

**Draft
New Castle
Town Council Commitment
Civic Engagement and Social Capital**

Introduction

One challenge for local governments is to create a vision of the future that addresses both physical characteristics and social desires of the community. New Castle's Comprehensive Plan guides the physical characteristics and through physical planning addresses one level of social elements. In New Castle's Comprehensive Plan the community endeavors to create a compact urban form with emphasis on mixed-use development that is pedestrian and transit oriented. From this physical planning Town Council achieves social outcomes, as well: to maintain New Castle's small-town character, to allow for community interaction in the natural course of daily life, to keep New Castle from losing its authenticity, its history, its variety of settlement patterns, and its diversity of people.

In order to influence other aspects of the social element the Town Council uses a practice of governance that emphasizes civic engagement and the constant creation of social capital. In other words, how Town Council intends to conduct itself in a partnership with the community to govern New Castle. Town Council believes that their ability to govern is based upon "the consent of the community" and as a result civic engagement and the constant creation of social capital are central to the successful functioning of New Castle's government and community.

This statement is New Castle Town Council's Commitment regarding civic engagement and the development of social capital.

Governance

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

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

Stated in another way: the Council/Town receive input from community members and responds to that input. For example, community members seek family oriented events that honor community history and they voice their desires to Council and Town officials. The Council discusses these community desires and in partnership with community members plan and create a series of community events celebrating the Town's 125th Anniversary Year. It's important to note that at every step in this process there is facilitating and partnering to the point where the line blurs between government and community and we all function in support of one another.

The above model of governance illustrates a "horizontal" relationship of reciprocity and cooperation, not a "vertical" relationship of dependency and authority. Clearly, the Town of New Castle functions in the horizontal relationship sphere. Scholars point out that our most successful communities function in the horizontal relationship sphere. Hand-in-hand with civic engagement/community partnering is the creation of social capital – the more we partner with the community, the larger the social capital bank account becomes.

What allows a community to function effectively in the horizontal relationship sphere?

Research shows that the answer lies in the community's store of "social capital". Social capital enhances the benefits of investment in physical and human capital," says Robert Putnam, noted political scientist and Dillon Professor of International Affairs at Harvard University.

What is Social Capital?

Putnam states that social capital means features of social life – networks, norms, reciprocity, and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives.

Examples of social capital can include Lion's Club, Historic Society, Garden Club, Knitting Guild, Senior Lunch, Friends of the Library, River Center, Super Seniors, soccer clubs, book

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

clubs, Chamber of Commerce, sports groups in general, arts groups, music groups, theater

groups, technical groups, professional organizations, etc. These groups create networks of citizens that come together for some mutual interest and they, in turn, create a network of citizens that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit and the benefit of the community. These networks not only help each other, they also create norms of behavior and trust that carry beyond personal relationships and, in New Castle, cross over from one group to another. These networks are self-starting, self-sustaining and self-enforcing. Experience shows that government creation of these groups is not effective. While government cannot be effective in the creation of these types of groups, we can develop a pattern of partnering, trust, reciprocity, facilitation, and seeking advice when working together for a community objective.

Facilitating Social Capital

What can government do to facilitate social capital? Protect diversity in population and settlement patterns – avoid homogenization. Enhance diversity and self-sufficiency in the community; create public spaces for citizens to interact (parks, trails, community centers, libraries, museum, lively/life on Main Street...); organize land use and settlement patterns in a manner so that people interact with each other (pedestrian oriented vs. auto oriented development uses); require a mix of land uses rather than allowing segregated land use patterns; permit, encourage and preserve informal gathering places so serendipitous conversations can occur; encourage activity on Main Street – outdoor restaurant seating, outdoor displays of retail wares and any other approach to give Main Street a life full of interaction; and protect our diversity of housing types and housing costs. Additionally, the Council can educate their staff on the concept of social capital and its importance. Building a relationship of trust and cooperation between Town employees and the Community we serve will build social capital.

New Castle Approach

The Town Council is providing staff with resources to enhance our approach to civic engagement. Much of the staff has attended training on Community Policing (the entire police department and other senior staffers) as a way build a staff ethic regarding engaging the community in a positive manner as part of our day-to-day work. Staff has also trained in the Incident Command System (ICS). The purpose of ICS training is to prepare staff to act when emergencies arise. ICS also gives staff the organizational framework and tools to plan and

execute special events of many kinds. Staff used the ICS planning system to plan, organize and execute the 125th Anniversary Events with few problems. During the 125th events staff was able to utilize the ICS planning process in a manner that allowed community member to partner and participate in the planning and implementation of these events. This partnering with the community clearly increased the community store of social capital and has provided Town staff with a blueprint for future events and celebrations.

At a recent Council meeting Mayor Frank Breslin stated: “Lesson I’ve Learned: We don’t lose by Giving, we Gain through Giving.”