

Issue Management Handbook

Washoe County Issue Management System

James Kent Associates

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“There are good things to see in the tide pools and there are exciting and interesting thoughts to be generated from the seeing. Every new eye applied to the peep hole which looks out at the world may fish in some new beauty and some new pattern, and the world of the human mind must be enriched by such fishing.”

John Steinbeck, Forward, Between Pacific Tides

INTRODUCTION

This handbook is written to provide information on James Kent Associates' (JKA) Human Geographic Issue Management System (HGIMS) that was pioneered in Washoe County, Nevada. Since 1983, the Washoe County Board of County Commissioners and Washoe County department and division heads have been engaged in annual strategic planning. The goal of these strategic planning efforts is to help Washoe County respond effectively to the rapidly changing conditions facing the County and its citizens. One of Washoe County's strategic goals is to develop an information program and system to anticipate and manage issues. This system is the Issue Management System.

Much of the founding work on the issue management system was done by Dr. James A. Kent through James Kent Associates and the Institute for Social Ecology and Public Policy. Many of the ideas and concepts included in this handbook come directly from the work done by Dr. Kent. James Kent Associates was under contract with Washoe County from March 1991 to April 1994 to provide issue management services to the County. As part of the contract, James Kent Associates agreed to work with Washoe County to help establish an issue management system in the County. The system is based within the Washoe County Department of Comprehensive Planning and a position, Community Coordinator, was established to help manage the system. The Community Coordinator is responsible for implementing the County's Issue Management System, to include developing applications through the Washoe County Geographic Information System (GIS).

This handbook will define and explain both issue management and the issue management system. The handbook begins with an example of a recent issue in Washoe County and its impact on both the citizens of a particular area and Washoe County. This example will be used throughout the handbook to illustrate various aspects of issue management.

A COMMUNITY IN TURMOIL

Early in 1990, staff from the Washoe County Department of Comprehensive Planning began to work with residents of the Palomino Valley area to develop a long range land use plan for their community. Palomino Valley is the name given by land developers to a large area (over 180,000 acres) located about 20 miles to the northeast of the Reno-Sparks metropolitan area. The Palomino Valley area began to develop in the late 1970's as a residential subdivision with agricultural uses and lots served by individual domestic wells and septic systems. Additionally, a General Improvement District (GID) was created to provide additional revenue to maintain the gravel roads in the area. The Codes, Covenants and Restrictions (CCRs) filed with the original subdivisions prohibited any lots smaller than 40 acres. These CCRs were due to expire in 1990 and residents were concerned about the future of their Valley when the CCRs disappeared.

Over the course of a year, a long range plan was developed and adopted as the Warm Springs Area Plan (Warm Springs is the name shown on government maps for the Palomino Valley area). The area plan provided for two distinct growth patterns in the Valley. The majority of the planning area was planned to remain with the large lot (no lots smaller than 40 acres) residential pattern, with agricultural uses permitted, that had historically existed in the Valley. However, a smaller area of about 3,800 acres in the center of the Valley was designated for a future specific plan. The specific plan meant that a more detailed plan would be developed within five years for the 3,800 acres. The impetus behind the designation of a specific plan was the desire of

property owners in that 3,800 acre area to use their ground water rights to develop their property with lots smaller than 40 acres in size.

The area plan provided very general guidance as to the content of this specific plan. However, the area plan was very specific on the number of dwelling units permitted in the planning area based on the perennial yield of ground water in the area and the amount of ground water rights owned by various individuals in the area. Since the property owners in the Specific Plan Area (SPA) owned over 85% of the ground water rights in the valley, most of the future dwelling units in the planning area were planned to occur in the SPA.

Work on the specific plan began shortly after the adoption of the Warm Springs Area Plan in early 1991. A citizen's task force was formed to assist a local consulting firm in the preparation of the specific plan. Of the seven citizens on the task force, five owned property within the SPA. In the fall of 1991, the task force was ready to present a draft specific plan for review by the neighborhood Citizen's Advisory Board (CAB) for the planning area. It was at this point in the process that the first serious opposition to the plan surfaced.

Representatives from the Homeowner's Association in the area strenuously objected to virtually every aspect of the draft plan. Their major objections to the plan centered around its small lots (less than third acre in the interior of the SPA), traffic flow (fear of traffic from the SPA using "their" roads outside of the SPA), a proposed community water and sewer system, and lack of permitted agricultural uses in the area. Some modifications were made to the draft specific plan, but these modifications did not satisfy the residents who objected to the draft specific plan. These residents claimed that the plan would destroy the "rural character" of the Valley.

Several of those objecting to the plan formed their own group to propose alternatives to the draft specific plan. This new group met with residents in the area and began work on an alternative specific plan. This alternative plan contained these residents vision of their "rural character". At a public hearing on the draft specific plan before the Washoe County Planning Commission, the two plans (together with their opposing groups of residents) collided. Over half of the residents of the Valley attended the public meeting, which was heated and lasted well into the night. The Planning Commission decided to return the draft specific plan to the community to work out the differences expressed during the public hearing.

The task force made several more modifications to the draft specific plan, but by this time the Valley was seriously divided over the specific plan. Splinter groups had formed, each with their own version of the specific plan. The homeowners association became disillusioned with the actions of the CAB and accused CAB members of selling out to SPA owners. The GID jumped into the process and claimed that they would be unable to maintain any of their roads if the draft specific plan was adopted. Neighbors no longer spoke to each other and several members of the task force were anonymously threatened because of their work on the specific plan. Staff from the planning department worked with several of the groups in the planning area and slowly a picture formed of the key concepts of the resident's vision of their "rural character". Their key concepts included continued agricultural uses (specifically, horses and 4H animals) in the area, gravel roads (to permit horse riding) and fear of a community sewer system (viewed as the first step in urbanizing their Valley). The conflicts over lot size in the SPA was found to be based not on the size of the lot, but rather in the ability of future residents to have continued agricultural uses.

Once these key concepts were integrated into the draft specific plan, objections to the plan rapidly diminished. Due to the severe splitting and fragmentation of various groups in the planning area, there were still groups who objected to the draft specific plan; however, the majority of residents felt as though the compromises in the draft specific plan were acceptable. After two more public

hearings before the Planning Commission, a specific plan was eventually adopted by the County Commissioners.

The legacy of the specific plan process still lingers in the planning area. The division between the CAB and the homeowners association has not healed and, as such, the CAB no longer represents the entire community. Several seats on the GID have been assumed by people who were deeply involved in the fight against both the first specific plan and the CAB. The GID has been active in trying to become autonomous and in replacing the CAB with a "more representative group". Any action by the CAB is likely to produce strenuous objections from the GID and the homeowners association, and the reverse is also true.

ISSUE MANAGEMENT

WHY ISSUE MANAGEMENT?

In retrospect, the problems associated with the Warm Springs Specific Plan process could have been minimized with a greater attention to resident (citizen) involvement at the beginning of the process. By the time the key concepts of the residents had been identified, the specific plan had assumed a life of its own and objections to the plan became personal attacks against those involved in the planning process. A process that should have been completed in eight or nine months stretched into almost two years, draining the area residents of their energy and putting excessive demands upon both the consultants and planning staff involved with the specific plan. The divisions formed within the area created a dysfunctional community and it will take several years, if at all, for the community to heal itself.

Clearly, government cannot continue to sit idly by and allow a process to tear apart a community while draining both citizens and staff of precious energy and limited resources. In these times of fiscal austerity, government must focus its limited resources (both money and personnel) on those areas which will produce the optimum benefit for the community. Issues which degenerate into a situation similar to the Warm Springs Specific Plan process divert these limited resources from other deserving areas or projects.

Issue management allows government and community the opportunity to respond to emerging issues before they become problems. Issue management is defined as "the ability to recognize, analyze and respond to conditions which contribute to the development of issues affecting an organization's interests"¹. In defining issue management, it is important to note three items:

- Issue management is an ability; it is a learned skill. Issue management is a set of management skills that can be applied to all levels of government.
- Issue management deals with conditions that give rise to issues. By focusing on conditions, issues can be resolved at their source rather than placing "Band-Aids" on symptoms.
- Issue management concerns itself with those issues that are affecting or may affect community, government, or agency functions. While issue management does not attempt to address all of the issues within a community, it insures that discovered issues are networked to the appropriate personnel for the action through a facilitation process.

Issues which are resolved through citizen action or facilitation result in solutions which have public backing or are "owned" by those involved in the process. Once people are given the opportunity to share in the development of solutions and understand the implications of those solutions, then they share the responsibility for carrying out those solutions. People may not entirely accept all of the aspects of the solutions, but understanding the process of how the solutions were reached and accepting responsibility for that process creates a healthy environment in which to carry out those solutions.

¹ Kent, James et al., SRM International; [Pre-Crisis Management: How to Manage Issues before They Manage You](#) (1984)

Issue management also allows agencies to look beyond their traditional function as providers of services and expand their role to become facilitators of services. Goods and services can be seen as being provided from within an organization or community and facilitation looks toward the citizenry as a source of capital to provide those goods and services. Historically, organizations and communities are most effective when citizens are allowed to solve their own problems or are given the opportunity to provide their own goods and services. In their role as a facilitator, agencies ask the following three questions for policy or decision making:

- What can citizens do for themselves?
- What can the public agency facilitate citizens doing for themselves?
- What must the public agency do for its citizens?

Placing government in a position to become a facilitator in helping its citizens solve their problems is the basis of the issue management system. Coupled with giving citizens the opportunity to work on solutions to their problems, issue management is a very powerful tool for all agencies dealing with citizen and community issues. Facilitating solutions which allow citizens to do more for themselves frees up limited resources which can be focused on other areas. Additionally, resolving issues before they become disruptive to both the community and the agency saves precious energy which can then be funneled into more productive endeavors.

HOW DOES ISSUE MANAGEMENT WORK IN WASHOE COUNTY²?

“Issue management is a management tool which allows Washoe County to respond to issues before they become a conflict and a crisis for both the County and our citizens. Washoe County operates with a vertical management organization, where communication is passed through formal channels up and down the organizational ladder. This type of communication pattern is cumbersome and slow to react to new situations. Frequently, the County Commissioners and department heads find that they are spending more of their time and resources reacting to conflict and crisis. To the surprise of the Commissioners and the department heads, they discovered that much of this conflict and crisis comes from the citizens that the County serves. Citizens were not only reacting to the County's projects and programs, but many times successfully resisted them as well. Washoe County finds itself bogged down in expensive delays, postponements and even cancellations, all because the County had been ‘ambushed’ by organized citizen resistance.”

“Many of these delays are unnecessary. Often what our aroused citizens really want is not so much to prohibit projects or cause trouble for the County, but rather they want their local issues factored into the planning of those projects. In the Warm Springs Specific Plan process, the majority of the opposition to the plan went away once the identified key concepts of the area's residents were incorporated into the plan. Citizens of the planning area did not object to SPA landowners developing their property, rather they wanted to ensure that their values (why they lived in the area) were part of the final plan. Washoe County cannot afford the costs, expressed in terms of both resources and staff, associated with ignoring the social and environmental factors of our projects and policies.”

“Washoe County's current vertical organization forces us into a "top-down" management style which is largely ineffective in anticipating citizen response and involvement to our projects and policies. Our ‘top-down’ organization inhibits us from accessing the knowledge of the parties directly impacted by an issue. Our policies and decisions frequently neglect the context of a situation and focus exclusively on the technical and legal aspects of content. The result is often ineffective policies and decisions which require tremendous resources to implement and correct.”

² This section is composed of direct quotes from a paper titled, Implementation of Issue Management in Washoe County, Nevada Using a GIS by Tim Davis, GIS Analyst II and Bob Webb, Community Coordinator, Washoe County (1993).

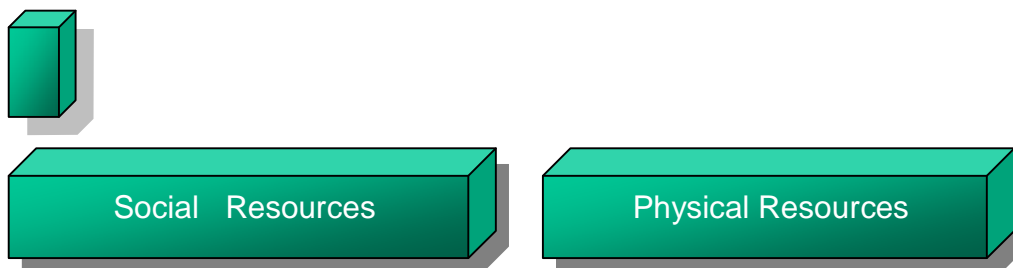
“In order for Washoe County to better anticipate citizen response and involvement, we have moved to a more horizontal organization, where communication is able to move quickly up and down the organizational ladder. Horizontal organizations have fewer levels to ‘screen’ information coming from the real people and groups at the bottom of the ladder. Consequently, users are given the opportunity to act quickly and appropriately based on the knowledge of the people closest to the issue.”

“Hand in hand with creating a more horizontal organization, Washoe County can use issue management to better understand the context, content and ownership of citizen's issues so that implementation of a proposed project or program can be achieved successfully. Implementation will be successful because setting the context deals with clarifying the who, what, where, how and why of the issue. Establishing this ownership identifies citizens who carry the issue and who are willing to participate in the creation, enactment and implementation of official policies and decisions. In the Warm Springs Specific Plan process, if the context, content and ownership of the issues had been identified earlier in the process then the task force could have been composed of citizens who carried the issues and who would have become part of the solution sooner. Resources and effort which were wasted in fighting the plan could then have been diverted into positive channels to make sure the plan benefited all involved parties.”

WHAT IS THE ISSUE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM?

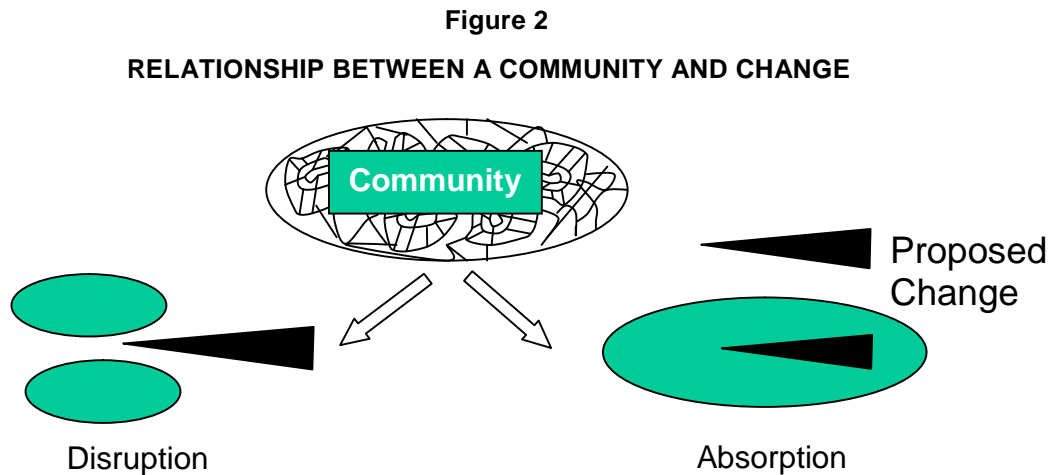
The issue management system is a model designed to assist users to develop policy or make decisions based on the human elements of the communities/citizens they serve. The issue management system looks at life and its sustaining resources within a defined area (called a community). The system assumes that there is a relationship between society (social resources) and the environment (physical resources) in a community which must be maintained or the community will become dysfunctional. A community is based on its social and physical resources. These resources constitute the who, the what, the where and the why of each community. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the social and physical resources of a community.

Figure 1
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A COMMUNITY
AND ITS RESOURCES



Source: James Kent Associates

A community is not static and is constantly reacting to changes in its social and physical resources. A healthy community establishes itself quickly after changes to its resources by absorbing the impact of the change. On the other hand, a dysfunctional community can easily become disrupted by changes to its resources and may take a relatively long time to regain its balance. Figure 2 illustrates the impact of change to a community.



- Source: James Kent Associates

A proposed project or policy will change the social resources, physical resources or both resources of a community. The purpose of the issue management system is to bring the community back into balance by having the citizens involved in the process and the solution. The system achieves this balance by understanding the persistence and diversity associated within a community.

The persistence of a community is the main reason why most people move into a community and why they choose to continue to live there. Persistence of social resources includes people's sense of stability coupled with their ability to participate, predict and control events affecting their future. Persistence of physical resources means that the yield of renewable and non-renewable resources will continue well into the future.

Diversity refers to the ability of people to manage how their community functions in a manner that produces optimum choices and economic options without destruction of the community's social and physical resources. Diversity holds a community together in its daily functions. Diversity of social resources refers to the range of options people have for cultural and economic activities: whom to associate with, where to live, how to earn a living, how to get and give help, and where and how to have fun. Diversity of physical resources concerns the variety of resources in a community and how widespread or abundant these resources are in the community_

In the Warm Springs Specific Plan process, the draft specific plan was the introduced change which altered the balance of the Warm Springs community. The draft plan had a major impact on the social resources of the community. Prior to the draft plan, the community's persistence was based on the stability which came with 20 years of growing as a community which encouraged agricultural uses on large lots and thrived on its spirit of independence. People in the area surrounding the SPA felt threatened by a plan which did not match their perception of how they

live and why they moved to the community. Many of the residents were certain that the people who would move onto the small lots in the SPA would have no appreciation for the community's current lifestyle. These residents felt they would eventually be forced out by the "newcomers" to their community. Since many of these residents felt excluded from the planning process (particularly since the majority of the members of the task force owned property inside the SPA), they struck out emotionally at the draft plan and the community became disrupted.

ISSUES

An issue is a subject of widespread public interest that an individual or network has decided to act upon to protect or maintain participation, predictability, and control of their environment. Issues express a requirement or demand and are action oriented. There are three important things to recognize about issues:

- Issues begin merely as points of interest and discussion. Usually individuals and groups don't sit down and think up issues in order to hamper projects or policies. Rather, there is generally a high degree of uncertainty and questioning before people make up their minds. How the County responds at this point is crucial to determining whether an issue will be resolved or intensified.
- Issues are situations upon which an individual, network, or group can act. The subject of the weather is a topic of interest and discussion, but most people cannot act upon it. Most activities of Washoe County are also subjects of interest and discussion, and because laws govern planning and permitting processes, individuals, networks, and groups are afforded the opportunity to act on the issue.
- People act in order to maintain control of their environment. If individuals or groups feel that their ability and opportunity to determine their future is going to be taken away or diminished, then they will act to maintain control rather than participate in a planning process.

Stages in the Growth of an Issue

Issues are not static, but dynamic. Issues are born, grow and die. There are three stages in the growth of an issue:

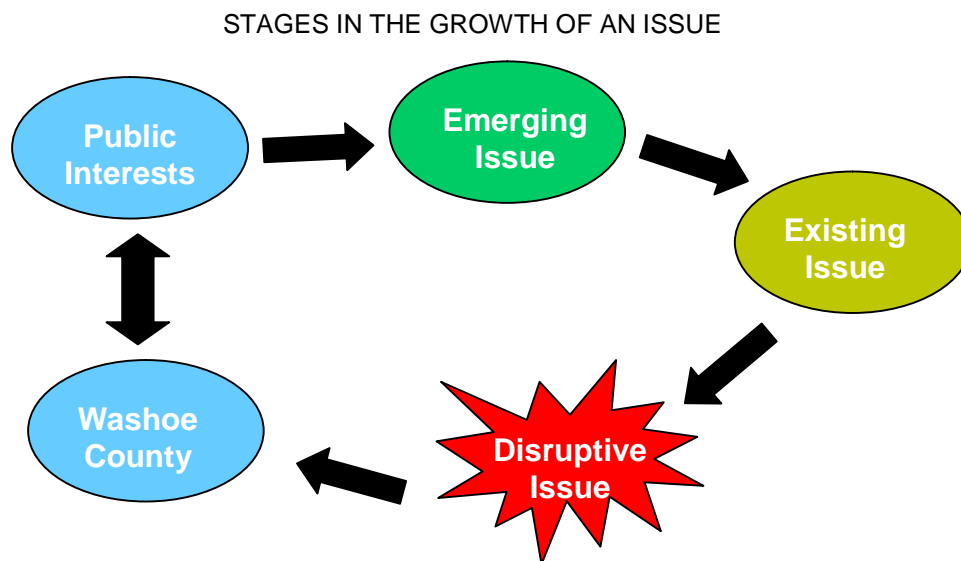
Emerging issue. A topic of discussion or activity that may evolve into a demand for action. Emerging issues are characterized by casual conversation between network members or by casual comments heard in the community. An emerging issue can frequently be resolved by the people themselves.

Existing issue. A public demand being made on others without formal action. Existing issues are characterized by people complaining about a situation. Public or governmental resources are usually needed to facilitate resolving an existing issue. Frequently, the actions needed to actually resolve the issue can be returned to the people themselves.

Disruptive issue. A direct public demand for action. Usually, a disruptive issue has divided the community into opposing factions. Disruptive issues are characterized by grievances being filed, people organizing to fight the issue, and/or people seeking legal counsel. Direct intervention and action by public or government agencies is necessary to resolve a disruptive issue.

Figure 3, on the following page, illustrates the stages in the growth of an issue. Figure 3 also illustrates how there is a direct relationship between the actions of Washoe County and the interests of its constituents. It is within these public interests, or areas of concern, that issues are born.

Figure 3



Source: James Kent Associates

When to Respond to an Issue

As an issue progress through its various growth stages, its effect on individuals, communities and the public agency changes. Table 1 on the following page shows some of the human and organizational effects experienced during the different stages of an issue. The earlier that Washoe County responds in the growth of an issue, then the less disruptive the issue becomes. The preferred stage to respond to an issue is when the issue is emerging.

In addition to responding early in the growth of an issue, Washoe County should rely on informal networks to give and get information about issues. Often the County acts in a way to create surprise among the public which, in turn, creates issues. The issue management system helps the County to understand the public interest and to use the information about communities and networks to get the word out to the people. Getting the word out will help Washoe County manage the level of surprise and reduce the chances of creating an issue.

People want information about policies and projects which affect them and their environment. People also want the chance to be part of the process which determines public policy and decisions which affect them. When people are thwarted from either gaining information or participating in the process, then they react. Disruptive issues occur when individuals and groups feel the loss of their ability to protect and maintain control of their environment. Learning to identify issues and their stages allows users to begin to formulate concerns, opportunities and practices to address issues before they become disruptive.

In the Warm Springs Specific Plan process, each of the issues went through the growth stages described above. Unfortunately, no one in the County was able to identify the issues until they had become disruptive and derailed the process. The opportunity existed early in the planning process to expand the task force and involve more people in the initial stages of the plan. If that opportunity had been taken, and if the property owners were willing to listen to the concerns and ideas of residents outside of the SPA, then issues could have been addressed as they were

emerging. As it was, people in the community felt alienated from the CAB and shut off from the planning process; therefore, they reacted by disrupting the process.

Table 1
 Human and Organizational Effects
 Experienced During the Different Stages of an

Emerging Issue	Existing Issue	Disruptive Issue
Explicit Feelings	Intensified Feelings	Recall petitions
Numerous Options	Outside Involvement	Referendum
Phone Calls	Leadership Involvement	Feelings of Failure
Letters	Media Coverage	Feelings of Crises
No Response	Personal Time Loss	Emergence of Hard-liners
Local Involvement	Rumors	Polarization of People
Informal Discussions	Increased Project Costs	Loss of Cooperation
Grassroots Awareness	Hardening of Positions	Loss of Creativity
Network Awareness	Options Narrowed	Involvement of High-Level Managers
Legitimate Questions	Demands	Coalitions Formed
Uncertainty, Doubt	Exaggeration	Loss of Futures
Increased Anxiety	Ownership of Issues	Outside Intervention
Project Threat	Polarization of Ideas	Legal Intervention
	Coalition Building	Litigation
	Appeals to Higher Authority	Legislation
	Legal Involvement	Loss of Options
	Stalled Projects	Stalemate
	Pressure on Elected Officials	Legal Costs
		Loss of Power
		Media Campaigns
		Civil Disobedience
		Loss of Credibility
		Imposed Sanctions
		Project Postponed or Canceled

Source: James Kent Associates

THE ISSUE MANAGEMENT CYCLE

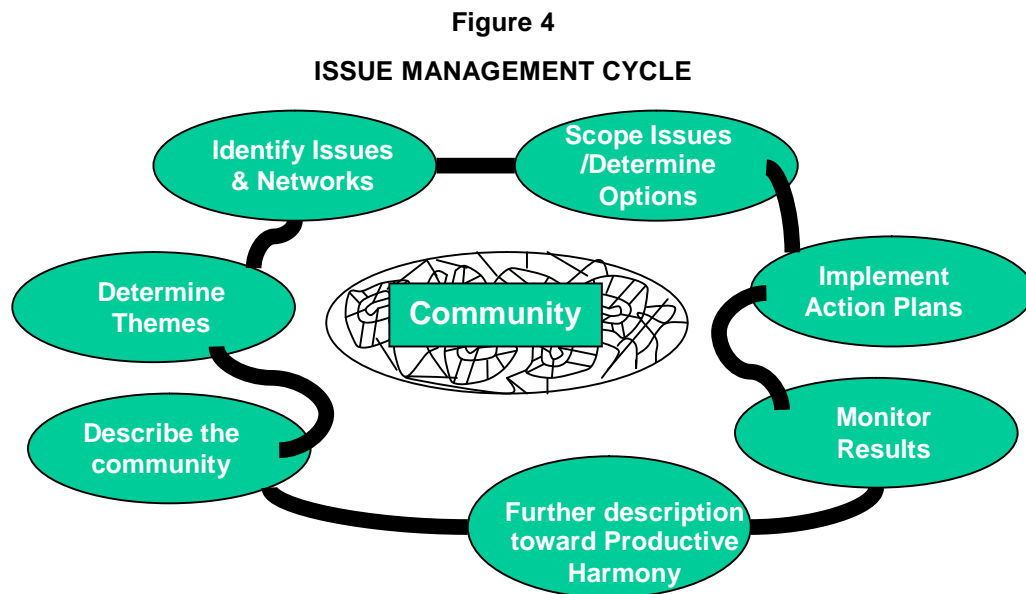
The issue management cycle is how information is collected and used to determine future strategy in the issue management system. The issue management cycle is designed to allow information to emerge naturally from the community. A community is a geographic area characterized by particular patterns of cultural lifestyles, economic conditions, institutional arrangements and topography.

The basis of the issue management cycle is threefold:

- The individual is the basic unit of society.

- The individual has the power to control, predict and participate in their environment in a way that does not oppress others.
- Every community has its own rate of growth or capacity to accommodate change. Positive accommodation of change will occur only when positive growth mechanisms can be mobilized and maximized within the community.

Figure 4 illustrates the issue management cycle.



Source: Washoe County Department of Comprehensive Planning

Steps in the Issue Management Cycle

The steps in the issue management cycle include:

1. Describe the community. Seven cultural descriptors are used to describe the community. These cultural descriptors will reveal how the community is structured and how it performs. The seven cultural descriptors are explained in greater detail in the next section.
2. Determine themes. Themes are views or observations by people about their social resources. Themes do not carry a demand, but instead reflect attitudes, beliefs, values, and customs. Themes cannot be acted upon due to their nature, but they can focus efforts to identify the issues.
3. Identify the issues and their associated networks. When an issue is identified, it must be validated. Networks usually carry issues which are to be acted upon. Networks are identified at the same time that issues are identified.
4. Scope the issues and determine options. Issues are transformed into strategies for action. In order to be effective, strategies must be pertinent to the community and based on a community's description.
5. Implement action plans. Implementation is making decisions for taking action. It is the who, what, how and where of forming a plan or mitigation schedule to address the selected issues.

6. Monitor the results. Evaluation is continuously tied to the community's descriptors. Only by re-entering the community and evaluating its social and physical resources can a person determine if their actions have been effective.
7. Further description. Ongoing description is necessary to remain grounded and to maintain momentum. Over time, the goal is to approach Productive Harmony between people and nature, as called for in Section 101 of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The issue management cycle centers on the community. The cycle also requires interaction between Washoe County and the community in revealing the true themes and issues of concern. Once these issues are identified and defined, then they may be resolved through enhancement and/or mitigation.

The issue management cycle was never initially done for the Warm Springs Specific Plan. If County staff had an idea about the composition of the community, through its descriptors, then it would have been possible to identify the themes, issues and networks within the community. Instead, for the first half of the process, staff and the consultant were trying to react to the expressed themes of large lots and 'rural character' without understanding the structure of the community. The real issues of agricultural use, permitting horses on roads in the area and urbanization of the area by introducing community sewer systems did not become evident until much later in the process and only after the networks carrying these issues had been identified and worked. Had the themes and issues been revealed early in the process, then a strategy could have been developed to ensure the draft specific plan contained appropriate measures to address those issues. As it happened, no strategy was ever developed and the implement action plan step did not occur until very late in the planning process and after much damage was done to the social resources of the community.

CULTURAL DESCRIPTORS

The cultural descriptors are used to identify various elements of a community by organizing information gathered about the community into seven general description areas. Cultural descriptions can be used to describe and predict change in the values, routines or activities of people living in a community. The description process generates themes which characterize a community's geographic area, its networks, and the concerns and issues of people living in the community.

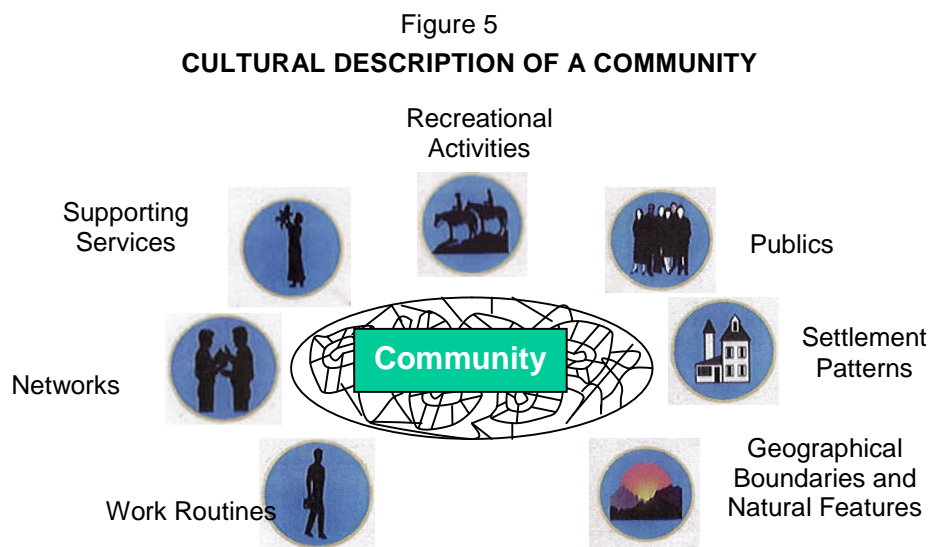
The cultural description of a community is obtained through a variety of sources. The best source of information about a community is through observing and participating in the daily events and routines of that community. Other sources include discussions with County Commissioners or County staff who conduct business in the community, information gleaned from local newspapers or newsletters, review of technical or social reports, or discussions with community leaders. Ideally, three types of people are involved in describing a community:

- Describer: The principal person who provides information on a community. A describer's information comes from listening to people, not interviewing them. Describers should be able to observe and listen without making value judgments or interpreting information.

- **Recorder:** A person who writes down information as it is expressed by the describer(s). Recorders do not interpret descriptions, but record information as it is told.
- **Reflector:** A person who concentrates on listening and clarifying the describer's information. The reflector asks questions to clarify concepts and to probe further into the information.

Seven Cultural Descriptors

Seven cultural descriptors are used to describe a community. The seven descriptors are geographic boundaries and natural features, networks (both formal and informal), publics, recreational activities, settlement patterns, supporting services and work routines. Figure 5 illustrates the seven cultural descriptors and their relationship to the community.



Source: James Kent Associates

Geographic Boundaries and Natural Features. A geographic boundary is any unique physical or cultural feature that defines the extent of a community. Cultural and physical features generally separate the cultural identity and daily activities of a community from those living in other geographic areas. Cultural features are usually established by people or agencies over time and are based on historical, ethnic or social events. Examples of cultural features include school district boundaries, ethnic settlement patterns forming distinct neighborhoods (e.g., Chinatown or a Polish community), and differing income levels (e.g., Nob Hill). Physical features include geologic, biologic, and climatic features, distances, or any other characteristics that distinguish one area from another. Examples of physical features include mountain or hill ranges, valleys, roads, railroads, distances separating rural communities or areas, and rivers or streams. Geographic boundaries may be either permanent or temporary; over time, boundaries may dissolve as new settlement patterns develop and cultural/physical access to an area changes. Some questions to use when completing this descriptor include:

- What geographic area do people consider to be their home turf? What is the area which people identify as "theirs"? Are there any particular social or physical characteristics which people say are unique to their area?
- Within what general area do most of the routine activities occur? How far do networks which people use on a daily basis extend?

- Are there any physical barriers that separate geographical areas? Are there any cultural or economic barriers?

Networks. Networks are comprised of people who support each other in predictable ways because of their commitment to a common purpose, their shared activities, or similar attitudes.

Networks share information and ideas. Networks function at different levels: within a neighborhood or community, across several different communities, or throughout a region. There are two types of networks: formal and informal.

1. **Formal:** A group of people committed to an activity or purpose. People usually join a formal network to *represent* their interests. Formal networks are usually identified by the vertical structure of their organization and management system. However, formal networks also refer to situations where several formal groups which have banded together for a common cause or purpose. These formal types of networks are usually not permanent and exist only as long as needed to work on their common goal. Formal networks meet in specific locations at a scheduled time and usually follow an agenda. Examples of formal networks include cattlemen's associations, homeowner associations, a preservationist or recreational club, and groups united to support/fight a common cause (such as Yucca Mountain).
2. **Informal:** An informal arrangement of people who join together to *express* their interests. Informal networks have a very horizontal structure and may only exist to help people communicate with others who share common interests (e.g., a phone tree). Informal networks usually gather in familiar places where the people feel comfortable. These places are called gathering places and include restaurants, feed stores, bars, parks, etc. Examples of informal networks include ranchers who assist each other in times of need, grassroots citizens with a common cause, or families who recreate together.

Figure 6 on the following page compares formal and informal networks.

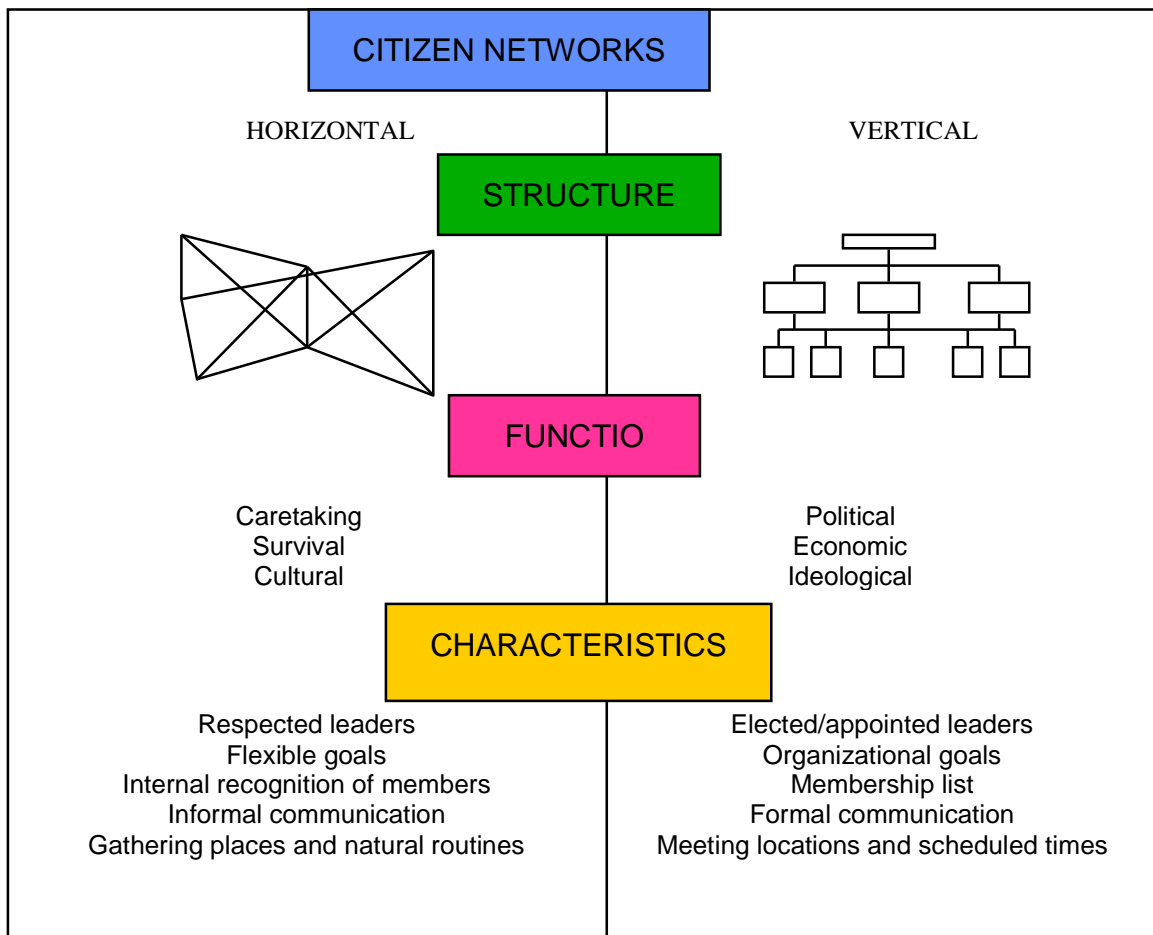
It is important to note that networks are linked to other networks at different levels both formally and informally since people are often members of more than one network. Networks are important for identifying and validating issues and for monitoring the effectiveness of decisions. Some questions to use when completing this descriptor include:

- What networks do people use to express their interests? What is the function of each network? Who are the key contacts or respected leaders in each network?
- When and where do the networks gather to share information or services? How do the members of the network communicate with each other?
- Which networks function in an on-going manner? Which networks function temporarily around particular events or issues?

Publics. A segment of the population or group of people having common characteristics, interests, lifestyle, or some recognized demographic feature (e.g., average age, income, or ethnicity). The publics descriptor identifies a group of people who influence the community locally or who live elsewhere and have an interest in the way the community functions. Sample publics include ranchers, casino workers, farmers, homemakers, landowners, horse owners, recreationalists, senior citizens, small business owners and youth. Some questions to use when completing this descriptor include:

- What is the demographic make-up of the community? Are people defined together in understandable demographic groups?
- Who do people associate with that share common values or lifestyles? Are there common characteristics or lifestyles within the community?
- What are the on-going interests of each public? What publics outside of the community influence activities within the community?

Figure 6
 COMPARISON OF FORMAL AND INFORMAL NETWORKS



Source: James Kent Associates

Recreational Activities. A recreational activity is the way in which people spend their leisure time. Recreational activities include what recreational opportunities are available, the seasonality of these activities, the specialized equipment or resources involved in these activities, and the money and time required to pursue the activities. The frequency of local/non-local uses of recreational resources, the preferences of local/non-local users, and the location of the activities are also included. Some questions to use when completing this descriptor include:

- What are the principal types of recreational activities? Which activities, sites or facilities are most preferred? Are there recreational activities in which a wide range of people participate?
- What is the orientation of leisure time activities? Do these activities center around the family, team, church, school, etc.? How do the disabled or elderly recreate or spend their leisure time?
- How much time and money is spend on recreational activities? What kinds of recreational vehicles or equipment are used?

Settlement Patterns. A settlement pattern is the distribution of a population in a geographic area, including the historical cycles of settlement. Settlement patterns identify where a population resides and the type of settlement categorized by its centralized/dispersed, permanent/temporary, and year-round/seasonal characteristics. It also describes the major historical growth/no-growth cycles or benchmarks and the reasons (with dates) for each successive wave of settlement (e.g., 1977-78 pre-casino boom settlement pattern). Settlement patterns will help identify times of change within a community. Some questions to use when completing this descriptor include:

- Where do people live and how is the population distributed in a community?
- What is the history of settlement? What types of people have moved into the community with each wave of settlement? Why did people settle in the community?
- Have there been significant increases or decreases in population in the past? Is the current settlement stable, increasing or decreasing? What major changes have occurred during past settlement cycles?

Supporting Services. A supporting service is any arrangement people use for taking care of each other. Supporting services include institutions serving a community (formal) and people's individual caretaking activities (informal). Supporting services emphasize how these activities are provided and enhanced in a community. Formal supporting services include commercial businesses, religious institutions, social welfare agencies, governmental organizations, and educational, medical and municipal facilities. Informal supporting services center on the family, the neighborhood and/or on friendship. People use these informal supporting services on a day-to-day basis to satisfy their caretaking needs. Some questions to use when completing this descriptor include:

- Where are the major support services located? What is the geographical area that these services support? Which services are routinely used by people in the community?
- How are the support services operated? What services are provided seasonally?
- How do people care for each other on a day-to-day basis? How do families, friends, church or volunteer groups provide support? How are the elderly, youth, disabled, poor and others taken care of? To what degree do people take care of their own problems or rely on formal supporting services?

Work Routines. A work routine is the way in which people earn a living, including where, when and how. The types of employment, the skills needed, the wage levels, and the natural resources required in the process are used to generate a profile of a community's work routines. The opportunities for advancement, the business ownership patterns and the stability of employment activities are also elements of work routines. Some questions to use when completing this descriptor include:

- What are the ways in which people earn a living? What kinds of skills are required of people in the various types of employment? What is the level of pay? Has there been significant shifts in employment activities or income levels in recent years?
- How stable are the employment activities? How significant is unemployment? What is the average age of the work force? Are youth and the elderly able to find employment?
- Are the majority of businesses owned locally or by corporations/people from outside the community? Do people commute to work or work within the community? What work routines are seasonal in nature?

Completing the Cultural Description

After information on the seven cultural descriptors is compiled, then the cultural description of a community is completed using the following techniques:

Describing. Describing is the ability to communicate what is seen in a community in a way that informs others without value judgments impairing the description. All observations should be written down for later reflection.

Reflecting. Reflecting is the ability to listen to the observations of another individual (describing the community) and refining the description from their responses without giving advice or answers based on other experiences, prejudices, etc.

Being a Stranger. Being a stranger is the ability to observe and interact in a community with a minimum of preconceived ideas and conclusions about that community. This is the most difficult technique in describing a community and the most difficult to accomplish.

Listening. People are willing to talk to others about their communities. The ability to actively listen to others will reveal an abundance of information. An active listener listens with their whole being and attempts not to form any response until the listening is finished.

Focusing. From the overall description, it is important to focus on the description to find the issues that relate to Washoe County.

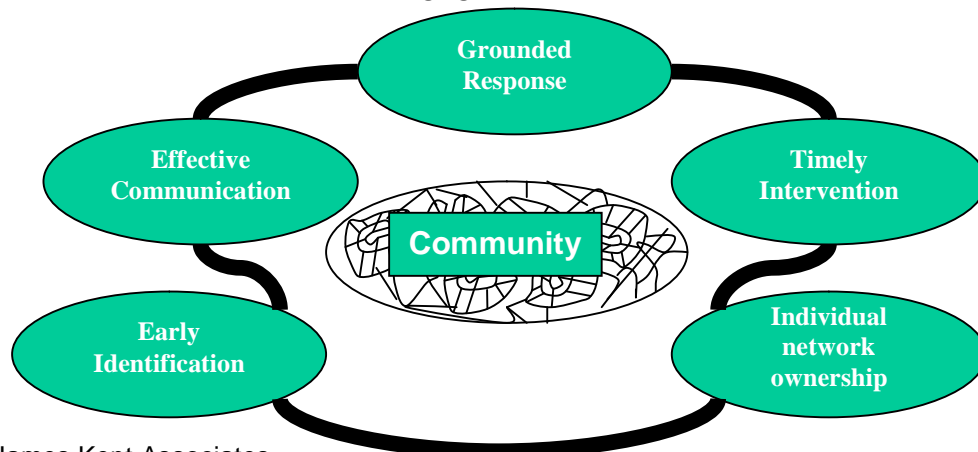
Documenting. The description must be documented in a usable way. In Washoe County, the description is documented inside the Issue Tracking System, which is a part of the Washoe County Geographic Information System (GIS).

ELEMENTS OF THE ISSUE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

There are five elements to the issue management system: early identification, effective communication, grounded response, timely intervention, and implement and evaluate. The key to success in the issue management system is to base all of these elements within the context of the community. Figure 7 illustrates the issue management system.

Figure 7

FIVE ELEMENTS OF THE ISSUE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM



Source: James Kent Associates

Context of the Community

Early Identification

The key to successful issue management is to identify the citizen's issues and involve the citizens in the resolution of these issues early in the process. Early identification of the issues is essential for staying in front of the issues. By identifying issues early, then strategies to deal with the issues can be identified while maximum options for action are still available.

Early identification of the issues begins with a cultural description of the community affected by the proposed policy or project. Demographic information about a community is useless without the cultural descriptors which paint a complete picture of the community: what makes it tick, what's important to the people living there, how people communicate with each other, and what people are likely to become upset about the policy or project. The cultural descriptors will also define the natural boundaries of a community, since cultural communities rarely follow political or administrative boundaries. The seven cultural descriptors have been defined earlier in this handbook.

Once the cultural description of a community is complete, then Washoe County is in a good position to know how proposed policies or projects will be accepted by the people in the community. A complete cultural description allows Washoe County to account for the needs of a specific community. This allows the County to design the most appropriate strategy for addressing the community's specific concerns and avoiding unnecessary issues.

As a final note, the issue management system user should be aware that communities grow and change over time. As changes in communities occur, the way people relate to the use and management of their land and resources will likewise change. In order to stay responsive to these changes, the user needs to be able to stay in touch with a community in an ongoing manner. The culture of a community is dynamic and the agency should make the effort to verify and update the community's cultural description on a regular basis.

In the Warm Springs Specific Plan process, it has already been mentioned that early identification of the real issues would have saved all parties involved a great deal of effort and resources. The lack of a cultural description for the community meant that the task force and the consultant began designing the specific plan in the dark with no idea of the values of the surrounding residents. Consequently, the draft specific plan violated many of the key values cherished by the community's residents. A cultural description probably would not have solved all of the concerns about the SPA, but it certainly would have reduced the potential issues to a manageable level.

Effective communication

Miscommunication, inaccurate communication or lack of communication is usually at the root of most issues. Effective communication can reduce the number of unnecessary issues and refine the understanding of the real issues. In a community, effective communication begins with informal networks.

Identifying and resolving issues when they are emerging is one of the most important aspects of issue management. Emerging issues can only be found in informal networks. Many people in communities don't become involved in formal networks (e.g., civic groups or citizen advisory boards), so informal networks are their way of taking care of each other and getting information. Information in an informal network is passed on in a way that people can understand and process. People in these networks trust those who interact with them on an informal basis and in their own environment. Often, informal networks are not involved early in the planning process for a project or policy and opposition suddenly shows up well into the process. Frequently, this opposition emerges during public hearings and takes our elected/appointed officials by surprise. Public officials and staff are often heard to remark, "Where were these people when we had all of those meetings nobody came to?"

Informal networks can be used to:

- Monitor changing public attitudes and activities.
- Identify and evaluate issues.
- Dispel rumors about projects and policies.
- Inform people about current and future plans.
- Discuss opportunities and strategies available to address issues.
- Prepare for formal public participation and news releases, if needed.

It is critical to become involved with a community's informal network as early as possible in the planning process. Informal networks are important for identifying the real issues while they are still emerging. During the emerging stage of an issue, citizens are very clear about their concerns. Usually a group has not yet formed to deal with the issue and emotions are controlled. Identifying issues while they are emerging creates pre-crisis opportunities to anticipate, adapt, act and educate. If Washoe County, as an organization, does not use informal networks, then we are doomed to be managed by issues rather than actively managing issues.

In the Warm Springs Specific Plan process, miscommunication was a constant problem for the task force, the CAB, the consultant, and for planning staff. Invariably, at least half of every meeting held in the community was spent discussing concerns (owned by agencies) and issues (owned by people) which had been discussed during previous meetings. Much later in the process, the informal networks operating in the planning area were identified and the key individuals in these networks were used to relay information on the specific plan. Consequently, residents came to meetings better prepared and informed. Likewise, meetings did not last as long and were able to spend more time concentrating on concerns/issues as opposed to discussing old items.

Grounded Response

The key to resolving issues is to distinguish between issues and themes and to ground these issues in real people. As mentioned earlier, themes are the views or observations by people about their community. Themes do not carry a demand, but instead reflect attitudes, beliefs, values, and customs. Themes cannot be acted upon. Issues, on the other hand, express a requirement or demand and are action oriented. Issues can be acted upon and resolved through appropriate strategies and mitigation measures. Issues are carried by various people within a community. Table 2 on the following page shows the difference between themes, issues, and the people carrying the issues for the Warm Springs Specific Plan process.

Issues are owned by people with faces, names, addresses, telephone numbers, traditions and interests. Issues must be grounded, that is people who carry issues must be identified and those people must be able to stay in touch with their issue through the life of that issue. If names or faces cannot be linked with the issues affecting a policy or project, then effective action cannot be taken on those issues. Grounded responses to issues comes from the ability to:

- Identify people who carry the issue.
- Maintain the identity of people who carry the issue throughout the life of the issue.

- Probe the issue for the WHO, WHAT and WHY.
- Identify the subjects of interest upon which action can be taken.
- Understand the cultural description of the community.
- Establish direct communication with the networks.

After issues have been grounded, the next step is to verify the issues with the informal networks and begin to identify opportunities and strategies to address the issues (as discussed above in effective communication). The key to success in grounding responses is to turn issue carriers into issue resolvers by keeping those people actively involved in the issue management process. Four factors are essential to turning issue carriers into issue resolvers:

Table 2

**Themes, Issues and People
Warm Springs Specific Plan Process**

Themes	Issues	People
<p><i>Rural Character</i></p> <p>"We are a rural community."</p> <p>"We want to maintain our rural lifestyle."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to have 4H animals on a residential lot. • Continued agricultural uses in the community. • Retaining gravel roads so horse riders can move around the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homeowners Association • Farmers
<p><i>Large Lots</i></p> <p>"We don't want any lots smaller than 40 acres."</p> <p>"No one will drive out this far to buy third acre lots."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making sure that there are no lots smaller than 10 acres in size next to existing 40 acre lots. • Keeping lots larger than one acre so horses and 4H animals can be kept on the lot. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local 4H club • People using agriculture to supplement their income • Residents adjacent to the SPA
<p><i>Traffic</i></p> <p>"We don't want traffic from the SPA driving on our roads."</p> <p>"People from the SPA will use our roads as short cuts."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making sure that current residents will not have to pay more taxes to maintain their roads. • Ensuring that SPA residents will pay the full cost of building roads inside the SPA. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Improvement District • Homeowners Association

Source: James Kent Associates

Understand the changes. The issue carriers must be able to understand the changes which will result from the proposed project or policy. People don't relate to technical information such as acre feet of water, parts per million of dissolved oxygen or 3:1 soil stabilization techniques. However, people can relate to dropping water levels in their wells, rivers where the fish can no longer live and erosion scars on a hillside. Washoe County should describe strategies or solutions in terms that people can relate to and understand.

Share in decisions. The issue carriers must be given the opportunity to share in deciding what will happen. People must be given the chance to have direct input into the decision process. This doesn't mean Washoe County abdicates its decision authority; rather, it means the County broadens the data base upon which decisions will be made.

Share responsibility. The issue carriers must share responsibility for carrying out the actions which were decided upon. Ownership in the resolution of an issue is as important as the ownership of the issue. Washoe County should share the burden of work when carrying out agreed upon actions. The amount of the public's involvement should be agreed upon through some type of County/public partnership.

Track the issue. Issue carriers must be able to track their issues all the way through the planning, decisions and implementation of a project or policy. As a rule, people are not familiar with the bureaucratic mazes associated with the planning and implementation process of the County. The issue carrier must be kept aware of the status of their issue throughout the process. People usually do not care about the entire project or policy, but only that part which directly affects them.

Grounded response to an issue can begin before the public is aware of a proposed policy or project. An awareness and understanding of the existing social resources of a community, as defined by the seven cultural descriptors, allows appropriate strategies to potential issues to be formulated and implemented early in the process.

In preparing the draft specific plan, the SPA consultant made a few changes based on comments made during the CAB meeting. These changes were based largely on themes and were, therefore, ineffective in responding to the issues of the residents. Even after an issue had been identified (e.g., permitting agricultural uses on some lots inside the SPA), the response was not grounded with the individuals who carried that issue. Later in the process, issues were grounded by planning staff through individuals and then tied to the appropriate informal networks. The reaction to the proposed responses for the identified issues was fed directly to the consultants preparing the plan. These informal networks were kept aware of the progress of their issue through the planning process and, as such, were able to support the actions resulting from the responses in later public hearings.

Timely Intervention

Once Washoe County knows and understands a community (to include its cultural description and networks) and has identified issues early in their stage of growth, then prevention of emerging or existing issues will keep those issues from becoming disruptive. However, issues usually emerge once policies or plans for projects are underway. At this point, the ability to accurately scope the issues will assist in determining when and how the County should intervene with those issues. The scoping of issues consists of three separate, yet interacting, elements: extent, intensity and duration. Table 3 on the following page shows the definition of each of the components of the three scoping elements.

The extent of an issue describes the geographical coverage of an issue. Isolated issues are very limited in area and usually affect only a small number of people. Local issues usually involve a single community and regional issues encompass several communities or are widespread

throughout a region. The intensity of an issue describes the stages of growth for an issue: emerging, existing or disruptive. The duration of an issue defines how long an issue will remain a point of contention and refers to the time frame needed for attention. Duration is expressed in one of three categories: immediate, short-term, or long-term. By the scoping of an issue, users can determine the dynamics of an issue and evaluate when best to intervene.

Table 3
ISSUE SCOPING

SCOPING ELEMENT	COMPONENTS		
Extent	Isolated	Local	Regional
	Limited in area and affecting a small number of people.	Prevalent in one area or community.	Widespread through several communities or entire region.
Intensity	Emerging	Existing	Disruptive
	Casual conversation between network members or casual comments heard in community.	Demands being made on others without formal action. People complaining about situation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • grievances being filed • people organizing to fight • people moving • people seeing lawyers
Duration	Long-Term	Short-Term	Immediate
	Issue will probably resolve itself within six months due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased knowledge • increased familiarity • passage of time • change of season 	Issue will remain a sore point but will not lead to disruption due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • impersonal nature • non-threatening nature • "that's just the way things are" attitude 	Issue will remain and escalate into disruption of community due to perception of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discrimination • personal threat • loss of self esteem • loss of control

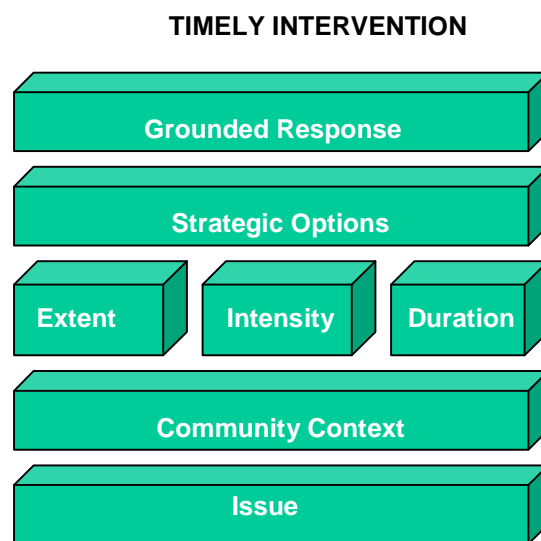
Source: James Kent Associates

As the scope of an issue moves toward the right side of the issue scoping table (Table 3), fewer options are available to respond to the issue. If an issue is isolated in extent, emerging in intensity and immediate in duration, numerous options remain open for responding to the issue and the time frame is such that informal networks (particularly issue carriers) can be worked to ground responses. On the other hand, if the issue is regional in extent, disruptive in intensity and long-term in duration, then very few options remain open to respond to the issue. People have become polarized, coalitions have formed, confrontation attitudes have prevailed and win/lose outcomes are expected.

When scoping an issue, users should keep in mind two factors: grounded response and community context. First, grounded response must be planned at all stages of issue management. It can be very easy to fall into the trap of rationalizing that "since the issue is not hot" we can afford to postpone action on it and concentrate on the immediate issues. Unfortunately, issues have a tendency to grow and become immediate. Postponing action on

issues until they become immediate will guarantee that users will constantly react to issues instead of planning to manage them. Second, issues must constantly be evaluated against the context of the community. The scoping of an issue, the possible options available to respond to the issue and the grounding of the responses must be measured against the community context. Overlooking the community context will lead to responses which are not anchored to the community and which will probably not resolve the issue. Figure 8 illustrates the relationship between the issue, the community context, issue scoping, strategic options and grounded responses to issues.

Figure 8



Source: James Kent Associates

After scoping an issue and determining the appropriate options and response, the user must consider the urgency, association and timeliness of intervention.

- **Urgency.** Urgency deals with how quickly options for dealing with the issue are being closed as the issue grows. If an issue is rapidly moving from the emerging to existing stage, and at the same time is rapidly evolving from a local to a regional issue, then options for action are being reduced and immediate intervention may be needed.
- **Association.** Association concerns the relationship between issues. The user may have to address issue "B" before it can address issue "A" and that both of these may have to be addressed before issue "C" can be tackled. Understanding the association of issues will assist in determining the sequence of response to issues.
- **Timeliness.** Timeliness deals with the public's level of awareness and interest in dealing with an issue at a specific point in time. Informal networks operate on their own agenda and time frames. If an issue needs more immediate attention than what natural time frames permit, then an issue can be fused to stimulate interest. For instance, discussing voluntary water conservation measures to be implemented during the summer is difficult in the spring after a "wet" winter when rivers are full. However, fusing the issue with a concern for decreasing water quality because of high sediment levels in full rivers may be one way to approach the issue.

In the Warm Springs Specific Plan process, immediate intervention became the only viable option for the County after the public hearing with the Planning Commission. The issues "exploded" as disruptive and needed immediate attention. Initial attempts at intervention were ineffective because the County did not understand the cultural description of the community. Only after key County staff understood the culture of the community and were tied into the informal networks did intervention achieve some success.

Individual Network Ownership

The primary benefits of issue management are the enhanced ability of individuals and networks to participate in civic life and the enhanced capacity of the community to handle its own affairs. This concept is known in the literature as social capital. In an issue management program, social capital is achieved if individual networks have ownership of the process and the outcomes of public involvement.

After an issue has been identified and scoped, various options or strategies have been formulated to resolve the issue, and the response to these options have been grounded, then the final element of the issue management system is to implement the preferred options and to evaluate the results of the County's action. It is critical to the issue management system for the results of the selected action to be analyzed and recorded. This analysis provides the County the ability to learn from the issue management process. This learning ability permits the County to anticipate and prepare for the next issue based on the experiences gained from previous similar issues.

The implementation tool for the Warm Springs Specific Plan process is the adopted specific plan. As the specific plan changes from a plan on paper to development proposals submitted for review by the County Commissioners, it is crucial that staff evaluate the community's reaction to the action plans designed to resolve the identified issues. This evaluation will involve formal evaluations of the specific plan every five years and informal evaluations conducted in the community continuously.

In spite of the adoption of a specific plan which seems to satisfy the majority of the community's residents, the legacy of the specific plan process still lingers in the community. The community still retains scars of the fight over the specific plan and it will take quite awhile for the community to heal itself. If the issue management system had been used by the County at the beginning of the planning process, instead of in the middle, much of the miscommunication and upheaval could have been prevented. It is important to remember that in the example of the Warm Springs Specific Plan process, the issue management system was not started until late in the planning process and after issues became disruptive to both the community and Washoe County. If the issue management system had been started earlier in the process, then much of the disruption to the community could have been avoided. The advantages for Washoe County when using issue management are many, but the most important are healthy communities, citizens involved with solving issues instead of fighting them, and the ability of the County to allocate scarce resources for many projects instead of the disruptive few.

THE COMMUNITY COORDINATOR

The Community Coordinator is responsible for issue management in Washoe County. Through the issue management system, the Community Coordinator is able to identify trends, access networks, recognize emerging issues, clarify options for dealing with issues and provide alternatives. These roles of the Community Coordinator are further discussed below.

ROLES OF THE COMMUNITY COORDINATOR

Identify trends. By monitoring and analyzing issues, the Community Coordinator can identify trends and use this information to anticipate a community's reaction to certain issues or

situations. For example, the Community Coordinator may identify that a community has been historically active in any issues concerning their ability to keep horses on their residential lot. Through the evolution of several of these issues, the Community Coordinator has also been able to identify a strong network which mobilizes to deal with horse related issues. By recognizing this trend, the Community Coordinator is in a position to anticipate the reaction of the community to an issue and to use related community information (e.g., networks) early in the stage of an issue. For example, if a County agency is contemplating an ordinance which restricts the ability of property owners to have livestock (to include horses) on certain size parcels, the Community Coordinator can provide the agency with notice that this may be an issue in this community. Further, the agency can see how previous related issues were resolved in this community and have access to the identified network which becomes involved in these issues. This information should help the agency develop a strategy to approach the issue within the community.

Access networks. By maintaining a viable list of networks, the Community Coordinator is able to plug into different networks to validate issues, recognize emerging issues, provide information, dispel misinformation, or test reactions to a proposed project/proposal. These networks also provide the County Commissioners with ready access to community residents.

Recognize emerging issues. By routinely talking with people who live in a community and by checking with County employees who work with people in the community, the Community Coordinator should be able to recognize emerging issues and start the resolution process early in the growth of an issue. This role could pay a dividend by allowing the County to anticipate issues, rather than react to them.

Clarify options. Based on historical records and the information compiled for a community, the Community Coordinator should be able to provide options and alternatives for users when developing a strategy to deal with issues. Frequently, issues have been managed independent of their context within the community and without any reference to historical precedence. When viewed in the "big picture", alternative courses of action become clearer and users can be given a range of options to choose from. Using the historical records and viewing the community as a whole should provide options for the County to use when approaching the community and could even raise alternatives for mitigation measures, if needed.

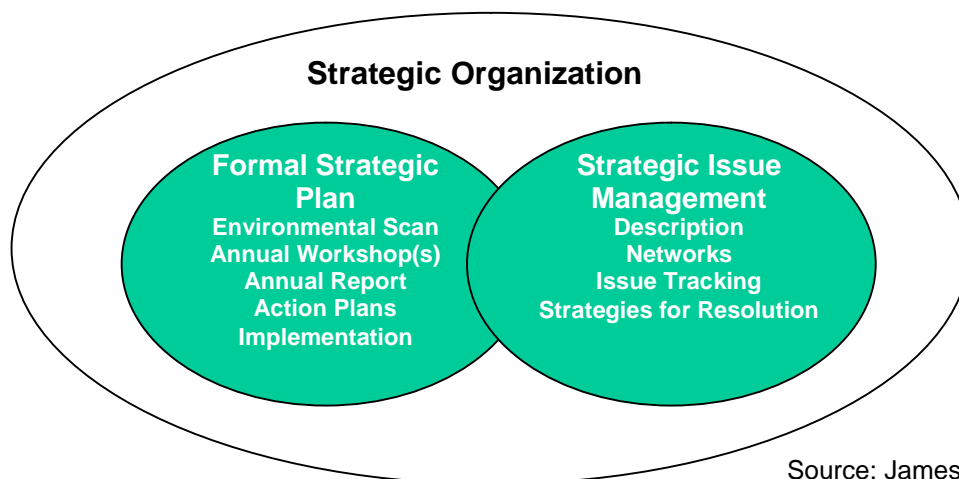
Provide alternatives. Frequently, agencies approach a problem or issue from a single avenue and are not able to view the problem/issue from other angles. Agencies lock onto a specific solution and the solution then takes on a life of its own, with later alternatives overlooked or ignored because the ideas did not originate within the agency. The Community Coordinator can provide agencies with resources such as networks and community contacts who may be able to view a problem or issue in a different light and provide alternatives early in the process. If an agency finds itself locked into a single solution, the Community Coordinator can work with the agency to identify resources which may be able to provide other alternatives or facilitate discussions designed to brainstorm the problem or issue.

Regardless of the role which the Community Coordinator assumes, the fundamental outcome of any issue or process should allow the County to do three things: learn, anticipate and adapt. First, the County should learn from each issue and/or process. This learning process should be recorded as part of the issue and stored in the issue management database for easy access and retrieval. Second, based on the experience gained from similar issues or situations, the County should be able to anticipate and prepare for the next issue. Identifying trends, recognizing issues and gaining access to networks are all tools used to prepare for the next issue. Finally, the County must be able to adapt and move quickly to act on information. Clarifying options and providing alternatives are two tools which will help the County act on its information.

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND ISSUE MANAGEMENT

Strategic planning helps Washoe County to respond effectively to the rapidly changing conditions facing the County and its citizens. Strategic planning is for the County as an organization, unlike master planning which is planning for a community. Strategic planning in Washoe County consists of two closely related elements: the formal strategic plan and strategic issue management. Figure 9 illustrates the strategic planning process.

Figure 9
STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS IN WASHOE COUNTY



Source: James Kent Associates

FORMAL STRATEGIC PLAN

The formal strategic plan consists of five elements: environmental scan, annual workshop(s), annual report, action plans and implementation. The formal plan includes the County Commissioners and selected members of the County organization, usually department heads. The formal plan concentrates on Washoe County as an organization and seeks to identify several key areas for the County: organizational mandates, mission statement and organizational philosophy, identification of critical trends and strategic issues, and development of strategies and action plans.

The formal plan produces an annual report which records the results of the formal process. The report may also include the action plans which detail the timetables, resources, and responsibilities necessary to implement the highest priority strategies. These action plans may also be published separately from the annual report. The action plans are reviewed during subsequent strategic planning workshops to evaluate the effectiveness and appropriateness of the priority strategies. The evaluation of the action plans, and their founding strategies, forms the basis for the next strategic plan cycle.

STRATEGIC ISSUE MANAGEMENT

During the first few years of the formal strategic planning process, the County Commissioners determined that an important aspect of the County was not be included as part of the strategic plan. This missing part of the strategic planning process was involvement by the citizens of the County. While the formal strategic plan effectively addressed the County as an organization, it was less effective in addressing the County's role in providing service to its constituents. Indeed,

it seemed to the Commissioners that not only were County residents unaware of the strategic plan, but that many of the County employees were also unaware of the strategic plan. The County was operating on two levels: the daily survival level of County residents and staff, and the broader strategic vision of the County Commissioners and department heads.

Strategic issue management was the tool chosen by the County Commissioners to complete the missing part of the strategic planning process. As a tool, issue management is well suited to assist the County in determining strategic issues which require attention by the County as an organization. Strategic issue management focuses on two separate elements in searching for strategic issues: issues belonging to the residents of the County outside of the County organization and issues belonging to staff within the County organization. Issues from both of these elements are discovered using the issue management system.

Strategic issue management revolves around four inter-related parts: descriptions, networks, issue tracking and strategies for resolution. The first two parts, descriptions and networks, have been described earlier under the issue management system. The only modification needed for strategic issue management is to include the County organization when completing the cultural descriptors. This means that the appropriate parts of a cultural description are completed for the County organization. This description paints a social picture of the agencies which comprise the County organization and identifies formal/informal networks operating within the County organization. The descriptions of the County organization and the communities allows early identification of strategic issues and permits the County to formulate appropriate strategies to address these issues.

Strategic issues are tracked using the issue tracking system. This system is designed to gather all of the elements of the issue management system in a database which is accessible through Washoe County's Geographic Information System. The historical perspective of the issue tracking system is instrumental in strategic issue management by allowing the County to examine the progress of related issues when determining appropriate strategies to resolve strategic issues. The issue tracking system also permits the County to analyze past and existing issues for trends which may require attention at the strategic level. Taken together, a complete description (to include using identified networks) and issue tracking combine to give the County a "big picture" view when formulating strategies for issue resolution.

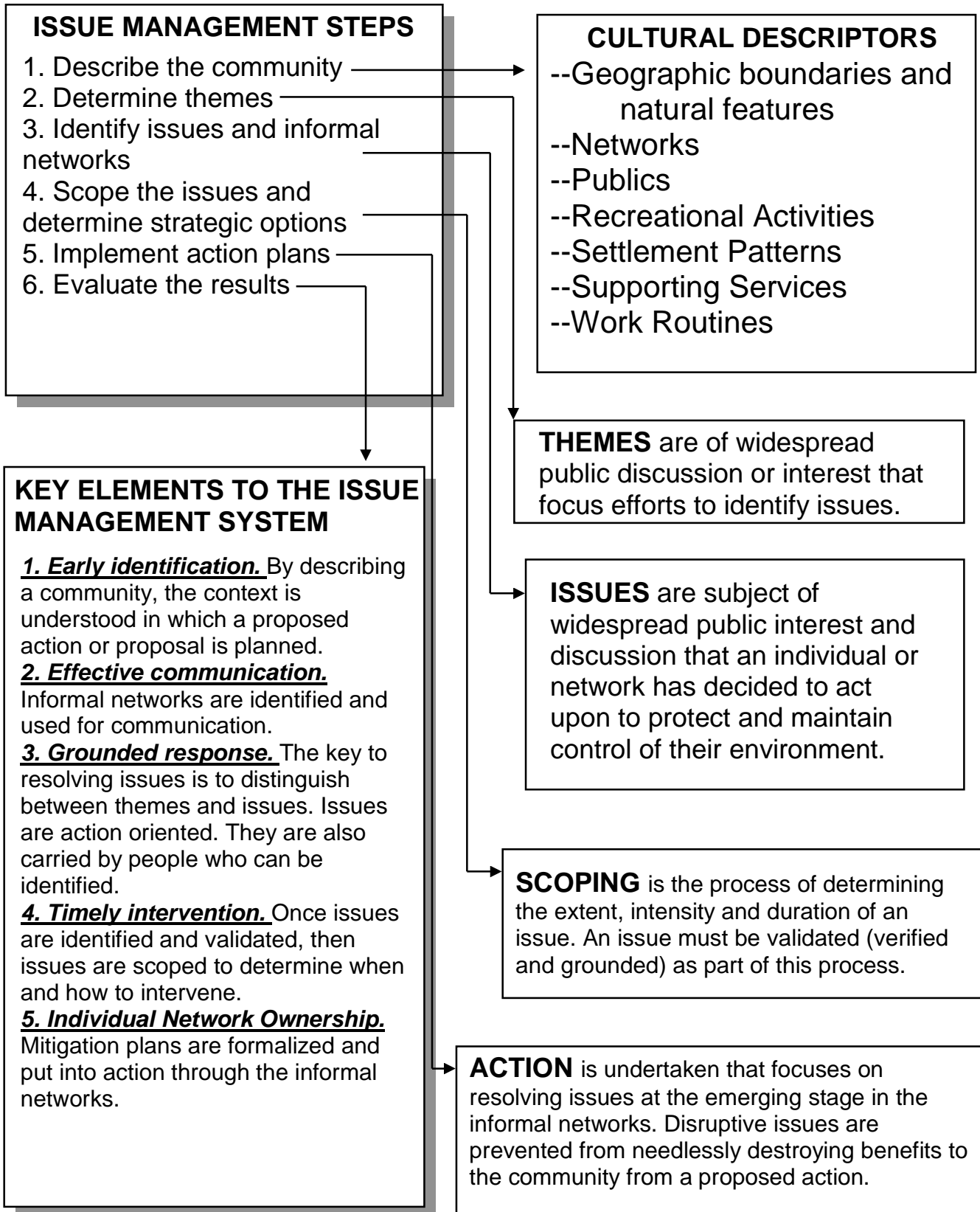
PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

The formal strategic plan and strategic issue management complement each other as parts of the County's strategic planning process. It would be very difficult to build a strategic organization without both parts of the strategic planning process working together. The formal strategic plan is crucial to identify areas within the County's mission and organizational philosophy which require strategic attention. Strategic issue management identifies issues from the communities and within the County's organization which need strategic resolution. The combination of both of these elements gives the County Commissioners a better picture of the County as an organization and permits the formulation of various action plans which include the issues of the County's constituents.

CONCLUSION

The issue management system is a valuable tool in resolving issues which face governments and their citizens. Application of the Human Geographic Issue Management System (HGIMS) has helped these entities recognize potentially disruptive issues and formulate strategies to resolve these issues. Through HGIMS, citizens are involved in policy/project decisions which directly affect them and are given the opportunity to share in the outcome of those decisions. HGIMS is well suited to enable agencies to integrate strategic issues into the planning process. The true value of HGIMS may rest with its ability to provide these strategic issues in a management context. Governments have discovered that they must shift their focus from constantly reacting to disruptive issues to instead anticipating issues which can be resolved with the involvement of active citizens. This anticipation and resolution is really possible only in a strategic organization that constantly looks ahead and evaluates not only where it has been, but where it is going. The application of HGIMS helps governments become better strategic organizations that respond more effectively to the issues of their citizens.

Simplified Issue Management Program



APPENDIX A

ISSUE MANAGEMENT TERMS

Anticipation. The access to and use of information that empowers the individual to be aware of possible changes in the environment. Early identification and anticipation of issues are critical elements of issue management.

Balance. The interactive and interdependent point between the social and physical resources of an area (e.g., a community) where the greatest resilience, health and sustainability exists for both resources. Changes to a community in balance can usually occur without producing social, cultural, or economic disruption.

Barriers. Physical, social, or cultural forces which tend to delineate communities.

Boundaries. Lines drawn between distinct communities. Boundaries are areas of neutrality between communities.

Caretakers. Individuals within a community which implicitly or explicitly take care of people, help others take care of themselves, or have skills or knowledge which others seek out. Caretakers also serve as verifiers of information and issues in their networks.

Category.

1) The broad subject area under which issues are grouped for reference. Categories include such broad groupings as streets, parks, water service, sanitary sewer service, wetlands, etc. A specific issue such as the extension of Joy Lake Boulevard or the proposed designation of Whiskey Springs Road as an arterial would both be grouped under the streets category.

2) The central concern or focus of a network. The category directs the community coordinator toward issues or items of interest to the network. For instance, a network comprised of soccer clubs, coaches and players would have soccer as its category. The soccer network would probably be interested in issues involving parks and recreation uses, access to parks, etc.

Communicators. Individuals within informal networks who actively possess, express and share information. Communicators are frequently the "glue" which hold networks together and are trusted by others in the network.

Community. The community is a collection of neighborhoods. A community is a geographic area that is characterized by particular patterns of cultural lifestyles, economic conditions, institutional arrangements and topography. A community is also a defined geographic area within which humans and nature rely on shared resources. In Washoe County, several communities are usually contained in a planning area. People in a community focus on issues such as "our open space", "our high school", or "our shopping center". The seven cultural descriptors are used to define the structure and characteristics of a community.

Community Coordinator. Individual within the Washoe County Department of Comprehensive Planning who is responsible for issue management for Washoe County. The Community Coordinator is part of the Strategic Planning and Projects Program.

Contacts. Individuals within a network or a community. Contacts include caretakers, communicators, members of a network, the primary person to contact within a network and/or the key person within a community.

Context. The circumstances or setting in which a proposed change occurs.

Critical Incident. A decision or act which moves an issue from the emerging or existing stage to disruption.

Culture. The shared values, behaviors, knowledge, and wisdom of a community.

Description. A process for identifying various elements of a community. The description process generates themes which characterize a community's geographic area, its networks, and the concerns and issues of people living in the community. Ideally, three types of people are involved in describing a community:

Describer: The principal person who provides information on a community. A describer's information comes from listening to people, not interviewing them. Describers should be able to observe and listen without making value judgments or interpreting information. Describers provide their information in one of the seven cultural descriptors for a community. In Washoe County, sources of information for describers include County Commissioners, area planners, Utility Division work crews, etc.

Recorder: A person who writes down information as it is expressed by the describer(s). Recorders do not interpret descriptions, but record information as it is told.

Reflector: A person who concentrates on listening and clarifying the describer's information. The reflector asks questions to clarify concepts and to probe further into the information.

Seven cultural descriptors are used to describe a community:

Geographic Boundaries and Natural Features³. A geographic boundary is any unique physical or cultural feature that defines the extent of a community. These boundaries are defined by the six other descriptors. Cultural and physical features generally separate the cultural identity and daily activities of a community from those living in other geographic areas. Cultural features are usually established by people or agencies over time and are based on historical, ethnic or social events. Examples of cultural features include school district boundaries, ethnic settlement patterns forming distinct neighborhoods (e.g., Chinatown or a Polish community), and differing income levels (e.g., Nob Hill). Physical features include geologic, biologic, and climatic features, distances, or any other characteristics that distinguishes one area from another. Examples of physical features include mountain or hill ranges, valleys, roads, railroads, distances separating rural communities or areas, and rivers or streams. Geographic boundaries may be either permanent or temporary; over time, boundaries may dissolve as new settlement patterns develop and cultural/physical access to an area changes. By knowing the geographic boundaries of a community, a community coordinator can identify the natural resource use and development opportunities that are unique to a particular geographic area.

³ Preister, Kevin and James A. Kent, *Social Ecology: A New Pathway to Watershed Restoration*, Watershed Restoration: Principles and Practices, Jack F. Williams, Christopher B. Wood, and Michael Dombeck, eds. (1997)

Networks. People who support each other in predictable ways because of their commitment to a common purpose, their shared activities, or similar attitudes. Networks share information and ideas. Networks function at different levels: within a neighborhood or community, across several different communities, or throughout a region. There are two types of networks: formal and informal.

Formal: A group of people committed to an activity or purpose. Usually these groups are identified by the vertical structure of their organization and management system. However, formal networks also refer to situations where several formal groups which have banded together for a common cause or purpose. These formal types of networks are usually not permanent and exist only as long as needed to work on their common goal. Examples of formal networks include cattlemen's associations, homeowner associations, a preservationist or recreational club, and groups united to support/fight a common cause (such as Yucca Mountain).

Informal: Individuals or families networked together for the common purposes of survival, cultural maintenance, or caretaking of each other. These networks exist in the horizontal, informal system. Examples of informal networks include ranchers who assist each other in times of need, grassroots citizens with a common cause, or families who recreate together.

It is important to note that networks are linked to other networks at different levels both formally and informally since people are often members of more than one network. Networks are important for identifying and validating issues and for monitoring the effectiveness of decisions.

Publics. A segment of the population or group of people having common characteristics, interests, lifestyle, or some recognized demographic feature (e.g., average age, income, or ethnicity). Public identifies a group of people who influence resource use locally or who live elsewhere and have an interest in the way resources are managed. Sample publics include ranchers, casino workers, farmers, homemakers, landowners, horse owners, recreationalists, senior citizens, small business owners and youth. By identifying the publics and characterizing each public's interests, a community coordinator can determine how different segments of a population will be affected by decisions made by government agencies. Also, projections can be made about how changing publics will influence resource management in the future.

Recreational Activities. A recreational activity is the way in which people spend their leisure time. Recreational activities include what recreational opportunities are available, the seasonality of these activities, the specialized equipment or resources involved in these activities, and the money and time required to pursue the activities. The frequency of local/non-local uses of recreational resources, the preferences of local/non-local users, and the location of the activities are also included. A knowledge of recreational activities is used to evaluate how decisions by government agencies affect the ways people recreate, and how changes in recreational activities, in turn, affect the community.

Settlement Patterns. A settlement pattern is the distribution of a population in a geographic area, including the historical cycles of settlement. Settlement patterns identify where a population resides and the type of settlement categorized by its centralized/dispersed, permanent/temporary, and year-round/seasonal characteristics. It also describes the major historical growth/no-growth cycles or benchmarks and the reasons (with dates) for each successive wave of settlement (e.g., 1977-78 pre-casino settlement pattern). Settlement patterns will help identify times of change within a community.

Supporting Services. A supporting service is any arrangement people use for taking care of each other. Supporting services include institutions serving a community (formal) and people's individual caretaking activities (informal). Supporting services emphasize how these activities are provided and enhanced in a community. Formal supporting services include commercial businesses, religious institutions, social welfare agencies, governmental organizations, and educational, medical and municipal facilities. Informal supporting services center on the family, the neighborhood and/or on friendship. People use these informal supporting services on a day-to-day basis to satisfy their caretaking needs. A knowledge of the supporting services descriptor is used to evaluate how decisions by government agencies affect the ways people take care of each other, and how changes in supporting services, in turn, affect the community.

Work Routines. A work routine is the way in which people earn a living, including where, when and how. The types of employment, the skills needed, the wage levels, and the natural resources required in the process are used to generate a profile of a community's work routines. The opportunities for advancement, the business ownership patterns and the stability of employment activities are also elements of work routines. A knowledge of work routines is used to evaluate how decisions by government agencies (e.g. project approvals) affect the ways people earn a living. In addition, knowledge of work routines can be used to forecast how changes in work routines affect the community.

Diversity. Refers to the ability of people to manage their how their community functions in a manner that produces optimum choices and economic options without destruction of the community's social and physical resources. Diversity holds a community together in its daily functions.. Diversity of social resources refers to the range of options people have for cultural and economic activities: whom to associate with (networks), where to live (settlement patterns), how to earn a living (work routines), how to get and give help (supporting services), and where and how to have fun (recreational activities). Diversity of physical resources concerns the variety of resources in a community and how variable these resources are in the community.

Duration. Defines how long the issue will remain a point of contention. Duration also describes the urgency of addressing an issue and possible consequences of not responding in a timely manner. The duration is defined by one of three categories:

Long-term: The issue will probably resolve itself within six months due to several factors, to include: increased knowledge, increased familiarity, passage of time and change of season.

Short-term: The issue will be remain a sensitive subject but will not lead to disruption because of: impersonal nature of the issue, non-threatening nature of the issue. and/or a "that is just the way it is" attitude by people.

Immediate: The issue will remain active and will escalate into a disruptive intensity due to people's perception of: discrimination, personal threat, loss of self-esteem, or loss of control.

Enhancement. Improvements to a proposed change which will make that change acceptable to a community.

Extent. Describes the geographical coverage of an issue and defines how widespread the public interest is in an issue. The extent is defined by one of three categories:

Isolated: The issue is limited in area and involves only neighborhoods or very limited parts of a network. The issue usually involves only a small number of people.

Local: The issue involves a community or several neighborhoods within a community. The issue also involves formal networks who can influence decision-making.

Regional: The issue involves the region or several communities within the region. The issue also involves a wide variety of informal and formal networks and may receive regional media attention.

Gathering Place. A place where people regularly meet and discuss items of interest to themselves and their community/neighborhood. Gathering places are an excellent place to gather information and to validate issues. Gathering places can also be used to disseminate new information or dispel myths/misinformation (either by posting notices or talking with people)⁴.

Informal gathering places: Informal gathering places are usually easily accessible and open to everyone. Examples are a park, a bowling alley, or a coffee shop. These places are associated with informal networks and people in these networks know who they will likely find at these places at certain times.

Formal gathering places: Formal groups tend to meet in a distinctive setting such as a school, firehouse, or government meeting area. Access to formal gathering places are sometimes restricted, either by location or by exclusion from the group itself. Formal group meetings are usually scheduled well in advance and may be publicly noticed.

Geography. A specific geographic area with defined boundaries. The area (size) of geography varies with the level desired when describing areas and the impact of an issue on an area. Region, community and neighborhood are all areas under geography.

Grounding. The process of identifying the carrier or carriers of a particular issue. Identifying the carriers of an issue will help relate the issue to networks and other people in the neighborhood or community. Grounding is one part of the validation of an issue.

Historian. An individual who can paraphrase or record the history of an area.

Impact. The consequences of change on a community.

Indicators. Measures which collectively provide an indication of stability or disruption within a community.

Intensity. See Stages of an Issue.

Issue. A subject of widespread public interest and discussion that an individual, network or group has decided to act upon to protect and maintain control of their environment. Issues are situations upon which an individual or group can act. For instance, a development project is of interest and discussion to a group. The group is able to act upon this issue because laws governing planning permit action. Issues are not static, but dynamic in that they are born, grow and die. Issue management uses emerging, existing and disruptive (issue intensity) to describe the stages in the growth of an issue.

Issue Carrier. The person within a network or a community who is personally involved in an issue and who has a stake in the outcome of the issue.

Issue Loading. The process of attaching additional issues onto an existing issue. Usually, people will take issues from other areas (e.g., a different development, a similar situation) and add it to the current issue. These additional issues frequently cloud the

⁴ Oldenburg, Ray, The Great Good Place, Marlow and Company, New York (1999).

current issue and make resolution of the current issue more difficult.

Issue Management. The ability to recognize, analyze and respond to conditions which contribute to the development of issues affecting an organization's interests and community health⁵.

Issue Management Cycle. A method to collect information on a community and to design strategies for resolving issues. The issue management cycle allows Washoe County to determine issue management strategy for one or several communities. The issue Management cycle is based on a complete investigation of a community using six inter-related steps⁶:

1. Describe the community: Using the seven cultural descriptors to define a community. The description process will give a picture of how people live and interact in their communities.
2. Determine themes: Themes are views or observations by people about their social resources. Themes do not carry a demand, but instead reflect attitudes, beliefs, values, and customs. Themes cannot be directly acted upon, but focus efforts to identify issues.
3. Identify the issues and their related networks: When an issue is identified, it must be validated. Networks usually carry issues which are to be acted upon. Networks are identified at the same time that issues are identified.
4. Scope the issues and determine strategic options: Issues are transformed into strategies for action. In order to be effective, strategies must be pertinent to the community and based on a community's description.
5. Implement action plans: Implementation is making decisions based on a selected action. It is the who, what, how and where of formulating a plan or mitigation schedule to address the selected issues.
6. Evaluate the results: Networks are monitored in order to find out if the actions to resolve issues have been effective. Evaluation is continuously tied to a community's description. Effective action to resolve issues may change parts of a community's description and this change must be reflected in a new description.

Issue Management System. A model designed to assist Washoe County to develop policy or make decisions based on the human elements of the communities/citizens we serve. The issue management system looks at life and its sustaining natural resources within a defined community. The goal of the issue management system is to determine issue management strategy for one or several communities. There are five elements to the issue management system:

1. Early Identification: Using the seven cultural descriptors to define a community. This definition will give a picture of how people live and interact in their communities. A complete cultural description allows Washoe County to account for the needs of a community and helps to identify issues early in their development.
2. Effective communication: Effective communication can reduce the number of unnecessary issues and refine the understanding the real issues. In a community, effective communication begins with informal networks. Informal networks are identified and involved early in the planning process.

⁵ Preister, Kevin and James A. Kent, *The Issue-Centered Approach to Social Impact: From Assessment to Management, Social Impact Assessment*, Nov.-Dec. 1981, reported in *Clinical Sociological Reviews* (1984).

⁶ Kent, James A. and Kevin Preister, *How to Describe a Community: A Manual for the Back Pocket, The Partnership Series*, BLM National Training Center, Phoenix, Arizona (2001).

3. **Grounded Response:** The key to resolving issues is to distinguish between themes and issues and to ground these issues in real people. Themes are views or observations by people about their community. Themes do not carry a demand, but instead reflect attitudes, beliefs, values, and customs. Themes cannot be directly acted upon, but focus efforts to identify issues. Issues express a need or demand and are action oriented. Issues are carried by people and must be grounded with people. These issues may then be validated.

4. **Timely Intervention:** Once issues are identified and validated, then the issues are scoped to determine when and how to intervene. Strategies for action are subsequently designed based on the scope of the issue(s). In order to be effective, strategies must be pertinent to the community and based on a community's cultural description.

5. **Individual Network Ownership:** When individual networks have a sense of ownership about the process of civic engagement, implementation is possible. Implementation is making decisions based on a selected action. It is the who, what, how and where of formulating a plan or mitigation schedule to resolve selected issues. Informal networks are monitored in order to find out if the actions to resolve issues have been effective. This evaluation procedure is continuously tied to a community's cultural description. Effective action to resolve issues may change parts of a community's description and this change must be reflected in a new description.

Issue Facilitator. The person within an organization responsible for working and, ultimately, resolving an issue. Frequently, issues are identified by others within the organization and then passed to the issue owner. The issue owner should validate (verify and ground) an issue before developing a strategy to deal with the issue.

Issue Resolver. The end result of working with an issue carrier to have the person actively involved in the issue management process. To turn an issue carrier into an issue resolver, four things must happen: the person must understand the changes resulting from the proposal, the person must be given the opportunity to share in deciding what will happen, the person must share responsibility for carrying out the actions decided upon, and the person must be able to track their issue throughout the entire process.

Member. An individual belonging to a network who is neither a communicator nor a caretaker.

Mitigation. Reducing the impacts of a proposed change which will make that change acceptable to a community.

Neighborhoods. The neighborhood is the smallest geographic unit for tracking issues. People identify with "my house", "my street", "my neighbor", backyards and the local park. People also have a clear idea of the neighborhood's boundaries. People generally know the types of people who live in their neighborhood and their differences. In urbanized areas the neighborhood usually covers a few city blocks while in rural areas the neighborhood may be a subdivision or a small town.

Opportunist. An individual who manipulates an issue for their own benefit while purporting to represent and speak for a community or other group of people.

Ownership. An individual, network or group claiming their right to become involved and taking responsibility for participation in the resolution of their own issues.

Persistence. Refers to the ability of people to manage the resources of their community in a manner that ensures the resources will be around for some time to come (i.e., for the following generations). The persistence of a community is the main reason why most

people move into a community and why they choose to continue to live there. Persistence of social resources includes people's sense of stability coupled with their ability to participate, predict and control events affecting their future. Persistence of physical resources means that the yield of renewable and non-renewable resources will continue well into the future. For example, in Washoe County many communities rely on ground water as the only source of water. The persistence of physical resources for these communities depends upon ground water resources being available for future generations⁷.

Public Interest. The basic desires of people as defined by individuals, networks, and organizations and reflected in ongoing discussions and activities.

Region. The region is a collection of communities. The region is a rather large area and the perception of its boundary is general. The main component of a region is common values over or understanding on regional issues. In Washoe County, regions usually equate to planning areas.

Resilience. The ability of a social or physical system to remain productive and recover from impacts or changes. This ability is based on the system's internal strengths and the impacts or changes may be either internal or external.

Resource. The attributes of a given geographic area (community). Resources of a community are defined in terms of social resources and physical resources.

Social Resources: The people found in a defined geographic area. Their resources include their survival networks (e.g., supporting services) and their self-subscribed boundaries around various living patterns and activities.

Physical Resources: All of the natural and biological attributes of a given geographic area. Such resources may be renewable (e.g., timber, wildlife, water, etc.) or non-renewable (e.g., minerals, fossil fuels). This resource does not include human attributes (e.g., factories, refineries, etc.).

Scoping. The process of determining the extent, intensity and duration of an issue. An issue must be validated (both verified and grounded) as part of the scoping process.

Stages of an Issue (Intensity). Defines the level of public interest or involvement in an issue. The three stages of development of an issue are:

Emerging: A topic of discussion or activity that may evolve into a demand for action. Emerging issues are characterized by casual conversation between network members or by casual comments heard in the community. An emerging issue can frequently be resolved by the people themselves.

Existing: A public demand being made on others without formal action. Existing issues are characterized by people complaining about a situation. Public or governmental resources are usually needed to facilitate resolving an existing issue. Frequently, the actions needed to actually resolve the issue can be returned to the people themselves.

Disruptive: A direct public demand for action. Usually, a disruptive issue has divided the community into opposing factions. Disruptive issues are characterized by grievances being filed, people organizing to fight the issue, and/or people seeking legal counsel. Direct intervention and action by public or government agencies is necessary to resolve a disruptive issue.

⁷ Preister, Kevin and James A. Kent, *Using Social Ecology to Meet the Productive Harmony Intent of the National Environmental Policy Act*, *Hastings West-Northwest Journal of Environmental Law and Policy*, University of California, Volume 7, Number 3, Spring 2001.