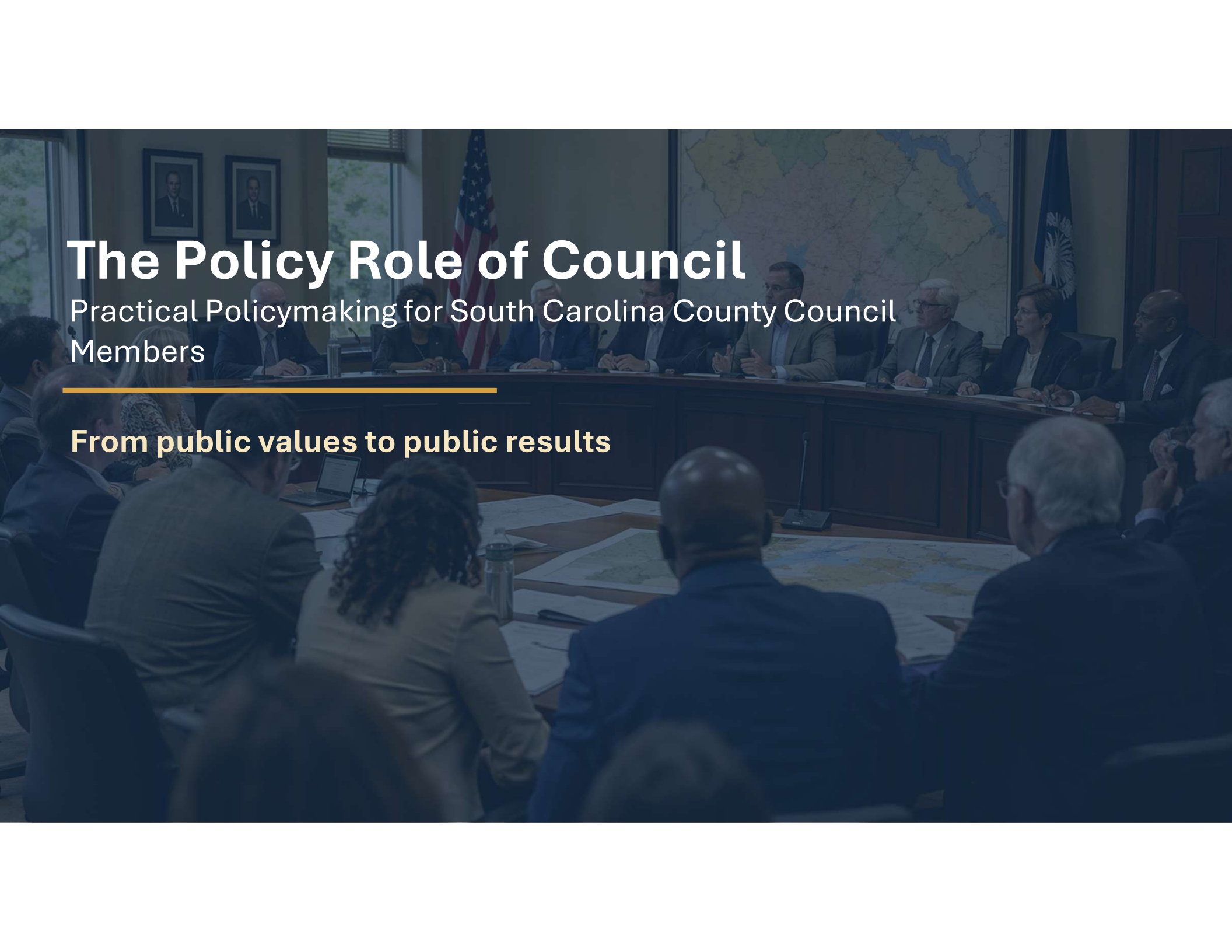




The Policy Role of Council

Practical Policymaking for South Carolina County Council Members

From public values to public results

Learning objectives

Participants will leave with a practical model for governing through policy.

Describe appropriate policymaking responsibilities of county council.

Differentiate policymaking from administration.

Recognize how public values affect policy decisions.

Understand how forms of government shape roles and boundaries.

Practice practical public policy development using Turn the Curve.

Course promise

Better questions.
Clearer roles. Better
decisions. Measurable
results.

Course promise

Better questions. Clearer roles. Better decisions. Measurable results.

What this course does

Provides a practical model for moving from community issues to adopted policy, implementation, and results review.

What it does not do

It is not a legal seminar, parliamentary procedure class, or academic theory lecture.

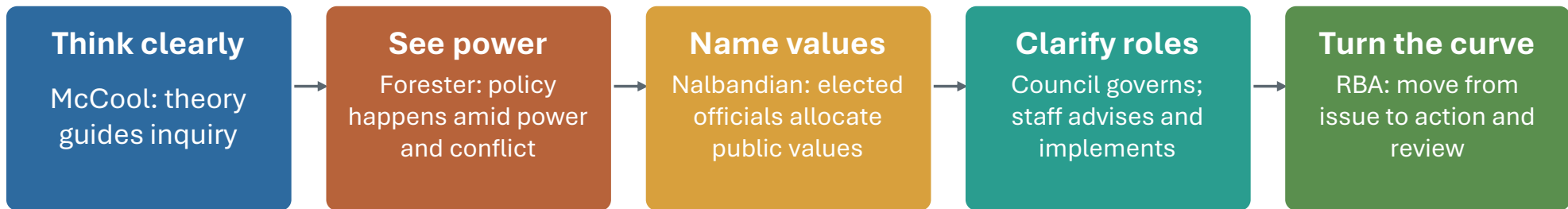
What participants practice

Problem framing, public values analysis, council/staff role clarity, and the Turn the Curve method.



The course in one slide

Think clearly → See power → Name values → Clarify roles → Turn the curve



Good policymaking begins with disciplined thinking, recognizes power and values, clarifies roles, and ends with practical action and measurable results.

Leadership for the common good

Public office means making choices that affect other people's lives.

A serious meddling in the lives of others.

Max DePree

Why it matters

County decisions shape services, rights, costs, opportunities, places, and trust.

Council obligation

Use public authority carefully, transparently, and with attention to consequences.

Practical guardrail

Ask who benefits, who pays, who is burdened, and how will we know?

Why government? Order, rights, and protection of the weak

A brief foundation for democratic governing responsibility.

Hobbes

Government provides order where private power and fear could dominate public life.

Locke

Government protects rights and creates conditions for equal access and restraint on abuse.

Democratic choice

The American system chooses self-government over autocracy, oligarchy, or theocracy.

Practical takeaway: county government exists to structure common life and protect the public good.

Informed public judgment and representative refinement

Public decisions require both an informed public and responsible representatives.

Jefferson: inform discretion

If the people are not enlightened enough to exercise control wisely, the remedy is not to take power away, but to inform discretion through education.

Madison: refine and enlarge

Representative government should refine and enlarge public views through chosen citizens who discern the true public interest.

Council members are not simply vote-counters. They are representatives charged with public judgment.

One state, 46 counties, many realities

Forms of government shape administration; council still governs.

Council
SC Code §4-9-310

Council–Supervisor
SC Code §4-9-810

Council–Administrator
SC Code § 4-9-610

Council–Manager
SC Code §4-9-410

Administrative authority varies by form of government.

Council makes public choices through policy, budget, ordinances, priorities, and oversight.

Council/staff role clarity must respect each county's legal structure.

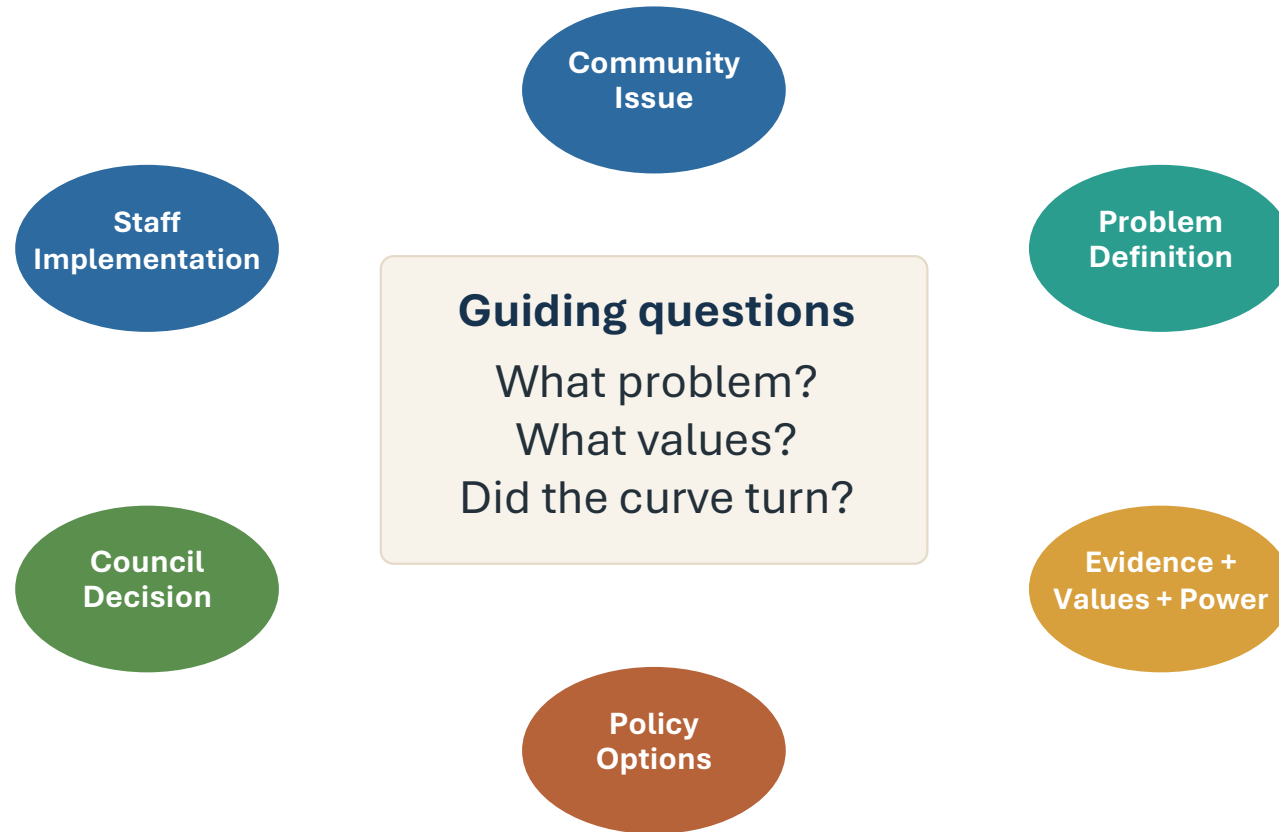
Always consult your county attorney and applicable law for specific legal questions.

Sources of Authority:

- SC Constitution Article VIII
 - Local Government
- S.C. Home Rule Act
 - Code Section 4-9-10 et seq.

County policy cycle

How community issues become adopted policy, implementation, and results review.



What makes an issue public?

Not every complaint is a policy issue — but every complaint may reveal one.

Private problem

A resident complains about a neighbor's pecan tree. The issue may remain private if no public authority, resource, or impact is involved.

Public issue

A pattern of complaints, safety risk, ordinance gap, service failure, infrastructure issue, or public cost may create a public issue.

Better frame

Not “good with money or good to people,” but “How can we be good with money and good to people?”

Policy work begins when private concerns reveal public values, public authority, public cost, or public consequences.

What is public policy?

A practical county government definition.

Public policy is a decision by government about what should be done, why it should be done, who should do it, how it should be paid for, and how the public will know whether it worked.

Ordinances

Budgets

Fees & taxes

Land use

Capital plans

Service levels

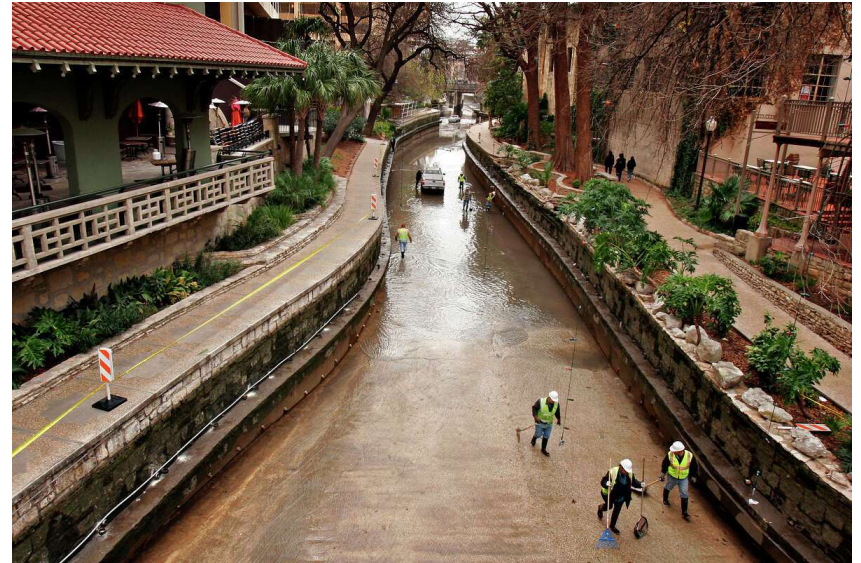
Appointments

IGAs

Policy is what council funds, authorizes, regulates, prioritizes, or chooses not to do.

What you see depends on where you stand

Policy issues look different from different positions.



A shared policy process helps people compare perspectives instead of simply defending positions.

What you see depends on where you stand

Policy issues look different from different positions.

Resident perspective

- Lived experience
- Service impacts
- Trust or frustration
- Stories and symbols
- Costs felt personally

County perspective

- Legal authority
- Budget constraints
- Staff capacity
- Precedent
- Countywide equity

A shared policy process helps people compare perspectives instead of simply defending positions.

Theory is not the opposite of practical judgment

Theory helps council members organize complicated problems.

Theory will not pave a road, fund EMS, or balance a budget. But it can help council understand the problem before choosing the solution.

What problem are we solving?

Who is affected?

What evidence do we have?

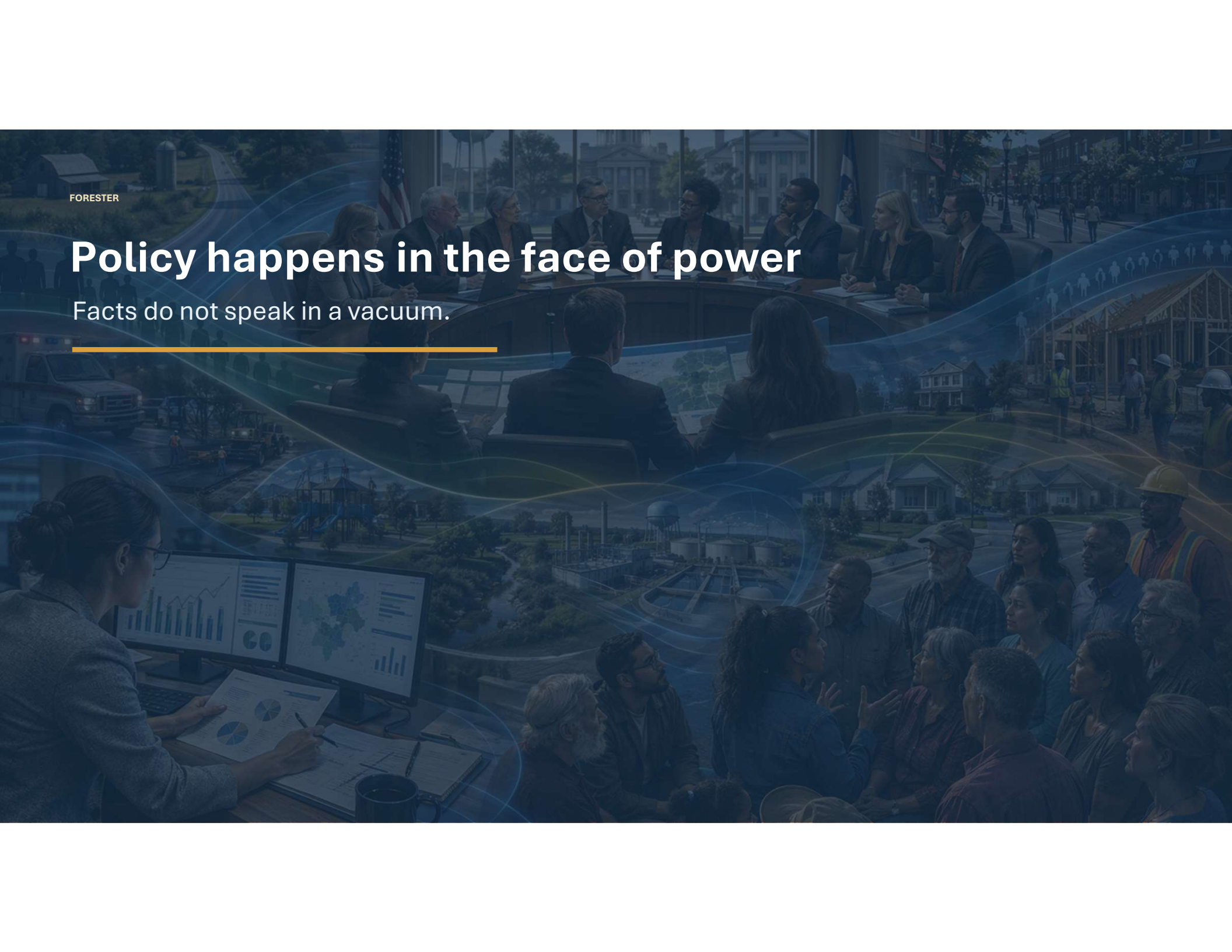
What values are in conflict?

What authority does the county have?

How will we know whether it worked?

**The first step is not action;
the first step is
understanding.**

John Gardner



FORESTER

Policy happens in the face of power

Facts do not speak in a vacuum.

John Nalbandian: scholar, practitioner, “pracademic”

Why his work fits county council leadership.

Academic credibility

Professor Emeritus at the University of Kansas School of Public Affairs and Administration; longtime scholar of local government and politics-administration relationships.

Elected experience

Served eight years as an elected city commissioner in Lawrence, Kansas, including terms as mayor.

Course relevance

Explains public values, political acceptability, administrative sustainability, and council/staff partnership.

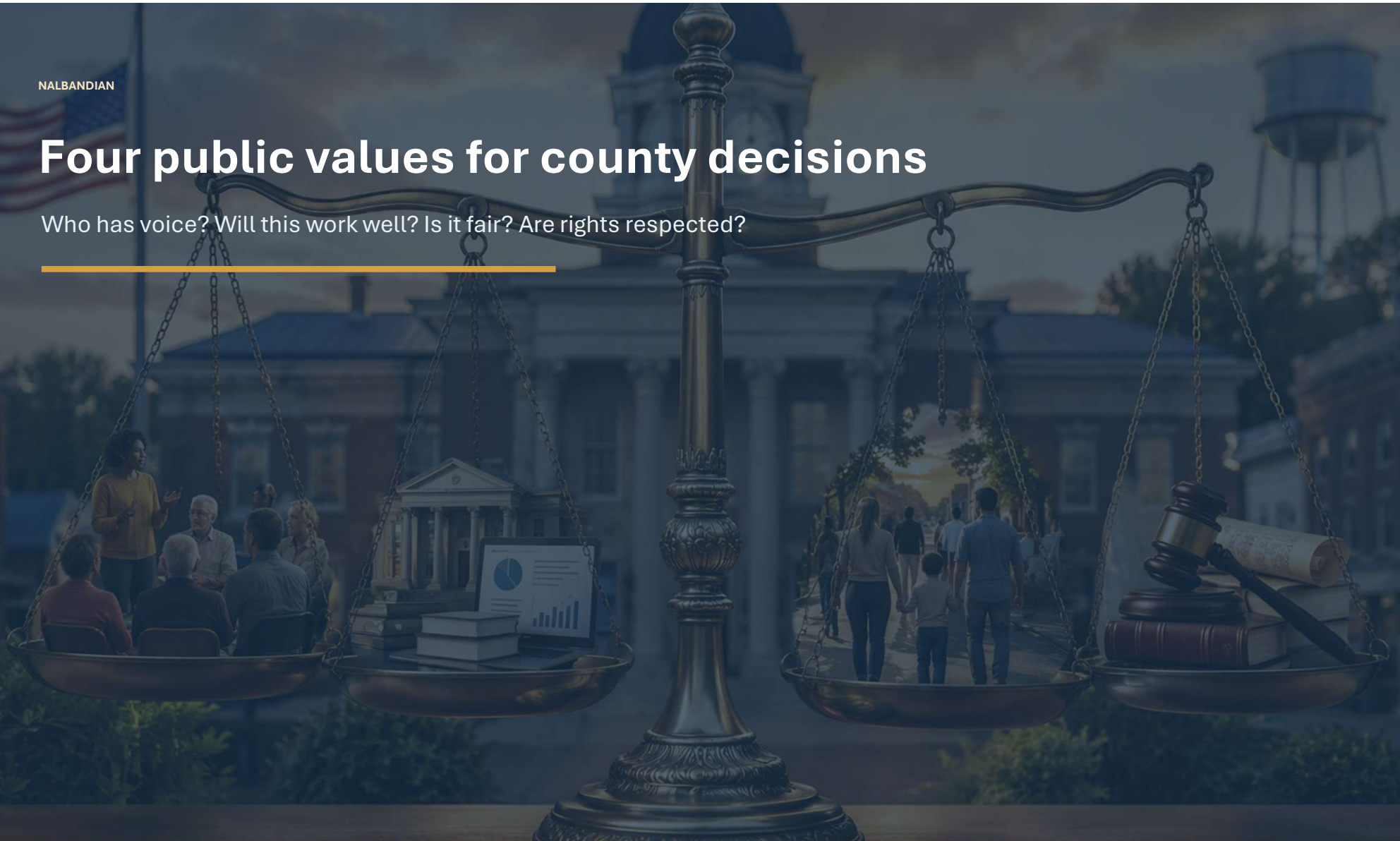
“

Good politics is about making legitimate choices among competing public values.

NALBANDIAN

Four public values for county decisions

Who has voice? Will this work well? Is it fair? Are rights respected?



So... what is the proper role of council?

Start with participants' own understanding before giving the framework.

In groups of three or four:

List the three most important responsibilities of county council.

Identify one thing council should not do.

Name one place where the council/staff line can get blurry.

Debrief prompt

What did your group agree on? Where did you disagree?

Council members wear multiple hats

The governing body represents, decides, convenes, and oversees.

Advocate

Voice constituent concerns and lived experience.

Delegate / Representative

Reflect district or countywide preferences where appropriate.

Trustee / Steward

Use judgment to protect the long-term public interest.

Policymaker

Set direction: budgets, ordinances, priorities, and plans.

Oversight Body

Ask whether adopted policies are producing results.

Boundary Keeper

Respect the line between governance and administration.

Four public values for county decisions:

Representation / Participation

Who has voice?

Social Equity

Are benefits and burdens fair?

Efficiency / Professionalism

Will this work well?

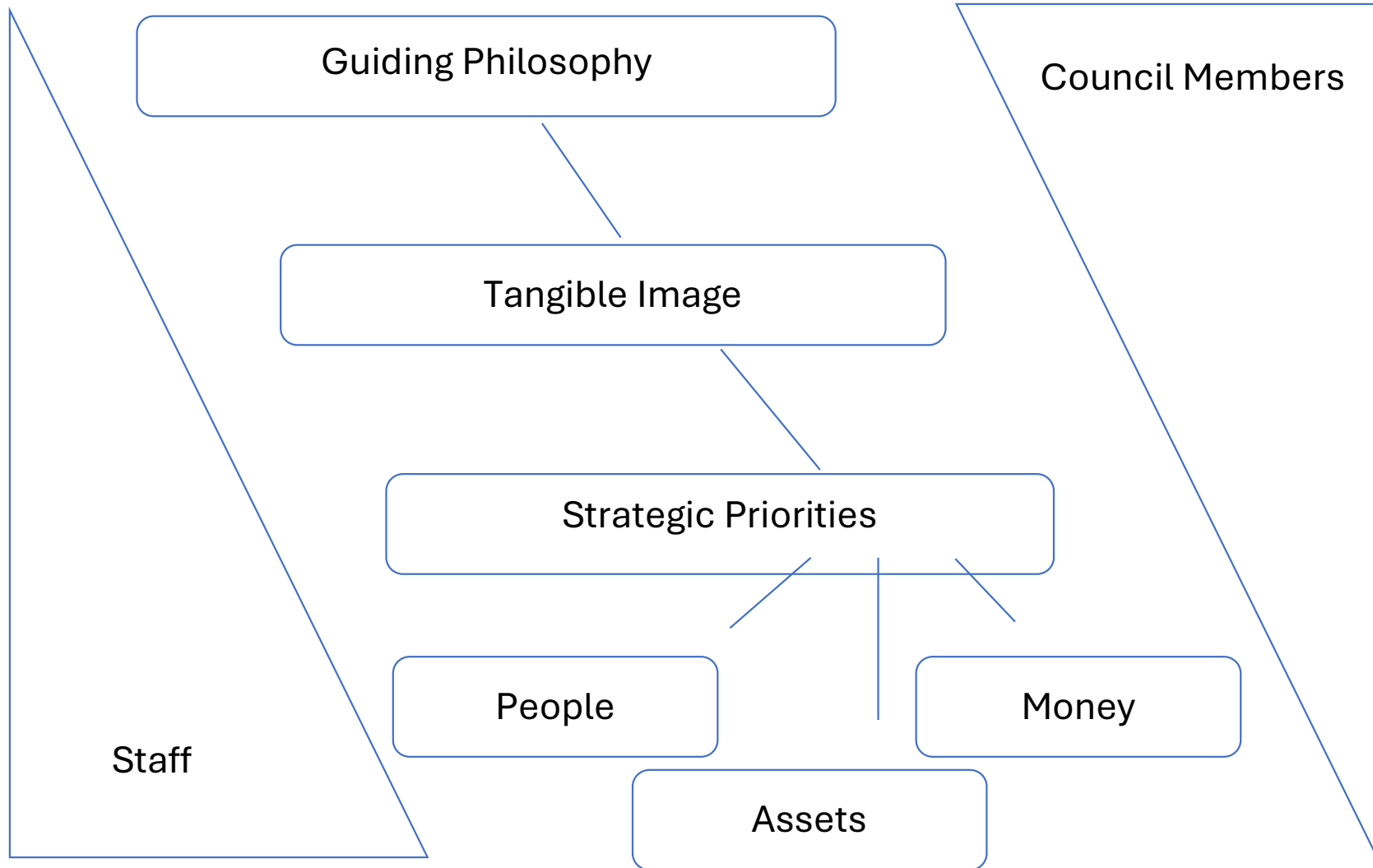
Individual Rights

Are rights respected?

Values in common county decisions

When people disagree, they are often prioritizing different values.

Issue	Value 1	Value 2	Value 3	Value 4
EMS response	Safety	Rural equity	Taxes	Staffing capacity
Zoning	Property rights	Neighborhood impact	Growth	Environment
Roads	Fairness	Traffic volume	Safety	Economic development
Solid waste	Convenience	Cost	Environmental quality	Enforcement
Employee retention	Service quality	Fiscal stewardship	Workforce stability	Fair pay



Legislative authority and staying in your lane

Council acts most safely and effectively through policy, budget, and oversight.

Core legislative responsibilities

- Adopt annual budget and set millage
- Pass local ordinances
- Set policy direction
- Provide policy oversight
- Request reports and analysis

Stay in your lane

- Know your form of government
- Respect policy/administration lines
- Act in good faith
- Follow established law
- Document reasoning

Training note: This is governance education, not legal advice. Consult the county attorney for specific questions.

Immunity and liability: practical awareness

Know enough to recognize when to ask the county attorney.

Absolute legislative immunity

Protects you while voting on ordinances or budgets

Includes administrative acts done in furtherance of a direct legislative act Generally associated with legislative acts such as voting on ordinances or budgets.

Qualified immunity

May apply to discretionary or administrative acts, but can be lost if clearly established rights are violated.

Training note: This is governance education, not legal advice. Consult the county attorney for specific questions.

Immunity and liability: practical awareness

Know enough to recognize when to ask the county attorney.

SC Tort Claims Act

The County (entity) is the defendant, not the individual

Liability Caps: SC limits damages in state court

Covers negligence or "honest mistakes" made within the scope of your job

Personal risk areas

State Level: If conduct involves Actual Fraud, Actual Malice, or Intent to Harm

Federal Level: If you violate a Clearly Established Right (Qualified Immunity lost)

42 United States Code § 1983

Criminal Acts: Bribery, embezzlement, or official misconduct

Training note: This is governance education, not legal advice. Consult the county attorney for specific questions.

Two logics of local government

Good governance bridges political acceptability and administrative sustainability.

Political logic

Values
Stories
Representation
Conflict
Compromise
Political acceptability

Administrative logic

Data
Reports
Expertise
Continuity
Implementation
Administrative sustainability

The problem is not that council and staff see things differently. The problem is when they do not understand why.

Roles in policy development

Different contributions, shared purpose.

Council brings

- Public values
- Community priorities
- Political judgment
- Legitimacy
- Final policy authority

Staff brings

- Facts and data
- Technical expertise
- Legal and fiscal analysis
- Operational knowledge
- Implementation capacity
- Professional recommendations

Council should not surrender judgment to staff. Staff should not surrender analysis to politics.

A practical rule of thumb

Govern through policy, budget, priorities, and evaluation.

Council decides

the WHAT and WHY

public purpose • values • priorities • final
policy direction

Staff advises

on HOW, HOW MUCH, HOW SOON, and WHAT IF

analysis • feasibility • cost •
implementation • reporting

The council acts as a body. Individual members should avoid directing county employees outside appropriate channels.

Who should do what?

Identify whether the task belongs mainly to council, staff, or both.

Scenario A
Solid waste hours

Scenario B
Road crew complaint

Scenario C
Animal control ordinance

Small-group discussion: 10 minutes

Who should do what?

Identify whether the task belongs mainly to council, staff, or both.

Scenario A Solid waste hours

Staff analyzes usage, staffing, cost, complaints, and alternatives.

Council decides service-level expectations and public values.

Scenario B Road crew complaint

Council member refers concern through proper channels.

Staff investigates operations.

Council addresses policy if a broader pattern appears.

Scenario C Animal control ordinance

Staff researches, drafts options, estimates cost, and coordinates with the attorney.

Council weighs values, hears public input, and adopts policy.

Small-group discussion: 10 minutes

Public values screen

A practical checklist before major policy decisions.

What public purpose are we serving?

Who has been heard?

Who is missing?

Who benefits?

Who pays?

Who may be burdened?

Is this efficient and professional?

Is this fair?

Are individual rights affected?

Can staff implement it?

How will we know if it worked?

This screen does not make hard choices easy. It makes values and tradeoffs visible.

The \$1 million decision

Use the four-value matrix to evaluate competing public goods.

Your county has \$1 million available. Three proposals are on the table:

Option 1

Improve EMS coverage in a rural area.

Option 2

Repair a deteriorating recreation facility.

Option 3

Provide matching funds for an industrial access road.

Group tasks

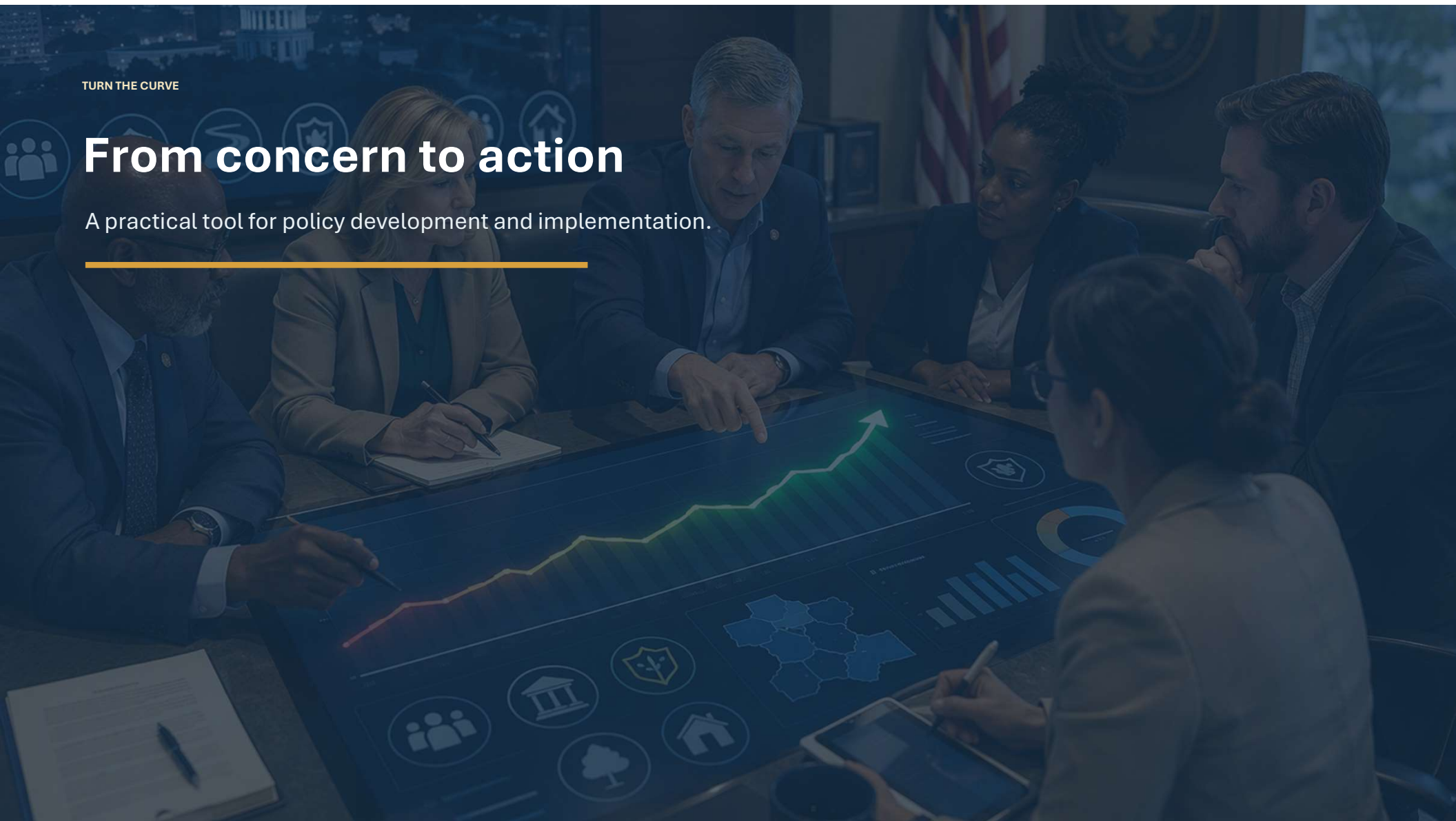
Identify values in tension • Request missing data • Identify affected voices • Consider phased options • Name a result to measure

Debrief: Which public value most influenced your decision?

TURN THE CURVE

From concern to action

A practical tool for policy development and implementation.



The six Turn the Curve questions

A simple tool for county policy work.

1

What's the end?

2

How are we doing?

3

**What's the story
behind the curve?**

4

Who are partners?

5

What works?

6

**What do we propose
to do?**

If council can answer these six questions, it is much closer to a real policy plan.

What's the end?

Start with the desired condition, not the preferred solution.

Poorly framed

Build a new EMS station.
Adopt a litter ordinance.
Hire more planners.
Add road funding.

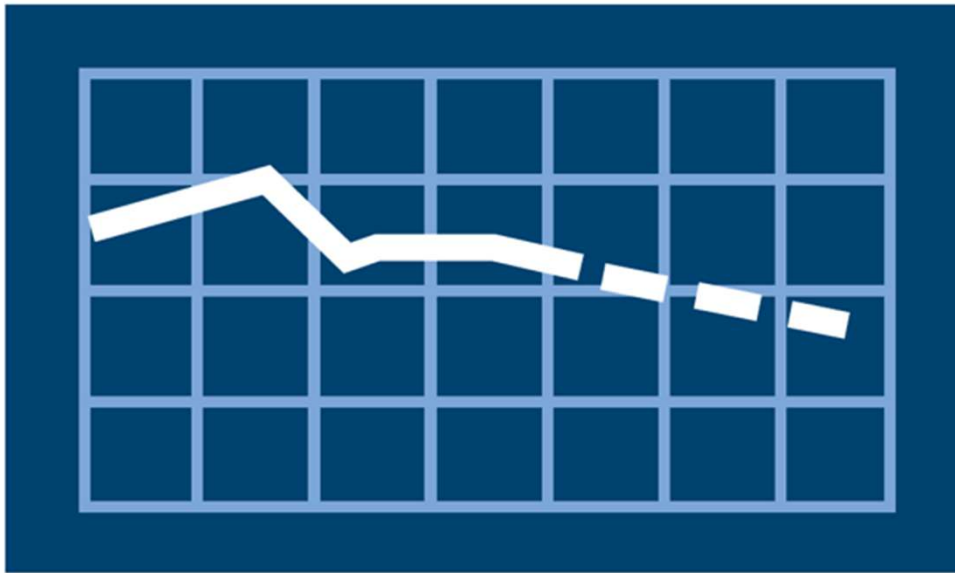
Better framed

Residents receive timely emergency medical response.
Public spaces are clean.
Permit applicants receive timely service.
Roads are safe and well maintained.

A solution tells us what we want to do. A result tells us what we want to improve.

How are we doing?

Plot the baseline and forecast before choosing a strategy.



Council questions

What measure tells us whether the issue is getting better or worse?

Do we have 5 years of data?

If we do nothing differently, where is the trend headed?

What's the story behind the curve?

Diagnose before prescribing.

Contributing factors

What is supporting progress?
What is helping the curve move in the desired direction?
What strengths can be built upon?

Restricting factors

What is hindering progress?
What root causes are driving the trend?
What assumptions need testing?

If council misunderstands the story behind the curve, it may fund the wrong solution.

Who are partners with a role to play?

Root causes often point toward needed partners.

**County
Departments**

**Constitutional
Officers**

Municipalities

State agencies

Courts

Hospitals

**Technical
Colleges**

Nonprofits

Businesses

Residents

**Neighboring
Communities**

Faith Communities

If the story behind the curve involves forces outside county government, the solution probably requires partners outside county government.

What works to turn the curve?

Brainstorm options that address root causes.

No-cost / low-cost

Communication
Coordination
Scheduling
Referral changes
Use existing data better

Operational

Deployment changes
Process redesign
Cross-training
Workflow improvements

Policy / ordinance

New standards
Fee changes
Prioritization criteria
Service-level policy

Budget

Staff
Equipment
Facilities
Technology

Ask: Does the option address one or more identified root causes? Is it evidence-informed? Is more research needed?

Example: Rural EMS response time

Do not assume the solution before defining the result and story.

Result

Residents in all parts of the county receive timely emergency medical response.

Measure

Average EMS response time in rural service areas.

Desired curve

Response times stabilize, then improve.

Story behind the curve

Increased call volume
Population growth outside municipalities
Staffing shortages
Hospital turnaround delays
Long travel distances
Limited station coverage

Partners and possible actions

EMS director • administrator/manager • hospitals
• fire departments • municipalities • technical colleges

Deployment analysis • recruitment strategy • mutual aid • station review • phased capital plan

Turn the Curve with public values

RBA keeps values practical; public values keep RBA democratic.

Result

What public value are we trying to improve?

Measure

Does the data show differences among places or groups?

Story

Whose explanation are we hearing?

Partners

Who has power, and who needs voice?

What works

Is the strategy fair, feasible, and legitimate?

Action plan

Is it politically acceptable and administratively sustainable?

Did we do something, or did things get better?

Activity matters, but activity is not the same as impact.

Activity questions

How many meetings did we hold?
How much money did we spend?
How many people did we serve?
How many projects did we start?

Result questions

Did response time improve?
Did complaints decrease?
Did road conditions improve?
Did employee turnover decline?
Are residents better off?

Now you try!

Use Turn the Curve on a shared county issue.

Working in small groups, identify an issue of concern where the curve is headed the wrong direction.

Question 1

What's the story behind the curve?

Question 2

Who are potential partners?

Question 3

What data and recommendations do you need from staff?

Question 4

What works?

Question 5

What should council do next?

Question 6

When should progress be reviewed?

Two-minute policy briefs

Report back using a structured format.

Issue

Desired result

Measure

Story behind the curve

Partners

Core value conflict

Next step for council

Next step for staff

Review date

What changed when you started with the result instead of the solution?

The four questions of practical policymaking

Use these before, during, and after major decisions.

Purpose

What public result are we trying to achieve?

Values

What principles should guide the decision?

Roles

What is council's role, and what is staff's role?

Results

How will we know whether it worked?

If you remember only one slide, make it this one!

Personal commitment

One question I will ask more often is:

One policy issue where I can use Turn the Curve is:

One way I can better respect the council/staff role distinction is:

Walt McBride • McBride Consults, LLC • walt@mcbrideconsults.com • (770) 503-4474