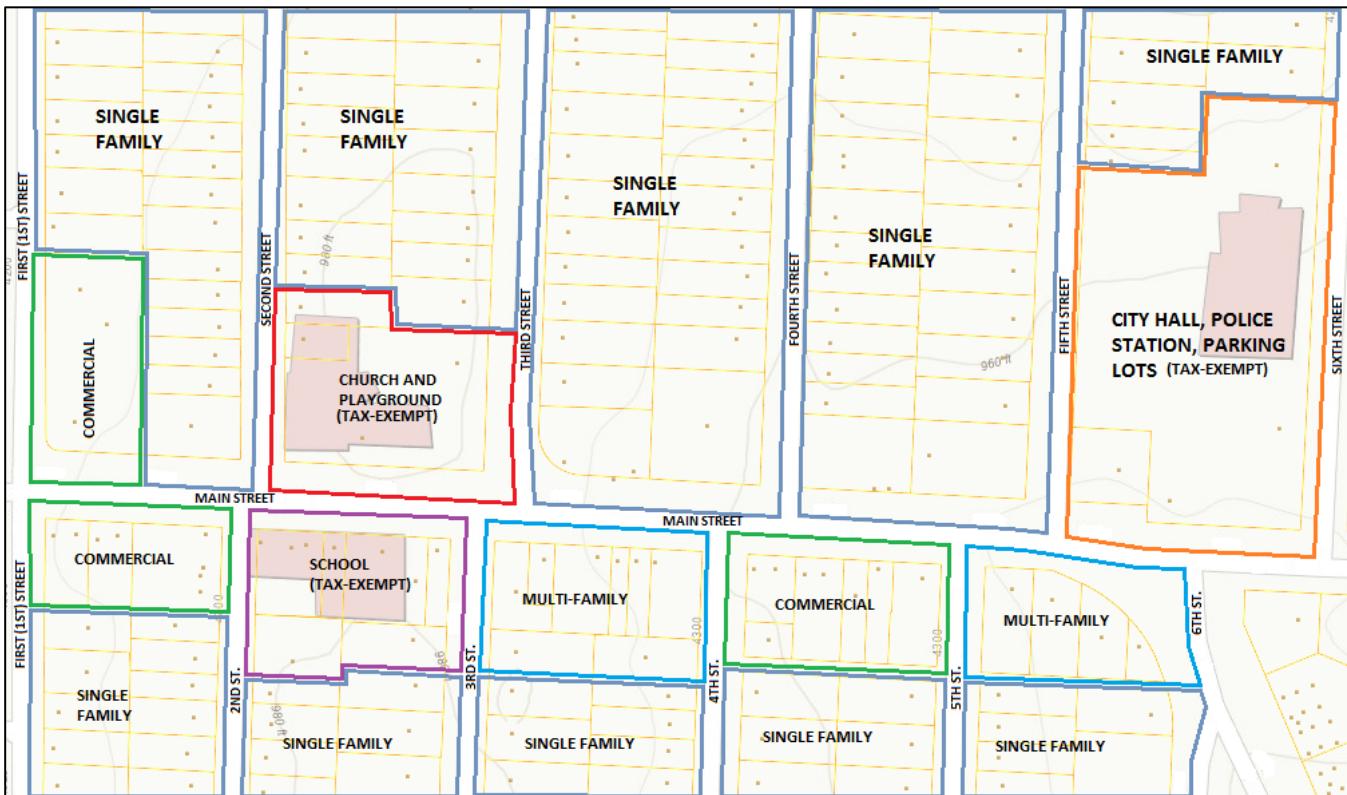
- Scenario Summary (for Business Community)
- Map of Northeastville and Project Rendering
- Questions for Discussion

(4) Elected Officials Packet:

- Scenario Summary (for Elected Officials)
- Map of Northeastville and Project Rendering
- Questions for Discussion

The Developer, Residents, and Business Community Packets do not provide information on the possible stakeholder interests of the other groups. However, the Elected Officials packet has information on all stakeholder groups. The intent is that information is withheld from Groups, so, the Groups can either ignore other interests or attempt to understand other interests themselves. Their choices may impact how the simulation plays out.

MAP OF NORTHEASTVILLE



PROJECT RENDERING



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Facilitating Discussion:

We look for whether participants fall into their personality types, or whether they challenge preconceived assumptions. What voices and personalities rise? Which ones are left behind? Do the results align with or differ from earlier discussions?

The Developer, the Residents, and the Business Community Groups will each be given a period of time (10-20 minutes) to discuss, among themselves, their respective stance(s).

Members of the Elected Officials Group are instructed that they **will not** meet together during the 10-20 minutes while the Groups are meeting. Instead, the Elected Officials—who will have summaries of each of the Groups' characteristics—will be instructed to spend those 10-20 minutes alone, reviewing the materials and preparing questions by themselves.

Alternative instructions may include:

- Instructing each Group that it **must** agree on **one set of positions** to recommend to the Elected Officials (whether pro or con);
- Allowing each Group to have one or more viewpoints represented (and dividing the Group speaking time accordingly);
- Not giving any instructions, possibly resulting in dominance by one group over another (as to time before the Elected Officials) and minority positions not being aired (creating its own lessons, there);
- Allowing, discouraging, or remaining silent as to whether members from Groups may interact with each other.

Facilitators may want to raise or lower the heat, as appropriate, in any simulation. For example:

- Introducing a facilitator as a new person/stakeholder;
- Visibly removing certain participants (e.g., Developer and a City Councilmember) to stoke worries of "backroom" deals.

Group participants might consider the following questions, from their own experiences in their communities, and apply their experiences to Northeastville:

- When you think of your own city or community, which challenges do you believe it faces, and what concerns you the most?
- What are your aspirations for your community? What about your community is unique, and should be preserved? What needs to change?
- What do you think the needs or wants of the other Groups might be? How can you address them? SHOULD you address them?
- How can you begin leading your community toward your vision? What leadership skills are needed to either bring other stakeholders on board with your vision, or find compromise?

City Council Meeting.

A City Council Meeting will then be called, and each Group will be given a period of time (5-10 minutes) to present its position to the Elected Officials. The Elected Officials may ask questions of the representatives. The Elected Officials will then have a period of time (5-10 minutes for open deliberation). The Elected Officials will be told that they need to hold either an up or down vote (the matter may not be tabled or continued, and no Councilmember may abstain).

Typical Timeline (1 Hour):

00:00—00:10	Set up (break into groups of 4, explain scenario, hand out packets, explain time limits).
00:10—00:30	Groups have 20 minutes to discuss and prepare to present.
00:30	Convene City Council Meeting.
00:30—00:45	Developer, Residents, and Business Groups have 5 minutes to make their presentations.
00:45—00:55	Elected Officials to deliberate openly for 10 minutes; may ask questions of Groups.
00:55	Decision Announced.
00:55-1:00	Process Time/Flex Time.

Municipal Simulation Debrief:

- What is on your mind right now?
- How have we modeled (or not) the leadership ideas we are exploring?
- What is going on for you in this activity?
 - Did your personality profile cause you to change up your approach today? Did you consider NOT following the directions? (Experiment and Risk)
- What assumptions are being challenged?
- How does what's happening here reflect processes at work or in your community?
- What concerns you most about bringing these ideas back to your organization/community?

V. Conclusion

Thank you for participating with us in Muni Sim.

Contact Teresa or David:

Teresa M. Kelly

teresa@teresamkelly.com

David E. Waters

DWaters@lathropgage.com

¹ Teaching Leadership. Case-in-Point, Case Studies and Coaching. Chris Green, Julia Fabris McBride @KLC Press 2015

Bibliography

Your Leadership Edge. Lead Anytime, Anywhere. Ed o'Malley, Amanda Cebula. ©KLC Press 2015

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