Vision 2025

Challenge:
In 2005, Riley County, Kansas decided it was time to revise and strengthen its land use policy. This policy would specify how all land in Riley County would be used and included decisions such as: where new homes could and could not be built, where new businesses could and could not be established, etc. This policy was designed to determine how land in Riley County would be developed and preserved into the year 2025.

The highly contentious issues exposed tensions between landowners, preservationists, homebuilders, and ecologists. There was significant concern raised about finding the appropriate balance of ensuring private property rights while pursuing a common good. Also, adding to the tensions was citizen frustration with the lack of meaningful public input into public policy decisions of this nature. Specifically for Riley County, this became an issue of preserving agriculture land and the rural character of the area while allowing and encouraging appropriate residential and industrial development.

Solution:
The Riley County Board of Commissioners created a steering committee of 25 stakeholders including ranchers, farmers, land developers, real estate agents, local elected officials, school representatives, conservation groups and other interested citizens to participate in extensive dialogue and planning on this issue. The charge to the steering committee was to provide land use recommendations to the Riley County Board of Commissioners. The Planning Office contracted with the Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy to facilitate the steering committee meetings and public dialogue. ICDD collaborated with the Riley County planning office to design, organize and facilitate all Vision 2025 meetings.

Director of the Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy, David Procter, and two facilitation associates, Terrie McCants and Dan Kahl, were integral in creating the structure for the Vision 2025 meetings and facilitating the planning sessions. Starting in 2006, the ICDD team alternated organizing and facilitating these meeting over a three-year period. Once a month, the 18-member steering committee would work through a process that had been designed and facilitated by the ICDD team. The steering committee discussed every aspect of land use planning and made recommendations for a clear and balanced policy.

Results:
At the end of the three-year period, the steering committee reached a consensus on their recommendations and presented those to the Riley County Land Use Plan. As part of its recommendations, the steering committee crafted a Land Evaluation And Scoring Analysis (LESA). The LESA provides a systematic procedure for evaluating land in Riley County for development by examining issues of soil quality, water availability, land slope and distance of the development to schools, emergency services, confined animal operations, and other homes.

The Riley County Board of Commissioners accepted all recommendations by the Vision 2025 steering committee. This process highlights ICDD strength in facilitating more inclusive and informed decisions and energizing citizen-inspired action. Through the Vision 2025 process, ICDD worked to create greater public awareness and understanding of issues and worked to narrow the understanding gap between citizens and elected officials.