



# 1. The Project and Process

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Almost 30 years have passed since the people of Champaign County last came together to consider, collectively, what their future should be. While many public and private organizations have adopted vision statements and plans of their own, we as a community, have not. The **big.small.all. Champaign County** community visioning project brought together residents from all walks of life to chart a course toward a common future that reflects our shared values. This document, **our future. here.**, records the results of that effort.

**our future. here.** identifies goals for most aspects of our county's life—from the arts to business development to preserving natural resources. It also elaborates specific objectives and lays out action strategies to realize them.

**our future. here.** is divided into the following four chapters:

**Chapter 1 – The Project and Process.** This chapter provides an overview of **big.small.all.** and the visioning process.

**Chapter 2 – **our future. here.:** The Vision for Champaign County.** This chapter presents the vision for Champaign County. It describes a framework of five strategic elements, 12 goals, and 35 supporting objectives along with other ideas raised in the process.

**Chapter 3 – Moving Forward: Objectives and Action Strategies.**

This chapter elaborates the 35 objectives and lays out action strategies to realize them. The objectives are organized into the vision’s five strategic elements.

**Chapter 4 – our job.now.: Implementing the Vision.** This chapter describes the proposed approach to implementing the action strategies.

Additional project documentation is available in the Appendices.

From the **big.small.all. Champaign County** Charter:

**Purpose**

A. The Community Visioning Project is intended to look beyond Champaign County’s immediate concerns to create a positive vision of a shared future reflecting common aspirations and building on our strengths and unique opportunities.

B. The purpose of the Community Visioning Project is to foster unity and clarity of purpose among the people of Champaign County so that we can take effective action in furtherance of shared community goals. The community visioning project will do this by:

- i) promoting mutual understanding of the circumstances and concerns of different demographic groups in the community;
- ii) developing an appreciation of the strategic environment confronting the county and of the community’s strengths and weaknesses;
- iii) overcoming collective ambivalence and hesitancy in the pursuit of community goals;
- iv) constructing a compelling vision of a future reflecting shared community values together with an action plan to achieve the desired future; and
- v) strengthening community leadership and fostering the emergence of a new generation of community leaders.

C. The Community Visioning Project will address conditions within a time span of 20 years.

**Purpose**

Taking charge of the future requires clarity of vision and unity of purpose. In a community as large and diverse as Champaign County we could not expect that to emerge spontaneously. **big.small.all.** was conceived as a means to cultivate common understanding, and commitment to action across the county. The purpose is spelled out in more detail in the project Charter (see sidebar).

Despite the challenges presented by adopting a wider scope, **big.small.all.** was designed to be a county-wide project for several reasons. First, the County most closely matches the market reach of the local economy. Additionally, many institutions operate with county-wide jurisdiction. Most importantly key issues and opportunities almost always cross jurisdictional lines and involve more than one local government.

The project, in a nutshell, was designed as a community-wide dialogue focused on a specific outcome: an articulated vision of the future of the community. The dialogue was structured to find areas of broad agreement, and to overcome ambivalence about community goals.

At its heart the visioning process is action oriented. Effective action requires shared understanding among private and public agencies and broad support in the public, private, and non-profit sectors of the community. **big.small.all.** was designed to produce a vision statement together with action strategies. The vision is intended not only to define a set of goals, but to inspire action to achieve them as well. **big.small.all.** also provides a mechanism for fostering initiatives and tracking and reporting on their ongoing realization.

**Project History**

It has been a long time since the entire community engaged in an effort similar to **big.small.all. Champaign County**. The last such county-wide project was the Town Meeting for Tomorrow in 1976 (see sidebar on the next page). In recent years many people had become concerned that Champaign County was losing the initiative and lacked the kind of shared vision needed to maintain mastery of its future. This persistent unease appeared in varied contexts from social service delivery to county land use planning to economic development and the competitiveness of the University of Illinois.

**1976 Town Meeting For Tomorrow**

Twenty eight years ago the community came together to consider its future in a public forum called the Town Meeting for Tomorrow. This was an effort to develop a community consensus on growth and other issues. It was sponsored by the RPC and the Champaign County Bicentennial Commission. More than 300 persons attended the initial Town Meeting on March 27, 1976 and discussions extended over the following year.

The project made numerous recommendations many of which were implemented over the succeeding 20 years, including a new terminal at Willard Airport, the Illinois Terminal intermodal facility, the County Health Department, and the Champaign County Economic Development Corporation.

**big.small.all. Financial Support****Sponsoring Organizations**

Champaign County  
City of Champaign  
City of Urbana  
University of Illinois  
Champaign County Alliance  
Carle Foundation Hospital  
Champaign County Chamber of Commerce  
Community Foundation of East Central Illinois  
Village of Rantoul  
Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District  
Parkland College

**Supporting Organizations**

Champaign County Design and Conservation Foundation  
Anderson Foundation  
Champaign County Community Development Corporation  
One Main Development  
Urbana Park District  
Ameren IP  
Champaign Park District

In the autumn of 2003 these concerns were taken up by the Metropolitan Intergovernmental Council, an informal panel comprised of executives of public agencies serving the Champaign-Urbana-Savoy metropolitan area. At the request of that body, staff of the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission proposed a community visioning project as the most effective approach. In April 2004, the Champaign County Board formally requested that the Regional Planning Commission set about organizing a public-private partnership to undertake a community visioning project.

The first informal meeting of what would become the **big.small.all.** Steering Committee took place in late November 2004. The effort was formalized in March of 2005 with approval of a charter setting goals for the project and outlining its governance. The charter can be found in Appendix A.

**Project Organization**

**big.small.all.** was established as an independent organization comprised of representatives from business, community organizations, and government. It is not incorporated and has no legal powers of its own. The organization is funded by contributions from businesses, non-profits, and governments. About one third of the funds came from private sources (see sidebar). Its business affairs are handled by the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission.

The overall strategic direction and fiscal supervision of the project is in the hands of a Sponsors Council comprised of the chief elected or executive officer of major funding organizations (those contributing \$10,000 or more). The Council also includes other community leaders acting in a personal capacity. The Sponsors Council is chaired by former Champaign County Board Chair, Barbara Wysocki, with University of Illinois Chancellor Richard Herman serving as Vice Chair. Sponsors Council members are listed in the Acknowledgements

The design and implementation of **big.small.all.** is overseen by a 44-member Steering Committee representing an array of businesses, civic organizations, and governments. The Steering Committee has also provided the preponderance of volunteers for the project and the members have been responsible for most of the community outreach. The day-to-day decisions are in the hands of a 10-person subcommittee of the Steering Committee called the Project Coordination Committee. The Steering Committee is led by two co-chairs: Bruce Knight, City of Champaign Planning Director, and Jennifer Armstrong, Executive Director of 40 North 88 West.

The process was designed and guided by ACP-Visioning & Planning, Ltd., New York ([www.acp-planning.com](http://www.acp-planning.com)). The project identity, web design, publicity program and public relations effort is the work of Surface 51, Champaign ([www.surface51.com](http://www.surface51.com)). The project is managed by staff of the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission.

## Participants

To be effective the visioning project requires the active engagement of a broad cross section of the community. The name **big.small.all.** was selected to denote an intent to make the process as open and inclusive as possible. The Steering Committee endeavored to bring together folks from every walk of life, age group, and ethnic heritage. The project is designed to include big institutions, small businesses, civic organizations, governments, the University of Illinois, Parkland College, and folks from every city, village, and rural township.

**big.small.all.** was distinguished by an intensive, multi-faceted and active effort to reach out to all identifiable groups and interests. This effort included:

- Consultant interviews with dozens of stakeholders;
- Direct contact by Steering Committee members with scores of interest groups, businesses, churches, and governments;
- An extensive publicity campaign including radio and television spots, billboards and distribution of 20,000 flyers mainly through the County's elementary schools;
- Fourteen different public meetings in various locations around the County; and
- Follow up contact with interest groups that were under-represented in the various meetings.



This billboard was part of the publicity campaign to generate awareness of the project. Other publicity and outreach methods included buttons, brochures, flyers, newspaper articles, public service announcements, and speaking engagements.

These efforts resulted in an unprecedented level of public participation. Over 1,100 people attended at least one **big.small.all.** event. Participants came from all over the county including all but two townships and all but three villages. Figure 1.1 illustrates the location of the first set of public meetings, the Community Dialogues, and the rates of participation from various locales. Throughout the project geographic representation was pretty well balanced with the City of Urbana and the smaller villages being somewhat over-represented and unincorporated areas and the Village of Rantoul being somewhat under-represented.

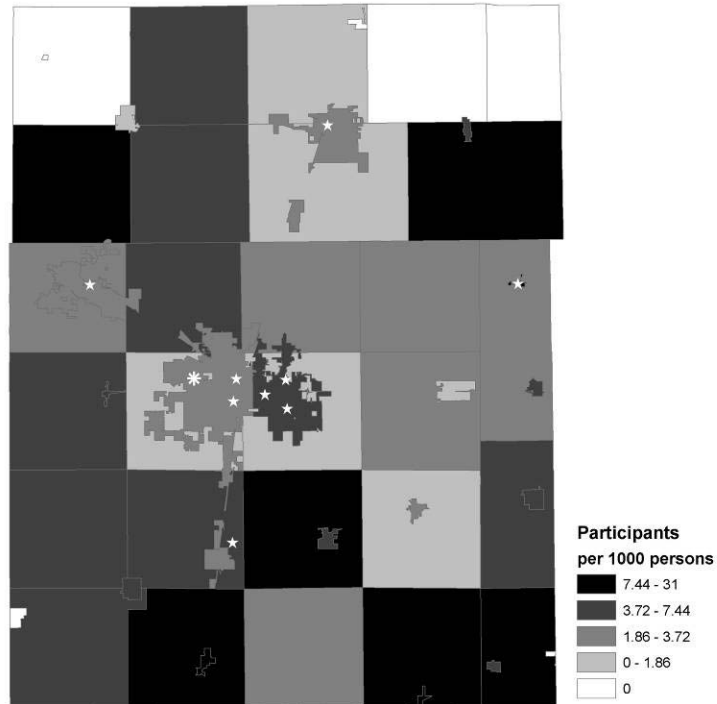
Participants were broadly representative of the county population albeit with some significant reservations. Experience has shown that some segments of the population are very difficult to involve in public meeting processes, particularly lower income households and young adults.

**big.small.all.** was no exception.

On the whole the participants generally had more education and higher household incomes than the population at large. And though they ranged in age from middle school students to World War II veterans, they also tended to be older than the general population.

The Latino and Asian communities were significantly under-represented, and African-Americans were somewhat under-represented. Persons 25 – 34 years in age were also significantly under-represented.

Figure 1.1 Community Dialogue Meeting Sites and Participation Rates



The demographic profile of participants was tracked using exit questionnaires at various points in the process. The detailed report including some information on occupations can be found in Appendix B.

### Process

**big.small.all. Champaign County** is a citizen-based initiative focused on producing a vision and plan of action for the future and fostering its realization. While the formal dialogue ended in 2006, the project as a whole has no defined end point and will live as long as active efforts continue to achieve its goals and objectives.

The **big.small.all.** process comprises four phases, each of which builds upon preceding activities.

- **your ideas. here.** – The Community Dialogues invited participants to generate ideas about the future of the county. The ideas collected during this phase were later used to develop goals and action strategies.
- **our future. here.** – The Community Assembly consisted of the Stakeholder Workshop and a series of Topical Stakeholder Committee meetings. These meetings explored issues and opportunities affecting the county. The Topical Committees did the hard work of developing detailed goals, objectives, and action strategies.
- **our choices. now.** – The Community Choices Workshops gave citizens the opportunity to review the progress of the effort, identify priority and problematic objectives, and volunteer to participate in

implementation. The results of these workshops were used to distill the emerging vision.

- **our job. now** – The Community Works is the ongoing effort to implement the ideas, make real changes, and track progress toward identified objectives.

**your ideas. here. – The Community Dialogues**

The ideas generated at the Community Dialogues constitute the foundation of the **big.small.all.** process. In November 2005 everyone living, working, or studying in Champaign County was invited to attend two-hour, open, public brainstorming meetings to think about the future. Approximately 680 people worked in small groups with a trained facilitator to respond to the following question: “What can we do to make Champaign County the best that it can be in the coming years?” This level of participation represented an extraordinary degree of public input. It also captured the diversity of the county, as participants came from varied backgrounds in terms of demographics, income, educational attainment, and place of residence.



A volunteer facilitator records participants' ideas at the meeting in Royal. The Community Dialogue yielded 2,222 ideas in total about the future of Champaign County.

**Table 1.1: Community Dialogues Dates, Locations, and Attendance**

Meeting Location		Participants
1	Nov. 1, Parkland College, Youth Kickoff	62
2	Nov. 1, Urbana Middle School, Urbana	83
3	Nov. 3, Rantoul Township High School, Rantoul	35
4	Nov. 7, Royal Community Building, Royal	40
5	Nov. 8, Unity High School, Tolono	48
6	Nov. 9, Illinois Terminal, Champaign	125
7	Nov. 10, University of Illinois, Urbana	76
8	Nov. 14, Lincoln Trail Elementary, Mahomet	56
9	Nov. 15, MLK, Jr. Elementary, Urbana	55
10	Nov. 17, Edison Middle School, Champaign	100
<b>Total</b>		<b>681</b>

**big.small.all.** held ten Community Dialogue meetings, including one focused on youth, and nine others at various locations around the County. A list of the meeting dates, locations, and attendance is included in Table 1.1. The meeting locations are also shown in Figure 1.1 In addition, ideas submitted via telephone, surface mail, email, and the website as well as those generated during the facilitator training sessions were included in the project database. A total of 2,222 ideas were generated.

Reports with the ideas sorted by meeting location and category are available in Appendices C and D.



Participants at the Illinois Terminal meeting listen to the opening remarks before breaking into small brainstorming groups. There were 125 registered participants at this meeting and a total of 681 at all ten meetings.

ACP reviewed all of the 2,222 ideas and sorted them into the 16 categories illustrated in Table 1.2. These groupings were used to structure the Community Assembly process. The ideas have been used as a reference point throughout the **big.small.all.** process.

**Table 1.2: Community Dialogue Ideas by Topic**

Category	No. of Ideas	Description
Education	243	Ideas relate to primary, secondary, and/or higher education
Social Issues	238	Ideas relate to social and human services issues including healthcare, senior issues, social equity, homelessness, low income needs, etc.
Prosperity	214	Ideas relate to jobs, business, industry, and retail.
Transportation - Public	114	Ideas relate to public transportation.
Community Character	172	Ideas relate to neighborhood and community character, amenities, design elements, revitalization, downtowns, and the urban core. These ideas are focused on the specific nature of development.
Development Patterns	160	Ideas relate to larger land use concerns, connectivity, etc. These are big picture ideas.
Arts, Culture, Activities, and Entertainment	156	Ideas relate to the different types of activities that enhance quality of life including arts and culture, community activities (e.g. markets, fairs, etc.), and other types of entertainment (e.g. movies).
Natural Resources	153	Ideas relate to natural resource and environmental management.
Leadership and Governance	146	Ideas relate to leadership (both civic and governmental), taxation, and processes that improve governance and community participation.
Delivery of Services	145	Ideas relate to “public” services such as utilities, public safety, criminal justice, libraries, and technological infrastructure.
Agricultural Economy and Preservation	92	Ideas relate to agricultural issues from economy to agricultural land preservation.
Parks and Recreation	92	Ideas relate to parks and recreation.
Transportation - Auto	92	Ideas relate to automobile transportation and the road network.
Transportation - Alternative	83	Ideas relate to biking, walking, and alternative forms of transportation.
Housing	58	Ideas relate to housing.
University and Parkland College	52	Ideas relate to the institutions of higher learning – University of Illinois and Parkland College.

**our future. here. – The Community Assembly**

Stakeholders from throughout the county participated in the Stakeholder Workshop and the subsequent Topical Stakeholder Committees, which together constituted the Community Assembly. The purpose of these activities was to synthesize public input, develop goals and specific objectives, and craft action strategies to achieve them.

**Stakeholder Workshop**

The Stakeholder Workshop was designed to engage stakeholders in discussions of the future of Champaign County by examining the physical environment and quality of life concerns. These participants were primarily individuals invited by the Steering Committee to ensure broad representation of all interests in the discussions. They also included interested citizens who chose to participate on their own. The workshop was held at the Urbana Holiday Inn on January 27, 2006. Approximately 400 stakeholders and volunteers participated in the event.

The participants were randomly assigned to small groups addressing specific topics. These groups of eight to ten people worked with a trained facilitator on two activities: a mapping exercise, “Strong Places, Weak Places” and a verbal exercise, “Critical Questions”.

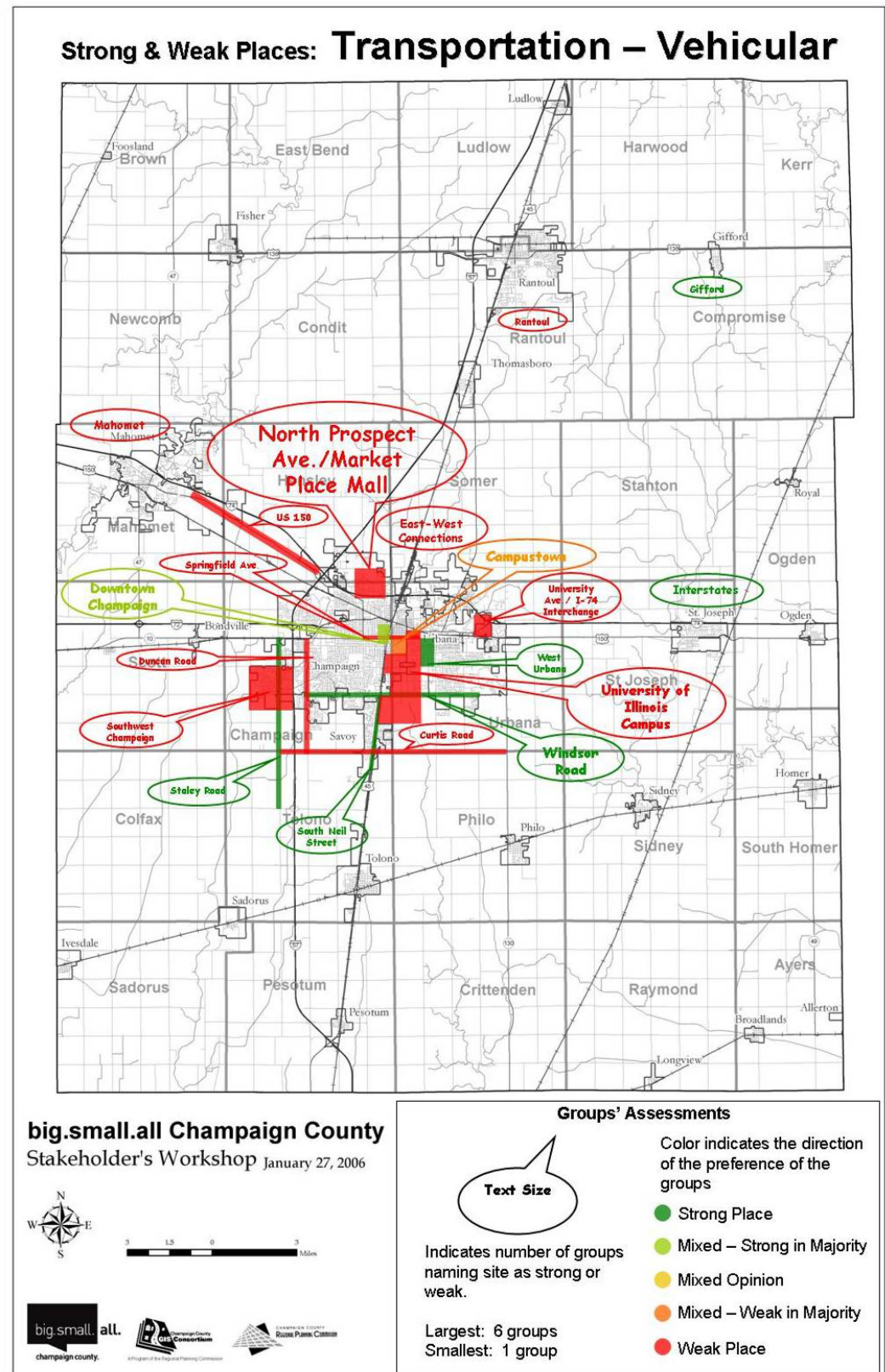
Mapping topics included: Agriculture; Commerce; Community Character; Neighborhoods; Parks, Trails, Recreation and Natural Areas; Transportation – Alternative and Public; Transportation – Vehicular; and Urban Areas and Downtowns. An example of the composite output of one of the nine mapping topics is shown in Figure 1.2.

The Critical Questions exercise addressed the following topics: Arts and Culture; Development Patterns; Economy; Education, Environment and Natural Resources, Leadership and Governance; Social Issues/Diversity; and University of Illinois and Parkland College. More information about the results of these exercises is available in Appendix E.



Pictures from the Stakeholder Workshop (from left to right) – Over 400 stakeholders attended the workshop and participated in two activities: Strong Places, Weak Places and Critical Questions.

Figure 1.2 Composite Map Showing Results of One Stakeholder Workshop “Strong Places, Weak Places” Exercise



**Topical Committees**

Agriculture  
Arts & Entertainment  
Development Patterns  
Education  
Housing & Community Character  
Leadership & Governance  
Natural Resources  
Parks & Recreation  
Prosperity  
Services & Social Issues  
Transportation

**Topical Stakeholder Committees**

Participants in stakeholder workshops were asked to sign up to continue to work in a committee on a topic of interest to them. Two hundred participants volunteered, and an additional 100 citizens were invited to join the committees in order to ensure broad representation and appropriate expertise. About two-thirds of those who signed up participated in at least one committee meeting.

Participants were organized into ten Topical Committees to ensure a workable number of reasonably sized committees. This was done by consolidating some of the 16 topical categories identified from the Community Dialogues (See Table 1.2). The Natural Resources and Parks committee eventually split into separate Natural Resources and Parks & Recreation committees. The sidebar lists the final 11 committees that completed this phase of the project.

The purpose of the Topical Stakeholder Committees was to carefully deliberate on ideas and issues that surfaced through the Community Dialogues and Stakeholders Workshop and to craft the Vision. Each committee was designed to include stakeholders representing a broad range of interests and expertise. In the end, the volunteer participants were able to choose to work on their topics of choice.

The committees met six times over a period of seven months. This was a substantial commitment and hard work. Inevitably, participation tended to fluctuate and declined somewhat over time, although this varied considerably from committee to committee. These meetings generally lasted two hours and many committees had extra meetings or worked outside the regular meetings as individuals or in subgroups.

The topical stakeholder committee process included the following activities:

- Developing goal statements for their topical areas;
- Identifying recurring themes from the related Community Dialogue ideas and, for each theme, crafting specific objectives with reference to a 25 year time horizon;
- Identifying actions that could be taken to implement the objectives and selecting a priority action for immediate attention;
- Conducting a community resources scan to identify appropriate organizations that could be involved in implementation, the resources needed, measurable criteria for success, and initial steps that could jumpstart implementation; and
- Reviewing their own work with reference to the Community Dialogues and the Stakeholder Workshop and the work of other committees with reference to potential conflicts or overlaps.

At the end of the process the 11 committees had developed 12 community goals, elaborated 68 specific objectives and identified 307 potential implementing actions. This work was reviewed by the Steering

### Addressing a Controversy

One objective turned out to be more difficult to finalize than any other. The “Urban Growth and Farmland Resources” objective became a matter of great controversy. The controversy derives in part from the underlying dilemma created by the location of Illinois’ premier research university in the midst of its best farmland. This issue also directly involves the livelihoods of both farmers and homebuilders.

Controversy over this issue arose as early as the second round of Topical Committee meetings in March, 2006. It was addressed in a variety of ways including:

- Involving ACP in the work of the Development Patterns Committee;
- Providing extra opportunities for the real estate development community to review drafts of the vision;
- Revising the design of the Community Choices Workshop to strengthen opportunities for providing critical comments; and
- Soliciting participation by the business community in the Community Choices Workshop.

Despite these efforts controversy remained.

In early December representatives of the Agriculture Committee and the real estate development sector met to try to develop a consensus approach. While some progress was made here, controversy remained.

In the end it was left to the Steering Committee to adopt a version of the objective that it feels fairly represents the views of the County as revealed in the **big.small.all** process. This version is, generally, supported by all interested parties.

Committee, and in some cases, by key stakeholders that may have been underrepresented on certain committees, such as developers, bankers, University of Illinois administration, Urban League, and others.

The results of the stakeholder deliberations – the preliminary vision – was reviewed by the public during the Community Choices Workshop described below.

### **our choices. now.** – The Community Choices Workshops

These events were designed to publicly review the results of the Community Assembly process, provide feedback, and prioritize components of the emerging county vision. The first workshop took place on October 25, 2006 at the University of Illinois Assembly Hall. Workshops were also held during the evening in Rantoul and Urbana to allow for additional participation and feedback. Approximately 360 county residents participated.

The workshops included a critical review of the action plans for each goal. Participants worked in small groups where they were able to raise concerns, make suggestions, and recommend additions.

Participants were also asked to identify the five top priority objectives in the entire Vision. They also could indicate up to three objectives about which they had reservations.

In order to fairly evaluate the voting, similar objectives were consolidated and evaluated with respect to the 360 maximum possible votes they could have received. When that was done two objectives or sets of objectives clearly stood out from the rest:

- The “Funding Quality Education” objective garnered 142 priority votes.
- Four very similar objectives were consolidated into the “Urban Growth and Farmland Resources” objective. The consolidated total for that objective was 154 priority votes.

The next highest priority vote total for any objective was 79, a little over half of these scores. The version of the vision that was reviewed at the Community Choices workshop can be accessed at [www.bigsmallall.cc](http://www.bigsmallall.cc).

### **our job. now.** – The Community Works

In the fourth and ongoing phase of the project, **big.small.all.** will serve as an instrument to move the community toward action to realize the vision, goals, and objectives. Chapter 4 details the proposed approach to implementing the action strategies.

### Drafting the Vision

Following the workshop, the Steering Committee considered the feedback in order to finalize the Vision. The final form of **our future. here.** was produced by ACP and Regional Planning Commission staff

**Goals, Objectives & Action Strategies**

Goals are the broadest policy statements, which express desired outcomes in simple terms. Objectives indicate a more specific policy direction and help to organize strategies. Action strategies are detailed sets of action steps to achieve an objective – such as a specific project or program.

under the direction of the Steering Committee. This occurred at meetings from November, 2006 to February, 2007. These efforts were directed at focusing on the components of the vision that enjoyed the greatest level of support as expressed at the Community Choices Workshops and on reducing duplication in the objectives and action strategies of the different topical stakeholder committees. Through this revision seventeen overlapping and redundant objectives were combined into six. An additional 23 objectives were moved to an “Other Ideas” category because they received limited support (less than 5% of the maximum possible priority votes during the Community Choices Workshop). The revisions to the objectives are summarized in Appendix F.

The document was heavily edited for consistency. This was necessary to fill in missing material that the Topical Committees did not provide. It was also important to ensure that the action strategies described activities that could be readily undertaken in a straight forward way.

**our future. here.** represents the ideas, hard work, and dedication of hundreds of Champaign County residents. It is – to the greatest extent possible – an expression of our collective hopes and aspirations for all aspects of our life together here.

**Prospects**

**our future. here.** does not have the force of law. It will be realized to the extent that individuals and organizations come together to pursue its objectives and undertake its actions.

The vision represents the community’s aspirations for the future and a roadmap for achieving them. This document describes goals, objectives, and actions that enjoy broad community support.

**big.small.all.** has also spurred creative thinking and engaged all sectors of the community in a productive dialogue. The project has helped find the creative “third path” that moves the community forward with collaborative efforts from the public, private, and civic sectors. It has helped to identify consensus in many areas, and has worked to provide a mechanism for approaching issues where broad consensus does not yet exist. With an emphasis on dialogue, the project sets the stage for clearly defining the issues for which further investigation and discussion may be required.

**our future. here.** is a not wish list to be implemented by any particular entity. It is an agenda for action by residents, community groups, businesses, institutions, and local governments who care about the future of Champaign County.