



## **Why Storytelling?**

### **Its Role in Heart & Soul Community Planning**

*"Stories can accomplish what no other form of communication can – they can get through to our hearts with a message. In our world of information transfer, data exchange, and media impressions, where we have become callused by so much communication, stories have the power to speak to us about what truly matters.... In our work we are surrounded by stories of hope, stories about healing, stories about fairness, stories about making a difference, stories about community, stories about connection". -Will Rogers in The Story Handbook*

Storytelling can be a powerful, inclusive way to engage the members of a community in collaborative process, to gather information about community perspectives on land-use and foster shared ownership of planning for the future. Here are several reasons why to incorporate storytelling into your project:

**Storytelling draws in more voices.** Most planning processes are not inviting to people who may not have experience with land use issues or who do not feel comfortable speaking up at the typical public hearing. Storytelling, on the other hand, allows anyone to share their perceptions in a form that is common across cultures. And stories provide a human face to the complex challenges facing communities today.

**Storytelling creates connections.** Storytelling can bring to life shared experiences and community values and can be an effective way to build common ground among individuals who typically do not connect. Stories can provide a common text for spurring community dialogue about planning for the future.

**Storytelling builds empathy.** How many times have you read a book or watched a movie and found yourself understanding a character who is so different from yourself? Listening to someone else's story allows us to be open to their views; it gives us a space to reflect on their perspective and grow to see new possibilities.

**Storytelling teaches us the consequences of our actions.** Telling stories can illustrate how a community has changed over time. Stories can honor and illuminate the past and allow us to trace the roots of how we came to be who and what we are today.

**Storytelling can give us hope for the future.** A story can also speak to our aspirations for the future in a way that invites others to feel connected to and share in that vision.

**Storytelling is action.** Through the process of telling our stories and listening to others' stories, we have an impact on our surroundings, we take a stand, we matter, we participate in our community. Our stories become a part of the living community archive.

**Note:** This document provides information for communities that are developing a storytelling project as part of their Heart & Soul Community Planning initiative. It is a working document, which means that it will be refined over time based on research and the experiences of our Heart & Soul communities. As such, we encourage you to provide feedback on it and let us know if you come across great projects or resources. (10.28.08)

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