A NEPA Storyboard Example

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The goal of an early storyboard is to help NEPA writers create documents that are clear, brief, and legally adequate.

The storyboard example in this newsletter shows the initial 8 pages for a transportation project. We originally prepared these sample pages and some additional ones for inclusion in a Shipley Group training manual for the Federal Highway Administration. As explained in that manual, using storyboards is a major technique designed to help NEPA teams create clear, brief, and legally adequate documents.

The storyboard example displayed below shows how a storyboard for a standard NEPA document might begin. It also shows how multiple contributors can collaborate on a joint vision for a projected NEPA document. Note that a storyboard precedes both the writing of draft text and the preparation of graphics. While a storyboard is similar to the traditional outline, a storyboard is more spatial and visual in nature, capturing the look and feel of each project page in the document. A successful storyboard is also as much a project management tool as it is a guide for writers.

Several earlier Shipley Group newsletters discussed storyboards. These earlier newsletters are available in an archive file at http://www.shipleygroup.com/environmental/index.html?pg=news. Newsletters discussing storyboards are numbers 38, 52, 53, 56, and 58.

The following listed points are some suggestions if you decide to work on storyboard pages for a projected NEPA document.

1. **Choose a convenient approach for your storyboard: blank paper and pens; flipchart pad; a shared computer file, with estimated page breaks; an available wall with a large whiteboard if available.**

2. **Count out estimated pages/screens to match the scope of your intended document.**

3. **Forecast and then answer likely questions from readers/users and list other resource topics of concern.**

4. **Also, record all team members' questions, cautions, or observations.**

5. **Identify and sketch possible graphics, linking them to major content points.**

6. **Encourage all contributors to make suggestions and comments because these will ensure that NEPA team members are addressing relevant management objectives and major resource issues.**

What should a storyboard look like? Messy is good! If it isn't messy, the NEPA team will not be willing to insert new ideas, draw arrows, or revise flawed content. So the storyboard in the following example is left messy to show what an early-stage storyboard might look like.

Sheet 1 (top left):

Chapter 1 What is the proposed Garden Way Improvement Project and why is it needed?

Photograph of the existing Garden Way, showing the two existing lanes and narrow shoulders (little space for turnouts or emergencies).

Sheet 2 (top right):

Back side of Chapter Divide

Option: Should the preview appear on the opposite page (the first page of text for Chapter 1?)

Preview box of Chapter 1

1.1 What is the Garden Way Improvement Project (GWIP)?

1.2 What can the public, individuals or groups, contribute to the GWIP Garden Way Improvement Project?

1.3 How did the GWIP originate? Garden Way Improvement Project

1.3 What sort of environmental analysis is necessary under NEPA? Other laws?

1.4 Why is the GWIP needed?

1.5 What are the goals and objectives for the GWIP?

1.6 What are the next steps--for the public? for Athens State DOT? and for the Federal Highway Administration?

Add to other Chap 1 sections (2 special new & below) and

Glossary of key terms used in Chapter 1

NEPA

EA vs. EIS

Alternatives

Disclosure documents vs. Decision Documents

Impacts and effects

Logical termini

Cultural Resources

Section 404 permit (COE)

Other project constraints or other necessary background for chapter 1? Coordinate with Mike Hennessey (legal counsel)

Repeat the full name in headings; avoid the acronym!

Sheet 3 (bottom left):

Chapter 1: What is the proposed Garden Way Improvement Project and why is it needed

○ Chapter 1 = Project givens and its history (overview)

○ Athens State DOT--Ongoing state planning for transportation excellence

○ GWIP now ripe for detailed analysis, especially NEPA analysis steps. Work on NEPA EIS began in 2007, due to be finished in early 2009. Notice of Intent filed in Sept 2007--Federal Register.

1.1 What is the Garden Way Improvement Project?

Replacing some 16.8 miles of existing 2-lane (State Road 345) with 3-lane (running from Sparta Creek, mile marker 20 to Interstate 322, about mile marker 37.

Overview (short paragraph intro to 1.1.1 and 1.1.2 and 1.1.3)

Chrono flowchart of key dates.

Link the NEPA info with discussion in 1.3

Sheet 4 (bottom right):

1.1.1 What highway improvements are included in the GWIP?

○ Widen the existing lanes and the shoulders (FHWA standard?)

○ Turn lanes at 5 major intersections; two traffic round in the village of Plato

○ New culverts and improved drainage structures

○ New commuter parking area at mile marker 37, with express bus connections to Wisdom (some 45 miles north)

○ Others?

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1.1.2 Where is the GWIP located?

Southwestern Athens, some five miles from the Athens state border; GWIP is in Olive County

A section of State Road 345, which runs from the state border across the state

> Need small project area map (1/4 or 1/3 page)? Option: Place on a separate page?

1.1.3 What governmental agencies are involved?

- Athens State DOT
- Olive County (and nearby Dill County, where many affected commuters live)
- FHWA (money and legal compliance)
- Several small communities, including Plato, South Wisdom, and several unincorporated bedroom communities along the Interstate

[note: Does 1.1.3 belong under 1.2?]

1.2 How did the GWIP originate? (History and background)

[note: Get updated survey data from the 1999 plan (use here and for trafc projections). Joan has copies of the plan]

Athens DOT responsible for statewide transportation plans. Last updated regional survey including Highway 345 data in 1999. Public input from Transportation Steering Committee, with citizens appointed by Governor

Olive County and nearby Dill County produced a transportation survey of current and projected need. In 1994?

FHWA projected funds for upgrades to SR 345 in its 2004 master plan for the southwestern region of Athens

Option: A planning flowchart with key dates and highlights? Duplicate of one in Section 1.1?

[note: Chron. flowchart?]

1.3 What sort of environmental analysis is necessary under NEPA? Other laws?

EIS as a disclosure document vs. subsequent ROD (projected for early 2010)

1.3.1 NEPA legal mandates:

1. Analyze all potential impacts (beneficial, adverse, long-term, short-term, direct, indirect, etc.)

2. Explain/disclose all discovered impacts to the public and any other involved or interested governmental body (esp. Native American tribes)

✳ Needed: Prioritize resource impacts so that major issues (resource questions) receive the most attention.

EA is a shorter option, but too risky, given potential impacts from GWIP. List risks?

- Delay, perhaps cancellation of project
- Funding vanish until after 2012
- Credibility with public (and other agencies) suffers
- Legal precedents are adverse, esp given the usefulness of EA rather than EIS

[note: List major issues in section 1.3?]

A storyboard is an evolving tool; so it helps a team manage a complex NEPA analysis. It begins early, before text is written, and is filled in as contributors fill in project details. An evolving storyboard allows contributors to review their progress on the complex analysis tasks for a NEPA proposal.

Agency decision makers and legal counsels should also be early and ongoing reviewers of storyboards. Such early reviews are all too rare. A project team's usual approach is to delay managerial or legal reviews until text is written and has been edited. Such late-stage reviews are not efficient, especially if reviewers spot major problems, such as ones requiring substantially revised text and additional graphics.

A Suggestion about Using Storyboards

Many NEPA practitioners have not had experience using storyboards. So if you want to introduce storyboards to your colleagues, start slow. Perhaps work on a storyboard for a short newsletter or a scoping notice. Optionally, work up a storyboard for a key section of an EIS or EA, perhaps the content pages for the traditional Chapter 1. (A storyboard is also useful as a planning tool for a web site, especially one with multiple menus and complex links between topics.)

But remember, go slow! As with any new technique, folks need time to get accustomed to a different planning and writing technique.

As you work on a storyboard, monitor your colleagues' views about how the process is going. Your goal (and hopefully theirs) should be to produce the best professional documents as efficiently as possible. Storyboards are just one tool for achieving this goal.