



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE BUFFALO-NIAGARA REGION: A Workshop

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Workshop on Public Participation in the Buffalo-Niagara Region

Monday, June 21, 2004 • 10:00 - 3:00 • 545 O'Brian Hall

The workshop hosted by the Baldy Center for Law & Social Policy brought together community leaders, practitioners, and scholars engaged in various regional participatory processes to study the current practice of public participation and to develop strategies for improvement. The Buffalo-Niagara region has a long history of citizen participation and activism focused on environmental issues. Due to its industrial past, there are issues of toxic wastes affecting human health as well as environmental quality. A local concentration of landfills for toxic and radioactive materials also raises issues of human health, especially for people and schools located directly adjacent to these sites. The rivers of the region support a large hydro-power plant and it is currently engaged in securing a new operating license using a community participation process. Of course, there are also issues of environmental protection - habitats, waterways, greenways -- with citizen involvement. There are issues of environmental management - dredging of the Buffalo River, regulating the flow of water in the Great Lakes, establishing a Peace Park on the Niagara River -- that bring local citizens together for discussion. In all, our region has a tremendous diversity of types of local participation and types of agencies, local groups, national groups, and businesses involved.

At this workshop citizen activists and some practitioners discussed what they are doing, who they are working with, what some of the challenges are that they face, and what outcomes they would like to have result from their work in the public arena. Workshop participants were asked to consider four questions which were discussed in facilitated roundtables.

- *What is the status of your issues? Which government agencies are involved?*
- *How do you understand the roles and responsibilities of these agencies?*
- *Why do you believe that public input matters? What precisely caught the attention of individuals and local groups to the point that they decided to make the commitment to become involved?*
- *How would you like your participation to affect the outcomes of your issues? What do you hope to gain as a result of your work?*

Citizens & Practitioner Roundtable Participants included: **Rick Ammerman** Hickory Woods; **Judith Anderson** Toxic Waste Lupus Coalition, East side of Buffalo; **Peggy Bogucki** Seneca Babcock Community Assn/Block Club; **Donna Hosmer** Cheektowaga Citizens Coalition, Bellevue; **Jackie James** Toxic Tonawanda; **Russell and Diane Radder** Hickory Woods; **Ann Roberts** Residents for Responsible Government, Lewiston Porter Schools; **Mike Schade** Citizens Environmental Coalition; **Tom Sullivan** New York Power Authority.

Faculty Participants and Organizers included: **Joe Gardella**, UB Chemistry and CAS; **Margaret Shannon**, UB Law; **Barry Boyer**, UB Law; **James Gardner**, UB Law; **Errol Meidinger**, UB Law.

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