

Halfway House

Crisis in Civic Responsibility

(Do at end of Context & Policy making)

Scenario

Recently, citizens of Bay City became involved in a serious conflict. The controversy began when a group of ex-offenders bought a house in a wealthy residential area of the city called Pacific View. Their purpose was to provide a place for recently released adult and juvenile prisoners and parolees to stay while they adjusted to community life. This kind of facility is called a halfway house, so this is what the ex-offenders named their new home—Halfway House.

Residents of Pacific View objected to having a facility for people who had committed crimes in their neighborhood. They feared that the ex-offenders or their friends would commit new crimes in the neighborhood and possibly harm their children. They were also afraid that their property would lose its value because of the unwelcome neighbors. They wanted the facility removed from their neighborhood.

To secure the removal of Halfway House, many residents of the neighborhood banded together and hired a lawyer. The lawyer argued that there were specific laws forbidding more than five unrelated people from living in a single house in the neighborhood. The purpose of this law, called a zoning regulation, was to preserve certain parts of the city for family homes.

The members of Halfway House also hired a lawyer. They wanted to stay in the neighborhood. They pointed out that they were self-supporting and that the members of the group wanted to improve their lives and live in a good environment. They wanted to get permission to remain in the neighborhood. This permission is called a *zoning variance*.

The question came before the City Council: Should the members of Halfway House be granted a zoning variance so that they could continue their efforts to rehabilitate ex-offenders by offering them a place to live in a normal, secure residential neighborhood?

In the activity which follows, members of the class will have the opportunity to role play the City Council meeting at which this decision is made.

Background on Delancey Street

Delancey Street, founded by ex-con and ex-addict John Maher, is a self-reliant and successful rehabilitation center with over 300 members. Delancey Street operates a moving company, a guard service and a flower shop. Work and a structured schedule are the major elements of the Delancey Street program. Delancey Street members all work, and many go to local colleges and trade schools. The Foundation will often trade services for tuition. Money earned by members goes into the community pool, and all basic needs are provided for them. In return for a two-year commitment a member gets a room, three meals a day, free medical services, and after a year, a free education in whatever field he or she chooses. The goal is to produce a self-reliant individual with a skill or profession who can make it on his or her own after leaving Delancey Street.

The transformation of the "street dude" into a productive citizen is a difficult process which involves changing the individual's self-image. Newcomers start at the bottom doing jobs such as scrubbing floors and cleaning toilets. New male residents are required to shave their heads; women are not allowed to wear make-up for a number of months in order to learn humility. Members take part in encounter groups known as "games," or the "circus" where members criticize one another, let off steam and try to solve their own problems. It is too soon to fully evaluate the success of Delancey Street, but the results so far make it a worthwhile topic of study.

Role Cards

Citizens opposing the variance who want Halfway House to change its location

Mike Walsh — Lawyer and Resident of Pacific View

"I respect Halfway House for the fine job they are doing in their rehabilitation work. At the same time, I feel a certain responsibility to maintain the integrity of our residential neighborhood as family dwellings, and Halfway House just does not qualify. I do not feel exceptions should be made. Satisfactory accommodations are available elsewhere in the community without having to disrupt an established family neighborhood."

William P. Henderson — Retired Corporate Executive

"Zoning laws are clear and exist for a reason. I don't see why we should make an exception for a bunch of hippie dope addicts and criminals. I don't want them in our neighborhoods attracting all the degenerates from all over who may very well decide to rob my house or molest my daughter while high on something. Why can't they live somewhere else?"

Keith Stevenson — Banker and Longtime Resident of Pacific View

"Halfway House has brought an undesirable element into our decent community. We have worked hard to purchase a nice home for our family. Zoning laws help to protect our investment and provide order. The value of our property will decline if this halfway house remains. We bought a home in Pacific View to get away from these social rejects."

Emily Caruthers — Longtime Resident of Pacific View

"I haven't slept a wink since they moved in down the street. This city has already gone down the drain. Everyone knows a little old lady can't feel safe. What if one of these troublemakers falls back into his old ways? You can't change a leopard's spots, you know!"

Kathy McLean — Resident of Pacific View; Mother of Four

"In no way do I want my children living in a neighborhood with ex-drug addicts, prostitutes and other criminals. Some of these people might be all right, but what about their friends and others who drop by to see what's going on?"

Tim Conroy — Bird Watcher; Resident of Pacific View

"For at least the last ten years, a rare bird has been making a nest on the roof of the residence of Halfway House. But the massive comings and goings of people have destroyed its sanctuary and nesting habits. Get these people out so my birds can return."

Kenneth Patrick — Resident of Pacific View

"The law is the law — zoning regulations are set to provide a certain order in the community."

Robert Anderson — Lawyer for the Residents of Pacific View

"The zoning law here is clear. The area is zoned for single family dwellings. There was a purpose in mind when it was written. Halfway House moved here in direct violation of the law. There are plenty of places in this city where they can live. As City Council members you know the law — it's up to you to uphold it."

David Samuelson — Resident of Pacific View

"The neighborhoods are a long established fact in Bay City. Halfway House is trying to destroy the distinctive character of the neighborhood. If we make this exception, other groups will want exceptions made for them too. It's people like us who vote and are your real constituents. It's up to you to preserve the character and quality of the city."

Mary Fuller — Resident of Pacific View

"A rule is a rule. We moved to Pacific View so our children would be brought up in a decent neighborhood. Exceptions should not be made to zoning regulations."

**Emily Talcott — Resident of Pacific View;
Mother of Three; Ladies Auxiliary Member**

"I don't quarrel with this group's right to rehabilitate themselves, but the zoning law is very specific, and I don't see why an exception should be made. This is a single family neighborhood, where the streets are safe and the people feel secure. Halfway House is certainly not a family and there is no way to guarantee what sort of changes they may bring to the neighborhood. I'm not willing to take a chance with my children."

Role Cards

Citizens supporting the variance which would allow Halfway House to remain in its present location

Don Jones — Founder of Halfway House

"Listen, let's stop beating around the bush. Everyone here talks crime prevention—you are all worried about the increase in violent crimes like murder, rape, assault—but when it comes to having an organization dedicated to reforming criminals into good citizens *in your neighborhood*, it's a different story. All that talk about zoning regulations is a bunch of garbage. You are really saying you don't want us in your neighborhood and this is a convenient way to get us out."

Ramon Gonzales — Bay City Sheriff

"Halfway House doesn't cost the taxpayers money, and it's not bureaucratic. It is reasonably humane — it doesn't keep people locked up. And it has had a reasonable degree of success. 68% of those who go through the Halfway House program do not return to prison. Few rehabilitation programs do as well. I think they should be allowed to stay."

David Flaherty — Ex-Convict and Member of Halfway House

"We, of Halfway House, believe that we are fulfilling an important need in this city—we take the burns off the street, and we turn them into responsible citizens. In doing so, we don't use any tax money. We have a number of businesses, and we support ourselves. We think that it is important to give people an alternative to street life. Living in a nice neighborhood, going to good schools are part of a way to break old patterns. Putting us back in the environment from which most of us came is not going to work. We live, work, and operate as a family—all of our earnings go into the pot. We are closer than a lot of families. This zoning regulation is just a subtle form of discrimination."

Karen Blackman — Member of Halfway House

"Halfway House put me on my feet again; without the people in this house, I would be back on the street committing crimes. It is a vital service to the community. Don't take it away!"

Bob Johnson — Community Rights Leader; Seeker of Prison Reform

"Halfway House is an example of a group of losers who have pulled themselves up from the gutter and are trying to make decent lives for themselves. They don't ask anyone for any handouts. These housing restrictions are phony and hypocritical and discriminate against worthwhile efforts like this. Why shouldn't these people, who are trying to break out of their former street existence, be able to live in nice surroundings in a decent neighborhood where they can develop self-respect?"

Mary Jackson — Former Prostitute and Drug Addict; Member of Halfway House; Currently a student at City College

"We are living as a close-knit family—probably a lot closer than you are with your families. We all work or go to school to better ourselves. If we become useful citizens, this helps you too, because we are not out on the street sticking a knife into you to get our next fix—or burglarizing your house. As City Council members, you are supposed to represent all the people in this city—not just the Pacific View rich. This phony zoning rule is just a fancy way of keeping people like us out of the neighborhood. Now is the chance for you to do the right thing for some of the other people in this city."

Sara O'Connor—Retired Resident of Pacific View, Age 82

"These nice young boys and girls from Halfway House have been wonderful to me. When my sister, who is not as youthful as me, got sick last September, they came and fed my cat and watered my plants. They may look a little funny but I want them to stay."

Anne Prescott—Interior Designer; Longtime Resident of Pacific View

"I feel Halfway House has a valid case—it meets a vital need in our community with its efforts to reduce crime. I don't feel that crime rates will go up at all or that our property values will go down. They seem very self-reliant and non-violent."

Daniel Franklin—Lawyer for Halfway House

"Halfway House provides the necessary link between prison life and community life. They are providing a vital service. Although the law states, 'No more than five unrelated people may live together in a single family dwelling,' there should be an exception made for Halfway House. They are providing an important community service as a rehabilitation center for juveniles and adults."

Dr. Edwin Carrington—Professor of Criminology

"Halfway House is an interesting sociological experiment in human behavior. It is a well-known fact that where people live influences their attitude about themselves. The people of Halfway House have made great strides in changing their life styles. Pacific View represents a break with the past and provides an ideal setting for developing a positive self-image within a structured and secure environment."

Rev. J. Sellers—Minister

"The people of Halfway House are providing a real community service as a rehabilitation center. Laws should take into consideration human concerns."

Role Cards

City Council Members:

Herman Wakefield, Age 62

- Occupation: Stockbroker
- Political Support:
 - upper middle class citizens
 - business interests
- Generally the people who support you:
 - wish to avoid spending taxpayers' money
 - like tradition
 - are concerned about law and order and the protection of property
- Tenure:
 - member of City Council for 8 years

Race:
White

Marcus O'Shea, Age 58

- Occupation: Owner of Small Business
- Political Support:
 - middle class citizens
 - working class citizens
 - merchants and small business interests
- Generally the people who support you:
 - consider pros and cons of each issue
 - are concerned with maintaining the traditions of the city
 - will consider reasonable changes
- Tenure:
 - member of City Council for 4 years

Race:
Black

Sam Adamo, Age 64

- Occupation: Corporation Lawyer
- Political Support:
 - upper and middle class persons
 - big business interests
- Generally the people who support you:
 - avoid spending taxpayers' money
 - like tradition
 - are concerned about law and order and the protection of property
- Tenure:
 - member of City Council for 12 years

Race:
White

Ruth Jacobs, Age 48

- Occupation: Accountant
- Political Support:
 - social reformers
 - women
 - minorities
 - youth
- Generally the people who support you:
 - feel the city should keep up with the times
 - support reasonable changes
 - are concerned with individual rights and freedoms
- Tenure:
 - member of the City Council for 2 years

Race:
White

Ethel Walker, Age 62

- Occupation: Banker
- Political Support:
 - upper middle class citizens
 - business interests
- Generally the people who support you:
 - avoid spending taxpayers' money
 - like tradition
 - are concerned about law and order and the protection of property
- Tenure:
 - member of the City Council for 4 years

Race:
White

Donald Murphy, Age 55

- Occupation: Teacher
- Political Support:
 - middle class citizens
 - city workers
- Generally the people who support you:
 - consider the pros and cons of each issue
 - are concerned with maintaining the traditions of the city but will consider reasonable changes
- Tenure:
 - member of the City Council for 4 years

Race:
White

Juan Medina, Age 47

- Occupation: Contractor
- Political Support:
 - ethnic groups
 - organized labor
- Generally the people who support you:
 - believe the city should keep up with the times
 - support reasonable changes
 - are concerned with individual rights and freedoms
- Tenure:
 - member of City Council for 4 years

Race:
Mexican-American

Mayor's Instruction Sheet

1. You will open the meeting by stating the issue:

Halfway House has applied for a variance (an exception) to the city law stating that "no more than five unrelated individuals may occupy a single family residence."

Halfway House feels that as a place of rehabilitation for juveniles and adults it is providing a vital community service. We are here today to hear discussion on this proposal. After hearing discussion from those of you present, the Council will vote on this proposal.

2. Open the meeting for discussion from the floor after giving the following guidelines for discussion:

First—Raise your hand when you wish to be recognized.

Second—When recognized, stand to address your remarks to the Council and state your name and position.

Third—You will have a maximum of two minutes in which to present your views. You may speak more than once, however.

Fourth—Unruly or disruptive citizens may be removed from the meeting at the Mayor's request.

Fifth—Council members will be allowed to ask questions of citizens who are speaking to the Council.

3. Then announce: "The meeting is open for discussion." The discussion should continue about 25-30 minutes. Call on individuals who favor and oppose the variance alternately.

4. After everyone has spoken, announce, "The floor discussion has ended."

5. Call an open meeting of the council members to discuss their views. After 5-10 minutes of discussion, call for a vote on the proposal for a variance to allow Halfway House to continue operating in its present location. Take a roll call vote. Remember, in the case of a tie, yours is the deciding vote.

6. Announce the decision of the Council: "The Council has decided . . ."

Journalist Observer Form

As a journalist observing the City Council meeting, you will have the opportunity to observe all of the role-players. It will be your job to evaluate the proceedings and to prepare a short news release. You may prepare your news release for television (on video-tape), for radio (on tape), or for a newspaper (in writing).

The news release consists of two main parts: the lead and the body. The lead is a summary of the story. It serves two functions:

1. It answers the questions: who, what, when, where, why and how.
2. It provides quick identification of persons, places and events necessary for an understanding of the story.

The body of the story is simply an expansion of the lead. The body elaborates each of the points mentioned above.

Evaluate the performance of the role-players using the form below.

1. Put a (+) in front of the role-players who were most realistic.

Put a (—) in front of the role-players who were least realistic.

_____ City Council Members

_____ Citizens Opposing the Variance

_____ Citizens Favoring the Variance

_____ Mayor

2. As a journalist, prepare a short news release about the proceedings of the City Council meeting.

Field Experience Activity: "Locating a Halfway House in Your City"

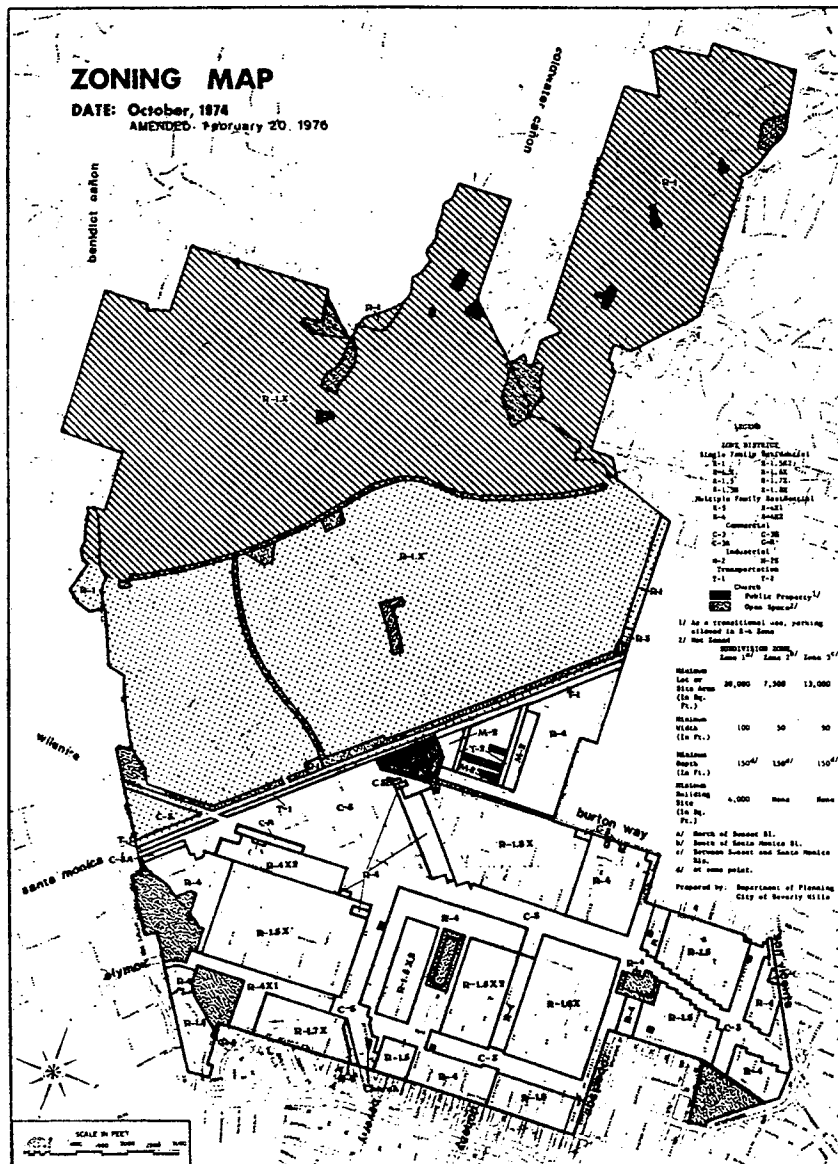
Every city has zoning laws which determine development. The laws are administered by the planning department of the city.

TASK 1: It will be your task to find out if and where a halfway house can be built in your city.

1. Make arrangements to visit your local planning department, usually located in City Hall.
2. Arrange an interview with a representative of

the planning department.

3. Ask for a zoning map of your city. It will look like the one below.
4. Find out if there is a law in your city which would permit/deny the development of a halfway house.
5. If halfway houses are permitted, where could they be located?



TASK 2: It will be your task to visit a group home, halfway house, ex-offender organization, or another community-based corrections facility in

your community. Use the Field Experience Report Form.

Field Experience Report

Community Based Corrections Facility

This field experience report form is provided for students going to a group home, halfway house, ex-offender organization, or other community-based corrections facility.

Name of Facility _____ Tel. No. _____
Address _____ Reporting Time _____
Contact Person _____
Transportation Arrangements _____

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways is this community based corrections facility *different* from a lock-up institution? How is this facility similar to a lock-up institution? _____

2. Describe the "human environment." What is the *feeling* between the people who live and work in this facility? _____

INFORMATION QUESTIONS

1. What is the basic purpose of this facility? Who lives here (if this is a residential facility)? _____

2. What are the special problems of the people whom this facility helps? _____

3. What is your evaluation of the services provided by the Probation Department in this city? _____

4. What is your evaluation of the services provided by the Parole Department in this city? _____

5. Do you believe that more persons presently sent to prison or camp should be placed in community based corrections facilities? Why or why not? _____

LIST ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS YOU WISH TO ASK IN THE SPACE BELOW:

Classroom Arrangements Halfway House

