

Community Involvement in a Major Institutional Master Plan

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Tom Smith's new home is situated in a quaint residential area a few blocks from the main Western University campus. Tomorrow Tom will start a new job at the state university's medical center. WUMC is a wholly owned subsidiary of the state-run university. Tom was hired to replace Bob Mack who was retiring after 20 years as executive director of the medical center. Tom's reputation and ability to generate a competitive advantage for each of his previous organizations were instrumental in his being offered the position. He possessed a unique ability to analyze markets and locate opportunities. Tom's former supervisor, Donna Jacobs, recommended him for the position at WUMC by stating, "As a long-term strategist, Tom always seems to know what his competitors are planning, which allows him to always keep the hospital one step ahead of the competition." WUMC is in need of a new, ten-year strategic and master site/facility plan, and the university believes that Tom is the ideal administrator to lead the hospital through the planning process.

It is early Sunday evening. Tom decides to drive to the medical center to acquaint himself with the route. On the way he observes that the sidewalks and parks in the neighborhood are bustling with activity. Arriving at the campus, Tom turns his car into the medical center parking lot. The lot is completely full. "Full on a Sunday evening—the parking situation is an item I will need to address in our master plan," he thinks to himself.

Tom picks up a newspaper on his way to work the next morning. The headline reads: "City Adopts Planning Ordinance." "I need to read that when I have an opportunity," he notes as he resumes his commute. The traffic, even at 6:00 a.m., is quite heavy and the sidewalks are again very active. Tom observes, "The community is certainly quite different from the metropolis I left back east."

Upon arrival, Tom finds the WUMC parking lot already near capacity once again. "I need to address this parking issue," he reminds himself. Prior to heading to his office, Tom decides that the early morning is an opportune time to get familiar with the hospital layout. As Tom walks through the hospital, he stops to introduce himself to the staff and employees. "Hello, my name is Tom Smith. I am the new executive director here at the medical center," he greets a professionally dressed woman in the hallway. "It is nice to meet you, Tom. My name is Dr.

*The Journal regrets that Mr. Muilenburg passed away before the publication of this article.

Nancy Ward and I am a cardiologist here at the medical center. We have heard many great things about you, particularly regarding your reputation for guiding hospitals through a strategic planning process. I would think that the passing of the city planning ordinance last night will present a new twist for your traditional process. I live in a neighborhood within a mile of the medical center and many of my neighbors are quite adamant against plans to expand the medical center. They think the university adds too much congestion to the roadways. I am quite sure they are pleased with the city council's decision to open up the process. Well, Tom, I have a triple bypass patient to care for. I look forward to working with you," Dr. Ward concluded as she walked away.

Tom is still considering the comments from Dr. Ward as he is greeted upon entering his office. "Good morning, Mr. Smith. My name is Betty Wilson and I am your secretary." Following an exchange of pleasantries Tom asks, "A cardiologist downstairs was just informing me of a new city ordinance that will have an effect on the university medical center. Are you familiar with this ordinance?" "Well yes. I read the article this morning and I am also quite active in my community's organization," Betty acknowledges. "The residents of this city are very active and invested in their community. They all have developed strong community-based organizations, and many of these organizations can be quite influential in the local political arena through the identification and support of potential candidates and the election of city council members," Betty continues. "The former director, Bob Mack, referred to this as populist politics. A city department of community services supports each organization. The department provides staff for each community organization in return for the organizations' input into the city's policy planning process." "So how does that affect our medical center?" Tom inquires. "According to the article, the new city ordinance requires that each major institution within the city must open up their planning process to the community organizations that surround the institution for their input and advice. Politically, it's much better if they agree with what you want to do," Betty answers. Suddenly stunned, Tom asks, "Betty, do you have Mr. Mack's telephone number?" Tom closes his office door behind him and reads the newspaper article. "This is hard to believe. The article suggests that I must open up our master site/facility planning process to public debate. How can I achieve a competitive advantage for this organization if the entire city, and our competitors, are aware of our facility requirements to support our strategic plan?" he thinks to himself.

"Mr. Mack is on line 1, Mr. Smith," informs Betty. Tom, attempting to disguise the anxiety in his voice, opens, "Good morning, sir. I apologize for interrupting your first day of retirement but I need some background information regarding this new city ordinance appearing in this morning's paper." "After reading the morning headlines, I thought I might get a call from you," Bob responds. "Strategic and long-range facility planning is historically conducted by management and the medical staff under board direction. This had been done without outside representation involved other than the broad-based community perspectives represented by

board members." Tom interjects, "That is the process that I am accustomed to. Why would the city legislate a change in the process? Bob, have you had complaints from community organizations in the past pertaining to the medical center?" "Yes. Some of the concerns include noise, traffic, density, and disruptions due to community events and construction. Other concerns came from private businesses that view the university as a competitor in the market. There are five community organizations in WUMC's impact zone representing some retail business but primarily residential. Many faculty and staff of the university live in these neighborhoods along with many of the most wealthy and influential residents of our city. Historically, these organizations have very different views and attitudes toward WUMC—attitudes ranging from mutually dependent to openly hostile," Bob concludes.

The description "openly hostile" continues to ring in Tom's head moments after concluding the phone conversation with Bob. Tom thinks to himself, "I was brought here to determine the long-range needs and facility requirements for WUMC to respond to changing market demands and to accommodate new growth. I am not familiar with the role of public servant. I am a strategist."

Betty's appearance in the office doorway interrupts his train of thought. "I have a memo here from Dr. Watson, the university president, which was just faxed to your attention." The memo reads:

I need to inform you of a city ordinance that was passed last night that will significantly affect the WUMC long-range site and strategy plan you and your committee will be working on. Any plan that you approve at the medical center must also satisfy the expressed expectations of the five community organizations in your impact zone. The plan will be used as a basis for new building and remodeling permits and is subject to an environmental effect statement with the opportunity for public comment. The plan must mitigate any concerns expressed by each community organization before final adoption can be granted by the university's governing board and the city council. Since we are a state-funded institution and subject to the political scrutiny that accompanies this designation, it is vital that the planning process be managed carefully by you and your committee to avoid the process becoming politically charged. I am confident that you will do what is best for the university, WUMC, and the community.

As he finishes reading the fax, Tom begins to understand the ramifications of this city ordinance for his planning strategies. "How can I conduct counter intelligence in an environment where every major planning decision that I make is public knowledge? My competition will know what I am doing ten years in advance! That is assuming that I can ever get a plan approved. How am I going to involve five community organizations in the planning process and still address the needs of this medical center? I cannot believe that a *city* has the legal authority to have a *state* institution follow these rules. I wonder whether the medical center can fight this ordinance in court? Well, my initial impression of the community being extremely active is certainly accurate. And I thought additional parking would be an easy first step!"

Tom calls a planning committee for the following Monday. As the planning committee members converge on the meeting, all discussions center on how the committee should handle the process in light of the city ordinance. Following opening introductions and remarks, Tom articulates what each board member has on their mind, "How do we ever arrive at a consensus for the plan with such divergent and competing interests involved in the process?"

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How should Tom Smith and the committee manage this situation?
2. Should Tom investigate the legality of a city ordinance that dictates the planning process of a state-operated institution?
3. What could Tom have done differently in the interviewing process to uncover this potential dilemma prior to taking the position?

The authors have used actual experiences as a point of departure for developing hypothetical cases that might take place in a variety of healthcare organizations. The events do not depict specific individuals or organizations.

To view the authors' solution to this case and previous cases run in "From the Field," visit www.ache.org/pubs/jhm.html.