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Facilitation in Development Transcript

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So our next session is actually Karen.

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In thinking about the different presentations that we've been having are that we were having this was a couple days. A few days ago, I realized we were focusing a lot on development models and policy and design.

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But we didn't really talk about the soft skills kind of the the human side of things, and I've had the good fortune to work with Karen on a project recently where she served as our facilitator.

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And so, and for many years as an architect I used to pride myself on oh we can do facilitation and we can do the design and and be really efficient and in working with Karen I realized, actually, it's very helpful, and less confusing for the participants,

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if I take off my developer hat and or by my facilitator hat and give it over to somebody else, so that I can just focus on the role of the design.

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So I'll just turn it over to Karen to share a little bit about her facilitation process and how that factors into the development process.

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Thanks grace Yeah, I'm excited to be here in my consultant role as opposed to my organizer role and.

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So my primary businesses that I am a coach, as it's been called and there been references in some of the presentations to using coaches and, and for communities to have coaches both, as they're developing and then certainly after move in and that's most

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of the work that I do. I think of myself as a relationship consultant or in the US, the term is often process consultant. They work with groups on conflict and consensus and Sochi accuracy and all those kinds of things.

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And I have lived in community I've been part of forming groups so I've been in that community member role in all of this, and I bring a lot of that awareness to the work that I do and helping communities get along with each other.

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And I did some training with the maga relationships and a lot of my work is based on that, and a bit of international flavor there as well I took some of my training from positive Lin Brown, who are in Austria.

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And so got some of that sense, sadly they don't know anything about cohousing but I taught them.

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So, that's another space that I connect with.

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And what I'm doing that I wanted to talk to you about today is increasingly I'm working with the development professionals on our four main projects so both developers and architects in a number of ways.

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I sit sometimes on the professional team meetings so I'm bringing into those meetings spaces and awareness of what's going on relational late in the community.

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And that can happen a lot of ways, including sometimes I find myself saying things like you know that options exercise that you've, you've got them working on, do they have to do it now because they're kind of spinning relational and they could use some

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some time to work on other things are there at burnout, or those kinds of awareness is and if we can coordinate amongst all of the professionals, so that if in fact that's the thing that's under deadline, it has to be done now I can support the community

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and how to do that and and and sort of delaying some of the relational work that they really need to do if we have to. And if we have flexibility within the development side, that we can actually put put a little bit of a pause on their energy toward

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development and come back to relationship work for a while so I work in a number of capacities and some of its just sort of sitting in on professional meetings, some of it is actually helping us grace said facilitate the design process.

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I've just said this is one of my favorite things to do because of the partnership that I get to have with the architects, and in that capacity I help with the agenda setting for the program in the days of doing this now on zoom, we do a lot of work on

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trying to change up interface modalities and just generally bringing better practices and how do we keep people engaged for the, you know, often multiple full day design workshops that we're asking people to do on zoom, how do we make that work for communities.

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And as Ray said also serving as an as a different role. So that's the professional and in this case the architect can be just the architect, and I can be bringing in facilitation practices and decision making practices, particularly as these groups tend

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to be relatively early in terms of relationship formation. Very often, the, the start of the design process is a trigger for new members to join they want to get in there and time to participate in the design process.

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And that means those new members aren't integrated in the group and they've not studied anything about the group processes for decision making. So they need a good bit of support, and we can actually build in some of that decision making training into

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the design workshops, largely through modeling, but by bringing in some of those practices that can be really helpful.

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And so I think some of the things that I can bring one of them quite frankly is ignorance, because I don't know development and architecture although I'm learning a lot.

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And I'm really good at picking up jargon that is familiar to everyone in this room you say these words and you know what they mean but the average community member doesn't or that it's going to push their cognitive load to work there so how can we reframe

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things so that they're just really accessible to the audience that we're working with. And I think I bring the perspective of the length of a member because I've been there, and sometimes what I'm bringing is I just say the same thing.

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In other words, because my voice is different and my tone is different and I use different words a different set of people understand it, so sometimes I'm literally just repeating what has already been said and that turns out to be useful.

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Another thing that I do that grace in particular has said was useful to her is I track what I think of is the cost of decision making to a group and here I'm not talking about financial cost.

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When these groups that are just learning how to be together have to make decision after decision after decision. It is exhausting. And there's an individual thing called decision fatigue and there's very much a group thing called decision fatigue and

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they end up making them less and less well. So I find myself very often sitting with professional development side professionals and saying, is it, do they need to make that decision is that actually a decision that will be made better if the group makes

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it. And what I find is often their decisions being offered to groups that actually the development professional already knows the answer. They already know what the best outcome is because the development professionals have done this before and they have

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the expertise and they know a good balance between class and sustainability or what sorts of sustainability things that or any number of other topics.

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And so, but but in the interest of involving the group. They offer decisions to the group because there are a couple of viable options and increasingly I'm encouraging the development side professionals to offer fewer decisions to group, or to put those

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decisions in the frame of unless you tell me to do something different. I'm going to do this. And so if the groups want to claim agency they absolutely can.

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But if they're just worn out, they, they have the choice to trust the professionalism of the people that they've hired and go that way rather than working through the process of trying to make a decision in a consensus or associate Socratic decision making

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process that they don't know how to do well, about a thing that they don't know very well because they aren't developers and architects and they don't have that information so the more that we can shift the decision making, to where we don't exhaust them

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with so much decision making, I think we free up space for them to do more relationship building more social activities more marketing actually have those kinds of activities, that's really what we need them to be doing on the project so I can bring that

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kind of awareness, because I work in relationships, all day long, about relationships and what's happening there.

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So I think those are the main things that I guess the other piece I would say is that typically I'm also working with the group in their relationship space, so I can kind of coordinate, what's going on relationship wise what's going on development wise

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and and help those pieces fit together well. So that's my sense of what's useful about bringing a facilitator into a project. And, and I wanted to get perspectives from a couple of the other professionals that I've worked with, and we have Eric Grantham

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Sure. Thank you for having me. And I want to echo everything that you just said and all the sorts of value that the facilitator can bring one of these projects.

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What I heard a lot is the ways in which a facilitator can help the community and, and I want to just re emphasize that the facilitator also helps the developer it helps the architect so in every way that a facilitator may be breaking down the sorts of

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processes or jargon that that's being brought by the professional team, the facilitators also helping the professional team to gain insight about how these communities operate and how to operate with those communities.

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And so each of the professionals that any project is going to bring on, I think, is prepared in every professional sense to execute a co housing project from design through development, you know, even if an architect maybe hasn't sat down and specifically

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done a co housing project, they have a wealth of experience they've got educational background, for the most part, in those sorts of community centric projects, what they may not have is exposure to the actual process of the community, the way that the

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community operates. And so, what we see as we're not lacking in the ability to execute.

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architects, DC is what have you are used to operating in a much more concrete structured realm where decisions are made much more on the fly and things are much more fluid indecisive and moving forward.

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And that can be different in cohousing, there's a process behind a lot of decisions, and having a facilitator available, not only helps to the community to become more acclimated with the way that some professionals may operate but it helps those professionals

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become more acclimated with the way that the community operates. And I think that that's incredibly valuable and it enables communities to go out and have that much more reach that much more flexibility and option in who they're bringing on board, such

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that if you have a good facilitator, you could potentially bring in a developer, a GC an architect who hasn't worked on cohousing before and doesn't know what it's about so much, they may, they might bring the professional chops to it, but what the facilitator

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brings is kind of the glue that makes everything stick together and move smoothly.

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Thanks Sarah, that's super useful, and Ryan a grace that shared a little bit about her experience but Brian Bowen if you'd be willing to share a little of your experience of having a facilitator on board.

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Yeah, I think in some ways we, I was super lucky because of my first real coaching experience, aside from being a short term member of Wasatch Commons in Salt Lake City was at wild sage and, you know, that was led by 1 million Hill development company

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and Jim Leach and he had a staff he had any Russell he had people who were very skilled who are just part of the deal packaged and brought to bear on the project and so I saw firsthand how incredibly valuable that was

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and how that institution really brought.

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Just a high degree of professionalism to all of its projects during this era that years the years were existed, you know, it's full developer forum, I mean Jim still here and he's still doing amazing things but the development company is not really developing

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And so I love seeing EDP develop that skill fullness as well as an architect running, you know, start getting more and more causing projects like Chris said I sort of fancy myself as semi decent at running these workshops and, you know, being able to

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listen to groups and get them to be excited and do all this stuff, but so much of this process was built on the personalities of, like, you know, Chuck and Katie right like architects who are good at taking information in a, in their to their mind and

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a very very quick wet time period digesting it and making decisions.

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So I thought that the workshops we were doing were working great. And I just didn't really understand why some people were, you know, like how it didn't work for everybody.

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And then that became more and more clear over time as I got more thoughtful about it, and saw like what Karen was doing, and other facilitators.

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And, and I realized like we, you know, first off with David and going digital, it didn't cost, another flight ticket in our hotel stay and everything for it to have a facilitator the room so didn't have like convinced the community of it.

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Second off, like we could change our pacing, we didn't have to like cram it all into like a two day thing, we could, we could really proceed it a more like emotionally sophisticated nuanced paste that works for everybody.

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And and building those time for the relational work. I really believe that like the relational work is legitimate development work, because that's what you are developing as a relationship with the people, the buildings frankly that's easy stuff.

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And being focused on what we need to hear from the group at that moment in time on that subject is super important and having a facilitator who's bringing you back to that all the time is really helpful.

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Also want to just say like, one of the things that I.

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So initially, we would get hired as the architect. And I'd say well you gotta hire, you know, a facilitator whether it was, you know, Karen more recently or Yana or any or Paris or something you got somebody has to be there than this role, and it was

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me trying to talk them into it all the time and they always looked at it as like some additional budget budget line and I'm saying, and it was hard to get them to do it, either because they knew they had have an architect but they weren't really sure

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they needed to have a relationship consultant.

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So a couple years ago I just said screw it I'm going to hire Karen directly under cactuses thing and she's on our team. So I just brought her in on these projects and said, the way we're doing this work is having Karen on our team as a facilitator.

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That was a game changer because then it wasn't like an additional cost of the community. They didn't have any sort of like internal discrepancies about whether they you know liked working with her not or different styles or things like that so it kind

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of makes that person a little bit fireproof as well, which is actually pretty valuable because as you guys know in the relationship building world like there's a lot of different styles out there and people have different affinities for different things

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and groups can get all kinds of weird sideways around this stuff, but it's just it was actually turn that it was a question that we didn't need to ask them.

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Like I already knew the answer. Like, you should have this as part of the system, it makes it work better. And so we're going to give it to you. So yeah, I think it works great.

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Thanks, Brian.

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And Eric and grace and I'm going to wrap up because I know we're at time, so thank you so much.

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Yes, thank you.