

## **Focused Conversations with Kalamazoo County Residents**

During the summer and fall of 1999, project staff met with fifteen groups to discuss Kalamazoo's future. The conversations were unstructured (see Interview Guide) to allow group members to bring up issues, hopes, and concerns about the community. Groups ranged in size from two to ten participants and discussions lasted from 90 minutes to over two hours.

We used this information to help us identify the issues citizens consider crucial, and to construct the questionnaire for the random and non-random surveys. Data gathered through interviews such as this convey with richness *why* people take the positions they do.

### *Composition of focus groups*

#### Group 1 *Business*

A countywide local business-oriented organization solicited members for group 1. The participants were from all over the county and ranged widely in age and experience. All considered themselves to be business people but with very different types of businesses. This group was predominately male.

#### Group 2 and Group 3 *Develop1 and Develop2*

These groups were comprised of people with development interests within the county. Members of these groups held occupations such as real estate sales, building and contracting, and land ownership. Again, participants came from throughout the county and were predominately male.

#### Group 4 *Alter-transit*

Participants in this group had similar interests in bicycling, and other forms of non-motorized transportation. Most lived in the City of Kalamazoo. Both genders were evenly represented in this group.

#### Group 5 *Seniors*

Senior citizens were represented in this group. Most lived within the City of Kalamazoo and were both male and female.

#### Groups 6 and 7 *Small town1 and Small town2*

Participants in group 6 had rural or small village backgrounds in the northern part of the county and most were senior citizens. Group 7 participants came from rural/agricultural areas or small villages in the eastern part of the county, and both were male and female, and aged from their late teens to late middle age.

Group 8 *Teens*

This was a group of teenagers, primarily from Portage. Both genders were represented.

Group 9 *Service Org*

This was a group from a women's service organization. Most lived in the City of Kalamazoo.

Group 10 *Officials*

This was a group of elected and appointed officials from townships throughout the county. Both genders were represented.

Group 11 *Historic*

This was a group of Kalamazoo City residents with interests in historic preservation.

Group 12 *KPS parents*

Participants in this group were parents of children enrolled in the Kalamazoo Public Schools.

Groups 13 and 14 *Farm1 and Farm2*

Both groups represented farm interests. Participants in group 13 were farmers (male and female) from throughout the county. Three generations of a local farm family comprised group 14.

Group 15 *Neighbor*

This was a group of Kalamazoo City residents with strong interests in neighborhoods and neighborhood preservation.