



Map 1

# PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING FOR COMMUNITY RELOCATION:

## A CASE STUDY OF KEEPHILLS, ALBERTA

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Le gouvernement provincial de l'Alberta (dans l'ouest du Canada) a décidé d'accorder à une compagnie l'autorisation de procéder au développement et au maintien d'une grande mine de charbon à ciel ouvert. Cette mesure a eu pour effet de perturber les conditions de vie d'une petite communauté rurale. En procédant à leur enquête sur l'ensemble de cette communauté tenant compte, de la réalité ethnique, les auteurs font l'analyse des rôles de la compagnie et de la communauté dans la mise en oeuvre du programme de participation, dont la compagnie avait pris l'initiative en 1976. Après une décade, ce programme est encore en marche.

Les résultats de cette enquête montrent que même si les objectifs de la communauté rurale et de la compagnie diffèrent considérablement, la participation du public au projet a éliminé les risques sérieux de conflit. En outre, la compagnie minière a réaménagé un petit village au sein de la communauté, construit une école nouvelle, un nouveau centre récréatif. Elle a aussi aménagé les infrastructures reliées au projet, et ce, sans frais pour la communauté.

When the Provincial Government of Alberta in Western Canada gave a utility company permission to develop and operate a large open pit coal mine, a small rural community in the area was disrupted. Using both survey and ethnographic collection procedures, the authors trace company and community involvement in a public participation program which was implemented by the utility company in 1976, and is still in place a decade later.

The results of this study show that while the community and utility company had very different goals, the public participation program implemented by the company averted major outbreaks of conflict. Furthermore, the utility company relocated a small village in the community, built a new school and recreational center, and rebuilt the associated infrastructures at no cost to the community.

## INTRODUCTION

The Keephills project in the province of Alberta, Canada involved the development of a large, open pit coal mine and a thermal generating plant. Since 1976, when this project began, it has established many precedents in community-developer-government relations in Alberta. For example, the Keephills project (hereafter often referred to as Keephills) represented the first time an established hamlet in Alberta was relocated in order to accommodate a coal mine and an associated plant for thermal power generation. The Keephills project was also the first major attempt in the province of Alberta to implement a consistent policy of public participation involving cooperative decision-making by both a community and a project proponent (in this case, a major utility company named TransAlta Utilities, hereafter often referred to as TransAlta). In addition, Keephills was the first energy project in Alberta to use sociological consultants to conduct a longitudinal social impact assessment and monitoring program from the inception of the program (see Note 1). There are a great many other "firsts" associated with Keephills, some of which were similar to other projects, and some of which were unique. While the particular subject of this paper--community relocation--is one in which an analysis of Keephills can be helpful for similar cases in the future, the details of the Keephills experience are unique. The process of public participation in the Keephills project demonstrates how this process might be used to deal with the concerns of local residents in similar development situations.

Much of the previous research on community relocation points to negative impacts (see Iverson and Matthews 1968; Matthiasson and Chow 1970; Bowles 1981; Colson 1971; Scudder 1982). The problems encountered by residents of these communities go far beyond the necessities of finding housing, jobs, or a new school for their children. The Keephills case of community relocation is different from most cases cited in the literature in that: (1) only part of the overall community was moved (e.g., the residents of a hamlet located in the greater community); (2) residents of the hamlet were relocated to a new locale which was adjacent to the previous hamlet (cf. Metzler 1963); and (3) an active public participation program was undertaken by the proponent, TransAlta Utilities. As a result, many negative impacts of relocation which have been identified by previous research failed to materialize at Keephills. While we do not have specific data to suggest that the public participation program was a key factor in the success of Keephills, previous research by Kupfer and Hobart (1978), and by Gibson (1976) suggest that "effective consultation" has a strong mediating effect on the potentially negative impacts of relocation for community residents.

## THE SETTING

The greater Keephills community is a collection of about 120 rural families who identify themselves as members of the community. These families are located south of Lake Wabamun, about seventy kilometers (forty-five miles) west of the provincial capital of Edmonton (see Map 1). Greater Keephills is an established community, with an eighty-year history of mixed farming and ranching. A few residents work in Edmonton, and some work full or part-time in the nearby Sundance power plant at Lake Wabamun (see Note 2).

Like most such communities, there are widespread kinship ties in the area, and geographical mobility is relatively low. According to our first survey in 1978, most of the residents were quite happy with their situations and well-satisfied with the quality of life afforded them in their locale.

At the hub of this larger rural community when the coal mine and thermal generating plant project began in 1976, lay the small hamlet of Keephills, with its elementary school and teacherage, a community hall built in 1938, a telephone exchange, and four private residences. In earlier years there had been a post office, two general stores, a gas station, and a dozen residences.

Although the Keephills hamlet has always been small, it is important to recognize that it is supported by a much wider geographic area. The busy community hall is still the focal point of regional social life, and is run by the Keephills Athletic Association, whose members are drawn from all 120 families in the surrounding area. Even if the hamlet was losing population and services in 1976, it served an important function as the social center and focal point for the larger rural community. One of the issues that emerged early in the Keephills project concerned the viability of the hamlet. There was considerable debate as to whether or not the hamlet was "dying out" prior to this project, or if it was merely "changing" as it had many times before in its long history. One of the most important contributions of the social consultants at that time was to point out to TransAlta Utilities that the hamlet performed critical services for the surrounding community, and that the larger community of Keephills was not identical with the hamlet alone. The hamlet was described as the social center of the surrounding community, and it was pointed out that although the hamlet had gradually lost some of its previous functions, it continued to perform essential functions within this context.

Almost immediately, the strip mine and associated power plant that comprised the Keephills development required some 5,280 acres of land for its plant, cooling pond, ash lagoons, and railway. The

proposed total mine permit boundary, not all of which will be mined, includes an additional 30,560 acres. When the Keephills Plant opened in 1982, it represented the largest operating coal mine in Canada.

## GOVERNMENT POLICY AND COMMUNITY RELOCATION

In the early 1970s, Alberta was in the midst of an economic boom due to its oil wealth. Provincial energy need projections were being amended upwards at regular intervals, and the three resident power companies in Alberta were scrambling to meet projected demands. In 1973, the provincial Land Surface Conservation and Reclamation Act was passed, giving the Alberta Minister of Environment discretionary power to require an environmental impact assessment wherever he thought this was appropriate. Until 1976, various resource and utility companies had been indifferent to social impact. These companies were secure in the belief that their role as developers and surveyors of power required engineering and technical expertise only, and that there was no significant public role to be played, nor any social impact to consider. In 1975, unexpected opposition to a major coal development project in the Camrose-Riley area of Alberta caught both the provincial government and the project proponent, TransAlta Utilities, quite unprepared. After the issue was fully politicized, the community of Camrose succeeded in having the provincial premier intercede and the project was indefinitely shelved. This provincial cabinet decision was the product of public politics, active community opposition, and inappropriate public relations by TransAlta Utilities (Goldenberg, et al. 1980).

By 1976, rhetoric concerning social impact and public participation was just beginning in Alberta, and the recently established Alberta Department of Environment was only beginning to make its presence felt. The Alberta Coal Policy was passed in 1976, and the Keephills application was the first project to be filed under this new legislation. The first provincial guidelines for the conduct of environmental impact assessment issued by the provincial Department of Environment also appeared in 1976. Prior to the Keephills project, there was no provincial environmental/ social impact assessment format and there were no precedents. Thus, whatever happened with Keephills was guaranteed to be groundbreaking. No doubt a certain "Hawthorne Effect," of which both the community and the utility company were well-aware, was relevant. The term "Hawthorne Effect" was originally given to the results of a series of experiments carried out by Roethlisberger and Dickson in 1939. The results of these experiments showed that paying attention to people affected their behavior independently of any other environmental change that may have occurred.

It was against this background that studies relating to an alternative development at Keephills were begun. Because TransAlta Utilities had been turned down at Camrose, the company made a major, wholly new commitment to the use of public participation at Keephills. It hired consultants to help both itself and the community learn to deal with one another, and to help both parties realize the implications of a new perception of a potential development as a joint problem which would require joint input to discuss and formulate policy.

Before any construction began, sociological consultants entered the Keephills community. They talked to residents about the public participation process and helped them set up an organizational structure to represent local interests in dialogue with both TransAlta Utilities and the government.

It soon became clear that leaders in the Keephills community were willing to take a cooperative "wait and see" position. This early cooperative inclination was shared by most residents, and was a key ingredient in the subsequent history of development in the area. If local residents and/or leaders had been antagonistic, resentful, and confrontational from the outset, the Keephills project would have developed differently. Thus, although analysis of community attitudes is not part of the present paper, it is an important factor (see Note 3).

## THE EMERGENCE OF THE HAMLET ISSUE

As soon as residents in the Keephills community learned that the potential mine area included the land on which the tiny hamlet of Keephills was located, they realized that both the survival of their community and the fabric of their lives were at stake. This was not merely a nearby or adjacent development, but a situation which promised to displace everyone over a period of perhaps fifty years of slow attrition, assuming the validity of various projections for long-term energy needs and developments in the province of Alberta. The potential threat to most landowners was quite clear, although distant and conditional since plans for the mine had not yet been approved. Aside from those whose land was needed immediately for the thermal generating plant and its associated facilities, there was no immediate threat of dislocation. Initial mining was scheduled to begin in the northern mine plan area.

Although representatives of TransAlta Utilities were willing to agree that there was a great deal of coal under the hamlet of Keephills (two million tons, or enough to run a thermal generating

unit for one and one-half years), they could not say when or if this coal would be mined. This decision was up to the Alberta Energy Resources Conservation Board and the various licensing agencies involved in approving mine plans. Although the site of the Keephills hamlet was included in the mine plan application which was submitted to the Energy Resources Conservation Board, this plan did not specify when or even if the hamlet would need to be destroyed.

This, then, was the first and key issue that emerged long before the public disclosure session officially required by the provincial government was held in the community. The provincial Department of Environment required this session as a component of public participation in the process of conducting an environmental impact assessment. Should the hamlet of Keephills be destroyed, protected, or relocated? Both the community and TransAlta Utilities had a real choice of options. Certainly, TransAlta could have postponed this issue as one which was unlikely to be relevant for fifteen years, and the company could have taken a "wait and see" position while fully expecting that in fifteen years, the hamlet would have disappeared through normal attrition, and with it, their problem. After all, as pointed out earlier, the hamlet had lost population and services in recent years and the few remaining residents were unlikely to survive for another fifteen years. The physical structures of the hamlet were old, and the county was talking about closing the school, which had continued to lose students. If the mine plan were to be accepted, there was little likelihood of any new population moving into a designated mine area, and every likelihood that the local population would drift away as some people were bought out, others retired, and still others found the social fabric of the community dissolving under various pressures and simply left. TransAlta Utilities was well aware of the likelihood of this scenario. As for the larger community, some local residents felt that too much was undecided to commit themselves to hamlet relocation. Some residents felt that they could successfully oppose the project, or have the hamlet left out of the approved mine area. Others felt that there were ways of protecting the existing hamlet from the impacts of mining by buffer strips or other means. Still others felt that perhaps local residents should be allowed to live out their lives in peace without the disruption of a relocation that was unlikely to be needed for fifteen or twenty years.

On the other hand, TransAlta Utilities was well aware of the two million tons of coal that lay under the hamlet. The company felt that relocation was feasible, and initial cost estimates of under one million dollars seemed to make relocation economically attractive. Furthermore, TransAlta Utilities was well aware of the precedent-setting nature of its activities in Keephills, and did not relish the prospect of what could happen to its reputation if it

became known as the creator of ghost towns. There was also the possibility that refusal to relocate the hamlet could create unified opposition capable of stalling the entire project before a sympathetic public and politically motivated government. Finally, the prospect of relocating the Keephills hamlet was exciting and challenging, and could contribute to positive public relations and a positive corporate reputation which would make it easier to deal with other communities in the future.

From the community perspective, residents knew that the survival of their social networks required a viable community center, and that a new hamlet could provide the opportunity to inject new life into their community at no financial cost to the residents. People came to feel that the trade-off of temporary social disruption for a new hamlet was a good one. After all, even if they won round one of the battle, the coal would make them vulnerable as long as it was there. The community was also aware that the county was seriously considering closing the existing school. Furthermore, relocation of the Keephills hamlet could only occur in the context of existing planning and subdivision requirements. Visions and talk about an expanded and more modern Keephills were common and were not seen as entirely fanciful in the context of the booming economy of the day. Since urban expansion west of the provincial capital of Edmonton was creating bedroom communities, the Keephills region was perceived of as a potentially attractive rural location in that context. This kind of speculation and awareness of migration patterns resulted in the belief that a relocated hamlet could secure the survival of the school. Finally, a decision to relocate the hamlet would eliminate the indecision and ambiguity, as well as the vulnerability and uncertainty that the residents of Camrose, Alberta were feeling as a result of their somewhat Pyrrhic victory.

#### THE PUBLIC DISCLOSURE MEETING: A NEW STYLE FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

In January 1977, an open house was held in the community of Keephills. At the public disclosure sessions required by the provincial government and at subsequent meetings, there was agreement in principle, although uneasy and without details, concerning what could have been one of the key conflicts in this development-land compensation. At the open house, which was attended by several TransAlta vice presidents, the future of the Keephills hamlet was discussed at length. TransAlta's senior vice president of planning suggested that the hamlet could be moved if necessary, and that the company would be prepared to pay for the relocation. He went on to say that "In the event that the Keephills coal is mined, you can be sure that there will be a replacement community established and functioning--before the site is disturbed."



In terms of conflict reduction, there are several points that can be mentioned here. To begin with, the initiative to form a local community organization to represent residents' views to the company came from TransAlta Utilities via the social consultants. These consultants were told to make themselves available to the community at company cost, and to aid and inform the community in any way. The consultants quickly established a high degree of rapport with community leaders, and were soon able to demonstrate that they could effectively help the community change corporate plans. They played a key role in having senior company executives come out to the community in person to hear and respond to community concerns. These concerns had already been discussed with the consultants, who had previously suggested to both TransAlta Utilities and Keephills residents the implications of various answers which they might give.

Unlike the public information program in Camrose, the information sessions in Keephills were informal and organized according to questions and answers from the community about their concerns. There were no lengthy slide shows, no models of mine and plant, and no long, formal speeches by public relations experts. Instead, there were genuine and respectful efforts to hear one another's views, and to try to respond to the concerns that were raised. Company spokespeople were not junior people in public affairs who "could not speak for the company," but major decision-makers who could alter corporate plans on the spot. All of these features of the information session were important. Some evolved by trial and error, while others emerged only after much discussion by both company and community spokespeople with the consultants. All of these features embodied the symbiotic stance that characterized the treatment of conflict throughout this project, and all exemplified the nature of public participation as it was developing in Keephills.

At this public information session, several other emerging issues related to hamlet relocation were broached. For once, the issue of "relocation or not" was resolved in favor of the former. The next logical questions were relocation when? By whom? In what form? Where? How? And with what consequences?

### THE PUBLIC HEARING IN THE SPRING OF 1977

After considerable discussion, the community decided, not unanimously, that it was probably in their best interests to press for relocation of the hamlet as early as possible, even if mining the existing hamlet's site could be indefinitely postponed. Our analysis showed no significant differences according to location,

work, ownership/tenant status, age, or gender with respect to whether or not residents were in favor of relocation. People felt that relocation would maximize the chances of survival of their social bonds, especially if the community could actively participate in the relocation and planning of the new hamlet, and if this were done early enough to allow a gradual transfer of allegiance from the old to the new hamlet by a population where the majority had not yet been directly impacted by the mining. This, then, was the community's position in the spring of 1977 at the public hearing on the mining application which was required by the provincial government. At public hearings held by the provincial Energy Resources Conservation Board of Alberta, technical application for the permits and licenses necessary to actually begin the project is made by the proponent. During this quasi-judicial hearing, the environmental impact assessment is but one, relatively small component of the proponent's submission, and the community has the status of "intervener." At the Keepphills hearing, TransAlta Utilities once again assured community residents and the provincial government that the hamlet would be relocated, if necessary, at company expense, and that details of the relocation would be worked out jointly by both community and utility company representatives.

#### THE DECISION OF THE ALBERTA ENERGY RESOURCES CONSERVATION BOARD

Early in 1978, a formal decision of the Energy Resources Conservation Board of Alberta was made. The Board's decision is required before the proponent is able to approach specific provincial departments in order to obtain the necessary licenses and permits. This decision of the Board officially recognized the cooperation that had thus far characterized the Keepphills project. The community's own organization, known as COKE (Committee on the Keepphills Environment), had intervened, but had done so constructively rather than in blunt opposition. In its own testimony, TransAlta Utilities recognized that COKE had effectively raised many issues. Neither TransAlta Utilities nor the Keepphills community treated the public hearing on the mining application in an adversarial manner. Indeed, the social consultants had been actively involved in the public participation program and had helped the Keepphills community prepare its own intervention. As a result of this public participation program, each side knew the other's position before the hearing was held. There were disagreements, but public participation does not eliminate conflicts, and is at best a means of constructively dealing with conflict.

The 1978 decision of the Alberta Energy Resources Conservation Board regarding the application from TransAlta Utilities instructed the company to set up a Steering Committee

which would include community and government representatives and would consult with TransAlta in such matters as hamlet relocation and end land use. The Board did not direct TransAlta to move the hamlet as a condition of obtaining its licenses. In addition, the Board rejected the mine plan, stipulated a pattern of deeper mining, and changed the sequence of opening new mine pits.

The effect of the Alberta Energy Resources Conservation Board decision was that the mine process would not reach the hamlet site for a considerably longer time that was previously thought, and perhaps not at all. This decision gave both the Keephills community and TransAlta Utilities another opportunity to reconsider their positions. Nonetheless, both decided to work together on the premise that the hamlet was to be relocated as quickly as possible. Due to the absence of a legal requirement to move the hamlet, there were dissenting voices in both groups.

### DECISIONS REGARDING THE NEW HAMLET

Given a commitment to proceed with relocation as early as possible, there were subsequent issues which emerged almost simultaneously and occasionally got in the way of each other. Concern arose about who would develop the new hamlet (and would presumably reap enormous rewards by selling lots to urbanites with rural pretensions); about how the relevant consultants would be selected and who they would be; about who would live in the hamlet and where; and about the selection of a new site and how this decision could be made. In general terms, substantive questions or issues and procedural issues stemmed from public participation.

The identity of the developer was very important to members of the Keephills community who believed that the developer could make great profits from establishing the new hamlet. Those who shared this opinion thought that the new hamlet should be jointly developed, and that local residents should have an opportunity to share in some of the profits. Other people wanted nothing to do with the development process, and were simply interested in access to a new and equivalent community so that they could ideally, in their own words, "get up one morning in my present location, go to work as I always do, and then return to a new location at the end of the day."

In summary, Keephills residents were interested in minimizing any disruption they would suffer and wanted TransAlta Utilities to do everything possible to ensure painless relocation. TransAlta was caught in a bind. Although the company had repeatedly stated that it was not and did not want to be in the development business, it had agreed to play a major role in relocating the Keephills hamlet and could not simply subcontract out all matters related to hamlet

relocation. Since county development guidelines no longer tolerated former building standards, it would be impossible to recreate the old hamlet. At minimum, TransAlta would be required to function as co-developer of the new hamlet. When it became clear from extended discussions with the county, TransAlta, and private consultants that the Keephills development could quite possibly mean a financial loss to the developer, the Steering Committee which had been established by TransAlta Utilities at the request of the Alberta Energy Resources Conservation Board soon agreed that TransAlta Utilities would have to be the sole developer, and that the company would develop a hamlet which would be as small as possible, but would also have an infrastructure which could accommodate future growth. This was a compromise solution which was neither easily arrived at, nor enthusiastically endorsed by either party.

The next decision concerned the hiring of a community planner. To handle this, two of the social consultants formed a subcommittee with one representative from TransAlta Utilities and two from the Keephills community. This subcommittee invited proposals from a long list of consultant/planner/engineers, including all nominations from any interested parties. Evaluation of the proposals allowed the subcommittee to reduce the larger list of nominees to five or six groups to be interviewed. Interviews were then conducted, and the subcommittee arrived at a final selection by consensus. This was an exercise, like many in this project, in cooperative public participation. The exercise was time-consuming and ever-so-slow, but ultimately effective and fair.

### THE SITE OF THE NEW HAMLET

Simultaneously, steps were being taken to select a site for the new hamlet. Site selection did not proceed as smoothly as hiring a community planner, and in fact took about a year. At times, it looked like the process was breaking down and producing irreconcilable differences. By February 1979, TransAlta Utilities was seriously considering postponing the site selection indefinitely, and the community was preparing to take their case to the public and to the Alberta Minister of Environment. An abbreviated review of events leading to this state of affairs is as follows:

**June, 1978--**The community planner submitted the terms of reference regarding relocation, including site selection, to the proponent, TransAlta Utilities. These terms suggested that the community would produce a list of preferred sites, and that TransAlta would endeavor to acquire the preferred site through negotiation with the owner on a full quarter section basis. Meanwhile, the sociological consultants had completed a survey of the community, including a question where respondents were asked

to identify where they would like to see the hamlet relocated. The results showed that two different locations were equally acceptable to residents.

**July, 1978--**COKE (Committee on the Keephills Environment) sought clarification regarding the selection of one or more site(s). TransAlta Utilities also sought clarification, suggesting that community priorities could only apply to lands for which TransAlta had negotiated an option to buy.

**August, 1978--**The revised terms of reference now suggested that a priority list should be compiled by COKE, and TransAlta should attempt to acquire the 'top-ranking site, subject to county approvals. If purchase of the top priority site could not be arranged, then the next priority site would be approached.

**October, 1978--**A public vote was held regarding all sites which were considered eligible. During the first survey of Keephills residents in the summer of 1978, the social consultants had asked people to nominate sites for relocation. It was this survey data that had produced the list of potential sites from which one would be selected. During the public vote, more people turned out to vote than the community had ever seen at federal or provincial elections. The results were immediately made public, with seventy percent of the votes cast for a site which had been identified in the survey during the summer of 1978. The next most popular site received only twenty-five percent of the votes.

**November, 1978--**Having received permission from all levels of government to proceed, TransAlta Utilities sought to negotiate the purchase of the land from the owner, who was interested in selling, but only at a very high and firm price. The owner would not allow a land appraisal and would not negotiate. His perception was simply that he had the only property in which the community was interested. Since this gave him the position of monopolist, he wanted to force the company to pay his price (monopolists do not have to negotiate prices). By the end of November, TansAlta had resisted this situation, and had instructed its landmen to begin negotiations concerning the second and third sites on the priority list, as stipulated in the terms of reference for land acquisition.

**December, 1978--**COKE wrote to both TransAlta Utilities and the provincial government stating its feeling that it had " . . . done our part in selecting a site. Now it is up to the proponent to obtain the preferred site."

**January/February, 1979--**TransAlta Utilities claimed that it could not allow itself to be "blackmailed" into paying an excessive amount. The company claimed precedents could be set for land values in the area and elsewhere, and instructed its landmen to

"undertake to negotiate an option" for the second site. TransAlta also advised COKE that "when such an option is obtained, the first preferred site will no longer be considered."

By the middle of February 1979, site selection had become a major issue which had developed to the point that both the Keephills community and TransAlta Utilities had taken public stands which could not be reconciled. TransAlta was reviewing its commitment to relocate the hamlet at all, while the community was adamant that the relocation should be to the site they had selected. The fact that the problem was based largely in "procedure" was irrelevant. If TransAlta's procedure had been followed, options would have been obtained on a number of sites from which a preferred site would have been selected by the community, and the site would have been purchased. However, this procedure still would have alienated some members of the community for at least two reasons: (1) the community's choice would be restricted to those properties on which the company had been able to obtain options--an unacceptable limitation to some who felt that in this way, the company could virtually dictate the site through their own option negotiations; (2) any landowner who negotiated an option to sell as one of several possible sites for development, and was subsequently told that his site was the preferred site for the hamlet, might well feel cheated since the value of the preferred site for the hamlet would be far above the option value. Thus, the issue of site selection was one that TransAlta was bound to lose, no matter how it proceeded. If TransAlta paid the owner's price, it would feel exploited. If it stopped site selection efforts, the community would surely balk.

After considerable consultation and dialogue, TransAlta decided to meet the owner of the preferred site more than halfway by purchasing eighty acres at his price. In doing so, the company resolved a major issue by yielding on this point, even though it was not legally bound to do so and was incurring considerable cost. The continuation of the project required some resolution of this issue. In retrospect, it might have been wiser to have proceeded more slowly in completing the negotiation of an agreed-upon procedure to handle site selection problems. Certainly, the utility company lost this round. In the larger analysis, it is possible that the larger public served by TransAlta Utilities also lost, since development costs of the Keephills Plant will eventually be paid by increased energy rates for all customers. Significantly, the larger public is not well-represented by the process of public participation as this process is usually understood and practiced.

We have now dealt briefly with the selection of a developer, a planner, a site location, and a time frame. In all of these cases, issues were both defined and resolved through lengthy active public participation involving many, many hours and days of tedious

homework and negotiation by members of the Keephills community, the staff of TransAlta Utilities, and a great many consultants. Although community representatives volunteered their time and received no compensation, all other participants were paid.

### THE SHAPE OF THE NEW HAMLET

Twelve submissions from the community planning consultant to the Steering Committee were required to resolve the issue of the shape or form of the new hamlet. At times, a great deal of frustration was evident on all sides and was compounded by a lack of information, conflicting time schedules, and the inevitable other minor and mundane details that affect all long-term interaction. Commitment to the process was often severely challenged by experts who thought they could do the job better if they were "unaided" in this way, and by those who wanted decisions made for them, but not by them. Yet *process* is the key to public participation, and the commitment has survived. A key point for discussion regarding the shape of the new hamlet was whether or not the residents wanted to try to recreate the ambience of a small and decidedly rural hamlet, or whether they wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to provide a more modern infrastructure with the potential for growth into a small town and even a bedroom suburb of Edmonton. In actual practice, this was the choice between paved and curbed roads with overhead lighting, or rougher roads with no lighting, and the choice between central waste treatment or household septic fields. This choice also involved choosing a circulation pattern for designing the streets, and decisions about the number and size of lots to be developed. In addition to deciding who should be eligible to live in the hamlet and whether preferences should somehow be allotted, the choice involved deciding whether to push for a modular school attached to a new community hall, or to seek a separate school facility. None of these decisions were easy, but they slowly emerged and the new hamlet was born.

The process of public participation discussed in this paper now has a ten year time depth and is still proceeding, if somewhat more routinely. Over the past ten years, community representatives to COKE have changed several times through elections, and utility company representatives have changed, as have government people. At times, personalities have made a difference as friendships and animosities were played out in this arena. As well, organizations like the Steering Committee and COKE have led a life of their own, and the normal organizational problems involving representativeness, goal definition and succession, organizational administration, finances, and so forth have all occasionally complicated matters. Since 1976, other developments have taken place in the province of Alberta as other energy projects have been

approved or come on stream and relevant legislation has been introduced. Other communities have applied some of the lessons learned at Keephills, and in some cases have made suggestions for improvements at Keephills.

### THE NEW HAMLET OF KEEPHILLS TODAY

The relocated hamlet of Keephills is situated close to the site of the old hamlet in a pine forest traversed by a creek. The new hamlet consists of thirty-one, one-acre residential lots, one commercial lot, an eight-acre school-community-hall site, and a twenty-eight-acre environmental reserve. Construction began in 1981, and the hamlet was officially opened in October 1982. Costs to TransAlta Utilities exceeded four million dollars, or about four times the original estimates. These higher costs were caused by many factors. For example, since the original estimate of one million dollars was made rather "freely," that figure was probably always an underestimate. At the time of the first estimates, no decisions about the size or shape of the new hamlet, nor about its facilities or amenities had been made. However, the cost of land alone turned out to be much higher than anticipated, and there were far more sessions with planners than anyone had anticipated.

In 1985, ten families resided in the new hamlet. By the fall of 1982, shortly after the new hamlet opened, school enrollment had increased to eighty-three students compared to thirty-seven students in the old school during its last term. Today, nearly 100 students are enrolled in the new school. The four residents of the old hamlet were given equivalent land holdings in the new hamlet, and were provided with new, full-service housing in exchange for their old properties. Residents from within the area whose land was already taken for the thermal generating plant and its facilities were given first option on the remaining lots in the new subdivision at the special cost of \$12,500.00 per lot. Residents from elsewhere in the mine permit area had the next choice, and in May 1982, remaining lots became available to the general public at costs competitive with other nearby subdivisions. The new hamlet of Keephills has provisions for approximately triple the population of the original site.

In the summer of 1984, when the thermal generating plant and new hamlet were fairly well established and functioning, a third opinion survey was conducted by the social consultants. This survey found that nearly eighty percent of the residents said they were satisfied with the new hamlet. In an open-ended question, about seventy-five percent of the respondents suggested that some aspects of the new hamlet (e.g., the community hall or school) were now the focal center of the Keephills community. Seventy-two percent of the sample said they thought the new hamlet had been



worth the disruption. Most respondents also endorsed the kind of public participation that had characterized the Keephills project from its inception. Nearly seventy percent of the respondents rated public participation as very good or good, and only three percent rated it as poor. Seventy-two percent said that public participation allowed for participation in actual decision-making, and over ninety-two percent stated that the process of public participation had educated the community. Eighty percent suggested that the public participation program used in Keephills would be a good model for similar developments.

### CONCLUSION

On October 8, 1982, an open house and sod turning ceremony for the new hamlet of Keephills was attended by approximately 300 people, including county, provincial, and local politicians, the senior vice president of planning for TransAlta Utilities and other company representatives, representatives of various consulting and construction firms which had participated in the relocation, many reporters from all parts of Alberta, and many local people. This was an emotional and enthusiastic event marked by many congratulatory speeches, such as that by the former Minister of Environment for Alberta, who challenged other Alberta communities "to use Keephills not only as a first, but as a shining example of what can be done," and by the senior vice president of planning for TransAlta Utilities, who said that "Keephills will no doubt become a reference for future projects where there is potential for conflict, and yet a desire for cooperation." Community representatives were also congratulatory, saying "people are well satisfied with what's happened regarding the hamlet. The company was generous. . . . I think they have listened quite a lot." Even weeks after the event, TransAlta officials were enthusiastic about what had been achieved, and have since given their full endorsement to public participation as the appropriate mechanism for conflict resolution in future circumstances similar to Keephills. Community representatives also volunteered similar feelings.

As the social consultants who were involved in this project, we expected that our third survey of local opinions would document a far higher level of satisfaction with the relocated community and with the local quality of life than was suggested in our second survey in 1981. We suspected that when the relocated hamlet actually opened, the proposals were actually enacted, and the physical evidence was undeniable, local residents would become believers regardless of how skeptical they may have been earlier.

**TABLE 1: Percentage Distribution of Residents' Ratings of the Keephills Community as a Place of Residence at Selected Times****1981 Survey**

Rating	1975	Present	Future
Excellent	30.7%	14.0%	12.2%
Good	47.7%	33.3%	26.7%
Average	19.3%	30.1%	20.0%
Below Average	---	15.1%	12.2%
Poor	2.3%	7.5%	28.9%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**1984 Survey**

Rating	1975	Present	Future
Excellent	15.6%	10.9%	9.5%
Good	38.1%	42.2%	36.5%
Average	41.3%	39.1%	33.3%
Below Average	5.3%	6.3%	17.5%
Poor	---	1.6%	3.2%
	100.3%	100.1%	100.0%

An assessment of the data presented in Table 1 above confirms our expectations. In our pre-construction survey of 1981, residents of the Keephills community viewed the past (1975) as very favorable, with seventy-eight percent reporting that the old hamlet was an excellent or good place to live, and only two percent claiming that it was a poor place to live. At the same time, predictions of the quality of life for the future hamlet were not very favorable, with over forty percent of the respondents saying that they anticipated a below-average or poor quality of life in the new hamlet. As expected in the 1984 survey, views of the past (1975) were not as favorable, with only fifty-four percent of the respondents stating that life in the old hamlet was excellent or good, while views of the future were considerably improved, with only twenty-one percent of the respondents expecting the future environment to be below average or poor.

Relocation of the Keephills hamlet was not a total success in all respects. Not everyone was fully satisfied with the relocation, nor was relocation of the hamlet the only issue which concerned the greater community. But although other issues abounded, few showed as much sign of "successful resolution" as relocation of the hamlet.

As long as the Keephills project continues, both local residents of the area and TransAlta Utilities will be actively involved in monitoring impact, making decisions concerning the environment, and implementing these decisions. There will be conflict, but there will also be conflict resolution. In the meantime, in the concluding words of the hamlet's first and oldest resident, who was eighty-one years of age at that time and the patriarch of one of the oldest and largest families in the area, "With the new hamlet, you should see a revival. You'll see a store and so on. There's every reason to believe this could be a very prosperous place in a few years. You can't ask for anything better, as far as I can see."

#### NOTES

1. The authors of this paper have been involved in the Keephills project from its inception. All data reported here are derived from consulting reports done either for the proponent or the community, from newspaper reports (for example, on the opening of the new hamlet), company documents (for example, concerning land acquisition policies), from official submissions to the Energy Resources Conservation Board of the province of Alberta, or from informal interviews with all parties who were active in the Keephills project over the past ten years.
2. Just North of Lake Wabamun lies a second, older open coal mine pit and plant. This mine has been in operation for some time, and is now in the process of reclaiming some of the land which was mined out. In addition, a fourth coal mine and plant is under construction southeast of the Keephills mine on the south side of the North Saskatchewan River.
3. There are several factors relevant to an explanation of this cooperative stance by the community. For one thing, members of the Keephills community were well aware of the postponement of the Camrose project, and realized that both TransAlta Utilities, and the provincial government would be under a great deal of pressure to get the next energy project quickly and successfully under way. Thus, the residents of Keephills may have felt that there was less chance of successful opposition under such circumstances. In addition, some of the residents of Keephills had already worked for or

were working for TransAlta Utilities, and were familiar with the nature of such projects. Thus, they may have felt more comfortable with this type of development--or they may have felt that future gains in employment opportunities would offset any losses that might have to be absorbed. Many residents told us that they simply agreed that the company had a right to the coal under their lands, and that they knew electrical energy had to come from somewhere. Although they felt unlucky that the coal was located directly under them, they responded constructively to the opportunity to have a say in planning the Keephills project, and felt that this was the best they could realistically expect under the circumstances.

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