

**CHAPEL HILL TOWN COUNCIL/UNC/CAROLINA NORTH ATTACHMENT 1**

**SUBJECT: Programmatic Environmental Impact Assessment (or, Strategic Environmental Assessment)**

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The purposes of this memorandum are to

1. Describe Programmatic Environmental Impact Assessment (PEIA), and to
2. Suggest that the Town and University consider working together to perform a PEIA, helping chart the future of Carolina North.

Programmatic Environmental Impact Assessments

Programmatic Environmental Impact Assessment (also known as Strategic Environmental Assessment, or SEA) is "the process of evaluating the impacts of a strategic action -- a policy, plan or program -- on the environment (or on sustainability), to inform decision-making." (Therivel, 2004). The PEIA process is a firmly established tool for examining alternatives at the strategic level, and can focus on the sustainability of various development options, helping make the right choices.

The PEIA approach is not the same as an Environmental Impact Assessment. A PEIA is a process involving the various stakeholders and experts, working together, looking at the big picture and evaluating alternatives. Environmental Impact Assessments (and Impact Statements) are basically at the project level, often performed after important decisions have already been made. The PEIA approach of evaluating alternatives at the strategic level, before important decisions have been made, helps lead to consensus on the best ideas resulting in the best outcomes.

Steps in Performing a PEIA

Steps in performing an PEIA are noted on the attached table. Early steps include determining, and agreeing upon, the goals and objectives (although they may change) of a given plan or strategic action.

When all stakeholders in involved in setting goals and objectives, then approaches for meeting them are much more realizable than when they established by one party and reacted to by others. Key components of setting goals and objectives are to identify "the authority responsible for deciding on the strategic action, the geographical area and time period covered by the strategic action, the initial (they may change) objectives of the strategic action, and reasons for carrying out the PEIA." (Therivel, 2004).

Final steps include report writing and implementation of the plan. Report writing is not seen as a large component of the process because, if done properly, all stakeholders will already know the report's contents. Another key step of the PEIA process is monitoring results over time, to determine whether there are needs for modifying the approach.

#### Reasons for Working and Developing a PEIA

Carolina North represents a unique opportunity for improving both the University and the local community. By working together from the outset, all sides' concerns can be addressed. This approach results in win-win outcomes for all parties.

While the University is taking seriously its mission with respect to Carolina North in commendable ways, the Law of Unintended Consequences could rear its ugly head. For example, the right approaches to Carolina North will attract new, energetic faculty, bringing forth ideas benefiting gown and town financially and otherwise. On the other hand, an approach resulting in worsening of the town's quality of life would surely have the opposite effect. By entering a process that maximizes input of good ideas, the University will better the chances that Carolina North will maximize the local quality of life, helping attract world class faculty to accomplish the University's mission. A PEIA can help achieve the ideals of all parties.

#### How Would the PEIA Process be Carried Out Here?

The process can unfold in different ways. A number of good consultants can be retained to provide advice on approaches and/or to serve as a facilitator. Numerous factors to be considered include establishing roles and responsibilities, individual tasks, timing, budgeting, and opportunities for public input.

#### **References**

Therivel, R., <http://www.brookes.ac.uk/schools/planning/SEAmicro/SEA.html> (March 22, 2004).

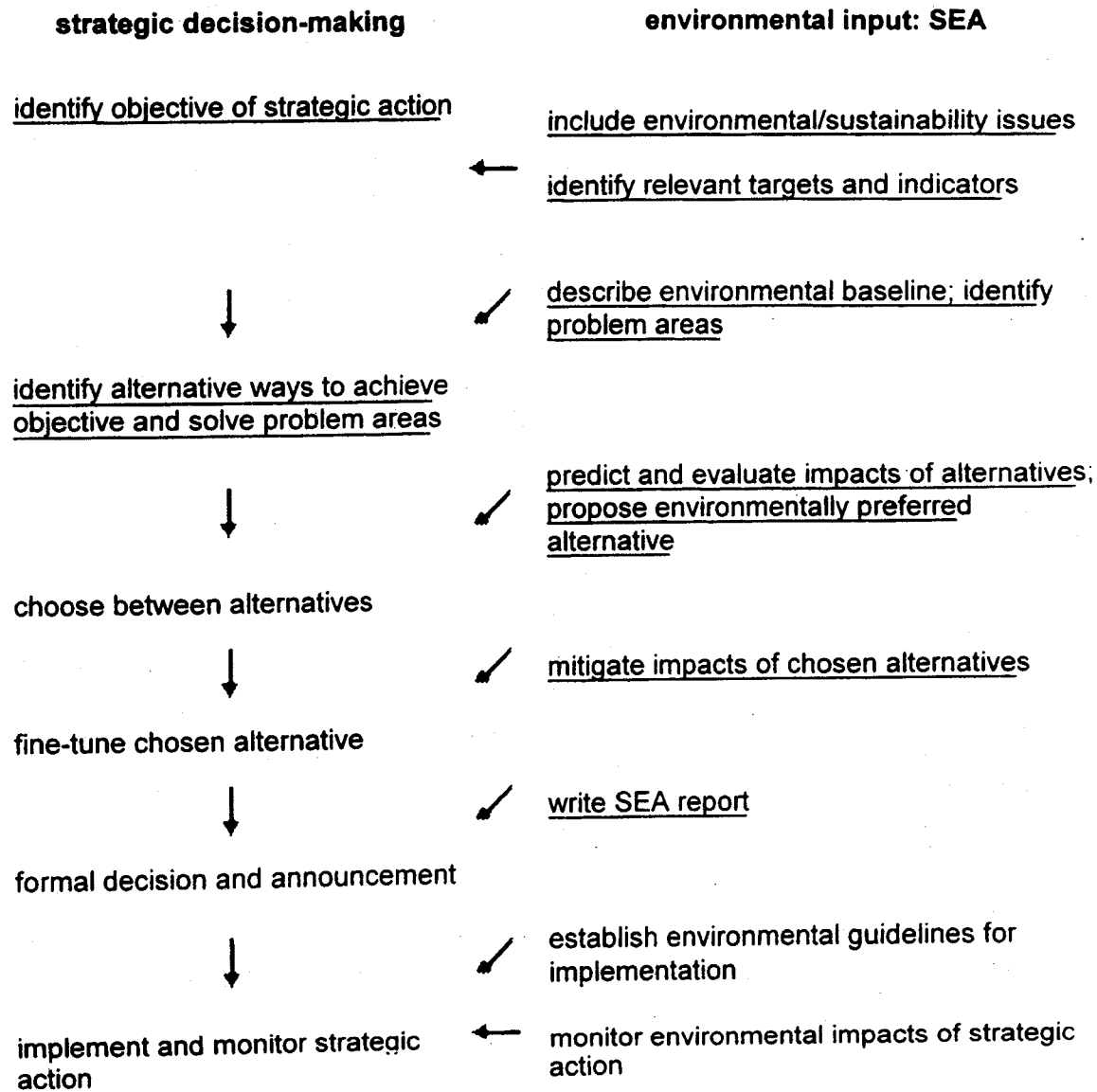
Glasson, J., Therivel, R., and Chadwick, A., *Introduction to environmental impact assessment : principles and procedures, process, practice, and prospects*, UCL Press, London (1994).

Therivel, R., and Partidario, M., *The practice of strategic environmental assessment*, Earthscan Publications, London (1996).

# Steps in SEA and decision-making

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The figure below summarises the stages of SEA and shows how these are linked to the decision-making process (look at left-hand column first):



The emphasis should be on **incorporating SEA in the formulation of the strategic action**: looking at the evolving strategic action afresh and being willing to change and improve it in the light of the SEA findings.

Experience suggests broad principles for how this can best be achieved:

- start early
- focus on sustainability issues rather than on narrower environmental concerns
- use qualitative approaches where appropriate to cope with uncertainty and lack of quantitative information
- consider alternatives
- involve a wide range of disciplines and all appropriate stakeholders in the SEA