

CLIENT NEWS FROM BONCKE MUELLER ELDRED ASSOCIATES, P.C.**Training the Decision-Makers**

by Bruce G. Boncke, P.E.

President, New York State Builders Association

The decision-makers in our communities are the Legislative Bodies, Planning Boards, Zoning Board of Appeals and various advisory groups. They are generally well-intentioned citizens who have politically or voluntarily decided to serve their communities. They are usually underpaid for their services and live the life of a hockey goalie. No matter how many saves they make, it's the one that got through that lost the game, and everyone remembers. Many communities are finding it increasingly difficult to fill positions on decision-making boards. Often they are putting ads in the newspaper! The demands on these individuals' time and knowledge are far greater than they were only 10-20 years ago. Personal and job mobility has also changed a lot of individuals' views on commitment to the communities they live in. Turnover and loss of continuity on decision-making boards is now a very serious issue that goes to the heart of the need for education. I recently completed a project that took a typical two years to obtain approval from a planning board. In that time, the entire board "turned over" with the exception of the chairperson!

The decisions made in our communities often involve large monetary issues, developers' risk, growth issues, and long-term effects on the environment, etc. Yet, there are very few Political Science graduates on our Legislative Boards and very few engineers, planners, environmental technicians, architects, etc., on our Planning Boards. Unfortunately, we find an increasing number of decision-makers that can't even interpret or understand the design plans and technical information submitted for an approval process. So, how do we establish baseline standards for putting people in these decision-making positions and provide them with the knowledge to do their jobs?



First, we have to stop trying to train these people about the chapter/verse legalities and get back to training them on how to review facts and information to make a decision. We spend far

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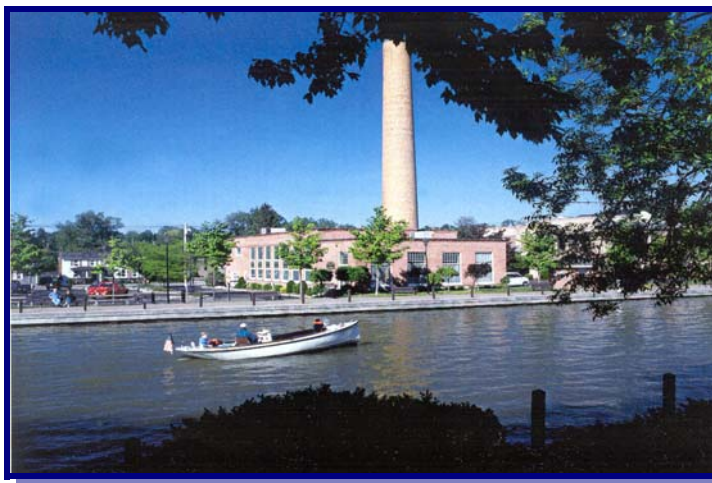
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Training the Decision-Makers—Con't.

too much time on training programs that concentrate on procedures, deadlines, legalities, case law and the legal consequences of their decisions. Many well-intentioned volunteers are discouraged by the emphasis on these issues that detract from what they felt they were put in position to do. We need to teach them how to read plans, what “Level of Service” means, modern best management practices for stormwater management, what “density” really means, what incentive zoning is, that clustering is a good planning tool, etc.

Second, we need to reprioritize some community budgets to emphasize training on planning issues. One of the most valuable resources for decision-based training is the New York Planning Federation’s annual conference. Yet, attendance is down, due largely to budget cutbacks, in a time when the education is needed more than ever! Community training and education needs to be an ongoing budgeted and funded priority that includes the entire public, not just the decision makers. In the spirit of Quality Communities, the decision makers are actually everyone in the community. With more broad-based community

education on growth and development issues, finding volunteers to sit on decision-making boards should be easier. Third, our building industry has to take a more active roll in the training and education process. We also need to seek positions on decision-making boards. Get



Summer on the Erie Canal

involved in your communities! Recommend, help organize and participate in community education programs. Volunteer to be on growth management and comprehensive plan committees to make sure our perspective is part of the education process. The worst time to educate decision-making boards, or the public, is during the heat of battle on a controversial project.

The Monroe County Department of Planning and Economic Development offers one of the best training programs in our state. I helped

develop the program and have been part of the faculty for 12 years. Communities routinely send new decision making board members and staff members. The program consists of about 10 topics/sessions including: powers/duties, SEQR, drainage, traffic, how to read plans and planning tools. Sessions are videotaped for additional use by communities. It concludes with a mock board meeting and site visits to view examples of issues learned. The program has trained over 600 decision makers in our area. It would make a great model for a statewide program.

If we are unable to improve on the training of our decision makers, we will see an increase in bad decisions made for the wrong reasons. Decisions like a positive declaration because it’s an election year and a group of neighbors signed a petition against the project, even though all project reviews indicated no significance! Actions like a 40 page scoping document copied from a nearby project so the community can be “consistent” in its treatment of developers, with no decision process on

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significance of the specific project impacts. Decisions made based on the fear of being sued rather than on the merits of the design.

I miss the days when decision makers asked me questions

that indicated they actually reviewed the plans and reports I prepared. I remember a board member once asking me for the name of the scientist and formula that I based my analysis on. I answered his question and he made the motion to approve the project. Oh, the good old days!

Is Your Public Project in Need of Funding?

For public entities, agencies and affiliates, the fall brings a new round of grant and loan funding options and deadlines. The kinds of projects eligible vary by program, as do the deadlines, and all are competitive.

The ***Environmental Protection Fund/Clean Water-Clean Air Bond Act*** 2001 funding cycle closes on August 31, 2001. Eligible projects include parks, heritage areas, historic preservation and land acquisition. Municipalities and not-for-profit corporations with an ownership interest are eligible to apply for the grant funds.

The ***Clean Water-Clean Air Bond Act*** also offers funding programs for public infrastructure-related project including wastewater treatment and pollution control. These NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation programs include grants and low interest loans.

Also oriented toward water and wastewater systems are the New York State Environmental Facilities Corporation ***“Pipeline for Jobs”*** program and the ***USDA Rural Development Loan Program***. “Pipeline for Jobs” is a grant program oriented toward economic development projects. USDA loan programs are oriented toward financially needy rural areas.

In addition to “pipes” infrastructure, transportation programs including public road and transit projects, air quality improvement programs, surface transportation enhancements and transportation efficiency improvement programs may be eligible for funding under the ***Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21)***.

Brownfields Restoration, Local Waterfront Revitalization, Land and Water Conservation Program



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projects, the ***National Recreational Trails Act Program*** and even ***Rural Utilities Services Broadband Funding*** for telecommunications access are all programs that are available to municipalities and other publicly-oriented organizations. These specialized programs are in addition to the more traditional ***Community Development Block Grant*** and ***Economic Development Administration*** programs.

Have a project idea without a funding source? Let Boncke Mueller Eldred Associates, P. C. help you research the possibilities and assist in the process. Please contact Aaron Gagné at 377-7360 or agagne@bmepec.com for more information.

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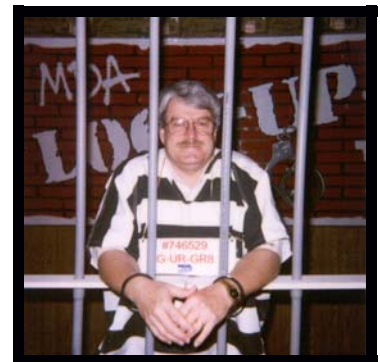
BME Employee News

Boncke Mueller Eldred Associates, P.C. is proud to announce the licensure of Denny J. Burdick as a Professional Engineer by the New York State Department of Education. Denny holds degrees in Applied Science (Construction) and Applied Science (Architecture) from Alfred State College in Alfred, New York. He is a member of the Rochester Engineering Society and the American Society of Civil Engineers.

BME is also pleased to announce that George Brinkwart has passed the New York State Engineer-in-Training examination, also administered by the New York State Department of Education. George holds a degree in

Construction Engineering Technology from Alfred State College in Alfred, New York.

Aaron Gagné has also recently been appointed to the Village of Lima Planning Board and to the Ontario Tobacco Asset Securitization Corporation, the group overseeing the bond sale and receipt of proceeds resulting from legal settlements with the tobacco industry. Aaron joins many other BME staff, including Bruce Boncke, Jim Mueller, Peter Vars, Bob Cantwell, Dave Zacharias and Andy Spencer in being active on volunteer boards and review committees. BME encourages all of its employees to “practice what we preach”, and become involved in their own communities at all levels.



Bruce Jailed for a Good Cause!



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Have you visited the Boncke Mueller Eldred Associates, P.C. web site lately? Next time you're logged in, stop by to see the variety of resources and tools that we have available, especially past articles that may be of interest.