

# City Hall/Town Hall Planning Process

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Jeff Barnouw - Amphitheatre Drive

## **The Pragmatism of the Planning (and Presenting) Process**

On Thursday November 19 yet another citizens meeting was held at the TV Studio on the plans for the Town Hall/City Hall complex, the day after the new plans were first presented to the Design Review Board and using the architectural drawings and illustrations generated for that earlier meeting.

Thursday's meeting was largely for the sake of the immediate neighbors of the City Hall, who voiced their concerns about noise and light and privacy. These concerns were addressed with real consideration by Planning and Community Development Director Kathy Garcia and by the lead architect Mike Jobses and landscape architect Andrew Spurlock. The same patience and openness were shown that we have seen throughout the succession of meetings, the long process of presenting ideas and getting feedback to be incorporated in the next iteration.

The manner of presentation and of responding to objections seemed to me to mirror the actual process of planning, of developing what was presented. Believe it or not, I was reminded of my dissertation, of writing it (it took a while, I and others were patient as it took shape) but more importantly for its subject, the 'Problem of Action' in writings of the late 18th and early 19th century, before, during and after the first French Revolution. Above all, Edmund Burke came to mind. A defender of the American Revolution, he was widely expected to support the French, but he was appalled at the 'clean slate' approach which swept away the ancient regime, including custom and traditional ways, to rebuild on a rational basis. Many of Burke's predictions of the failure of this approach were borne out in the years following 1789. Burke favored an approach he associated with "experience": "By a slow but well-sustained progress, the effect of each step is watched; the good or ill success of the first, gives light to us in the second; and so, from light to light, we are conducted with safety through the whole series." By steam-rolling any opposition, the French had to act in an historical vacuum, whereas Burke felt that resistance encountered should be crucial. Difficulty was an ally: "This amicable conflict with difficulty obliges us to an intimate acquaintance with our object, and compels us to consider it in all its relations."