

Name of Exercise: Extension of 'As Pärnu Sadama' (Port of Pärnu) to Vana Pärnu district and assessment of environmental impact

Location: Pärnu, Estonia

Participation Exercise under which Article? Article 6

Purpose of Participation Exercise:

To obtain the views of citizens on the extension plan for the port, in order to ensure environmentally sound living conditions for inhabitants.

Participation Techniques Used:

According to the Law on Building and Planning, planned investments such as that for the Port of Vana-Pärnu must be detailed and public participation undertaken. The inhabitants of Vana Pärnu were informed by the media (newspapers and radio) of the proposed port plan. The plan was prepared by a licensed company 'ESP Engineering'. The initial documentation for the plan (geological documentation, general plan of city, architectural requirements (streets, green areas), technical requirements (canalisation for waste water and storm water, central heating), special requirements (archaeological concerns)) was prepared by the City Planning Board of Pärnu City Government.

The plan was displayed in the petrol station at the port and a detailed plan was exhibited to the general public in the City planning Department of Pärnu City Council from 16 September 1999 to 30 September 1999. Comments could be made during the public exhibition phase and at the public hearing which took place in Pärnu City Council planning Department on 18 October 1999.

During the public hearing, the detailed plan was presented. Public discussions are generally held in the form of meetings, usually in the hall of the City planning Department where the content of the detailed plan and the proposals received are made available to the public and new proposals are recorded in the minutes.

Citizens had the possibility to make their own proposals for the scheme. Most were submitted in writing and one had 114 signatures and another had 26 signatures. There was also the possibility to submit proposals by e-mail, as Pärnu City Government has an internet homepage with e-mail link. However, no one took advantage of the opportunity as the public prefers to submit signed, written proposals.

There was also a possibility to make proposals verbally during a public hearing. These proposals along with other remarks and suggestions were collected from the public during the hearing and included in the minutes. Proposals were answered by the project manager in the same manner as the written proposals. Any outstanding problems that the project manager was unable to solve were forwarded to Pärnu County Government.

Who participated?

Local inhabitants participated very actively in the public hearing. There were 24 participants at the meeting: a Pärnu County Government representative; Vana Pärnu district representatives of the Pärnu House Owners Society (Pärnu Majaomanike Seltsi), Parents of V-Pärnu District, representatives of the inhabitants and representatives of enterprises that are located near to the proposal.

Stage(s) at which public participated in the process:

First, the public had the possibility to view the draft of the detailed plan and express opinions. This lasted for two weeks. After the detailed plan was prepared, it was exhibited for two weeks. The exhibition was followed by a public hearing. The public had the possibility to express opinions and make suggestions during the exhibition stage and the public hearing. All suggestions were answered in writing or verbally. The citizen's proposal collected 140 signatures. Proposals were given by the representatives of 6 enterprises, Audru County and 4 departments of Pärnu City Government.

Proposals were discussed at the public hearing in the hall of the City planning Department of Pärnu City Council on 18 October 1999. The public was informed about the public hearing through the local newspaper and radio. Citizens who had submitted proposals received a written invitation to the public hearing. All remarks and proposals were forwarded to the implementing agency of planning: project company – ESP Engineering.

What information was made available?

All available information was made public in the form of an explanatory note and plan. The plan showed the location of buildings, roads, communications, storage halls, and borders of lots. The explanatory note gave information including a description of the present situation and an environmental impact assessment. All information was made public free of charge, and was made further available by and within the City Planning Board of Pärnu City Government. All the documents were accessible by the public and information about the process of the detailed planning process was documented and filed.

The detailed plan also existed in digital format but it was not made publicly available (nor was any other electronic information) as the public in the region is not very sophisticated in electronic communications and it was thought that use of it might cause confusion.

What was the outcome of the public participation exercise?

The public participated very actively in the discussions of the detailed plan. Most attention was focused on environmental problems (noise, dust, minimization of vibration, preservation of green areas and the beach, and planning a sports area for children). The proposals that concerned the environment, however, proved capable of being solved and therefore were not presented to Pärnu County Government.

The boundaries of land belonging to enterprises located in the area of the detailed planning caused a lot of discussion. For this reason, the detailed plan could not yet be presented to the Pärnu City Council. Another public participation process with a public hearing will therefore be held. If the project managers are unable to find solutions to the problems, the suggestions will be forwarded to the County Government.

Comments of participants in the process:

The process of public participation was successful. Several environmental problems were solved before the detailed plan came into force.

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REC view on participation exercise:

The exercise seems to have been conducted in a fair and thorough manner. Notification appears to have been adequate and procedures were reasonably elaborate. The ease with which environmental proposals were addressed by the proponent may indicate that the public did not have sufficient knowledge to make detailed comments of a technical nature. A more active process, perhaps with independent experts or greater campaigning, may have resulted in a more in-depth understanding of the issues and a more substantial contribution from the public. The attitude towards use of electronic information is contrary to the general approach of the Aarhus Convention. However, the approach taken in the present case appears to be justified by the local conditions.

Significant omissions from requirements of Article 6:

None based on the information provided.