

# News from Birchler Arroyo Associates, Inc.

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## Planning Communities & Transportation Systems

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*Kids Planning*



*Workshop in Marshall*

## New Year's Resolutions

The staff at Birchler Arroyo Associates, Inc. is looking forward to 2009! Regardless of how you feel about New Year's resolutions, there is something to be said for a new year providing us fresh opportunities to move in a positive direction.

As professional planners, we strongly believe in the importance of planning efforts to effect positive change. Sometimes considered a luxury item, planning is the simple answer to the tough question: How can we improve our neighborhood, community, or region? Especially in these tough economic times, the value found in giving people a voice cannot be overlooked.

## High Value Planning Strategies



In our office, we have been discussing what high-value strategies communities can pursue today, this month, or this year to empower their business owners and residents. What planning tools are effective and efficient in this economic climate? What can we do today to prepare for the upswing? We've made a list of the top ten things your community can do that could lead to policy improvements, generate public confidence and promote civic pride.

1. **Hold a community workshop:** Ask the questions - Where are we now as a community? Where do we want to be? Compare the answers to the goals in your master plan. Do they still match up? If so, share that information with the community. If not, consider a master plan update in the future. Ask the community how it could help with implementation of certain objectives.
2. **Get your municipal boards & commissions on the same page by holding a series of joint workshops.** Review issues of the last year or two - what have been conflicts, misunderstandings or delays due to a lack of communication? Prepare an agenda of the top 2-3 things that should be addressed and keep the meetings to an agreed-upon time limit.
3. **Develop a business roundtable series:** Ask the businesses what the community can do to help in this economy. Provide businesses with resource lists. Facilitate networking between businesses that would encourage business-to-business opportunities within your community.
4. **Perform a corridor or downtown assessment to see what is working and what could be improved:** Birchler Arroyo Associates, Inc. (BA) has a new service called NEXTSTEPS for Downtown that will give your community constructive criticism and honest observations along with specific action items to put your corridor or downtown's best face forward.
5. **Conduct Mini Studies:** If a full-blown marketing or traffic study isn't in your budget this year, consider conducting a marketing snapshot, healthy community assessment, and traffic and parking assessments. These mini studies reflect the current situation in your community, identify issues that should be addressed in the short-term, and set the stage for additional studies in the future.
6. **Ignite a spark for the future of your community:** Get young people involved in a planning workshop. Invite the kids of your community in for a Saturday morning workshop where they can learn how to participate in community planning activities. Display a variety of maps and have them identify snapshots of their favorite places. What connections would they make? What changes do they think would make their lives better? Ask for their perspective on what makes a livable community. BA can provide resource materials and facilitate or train young people to moderate their own "snapshots" workshop.
7. **Find out what's happening with the older members of your community:** Host a seniors workshop to discuss their needs. The older members of your community have significant life experiences to share. Find out what skills and talents they have to offer and create strategies to match them up with boards, committees and other volunteer groups. Help them "age-in-community"; provide resources lists.
8. **Reach out to the whole community:** Develop an on-line newsletter, send email notices of meetings and agendas, create online social networking pages allowing discussion and comment of community events and activities



*DDA Tour in Shelby Township*

9. **Get out of the office and board room:** Take builders/developers around your town for a Familiarization Tour ("Fam Tour"). Show off the great opportunities for redevelopment in your community. Include your staff, board and committee members.
10. **Make the most of the downtime:** Take advantage of training opportunities for planning commissioners. Go to local workshops, use online webinars, host training workshops in your facility. To reduce costs, consider sharing the workshop and expenses with a neighboring community.

**Going to the Michigan Townships Association's Annual Education Conference January 28-29** at the Detroit Marriott at the Renaissance Center? Stop by the clearzoning/Birchler Arroyo Associates booth (#230) and say hello!

**We'd love to hear from you!** If you would like more information on the above articles, or if you have any other planning or traffic-related questions, please feel free to contact us. Our email addresses are our first initial and last name, followed by @birchlerarroyo.com. Our main phone number is 248.423.1776. Extensions are noted below:

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