



This article was printed from the Columns section of the *Chico News & Review*, originally published March 27, 2008.

This article may be read online at:

<http://www.newsreview.com/chico/Content?oid=643661>

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Printed on 2008-04-01 11:53:57.

20/30 vision

As part of the Chico 2030 General Plan Update, the city (aided by its consultant) has come up with a variety of ways to receive public input. It's conducted phone surveys and e-mail surveys. It's assembled a citizens' advisory committee. And it's been holding community workshops.

We've commended such outreach efforts, and still do, which is why we went into the Downtown Chico Visioning Workshop Tuesday night (March 25) with high expectations and enthusiasm. We came away hoping city planners and councilmembers haven't gotten blurred vision from a distorted looking glass.

See, the process had some flaws.

Take the walking tour: Participants (elected officials, business owners, residents, students, people picked up along the way) gamely pretended to see the city through other peoples' eyes, but what's wrong with their own? This artifice demanded preselected sites yet sought holistic assessments.

The 54 folks who made it back to the Arroyo Room participated in a live poll, generating statistics and graphs for the city to use. How representative was that group? And how valid were all the answers? When the vast majority of "voters" say there isn't a parking problem, asking them what would solve the parking problem seems ... well, problematic. We understand why several participants sensed a set-up, that city staffers framed the discussion to reinforce their notions.

We won't go that far, nor will we pooh-pooh the whole proceeding. Planning Director Steve Peterson says this is just one step in the visioning, designed to get citizens thinking outside the box, in preparation for upcoming work.

Opening minds is a worthy aim—just as long as the critical minds aren't closed.