

**THEORIZING PLANNING PRACTICE:
COLLABORATIVE PLANNING FOR SMART GROWTH ON LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK**

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by

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KEY WORDS

Smart Growth; New Urbanism; Collaborative Planning; Communicative Planning; Visioning

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how an ostensible tension between communicative and new urbanist planning theories is played out in practice. In collaborative planning processes that promote compact development, do professional planners facilitate public engagement, or do they advocate for smart growth, and are these roles mutually exclusive? The methodology for addressing this question is based on a qualitative research design that comprises semi-structured, open-ended interviews with public, private, and non-profit sector planners. Long Island, New York is a worthwhile laboratory for this investigation, as a number of progressive municipalities have undertaken collaborative processes – known as visioning initiatives – to engage community-driven, bottom-up planning for downtown redevelopment around Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) stations. This thesis demonstrates that planners effectively balance the roles of facilitation and advocacy in collaborative processes by engaging in shared learning with the local participants. Planners can ethically advocate for smart growth by educating local participants about the benefits of compact development, which, in turn, can facilitate an informed decision-making process among the local participants about the context-specific future of their community. In this way, planners merge their technical expertise with the intangible local knowledge of the participants in the planning process to advance compact development that is appropriately scaled and sensitive to the existing character of the community. Through an investigation of collaborative planning for smart growth on Long Island, this thesis concludes that a comprehensive theory of planning practice must account for the dialectical relationship between process and outcome that defines the planning profession.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the United States, the process of suburbanization has radically transformed the spatial distribution of residential and economic activity in major metropolitan areas. The automobile-oriented development pattern of mature suburbs is exemplified by sprawling single-family homes on large subdivided lots, dispersed employment destinations, and immense shopping malls, all surrounded by vast concrete seas of surface parking. Due to mounting concern over the environmental, social, and economic consequences of suburban sprawl during the 1980s and 1990s, the two related movements of new urbanism and smart growth emerged within the planning profession, calling for a paradigm shift in suburban development.¹ Rather than proceed with low-density expansion into the exurbs of metropolitan areas, these movements advocate for compact infill and redevelopment of existing downtowns, compatible with the concepts of sustainability and transit-oriented development. The fundamental goal is to achieve a pedestrian-friendly development pattern that offers a mix of land uses and a variety of housing options beyond detached, single-family homes that currently dominate the suburban built environment.

Long Island, New York is a prototypical mature, automobile-oriented suburban area with vast potential for redevelopment around the robust commuter rail network of the Long Island

¹ Gerrit Knaap and Emily Talen (2004) assert that it would be “uninformed and imprecise” to equate new urbanism with smart growth, largely because of the different origins of the two movements (p. 109). Whereas new urbanism drew from the principles of neo-traditional neighborhood design, smart growth was first and foremost a political movement that materialized in response to “anti-growth coalitions” (Grant, 2009). Nevertheless, although these movements are distinct, they are compatible and mutually supportive. Indeed, while the crux of new urbanism is urban design, and smart growth is more explicitly policy-oriented, the two movements are complementary and there is significant overlap in their respective agendas to stop the trend of continued suburban sprawl. This thesis uses the phrases somewhat interchangeably, but generally refers to the underlying theory as new urbanism and the type of development as smart growth, which is in keeping with much of the planning literature (Fainstein, 2000; Lewis and Baldassare, 2010).

Rail Road (LIRR). The rationale for downtown redevelopment on Long Island is multifaceted; it offers the possibility to increase housing options, expand the property tax base, and accommodate growth, while maintaining the single-family character of surrounding neighborhoods and preserving the limited remaining open space on the Island. However, public opinion about compact suburban development is mixed, due in large part to fears about the impact of increasing density on suburban quality of life. There also tends to be a disconnect between public support for smart growth in the abstract as opposed to that for place-specific project proposals, the latter being subject to the reality of NIMBYism (i.e., a sentiment of “Not In My Back Yard”) among existing residents, which can delay or even stifle municipal efforts to promote compact development. Nevertheless, a number of progressive municipalities on Long Island have sponsored collaborative planning processes – known as visioning initiatives² – that promote smart growth, with the explicit intent to engage community-driven, bottom-up planning to address the goals and concerns of existing residents. These initiatives, which simultaneously stress both the quality of the planning process and a particular planning outcome, raise thought-provoking questions about the appropriate role to be played by professional planners.

This thesis is linked to two different theories of urban planning, namely the process-oriented theory of communicative planning and the outcome-oriented theory of new urbanism. These theories present competing normative views of the role that planners should adopt in professional practice. Whereas communicative planning theory identifies planners as objective facilitators whose primary role is to help achieve community consensus in a collaborative

² As noted by Eugene McCann (2001), “visioning is a term often associated with participatory, collaborative, or consensus-driven planning processes” (p. 209). This thesis uses these phrases somewhat interchangeably regarding planning practice. The underlying theory is known as communicative planning (Healey, 1996).

process, the theory of new urbanism identifies planners as advocates for compact, mixed-use, and pedestrian-friendly development. This dichotomy begs the questions, how do professional planners perceive their roles in collaborative planning processes that promote smart growth, and how do they reconcile the coexistence of the potentially conflicting roles of facilitation and advocacy?

Furthermore, the question is not limited to public sector planners, since “planning—once seen as a local, public activity—is increasingly private and nonlocal, as private consultants now provide similar services to numerous [municipalities]” (McCann, 2001, p. 209). In fact, sponsoring municipalities of visioning initiatives retain a range of both private sector firms and non-profit organizations as outside consultants. Thus, another dimension to the broad question regarding how planners balance their different roles in collaborative processes is the extent to which there is a distinction between the experiences of public sector planners from the sponsoring municipalities and hired planning consultants from the private and non-profit sectors.

Using Long Island as a laboratory, this thesis explores how the ostensible tension between communicative and new urbanist planning theories is played out in practice. The methodology for addressing this question is based on a qualitative research design that comprises semi-structured, open-ended interviews with public, private, and non-profit sector planners. Through an investigation of collaborative planning for smart growth on Long Island, this thesis concludes that a comprehensive theory of planning practice must account for the dialectical relationship between process and outcome that defines the planning profession.

BACKGROUND

From the Railroad to the Automobile: The Development of Long Island and the Suburban Ideal

In order to establish substantive context about the contemporary efforts to promote smart growth on Long Island, it is important to first explore “the historical depth of suburban development” (Harris and Larkham, 1999, p. 1). Across the United States, the physical structure of metropolitan areas was influenced over time by advancements in transportation technology. As discussed by K.H. Schaeffer and Elliott Sclar (1975), urban development initially took the form of the walking city, which was a “necessary evil” in history before the advent of safe, reliable, and convenient transportation (p. 18). The pre-industrial walking city lacked privacy, was dirty, and was generally deficient in providing “the amenities for a peaceful, quiet and pastoral existence” (p. 16). One of the fundamental shortcomings of the walking city was the “physical and mental oppressions of the overcrowded household,” which was also a reflection of the broader tenet that “no space was ever wasted, for to cram everything into the smallest possible space was the natural style of the walking city” (p. 14, 17).

In *Crabgrass Frontier*, which is perhaps the most well-known and frequently-cited chronicle of American suburban development, Kenneth Jackson (1985) asserts that the “transportation revolution” between 1815 and 1875, marked by the rise of fixed-route public transportation systems, led to “the erosion of the walking city” (p. 20). Whereas “pedestrian movement [previously served] as a workable basis for organizing urban space,” the rise of public transportation vastly increased the “metropolitan orbit” of the earlier walking city (p. 33, 91). In the historical development of Long Island, this transportation revolution took the form of the

Long Island Rail Road (LIRR). Chartered in 1834, the LIRR, providing east-west commuter rail service between New York City and Long Island, sparked a suburban development boom and “transformed Long Island from farmland to economically vibrant communities” (Metropolitan Transportation Authority, 2009, p. 5). The LIRR expanded its reach over time, and 124 passenger stations now cover nearly 600 miles of track in New York City and across Long Island.

Nevertheless, as noted by Rudi Volti (2004), the geographic extent of suburban development was constrained until the advent of the automobile, since “rail transport was inherently inflexible, confining housing to corridors closely adjacent to trolley or bus lines” (p. 110). Indeed, the automobile enabled significant advances in mobility, enabling a wider span of suburban development beyond the hub-and-spoke model of the “star-shaped tracked city” (Schaeffer and Sclar, 1975, p. 50). As Jackson argues, “The real significance of the motor vehicle lay in its ability to move laterally and perpendicularly to the fixed tracks [of trains and trolleys], and thus open up land for settlement previously regarded as too remote” (1985, p. 181). Initially, only the very wealthy could afford to purchase an automobile, but prices eventually dropped in the 1910s and 1920s due to increasing efficiency and the use of mass production techniques. The ensuing widespread automobile ownership ushered in an increased rate of suburban growth, which was further amplified following World War II by the construction of the Federal Interstate Highway System, including the Long Island Expressway (Interstate 495) that now extends 70 miles across Long Island. The rise of the automobile, and the infrastructure to support this transportation mode, helped spur sprawling development patterns across Long Island.

Despite the historical significance of transportation technology in driving the process of suburbanization, Jackson affirms that, “Transportation change is not a sufficient explanation for the...development of the suburban trend” (1985, p. 42). Different eras of suburban development were indeed marked by advancements in transportation technology, but there was also an important *cultural* thrust for residential suburbanization. Specifically, due to a deep-rooted “distrust of urban life,” there emerged a “suburban ideal of a detached dwelling in a semirural setting” (p. 46, 288). Migration to the suburbs was a costly undertaking, and the “belief that poverty and crime were largely the handmaidens of overcrowding in the central city” provided an incentive for wealthy families to “escape” the perceived ills of city life (p. 57, 175).³ Low-density living arguably defined “America’s true manifest density” (Owen, 2009, p. 24), and the “romantic anti-urbanism” of the suburban ideal was characterized by the three interrelated themes “of private domesticity, of wishing to live closer to nature, and of retreat from the city” (Harris and Larkham, 1999, p. 10, 16). One fundamental tenet of this suburban ideal was “the notion...of suburbs as a sort of marriage of city and country” (p. 4). The preference for low-density living in a detached, single-family home, surrounded by a private yard, was “in direct antithesis to the dense lifestyle” that characterized urban residential options (Jackson, 1985, p. 58). This suburban ideal remains salient to this day, as Long Island is “a region that is passionately attached to the idea of *not* being urban” (Dunham-Jones and Williamson, 2009, p. 187).

It is important to acknowledge that, “Far from being an inevitable evolution or a historical accident, suburban sprawl is the direct result of a number of policies that conspired

³ Lewis Mumford (1961) observed that migration to the suburbs offered “compensatory freedom” from the problems of the city, and that “the suburb served as an asylum for the preservation of illusion” (p. 491, 494). Crime and poverty still plagued the city, but migration to the suburbs enabled avoidance of these issues, although today suburban areas are not immune to these historically urban problems.

powerfully to encourage urban dispersal” (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck, 2000, p. 7). In addition to funding the Interstate Highway System, the Federal Government also aided suburbanization through mortgage assistance from the Federal Housing Administration and Veterans Administration loan programs. Moreover, locally, the suburban ideal was codified in the zoning ordinances of municipalities and executed through the creation of large-lot, single-family subdivisions.⁴ Indeed, the built form of suburban communities is largely “attributable to the widespread dissemination of the pro-sprawl zoning codes of the 1960s” (Duany et al., 2000, p. 223). Therefore, while transportation technology helped to stimulate suburbanization, cultural mores provided a complementary social impetus to leave the city, and federal and local policies helped to facilitate this process.

Reflecting back on history, there have been three chronological phases of suburbanization. Long Island initially functioned as a “bedroom [suburb]” (Palen, 1995, p. 45), serving primarily as a residential location for commuters to Manhattan. After residential suburbanization, the initial diffusion of economic activity into Long Island was retail-oriented, and the major sources of employment remained in Manhattan until the second half of the twentieth century. The decentralization of employment – dominated today by office activity to serve the knowledge-based service economy – can thus broadly be characterized as the third phase of suburbanization, preceded by the suburbanization of housing and shopping. In the words of historian Robert Fishman, “suburbia in its traditional sense,” defined by daily commuting to work in the central city, “now belongs to the past” (1987, p. 205). While the New York metropolitan area is still “core-dominated” (Lang, 2000, p. 8), due to the ongoing role of

⁴ While outside the scope of this analysis, there were historically racist undertones in both the federal and local policies that must not be ignored, including “collective action racism” and “exclusionary land-use policies,” respectively (Cutler et al., 1999, p. 457; Kain, 1992, p. 450).

downtown Manhattan in attracting and retaining sources of employment, it is also important to note that commuting is now “multidirectional” (Fishman, 1987, p. 191).

Since World War II, residential and commercial development on Long Island “[has] largely followed highway corridors, ignoring the region’s transit heritage” and thereby promoting the low-density development that is characteristic of suburban sprawl (Dunphy et al., 2004, p. 3). For this reason, “[the] ubiquitous image of an isolated [LIRR] station in a sea of parking is far more common than the station anchoring an active commercial or mixed-use district” (Regional Plan Association, 2011a, p. 13). Although several commentators contend that sprawl represents “unplanned growth” (Ewing, 2008, p. 519), this development pattern did not occur through happenstance, but rather emerged in line with federal policies and municipal zoning ordinances that encouraged low-density development.

Responding to Sprawl on Long Island: The Promise of Smart Growth

Today, there exists a rich body of literature about the multitude of social, environmental, and economic consequences of sprawl, many of which stem from dependence on the automobile. In low-density suburbs, ownership and use of an automobile arguably amount to a “prerequisite to social viability” (Duany et al., 2000, p. 14). Those who cannot drive, either because of age, physical disability, or inability to afford an automobile, are disadvantaged by the automobile-oriented development pattern of sprawling suburbs. From an environmental standpoint, automobile use, which increases dependence on limited foreign energy supplies, contributes to both local air pollution and global climate change through vehicle emissions. Land use and transportation studies have demonstrated the correlation between low-density urban form, high

rates of automobile ownership, and increased travel distances, and therefore sprawling development patterns are associated with increased automobile emissions (Boarnet, 2011; Ewing, Pendall, and Chen, 2002). While some of these environmental concerns have been quelled by production of hybrid/electric vehicles and enforcement of stricter emissions standards, the environmental impacts of automobile use are exacerbated by the reality of intense traffic congestion in the suburbs.⁵

Additionally, automobile ownership enables personal mobility beyond the extent of suburban rail corridors, thereby encouraging greater land consumption and environmental degradation of open space. Furthermore, the environmental effects of land conversion are not the only resource impacts of suburban sprawl. As discussed in a 2000 report of the Transportation Cooperative Research Program (TCRP), there are also economic costs associated with the necessary expansion of infrastructure, such as roads and sewers, to serve new developments, and these costs are typically borne by the local municipality. Although the provision of infrastructure is a fundamental municipal service, it is clear that the additional costs could be minimized through the pursuit of “more sensible growth patterns” (p. 9-11). For all of these reasons, a general criticism of suburban sprawl is that it is a “dysfunctional” spatial pattern of growth (Ewing et al., 2002, p. 7).

These multifaceted social, environmental, and economic costs of sprawl have incited widespread criticism to the unhindered continuation of this suburban development trend. The first musings of opposition to sprawl were on display in the 1987 Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development. The Brundtland Commission Report, as it is

⁵ Although, as noted by Robert Cervero, “the idea of congestion in the suburbs almost seems like a contradiction in terms,” many roadways on Long Island are indeed plagued by the phenomenon of “suburban gridlock.” In 1986, Cervero warned of an ominous “future of frustrating traffic tie-ups [in the suburbs],” and this “suburbanization of congestion” has indeed come to fruition (p. xxi, 9, 11).

commonly known, introduced the concept of sustainable development, which is grounded in the so-called triple bottom line – or 3 E’s – of equity, environment, and economy. Defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), the principles of sustainable development became incorporated into the new urbanism and smart growth movements, which materialized in the 1990s in direct opposition to suburban sprawl.⁶

Concurrently with the rise of new urbanism among architects and physical planners, the smart growth movement began to take shape among environmentalists and policy planners. In the seminal text for the new urbanism movement, Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck (2000) assert that the suburbs throughout America have been “ravaged by sprawl,” and they describe their work as “a call to arms and a brief primer on stopping sprawl” (p. xiv, 216). Their fundamental message is to contrast the problems of continued sprawl – amounting to an “unsustainable” and “essentially self-destructive” form of suburban growth – with the preferred alternative of a “traditional neighborhood,” marked by “compact, pedestrian-friendly, and mixed use” development (p. 3-4, 263). The smart growth movement similarly advocates for this paradigm shift in suburban development trends in order to address the “perceived ills” of sprawl (Downs, 2005, p. 368). The two extremes of sprawl and a traditional neighborhood are “polar opposites in appearance, function and character,” and although the new urbanist principles were created for “designing new communities from scratch,” Duany et al. (2000) note that the

⁶ According to Jill Grant (2009), “As theories about the form that cities should take, new urbanism, smart growth, and sustainable development originally differed in terms of their understanding of the role of government, the importance of urban design, the appropriate scale of intervention (regional versus local), the relevance of social justice concerns, and the implications of environmental responsibility. Over the last decade however, the three concepts have increasingly fused together in the work of many designers, planners, and scholars” (p. 13). Furthermore, these concepts are all in keeping with the notion of transit-oriented development (TOD), namely compact, mixed-use development that is close to – and well served by – public transportation (Jabareen, 2006, p. 44).

techniques can “apply equally well to the improvement of existing neighborhoods” (p. 3, 136, 183).⁷ This potential application of new urbanist and smart growth principles to largely built-out suburban communities represents a new direction for land use development on Long Island.

The sprawling pattern of development on Long Island can easily be overshadowed by the continued centralization and dominance of New York City, but it is important to recognize that, “sprawl is a matter of degree” (Ewing, 2008, p. 520). It is unsurprising that the New York metropolitan area would be treated as an “outlier” when compared to other metropolitan areas in the United States in a “sprawl index” based on the metrics of residential density, mix of uses, strength of centers, and travel accessibility (Ewing et al., 2002, p. 5). Nevertheless, there are abundant opportunities for infill and redevelopment in local downtowns on Long Island, which is indicative of the extent of suburban sprawl. Despite an early history of compact development on Long Island along the LIRR corridors, subsequent development since the rise of the automobile has rendered Long Island’s downtowns an “underutilized regional asset” (Regional Plan Association, 2008, p. 8). Suburban sprawl has contributed to a “shrinking supply of land for new development” on Long Island, as less than nine percent of the land – corresponding to about 70,000 acres – is not yet developed and is not prevented from development through government restrictions (Regional Plan Association, 2010, p. 4). Duany et al. (2000) pose the question, “Why create new places at all when existing places are underutilized?” (p. 184). Indeed, existing downtowns on Long Island have the capacity to absorb additional development, which can prevent continued sprawl into the future.

⁷ While some contend that, “City form is a residual...[and] a by-product, not an intentionally achieved goal, over the course of history” (Marcuse, 1987, p. 289-290), others counter that it is an “illusion...that we cannot control the form of our communities” (Calthorpe and Fulton, 2001, p. 44). Both viewpoints warrant recognition, and indeed the built environment is shaped by a complex amalgam of forces, including – but certainly not limited to – the work of professional planners.

As uncovered by the Regional Plan Association (RPA) in a 2010 *Long Island Index* report,⁸ there is great redevelopment potential throughout Long Island, with over 8,300 acres of vacant land and surface parking, plus additional opportunities at already-developed sites, within a half-mile of downtown centers and LIRR stations. In order to realize this untapped potential, communities on Long Island must “look back to the future” by targeting compact development near LIRR stations, as was the case during the early stages of suburban development before widespread automobile ownership (p. 14). In essence, the report makes a clarion call for Long Island’s communities to reinvest in “the underdeveloped asset of our downtowns” (p. 2).

Nevertheless, as underscored by RPA in a follow-up *Long Island Index* report in 2011, regional capacity is only one factor to consider in this discussion, as there remains an important question that must be addressed at the municipal scale: “Is there the *vision and political will* for well-designed downtown redevelopment to proceed?” (Regional Plan Association, 2011a, p. 3). While both the new urbanism and smart growth movements emphasize the importance of regional coordination in combating the underlying effects of sprawl (Duany et al., 2000; Downs, 2005), Long Island lacks a regional land use planning authority and there is a time-honored tradition of local home rule among the nearly 100 distinct municipalities. Indeed, like many other suburban regions, Long Island is “divided into a crazy quilt of separate and overlapping political jurisdictions, which make any kind of coordinated planning virtually impossible” (Fishman, 1987, p. 190). Therefore, any strides toward implementation of compact redevelopment on Long Island must be made at the municipal level.⁹

⁸ The *Long Island Index* publications are financed by the Rauch Foundation, a non-profit organization that prides itself on abiding by the noteworthy operating principle that, “Good information presented in a neutral manner can move policy” (Rauch Foundation, 2012).

⁹ Although land use authority is vested to the local municipalities through New York State legislation, a number of public sector regional planning bodies – in addition to non-profit organizations – play an important coordination role on Long Island, including Nassau and Suffolk Counties, the Long Island Regional Planning Council, the Long Island Regional Economic Development Council, and the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council.

Overcoming NIMBYism: The Challenge of Promoting Smart Growth

Vision and political will are necessary prerequisites to achieving compact redevelopment, but the ingrained suburban ideal of low-density living on Long Island “has always been an impediment to change” (Regional Plan Association, 2011a, p. 3). The perception that “Long Islanders historically have had reservations about density and height” raises the intuitive question of whether the population is in fact “ready to embrace downtown living” (Regional Plan Association, 2008, p. 23). In 2000, only 20 percent of Long Island residents lived in a downtown, based on an “expansive definition” that encompasses any area within a half-mile of a downtown center or LIRR station, which therefore also includes low-density residential areas with predominantly single-family homes (Regional Plan Association, 2011a, p. 5). Furthermore, single-family homes comprise 83 percent of the housing units on Long Island (Regional Plan Association, 2008, p. 10).

Yet, a 2010 survey of 807 randomly selected Long Island residents revealed that 31 percent “could imagine themselves living in an apartment, condo, or townhouse in a local downtown area” (Stony Brook University Center for Survey Research, 2010, p. 14-15). Moreover, according to the findings of a follow-up 2012 survey, there is “growing support for alternatives to the traditional [single] family home” (Stony Brook University Center for Survey Research, 2012, p. 2). Specifically, 52 percent of survey respondents – an increase from 44 percent from the 2010 survey – said they would support zoning amendments that would increase height limits in local downtowns and permit apartments above stores (p. 2). Nevertheless, as noted by Anthony Downs (2005) in a discussion of “why we discuss [Smart Growth] more than we do it,” it is not uncommon for suburban residents “to support Smart Growth in the abstract, but

oppose its specific manifestations when the increases in density it calls for are planned near them” (p. 371).

Additionally, there are still entrenched pockets of NIMBYs and anti-growth advocates on Long Island who want to preserve the status quo by rejecting the prospect of any new development. The reality, however, is that, “Growth is likely to occur even if communities on Long Island try to limit it” (Regional Plan Association, 2010, p. 4). Based on official forecasts by the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC), the population of Long Island is expected to grow by approximately 461,000 between 2005 and 2035, and the number of payroll jobs is projected to increase by approximately 281,000 over this same horizon (Long Island 2035 Study Team, 2009, p. 5). The responsibility for accommodating this “inevitability of growth... must be shared by multiple jurisdictions” (Duany et al., 2000, p. 142), as no single municipality has the available land or infrastructure capacity to support all of the necessary additional development.

However, growth need not be viewed as a burden, as downtown redevelopment “can provide most of the housing and jobs that Long Island needs, helping to hold down property taxes with minimal changes to the Island’s existing single-family neighborhoods and open spaces” (Regional Plan Association, 2011a, p. 2). Thus, rather than view growth as either a “*problem* to be addressed” or a “*cost* to be accounted for,” it is possible to perceive growth as an “*opportunity* to be embraced” (emphasis added) (Chapin, 2012, p. 7, 10). From the municipal perspective, the prospect of expanding the property tax base by tapping into the potential of local downtowns should be particularly attractive, especially since 81 percent of respondents in the aforementioned 2012 survey of Long Island residents identified high property taxes as a very serious or extremely serious problem (Stony Brook University Center for Survey Research, 2012, p. 6). Although the

property tax issue is admittedly complex and will require a multi-pronged approach to address deep structural problems with the tax system in its entirety, the relevant point is that targeted increases in downtown density can be part of the solution. In this way, “Proponents of smart growth might expand their potential base of support by attempting to reframe the issue” (Lewis and Baldassare, 2010, p. 235). Indeed, the municipal benefits of downtown redevelopment on Long Island are multifaceted, offering the opportunity to increase housing options, expand the property tax base, and accommodate growth, while maintaining the single-family character of surrounding neighborhoods and preserving the limited remaining open space on the Island.

In recent years, an increasing number of municipalities on Long Island have started to acknowledge that downtown redevelopment can be viewed as a net positive. In 2009, a systematic review of 85 “place-based” reports about Long Island showed that one recurring theme was the “[importance] of downtown revitalization and smart growth to continued economic prosperity” (Long Island 2035 Study Team, 2009, p. 13). Of note, most of these reports were issued as documentation of “community visioning efforts initiated by the local municipalities” (p. 13). The explicit intent of these visioning initiatives, as they are commonly known, is to engage community-driven, bottom-up planning to address the goals and concerns of existing residents. In promoting smart growth, these initiatives simultaneously stress both the quality of the planning process and a particular planning outcome. This juxtaposition of process and outcome raises thought-provoking questions about whether professional planners are expected to be facilitators of public involvement or advocates for smart growth, and whether these roles are in fact mutually exclusive. In order to address these questions, it is important to scrutinize the function of public participation in the planning profession, as well as the theories that underlie planning practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

One key theme that transcends the planning literature on public involvement is that there is a qualitative difference between genuine, bottom-up public engagement that informs a planning process, and the mere façade of participation in the face of continued top-down decision-making. In her pioneering article in 1969, Sherry Arnstein equates legitimate public participation with the notion of citizen power, broadly defined as a scenario in which “the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes,” possess decision-making authority (p. 1). Arnstein employs the image of a ladder to illustrate eight “gradations” of public participation, ranging from the “illusory” model of manipulation, serving merely as a “public relations vehicle by powerholders,” to actual citizen control, in which the “have-not citizens obtain...full managerial power” in a decision-making process (p. 3, 4). Between the extremes of nonparticipation and citizen power is an intermediate category of tokenism – comprising the three rungs of informing, consultation, and placation – that represents the crucial “first step toward legitimate citizen participation,” but the critical missing link is the “redistribution of power” to the have-nots (p. 1, 5).

Although the examples that Arnstein cites, including the Community Action and Model Cities programs, are now outdated, her message is timeless, and there are still significant concerns about the extent to which citizens are effectively empowered in planning processes. Indeed, a more recent criticism of the “procedural dimension” of planning practice is offered by Oren Yiftachel (1998), who points to the “sinister dark side” of planning and reconceptualizes the field as a “tool of social control and oppression” (p. 395, 401). Yiftachel strives to expose the complicity of professional planners in promoting top-down decision-making, condemning

“meaningless forms of public consultation” initiated under the guise of genuine participation (p. 402).¹⁰

In contrast to the rather fatalistic assessment of the planning profession itself by Yiftachel, Judith Innes and David Booher (2004) present a different perspective, focusing their critique on the weaknesses of traditional *modes* of participation. Specifically, Innes and Booher classify conventional public hearings as “nothing more than rituals designed to satisfy legal requirements” (p. 419). By definition, these modes of participation are reactive, as citizens are typically invited to offer feedback on proposals that are already formulated. John Forester (1999) elucidates this point in his discussion of “the all-too-common intransigent public hearing postures of ‘decide-announce-defend’ ” (p. 63). The divisive nature of public hearings is further exemplified in the common use of “war metaphors referring to ‘battles’ and ‘coming out in force’ ” (Innes and Booher, 2004, p. 424). The unfortunate reality is that communication at public hearings often comes in the form of “knee-jerk ‘us against them’ adversarial bargaining,” as opposed to two-way dialogue (Forester, 1999, p. 4). For this reason, these opportunities for public involvement are problematic because they promote “formalistic, one-way communication,” based on a “simplistic duality” that pits citizens against the government (Innes and Booher, 2004, p. 421, 423).

Innes and Booher, in their effort to reframe public involvement, call for an alternative paradigm of participation – effectively embodied in the many visioning initiatives that have played out on Long Island – based on collaboration between “a fluid network of interacting agents” (2004, p. 422), including citizens, interest groups, businesses, non-profit organizations, public officials, and planners. One of the key underpinnings of the collaborative model is that, “While education of the public is essential it is not participation if it does not include the education of the

¹⁰ However, Yiftachel offers an important qualifier to his argument, asserting that, “The regressive consequences of planning often occur despite planners’ positive intentions because of the frameworks of power that manipulate and reshape policy outcomes” (1998, p. 403). Indeed, it is widely recognized that, “the struggle to challenge the inequality of power relations is likely to be a continuous one” (Healey, 2003, p. 113).

agency” (p. 426). This concept of two-way education reflects the co-production model of community knowledge, as outlined by Jason Corburn (2003) in the context of environmental planning. Unlike the deficit or complementary models of community knowledge, which contend, respectively, that “the public always has a deficit of knowledge or merely complements what experts already know,” the co-production model asserts that there can and should be a “fusing [of] the expertise of professional practitioners...with the contextual intelligence that only local residents possess” (p. 420, 430). Unlike traditional public participation mechanisms that only enable one-way flow of information, collaborative models of participation encourage a “co-generative learning process” based on “joint fact finding” and “joint problem solving” (Forester, 1999, p. 260; Innes and Booher, 2004, p. 426).

The discussion in the planning literature of alternative models of public participation reflects the “communicative turn in planning theory,” as noted by Patsy Healey (1996), in which the approach to spatial planning is based on “collaborative consensus-building” as opposed to “competitive interest bargaining” (Healey, 2003, p. 30). According to communicative theory, planning is an “interactive process” that plays out in the realm of governance, which Healey defines as an “attempt at the collective management of common concerns about co-existence in the shared spaces of urban regions” (2003, p. 104; 2006, p. xiv). The process-oriented focus of communicative theory, as espoused by Healey, is similarly echoed by John Forester, who argues that planners are “deliberative practitioners” whose work revolves around “the joint search for...how we shall live together” (1999, p. 26, 197). The goal of the deliberative practitioner is to “[make] participatory planning a pragmatic reality rather than an empty ideal” (p. 3).

One of the primary critiques of communicative planning theory is the excessive focus on process and the corresponding understatement of substance and outcome. For instance, Robert Beauregard (1984) notes that communicative planning theory is “devoid of any substantive

consideration of the actual *consequences* that planners produce through their work” (p. 258).

Susan Fainstein (2000) offers a similar commentary, contending that communicative planning is “a procedural ethic without substantive content” (p. 472). In direct response to this criticism, Patsy Healey (2003) asserts that “substance and process are co-constituted, not separate spheres” (p. 111).

One case study in the literature on communicative planning that effectively demonstrates the integration of process and substance is J.A. Throgmorton’s “On the Virtues of Skillful Meandering” (2000). The article is particularly noteworthy in the context of this thesis, as Throgmorton states that his objective is to “advance...understanding of planning as a communicative practice” through a discussion of his advocacy of new urbanism (p. 367). Throgmorton, a planning professor and local politician in Iowa, shares both procedural and substantive lessons he learned while serving his first term on the Iowa City Council from 1993 to 1995. The article clearly blends new urbanist and communicative planning theories, as Throgmorton combines a discussion of his goals to promote compact, mixed-use development, with recognition of “contestable meanings of key concepts,” such as residential density, among members of the public (p. 371). Indeed, Throgmorton invokes the challenge of overcoming NIMBYism when he discusses the struggle to convince the public that, “there is a qualitative difference between simply ‘packing more dwelling units together’ ” and promoting the new urbanist vision of pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods (p. 371).

The Throgmorton case study illuminates an ostensible conflict between the new urbanist and communicative theories regarding the appropriate role to be played by professional planners, which John Forester alludes to when he explains that:

[Planners] must often act as both negotiators seeking desirable ends and mediators managing the conflictual planning or design process itself...[The] interestedness of a negotiating role threatens the

independence and presumed neutrality of a mediating role. (1999, p. 61, 169)

Specifically, whereas the new urbanist planner, offering an unforgiving “critique of American suburbia,” is an “advocate who believes in a cause and eschews neutrality,” the role of the communicative planner is to “assist in forging a consensus among differing viewpoints” (Fainstein, 2000, p. 454, 462, 465). The role of the new urbanist planner conjures up thoughts of Paul Davidoff, the preeminent advocacy planner, who passionately states that, “Appropriate planning action cannot be prescribed from a position of value neutrality, for prescriptions are based on desired objectives” (1965, p. 331). On the other end of the spectrum are the communicative “mediator-facilitators,” who allegedly, at least in theory, “have no interests of their own, no commitments to anything but ‘the processes’!” (Forester, 1999, p. 193).

Reflecting on how theory plays out in practice, Thomas Campanella (2011) takes communicative planning to its logical extreme. In his assessment of the impacts of efforts “to empower ordinary citizens and the grassroots to shape and guide the planning process,”

Campanella proclaims:

This was an extraordinary act of altruism on our part, and I can think of no other profession that has done anything quite like it. Imagine economists at the Federal Reserve holding community meetings and polls to decide the direction of fiscal policy. Imagine public health officials giving equal weight to the nutritional wisdom of teenagers—they are stakeholders, after all! Granted, powering up the grassroots was necessary in the 1970s to stop expressway and renewal schemes that had truly run amok. But it was power that could not easily be switched off. Tools and processes introduced to ensure popular participation ended up reducing the planner’s role to that of umpire or schoolyard monitor. Instead of setting the terms of debate or charting a course of action, planners now seem wholly content to be facilitators—“mere *absorbers* of public opinion,” as [Harvard University Graduate School of Design Professor] Alex Krieger put it, “waiting for consensus to build.” (p. 146)

Through a sarcastic analogy to Federal Reserve economists and public health officials, Campanella sensationalizes a valid concern about the evolving role of planners in a process increasingly focused on public participation. As part of his broader discussion of the ongoing “identity crisis” plaguing the planning profession, which he claims has become a “jack-of-all-trades, master of none,” Campanella presents an ultimatum of sorts:

NIMBYism has been described as “the bitter fruit of a pluralistic democracy in which all views carry equal weight.” And that, sadly, includes the voice of the planner. In the face of an angry public, plannerly wisdom and expertise have no more clout than the ranting of the loudest activist; and this is a hazard to our collective future. For who, if not the planner, will advocate on behalf of society at large? (p. 147)

Campanella alludes to the challenge of promoting smart growth in the face of NIMBY opposition, asserting that, “If we put parochial local interests ahead of broader societal needs, it will be impossible to build...dense, walkable, public-transit-focused communities” (p. 147).¹¹ With this in mind, it is instructive to return to the Throgmorton case study, introduced previously.

Throgmorton eloquently describes how he balances the ideals of communicative and new urbanist theories in practice when he summarizes his perception of “good planning,” which necessitates:

...an open and inclusive process of argumentation in which specialized expertise plays a major but not dominant role. Instead of seeking to ram decisions through efficiently, treating subsequent deviations and hesitations as “political” interference, we should consider *meandering* (acting as a skilled-voice-in-the-flow) to be a reasonable and proper way of proceeding in a context where diverse people disagree about how to define and respond to problems. (2000, p. 375)

¹¹Despite the challenge in overcoming NIMBYism, this thesis argues that smart growth not only serves broader societal needs by preventing continued suburban sprawl, but also supports local parochial interests by potentially helping to reduce the rate of increase in property taxes. As is detailed in the Analysis and Discussion section below, planners can often establish community buy-in for smart growth in visioning initiatives by educating the local participants about the property tax benefits that can accrue to the municipality.

Throgmorton's discussion is illustrative of the complex amalgam of roles adopted by planning practitioners, and offers a contemporary answer to a question first posed by John Forester in 1987: "In the face of local land use conflicts, how can planners mediate between conflicting parties and at the same time negotiate as interested parties themselves?" (p. 303).¹² Yet, neither Throgmorton nor Forester venture into the terrain of collaborative planning models, in which the public is offered a more active role in setting the direction of future policy.

This issue of the role of planners in collaborative processes is raised by Eugene McCann (2001), who poses – but does not address – the question, how do planners react to "those in the process whose views about the future of a place are diametrically opposed to their own" (p. 210)? In the research conducted for this thesis, professional planners with experience in visioning initiatives were asked to reflect on the ways in which they balance the potentially conflicting roles of advocating for a particular future and facilitating a public process. It is important to note that, over the past few decades, there has been a fundamental "restructuring" of municipal land use planning, characterized by "an ongoing privatization of planning services and outsourcing of its functions to private consultants," including coordination and supervision of collaborative planning processes (McCann, 2001, p. 207). As such, an additional question unanswered by the literature is the extent to which there is a difference in the experiences of public sector planners and hired planning consultants in the context of collaborative planning initiatives.

¹² The article by John Forester serves as a source of inspiration for the methodology of this thesis. Forester explored the question he posed by interviewing public sector planners, inquiring as to how they perceived their role in traditional land use permitting processes, such as reviewing applications for subdivisions, site plan approvals, special permits, and zoning appeals. As is discussed in greater detail in the Research Design section below, the methodological approach employed in this thesis was to conduct semi-structured interviews with planning professionals who have experience in visioning initiatives on Long Island.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study explores the perceived roles of professional planners in collaborative processes that promote smart growth, using Long Island, New York as a laboratory for the investigation. The methodology for this thesis was to conduct semi-structured interviews with professional planners whose work experience includes at least one collaborative planning process on Long Island that supported smart growth principles. The interviews were conducted to investigate how planners balance the potentially conflicting roles of facilitation and advocacy in collaborative processes, and whether there is a difference between the experiences of public sector planners and hired planning consultants from the private and non-profit sectors. While the interviews were intentionally open-ended to encourage a free-flowing discussion, six broad questions were drafted to help structure the conversations (see Appendix A). Not all six questions were posed during each interview, and the direction of each interview was guided by the interests and experiences of the individual respondent.

The interview respondents who were originally targeted were selected as a sample of professional planners whose experience includes collaborative planning efforts on Long Island. During a number of interviews, respondents suggested additional planners to be interviewed for this thesis, many of which were indeed contacted and the resultant discussion incorporated into the research findings. Thus, this thesis also employed the snowball (or chain referral) sampling technique to build an evolving list of knowledgeable informants with whom to conduct an interview (Goodman, 1961; Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981). Although this technique may have added a self-selection bias to the interviews, the goal is not generalizability of findings but

rather documentation of a range of subjective viewpoints to help frame a narrative about the roles played by planners in collaborative processes. Some respondents who were interviewed as a result of the snowball technique do not have experience on Long Island, but spoke in generalities about collaborative planning, and their viewpoints are included to complement the perspectives of the originally-targeted interview respondents, where appropriate.

In the aggregate, there were 22 interview respondents who comprised a wide array of perspectives on the topic of collaborative planning for smart growth. The respondents included five public sector planners as well as eight private and nine non-profit sector consultants with various substantive and procedural specializations, such as land use, transportation, urban design, real estate and economic development, public outreach, and charrette management. The Analysis and Discussion section that follows represents a synthesis of findings from the 22 total interviews, all of which were conducted between January and March 2012 and typically lasted for 30 minutes each.

The interview respondents are not anonymous, and their names and the affiliations for which they were interviewed – present or former – are listed in Appendix B. Each interview respondent, while targeted because of his/her work with a specified planning agency/firm/organization, was asked to reflect upon his/her own personal experience as a professional planner, and was not asked to officially represent the particular agency/firm/organization at large. While the interview respondents are not anonymous, their responses are kept confidential. The back-up documentation of the interviews contains direct identifiers, such as the respondents' names and the date of the interviews, as well as indirect

identifiers, such as the names of the respondents' agency/firm/organization. Although there were both male and female interview respondents, only female pronouns are used for quotes and paraphrases to ensure the continued confidentiality of the responses.

In keeping with the technique employed by John Forester in his 1987 article about “the challenges [local planners] face as simultaneous negotiators and mediators in local land-use permitting processes” (p. 303), this thesis similarly presents planners' own accounts of their balancing of different roles in community visioning initiatives. Long Island serves as the broad laboratory for this investigation, but admittedly there is a different story that could be told for every local community. While “a discussion of a visioning project must recognize the sociospatial context in which it is deployed” (McCann, 2001, p. 210), the purpose of this thesis is not to dissect the content of a particular visioning initiative, but rather to explore the subjective experiences of professional planners through a discussion of their involvement in collaborative processes. During the open-ended interviews conducted for this thesis, several respondents referred to specific community visioning initiatives on Long Island to contextualize the discussion, but they also broadly synthesized their past experiences. Thus, not only is the analysis in this thesis purely qualitative, but also, as was the case for Forester, “the argument that follows seeks not generalizability but strong plausibility across a range of planning settings” (1987, p. 303).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION¹³

Professional Planners in the Visioning Process: The Public, Private, and Non-Profit Sectors

On Long Island, the geographic scope of community visioning initiatives has ranged from unincorporated hamlets, under the jurisdiction of a Town, to incorporated Villages, as well as one of the two Cities.¹⁴ With the exception of Shelter Island on the East End, all 13 Towns on Long Island have planning or development staff in some capacity, but most Villages do not employ full-time planners. The sponsoring municipalities of community visioning initiatives on Long Island – whether or not they have full-time planning staff – have retained a range of multi-disciplinary consultant teams to oversee the projects. In addition to land use and transportation planners, these teams often include real estate and economic development consultants, urban design professionals, and specialists in public engagement. According to a private sector interview respondent, one rationale for why a municipality would contract out the work for a visioning initiative is that “local staff doesn’t have the capability or the time to do it.”

In the opinion of a public sector interview respondent, there are two additional reasons why municipalities hire outside consultants. First of all, most gatherings between the public and the elected and/or appointed officials of a municipality tend to “devolve into gripe sessions”

¹³ In the section that follows, as well as the Recommended Further Research section below, all words, phrases, and sentences within quotation marks were spoken by interview respondents, unless otherwise cited. For purposes of confidentiality, quotes from the interviews are not attributed to specific respondents.

¹⁴ All municipalities on Long Island are located in either Nassau or Suffolk County. The two Counties often provide technical and/or financial support, within their respective boundaries, for community visioning initiatives, and Nassau County in fact has a formal Downtown Visioning Grants Program, where the goal is “to foster public participation and consensus building for local improvement projects that spur economic development” (Nassau County, 2011). In addition to partnering with municipalities that sponsor community visioning projects, both Nassau and Suffolk County served on the Executive Committee of the Long Island 2035 Visioning Initiative. The purpose of this regional project, completed in 2009, was to promote consensus among municipal officials and local stakeholder leaders about where and how Long Island can accommodate projected population and employment growth to the year 2035 (Long Island 2035 Study Team, 2009).

about matters such as local code enforcement that are unrelated to the purpose of a given meeting. Thus, in the case of a visioning workshop, if a consultant is leading the endeavor, the discourse is “more likely to stay focused” on the task at hand, namely to discuss goals for the future of the community. As a second explanation, the respondent stated the following:

Even though [municipal] personnel know the difference between a [public] hearing and a [visioning workshop], we are so conditioned to run hearings that we lapse into that mode of being very guarded and being very pedantic, and looking at every speaker as a potential litigant. It’s a natural habit we fall into...to watch everything we say because it may end up in an affidavit or a deposition...A [visioning workshop] has to be a kinder, friendlier atmosphere, one that encourages dialogue and candor.

A comparable explanation was offered by another respondent, this one from the private sector:

Often, the public sector agencies go into public meetings with hubris and arrogance, while, at other times, they are genuinely interested in hearing from the public, but the public comes in with...preconceived notions...It’s a lot easier as a consultant to go in and say, “I’m just here to create a public process by which a decision can be made in a way that is respectful...and hopefully is a little out-of-the-box-thinking.”

Yet another private sector respondent offered a similar, albeit more fatalistic, assessment of the challenges facing public sector planners:

It’s not that I don’t believe in public sector work, but I don’t think that the kind of initiatives that we are talking about should *ever* be undertaken by municipal workers...because I think that the level of possible negative pressure...working for a municipality – [imposed] by either an elected official or a community member – [is] extreme and direct, compared to this ever happening to a hired consultant. In other words, the level of [intellectual and professional] independence of hired consultants is potentially much higher than that of municipal workers...[who are sometimes also] too far in the forest to understand the trees, and sometimes they are too far into their own silos. There are all kinds of potential pathologies that exist with a municipal government.

The multitude of reasons why a municipality would hire a consultant to spearhead a visioning initiative certainly varies on a case-by-case basis. In practice, all visioning initiatives amount to partnerships between the officials and staff of the sponsoring municipality; the hired consultant(s); and the residents, civic leaders, and business and property owners that collectively comprise the local community.

In addition to hiring private sector firms, most municipalities that sponsor visioning initiatives also retain a local and/or regional 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization (NPO) as one of its consultants. In particular, the following three organizations have been involved time and again on community visioning initiatives on Long Island: Vision Long Island (VLI), Sustainable Long Island (SLI), and the Regional Plan Association (RPA).¹⁵ Interestingly, as reflected in the organizations' respective missions, VLI, SLI, and RPA each have a smart growth advocacy arm in addition to – and intermixed with – their work as consultants. VLI prides itself on “Leading Long Island’s Smart Growth Movement,” and defines itself as an organization that “educates, advocates, plans, designs, and provides technical assistance on Smart Growth projects.” In addition to its presence in Albany and Washington, DC to promote policy and regulatory changes, VLI has an overriding objective to “actively [involve] local stakeholders in planning” (Vision Long Island, n.d.). Thus, the dual importance of substance and process in planning – respectively, smart growth and local public involvement – are clearly evident in VLI’s mission. Similarly, SLI defines itself as a “catalyst and facilitator for sustainable development” to address the “aftermath of suburban sprawl,” and the organization promotes bottom-up community engagement to complement its top-down work with government officials. The self-identified

¹⁵ These three organizations, in conjunction with the University Transportation Research Center, also served as the Study Team for the aforementioned Long Island 2035 Visioning Initiative.

role of SLI is to “cultivate the conditions, identify resources and provide tools to advance sustainability on Long Island” (Sustainable Long Island, 2010).

Whereas VLI and SLI focus their work exclusively on Long Island, RPA operates in the 31-county tri-state region comprising New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. Part of the multifaceted mission of RPA’s Long Island program is to “advocate solutions to [issues of regional significance].” As noted previously in the Background section, RPA authored two *Long Island Index* reports – “Places to Grow” and “Getting it Done,” financed by the Rauch Foundation – that have helped to advance the discussion of smart growth on Long Island, and the organization boasts a breadth of “experience with transit-oriented development (TOD) planning throughout the New York metropolitan area” (Regional Plan Association, 2012).

There are those occasions in which municipalities offer consulting work to these NPOs based solely on their technical expertise, independent of – and perhaps in opposition to – their mission, which raises difficult ethical questions for the NPOs. One non-profit sector respondent stated that her organization has “gladly walked away” from projects in the past in which the local community was not open to smart growth.¹⁶ She continued:

The process itself is not enough; it’s about *what* you are planning... We have never [done] and will never do a visioning process to determine how to make the best mall or big-box store... We don’t seek out that type of planning work.

In a similar vein, another non-profit sector respondent recalled, “There were several communities in which we were invited, but we chose not to pursue working there because we felt like there was not a mission alignment.” She proudly stated that, while “it became more difficult when

¹⁶ In the aggregate, the interviews conducted for this thesis demonstrated that the explicit orientation to smart growth was more closely aligned with the non-profit as opposed to private sector consultants. Yet, in the words of one private sector respondent, “What distinguishes some of us from others [is that] we feel perfectly happy walking off a job if the [municipality] isn’t willing to do what we consider smart growth. We have certain thresholds that we are not willing to violate.” Another private sector respondent noted that she consistently feels “an obligation to raise... issues that [the] client may or may not want to hear... If you are just beholden to what the client wants, you are not going to have a good process, and you are not going to have a good plan.”

funding started drying up...I'm happy to report that we stayed true to our mission and carefully selected communities where we worked. We were fortunate to be able to do that.”

However, another non-profit sector respondent offered a noteworthy divergent opinion, namely that, “[in this economy, it’s really difficult to] pick and choose where you want to go for the work, and what kind of projects you want to work on.” When asked whether she struggles to serve as an objective facilitator of a public process that does not support smart growth, she confidently asserted:

I don't have a problem with it. Your role is not to advocate...If you're working in a community that only wants to see sprawl, then find your passion somewhere else...join a [local civic group]. Go do something that is going to feed your ego and feed your passion in another way.

Nevertheless, in the majority of cases, “[NPOs] are only hired if they are supportive of the [local chief elected official’s] agenda.” Indeed, as a non-profit sector respondent noted, “When [my organization] is asked to help with planning, there is a point of view already advanced...They want place-making...[which is] within our rubric.”

Thus, the predisposition towards smart growth in community visioning initiatives on Long Island is a function of both the demand on the part of the sponsoring municipality and the supply on the part of the hired consultant(s). In the words of one non-profit sector interview respondent, these visioning initiatives on Long Island tend to have smart growth goals “built into the process,” which hits at the crux of the question of whether planners struggle to strike a balance between the roles of advocacy and facilitation. An important dimension to this question – independent of the distinctions between public, private, and non-profit sector work – concerns the underlying ethics of the planning profession.

Serving the Public Interest: The Ethical Aspiration of the Planning Profession

During the interviews conducted for this thesis, several respondents, spanning all three sectors, spoke of the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct.¹⁷ As discussed at a 2006 address by W. Paul Farmer, Executive Director of the American Planning Association (APA) and the AICP, an ethics code “embodies values, and those values define both the profession and the behavior of those who embrace it” (p. 1). In addition to its procedural provisions, the AICP Code is divided into “aspirational principles” and “rules of conduct,” and while certified planners are not “held accountable” to the principles, they importantly “constitute the ideals to which we are committed” (American Planning Association, 2009). Similarly, although planners who are not certified are not subject to the AICP Code, Farmer has encouraged all planners “to choose to live by the code” (2006, p. 3). The section of the AICP Code on aspirational principles begins, “Our primary obligation is to serve the public interest,” and goes on to outline eight principles in support of this broad ideal. As elaborated in the APA’s “Ethical Principles in Planning” (1992), “While the public interest is a question of continuous debate, both in its general principles and in its case-by-case applications, it requires a conscientiously held view of the policies and actions that best serve the *entire community*” (emphasis added).

In the history of planning theory and practice, there has been – and continues to be – fruitful debate about not only the challenge of defining the public interest, but also whether there is in fact a single public interest that can adequately be served. In 1965, Paul Davidoff wrote about the “unavoidable bifurcation of the public interest” between the “welfare of all and the

¹⁷ As noted in Appendix B, 10 of the 22 interview respondents are certified as AICP, including one respondent who is a Fellow of the AICP.

welfare of minorities” (p. 332). As a variation of Davidoff’s paradigm of advocacy planning, Norman Krumholz, best known for his work as Cleveland’s Planning Director from 1969 to 1979, similarly rejected the notion of a “unitary public interest” (1982, p. 166). Rather than adopt “the planner’s traditional posture as an apolitical technician,” Krumholz, and followers of his model of equity planning, “devoted [themselves] to ‘providing more choices to those who have few, if any choices’ ” (p. 166). The shared motive of Davidoff and Krumholz was to promote social justice, which is now reflected in one of the aspirational principles of the AICP Code, specifically that certified planners have “a special responsibility to plan for the needs of the disadvantaged and to promote racial and economic integration” (American Planning Association, 2009).

Does smart growth serve the public interest? In her advocacy of the so-called “just city,” planning theorist Susan Fainstein, who “takes an explicitly normative position concerning the distribution of social benefits” (2000, p. 467), demonstrates the complexity of this question through her lack of resolve on the matter. On the one hand, Fainstein offers a harsh critique of the “spatial determinism” of the theory of new urbanism, effectively dismissing the possibility of a direct “effect of physical design on social outcomes,” which she appropriately notes is “an old debate resurfaced” (2000, p. 451, 463). On the other hand, although Fainstein is critical of the notion that smart growth alone can solve structural problems of social injustice, she does not dismiss its potential benefits for society:

The new urbanist approach of intermixing a variety of building types and levels of affordability, along with its support for transit-oriented development, is *not the panacea* that some of its supporters assume. If, however, it becomes the template for in-fill development...it can provide a physical framework for a city that offers a *higher quality of life* to residents and visitors. (emphasis added) (2005, p. 16)

Similar to the issue of property taxes, the challenge of addressing social inequities is admittedly complex and will certainly require a multi-pronged strategy beyond changes to the built environment. Yet, the relevant point is that smart growth can advance the cause of social equity; for instance, the construction of apartments in suburban downtowns can help to diversify the housing stock beyond single-family homes, thereby offering more affordable residential options. Therefore, while smart growth “can go only so far in the generation of a just city” (Fainstein, 2005, p. 16), it can nevertheless broadly serve the public interest. As one non-profit sector interview respondent stated, “We are trying to advocate for the greater good because the way Long Island has developed is, for lack of a better word, unsustainable.” As a private sector respondent elaborated, “Sustainability is not about fixing a building here and there according to [Leadership in Energy and Environment Design (LEED)] standards, but rather [it is] about building diverse, compact, durable, mixed-use, walkable places.”

Smart Growth on Long Island: A Win-Win for the Public Interest

Asked to reflect upon their roles as professional planners in visioning initiatives, many interview respondents prefaced their process-oriented remarks with important substantive viewpoints about development trends and the prospect of smart growth on Long Island. This is in keeping with what John Forester has acknowledged, namely that, “Because planners always work on problems but in processes, their arguments involve both substantive and procedural matters” (1996, p. 252). Indeed, the interviews conducted for this thesis clearly demonstrate that the planning process does not occur in a vacuum, independent of context and substance. Moreover, while the interview respondents spanned a diverse array of opinions as well as a wide

spectrum of professional planning experience on Long Island, some common themes were threaded through many of the discussions.¹⁸

Several interview respondents provided topical context by referring to the *Long Island Index* publications financed by the Rauch Foundation. One respondent offered testimonial for the recent *Long Island Index* 2012 Launch on January 18, 2012, which featured the release of the annual socioeconomic profile report for Long Island and the screening of a video, aptly titled, “Long Island at a Tipping Point” (Duarte Design, 2012). The video poses the rhetorical question, “How are we going to convince businesses to move here, or even stay here, if we can’t convince our own kids?” The interview respondent noted that local business owners are “starting to understand and support downtown redevelopment,” as it is becoming increasingly difficult for them to attract and retain employees. The high cost of living and the lack of diverse housing options are among the reasons why more than two-thirds of Long Island residents in the 18-to-34 year-old cohort reported that they are either somewhat or very likely to leave Long Island within the next five years (Stony Brook University Center for Survey Research, 2012, p. 2-3). In order to address this so-called “brain drain,” the *Long Island Index* video urges Long Island to “build differently,” asserting that, “constructing apartment buildings and condos will bring life back to our downtowns. It’s a tried and true strategy that has already worked for our neighbors.” The video concludes by recognizing that, although entrenched fear of change on Long Island is “understandable, given how much we have all invested in our homes, our schools, our communities...we can’t waste this chance. Let’s build a better future. Honestly, it’s the only option” (Duarte Design, 2012).

¹⁸ Nevertheless, in the aggregate, public sector respondents were more reserved and less explicit in their support of smart growth, perhaps as a reflection of their primary role as regulators.

The reality, however, is that “historical conservatism to change,” in the words of one interview respondent, runs rampant on Long Island. Apprehension about new development, and particularly apartments, ranges from potentially “warranted concerns” regarding such factors as traffic impacts,¹⁹ to deep-rooted NIMBYism. Whereas the former can be addressed through mitigation measures identified in the environmental review process, the latter is a much more formidable obstacle to overcome because of an ingrained “suburban mentality.” It is not uncommon for local residents to assert, in response to planners’ advocacy for smart growth in their community: “I hear what you’re saying, but we don’t want it, even though it makes perfect planning sense.” As an extension of this sentiment, planners on Long Island are often faced with the following challenge: “Do we need downtown apartments? Most people would say, absolutely, and the next community should try it, but my community can’t take it.” To be fair, in the words of one interview respondent, it is important to recognize that:

There is demented NIMBYism and there is misguided NIMBYism, and [the latter] is a very necessary reaction to past experience. Urban Renewal displaced [thousands of] people over 20 years in the 50s and 60s. People left that world to move out to Long Island and be on a green patch, and they found it, do you blame them for being [skeptical] of you? You sound and dress and are educated in the same way as Robert Moses and his crew. We live in a historical world, and there is no way to avoid those issues. Those people advocated like mad...[they] more than advocated. They went around on bulldozers and cut through neighborhoods.

The question of whether opposition to development is demented, misguided, or perhaps appropriate in certain contexts warrants consideration. As another interview respondent noted,

¹⁹ In addition to traffic, another concern generally expressed by the public regarding multi-family residential development is the possibility of school overcrowding. Yet, as will be discussed, apartments on Long Island have been shown to generate fewer school-age children on average than do single-family homes, and thus this concern can be alleviated if planners educate the public about the likely impacts of development.

“We need to beware of ‘fads’ in the planning profession.” Just as the fad of urban renewal had “unintended consequences,” the current fad of smart growth and transit-oriented development “has limits...[and] it is not appropriate everywhere.” Indeed, the respondent went on, “We are not so much *changing* the paradigm [of development on Long Island], but rather *improving* and filling in the paradigm,” by “building up” existing Villages and hamlets through targeted infill near LIRR stations. Rather than “applying carte blanche” the concept of smart growth, planners must consider the context of their work. In other words, it is irresponsible to engage in “pure advocacy, irrespective of context.” The goal should be to promote smart growth by reinforcing existing centers, while “[maintaining] the things that made people want to move to [Long Island] in the first place.”

Several interview respondents noted that there this is a generational dimension to smart growth opposition on Long Island, and while it is clearly an oversimplification to make blanket statements about entire age groups, the general trends – as reported by these knowledgeable informants – are noteworthy. According to one respondent, Long Island residents over the age of 70 “look back fondly” on their memories of leaving New York City to move to “a more rural environment” on Long Island. Another respondent noted:

Most of what drives the sentiment [on Long Island] is the generation that feels they were driven from Brooklyn and Queens in the 50s and 60s because of “the projects” and “those people”...and that image is indelible.

The result is often widespread “backlash to any apartments” among this age group, fearful that multi-family housing “represents everything that caused [them] to leave [their] old neighborhood.” For these reasons, many older residents reject the “perceived threat” of the

smart growth movement,²⁰ and while they do not comprise “a representative cross-section of the population,” they nevertheless serve as the “vocal minority” who traditionally vote in local elections and attend local Village/Town Board meetings.

Whether or not it is possible to overcome the older generation’s “consistent civic dogma,” several interview respondents expressed hope in convincing the majority of Long Island’s population of the benefits of smart growth. From the experiences of many respondents, Long Island residents in Generation X or younger (i.e., born in the mid-1960s or later) tend to be most open to the ideas of smart growth, as the possibility of downtown apartments offers a more affordable alternative to single-family homes and may also be more closely aligned with the lifestyle preferences of this demographic. Meanwhile, the aging Baby Boomer generation on Long Island seems torn. On the one hand, they are increasingly becoming “empty nesters” as their children grow up and move, so they presumably will no longer need single-family homes. On the other hand, these same people recall growing up or moving to a suburban environment on Long Island dominated by single-family homes, and they “want to keep it that way.” Yet, this duality is consistent with the goal of smart growth advocates, namely to promote only *targeted* increases in density in existing downtowns, preserving the single-family character of surrounding neighborhoods. In this way, smart growth can be a “win-win situation.”

A corollary to the goal of targeting increased density without radically transforming the suburban character of Long Island is the recommendation, offered by several respondents, that smart growth advocates should focus limited financial and technical resources on those

²⁰ The addition of apartments represents just one component of downtown redevelopment based on the principles of smart growth, but this is typically the most contentious issue. As noted by one interview respondent, “Everyone wants retail to work on Main Street – both for tax purposes and for a sense of community pride – but there is often pushback about the residential component of downtown development,” something which is not only desirable for certain segments of the population looking for housing diversity, but also is often necessary from the standpoint of financial feasibility. Indeed, in many cases, “it would be difficult to attract new retail [to the downtown] without new residential development.”

municipalities that are amenable to change, comprising what one respondent called the “coalition of the willing.” As discussed in the Background section, capacity for redevelopment is only one ingredient in the recipe for smart growth. There is also a fundamental need for local political will, which is a necessary complement – if not a precursor – to establishing public buy-in. At the level of local elected leadership, there remains entrenched opposition, in numerous municipalities across Long Island, to the idea of increased downtown density.

In discussing the impact of local politics on efforts to advance smart growth on Long Island, several interview respondents alluded to a recent (January 4, 2012) *Newsday* article that contrasted the viewpoints of Town of Oyster Bay Supervisor John Venditto and former²¹ Village of Farmingdale Mayor George “Butch” Starkie on the topic of downtown redevelopment. In the words of Supervisor Venditto, “What the mayor characterizes as revitalization...is not revitalization at all. It is overdevelopment. It is urbanization” (Ngo, 2012). Meanwhile, in a letter written by Mayor Starkie to his Village residents, and quoted in the *Newsday* article, he wrote, “As other downtowns die a slow death due to high taxes and rents, Farmingdale will be a model and a roadmap to change...Don't let nay sayers like my good friend John Venditto...claim ‘urbanization’ to scare you.” As one interview respondent advised, the best path forward for smart growth advocates is to acknowledge the existence of this “substantive wedge between camps,” and to focus their efforts on working with those municipalities, like the Village of Farmingdale, that are ready to embrace the promise of smart growth. She continued: “The [municipalities] that want to be left alone, leave them alone. There is no need to create a fight.”

²¹ Although Starkie, a one-term Mayor, decided not to run for re-election, current Mayor Ralph Ekstrand, inaugurated in April 2012, ran his campaign on the Farmingdale 2035 ticket as an indication of his dedication to revitalizing the local downtown in the spirit of smart growth (Fiscina, 2012).

Of note, while Mayor Starkie and Supervisor Venditto maintain polar opposite outlooks on smart growth, Farmingdale is an incorporated Village *within* the Town of Oyster Bay, which is a reflection of the complex geopolitical makeup of Long Island. As one interview respondent underscored, the Towns, Villages, and Cities on Long Island are “not only physically different and demographically different, but they also have the legal right to vary as they wish,” a reference to the tradition of local home rule. This respondent – from the private sector – opined that, although she considered home rule to be “inane,” making it at times “painful and difficult and complicated” to work within different regulatory frameworks in each municipality, it is also “extremely rewarding in the long run because, once you change the rules based on a local vision...you can [then] work to a specific end.” This begs the questions, how do planners work with communities to craft a local vision for smart growth, and how do they balance their proclivity to advocate with their mandate to facilitate a collaborative planning process?

Smart Growth Advocacy through Education:
Facilitating an Informed Discussion to Reach an Informed Decision

The notion of collaborative planning presents an interesting dilemma for professional planners. In the previously discussed AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, the juxtaposition of two of the aspirational principles – both of which pertain to planners’ primary obligation to serve the public interest – speaks to the need for planners to delicately balance the roles of advocacy and facilitation throughout the planning process. While planners “shall have special concern for the long-range consequences of present actions,” they also “shall give people the opportunity to have a meaningful impact on the development of plans and programs that may

affect them” (American Planning Association, 2009).²² In the interviews conducted for this thesis, one public sector respondent effectively synthesized this balancing act by planners in visioning initiatives:

You can't go in as a planner and say, I know what's best for the community. That's really not appropriate. I think you can advocate for what you *think* is a good move or the right direction for the community, but if they feel really strongly that this is not going to happen, this is not going to work for us, this is not who we are, we're not comfortable with this, [then] I think you have to respect that and incorporate that into your final recommendations...The real art and challenge in a community visioning session is, if you can, if you really believe as a planner that you are on the right side...you are able to *convince* them that they should look at it in a new way...This is a really rewarding experience and a wonderful part of the process.

A private sector interview respondent illuminated this point by elaborating upon the most common issue of contention regarding smart growth on Long Island, namely multi-family residential development. When working with communities in visioning initiatives, this respondent rationalizes the addition of apartments around LIRR stations by way of reference to the benefits that can accrue to the municipality, as follows:

We don't want to threaten your lifestyle. [We want to promote] infill to make your lifestyle even better...We're never going to reduce taxes, but we can slow the growth of taxes through smart growth, in the sense of *fiscally* smart growth.

One of the pervasive anecdotal concerns among communities on Long Island is that the addition of multi-family housing will be a net tax negative for their municipality and will undoubtedly result in school overcrowding. Yet, a 2009 study of 299 apartment complexes on Long Island

²² Regarding the procedural ethic of a broadly inclusive public process, Innes and Booher (2004) recognize that, “Collaborative participation is an ideal which will never be fully attained” (p. 429). Yet, they clamor for this alternative to the conventional methods of public participation because it adds “legitimacy” to the planning process by emphasizing upfront community buy-in (p. 430). Furthermore, despite criticisms that collaborative planning is “idealistic and utopian,” there is a cogent argument that this paradigm is “ethically proper” within the planning profession (Healey, 2003, p. 115).

demonstrated that (1) approximately two-thirds of the developments were tax positive on local school districts, and (2) on average, multi-family housing generates fewer school-age children than single-family housing, a reflection of the young professional and empty nester market demographic (Kamer, 2009, p. 4, 7).²³ This information can be used in visioning initiatives to help dispel the myths that apartment developments are necessarily a burden on a municipality. As a non-profit sector interview respondent mentioned, “Sometimes people don’t know that they are fighting something good... We need to *prove* that smart growth is the right direction forward because sprawl was so effective at blocking our minds.” Through education, it is possible to demonstrate that smart growth “is really in everyone’s best interest.”

Thus, there is a critical, top-down educational component of all visioning initiatives, and objective smart growth advocacy is often embedded in this education. In the words of a private sector interview respondent, it would be a “discredit to both the truth of what is happening and the value of planners” to deny that these trained professionals educate the community during the process of conducting a visioning initiative. One public sector interview respondent asserted that she does not view advocating through education as an ethical issue:

I feel very comfortable in advocating for something because I am not advocating for it for personal gain. I’m advocating for something because I believe it is a good solution to a development problem or a community issue. I don’t believe it is an ethical dilemma...[You have] the best interest of the community at heart, based on what your professional experience and your education has taught you.

²³ Of the 299 apartment complexes included in the study, 140 were located in Nassau County and 159 in Suffolk County. For those in Nassau County, there were 0.16 school-age children per dwelling unit, in contrast to the comparable ratio of 0.53 for all occupied housing units in the County in 2008. For Suffolk County, the ratios were 0.18 and 0.58, respectively (Kamer, 2009, p. 10-11).

This perspective, which transcended the different sectors of the planning profession represented in the interviews, underscores the need for planners to establish trust and credibility within the community. Just as one non-profit sector interview respondent explained that, “smart growth is not *my* vision for Long Island,” a private sector respondent echoed this sentiment, noting that “residents, not at first, but after a few meetings, realize that you only care about them.” Through this crucial education role, planners “provide guidance and context” for the planning process, in hopes that the local residents will “make an informed decision” about the future of their own community.²⁴ Indeed, in the spirit of visioning, the local participants are given a prominent role in charting a course for future development. As one private sector respondent concluded, “you as the planner do not have the right to make the decision for the public.”

Thus, planners must function as both educators and facilitators. Stressing the importance of inter-personal communication skills, one respondent commented that the best planners see themselves as “change agents.” While planners certainly play an important educating role, there is also an inherent danger in “bringing our view from on high, so to speak.” Although planners indubitably have their own pre-formed opinions, it is nevertheless crucial to “trust the process,” at times even allowing the local participants to go through “chaos and turmoil” if it promotes fruitful and informed discussion. As one public sector interview respondent stated, “You don’t always know what’s best, but you’re *doing* your best,” which underscores the importance of merging planners’ technical expertise with the intangible local knowledge of the community

²⁴ As a reflection of the importance of trust, several interview respondents noted that one crucial role for planners in a visioning initiative is to “manage expectations” regarding what is politically and financially feasible, as well as the likely timeline for implementation. One private sector respondent employs the strategic planning technique of SWOT analysis when collaborating with the public, in which she presents the likely strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with different options. Accordingly, planners must use their technical expertise to guide an informed discussion that acknowledges tradeoffs of different decisions.

participants. Accordingly, the “key values” of all visioning initiatives are “shared learning and collaboration.”

The interviews conducted for this thesis demonstrate that planners can ethically advocate for smart growth by educating local residents about the benefits of compact development. Following upfront education, the planners can more effectively facilitate an informed decision-making process among the local participants about the context-specific future of their community. One common theme that emerged in many of the interviews was that planners often need to moderate their expectations for a given community based on input from the local participants in a visioning initiative. Recommendations that emerge from visioning initiatives on such issues as building height and residential density are frequently “tamer” than planners would like to promote, but only the local participants can assess what is truly “palatable” for their community. Thus, the visioning process amounts to a joint venture between the planners and the local participants to advance compact development that is appropriately scaled and sensitive to the existing built fabric of the community. As one private sector interview respondent commented, “The big challenge is sometimes recognizing that a small step [forward] is still a step in the right direction.” Long Island is made up of downtowns of “all sizes, scales, and mixes,” and there is not one “smart growth doctrine” that can be applied independent of context. Indeed, smart growth is not “monolithic,” and while there are “core elements to creating a sense of place...it’s more of an art than a science.” In this way, planners effectively balance their roles as advocates and facilitators in collaborative processes by engaging in shared learning with the local participants.

RECOMMENDED FURTHER RESEARCH

This thesis, while using Long Island as a laboratory for the investigation about planners' roles in collaborative planning processes, did not delve into specific case studies. As facilitators, planners must serve as “vessels for consensus-building,” and it would be worthwhile to explore specific visioning case studies to assess whether – and, if so, how – consensus emerged during the planning process. As noted by a private sector interview respondent:

It is very difficult for us, as professionals, to forcefully try to pursue...consensus. We can help, but it typically comes when people locally understand the benefits...and start advocating *themselves*, with their colleagues.

In order to promote community ownership of the process, many visioning initiatives include design charrettes to “iron out the details” of downtown redevelopment.²⁵ One private sector interview respondent explained that consensus is achievable in a collaborative process explicitly because, during a charrette, “the advocacy gets transferred from the [planners and the] design team to the community participants that best understand and have internalized [the] project in their minds.” Most visioning initiatives involve some form of organized community leadership from the outset, in the form of steering committees and/or task forces, but the design phase in many cases enables the “natural leadership to evolve.” Indeed, a charrette – as a forum for designing context-specific smart growth – can create the conditions around which the

²⁵ The value of incorporating a design charrette into a collaborative planning process derives in large part from the notion of “drawing as problem-solving.” Concepts presented in the abstract, such as floor area ratio (FAR) and residential density, can stir up fear that potential development will be out-of-context with the surrounding built environment. Yet, “ostensible conflicts...can [often] be reconciled through good design.” Furthermore, the key to a successful charrette is incorporating a series of “short feedback loops” between the design team and the public participants. Emphasizing the importance of trust, one interview respondent used the following analogy to describe the respective roles played by the public and the design team in a charrette: “If you arrive in London and you take a taxi, you know where you want to go, but you don’t know how to get there. You tell the taxi driver where you want to go, and you trust that the driver will know the best way to get you there...[In a charrette, the community should be able to] trust the design team like the passenger trusts the taxi driver.” Nevertheless, there is an interesting debate within the urban design profession about the appropriate role of the public in the actual design process. Some designers are adamant: “I will not give you the pencil. I will not be secretary to the mob.” Other designers see “sharing the pencil” not as “wasteful and painful,” but rather as a valuable strategy for soliciting public input.

community participants are able to broadly coalesce around a vision for change. In this way, the local participants become their own advocate for smart growth. Subsequent research should conduct a more detailed and context-specific exploration into the role of design in promoting community consensus, in order to understand how smart growth advocacy can be transferred from planners and designers to local participants. Furthermore, while the interview respondents for this thesis comprised planners and designers who oversee visioning initiatives, it would be worthwhile to also interview local elected officials from the sponsoring municipalities, as well as the local residents, civic leaders, and business and property owners who are designated as the “actual decision-makers” in the collaborative processes.

One of the fundamental rationales for this thesis is the increasing influence of communicative planning theory in guiding planning practice, stressing the importance of public participation in the planning process. The goal of the collaborative planning model, based on communicative planning theory, is to promote fundamental democratic values, such as representativeness, open participation, transparency, accountability, and consensus-building (Agger and Löfgren, 2008). Accordingly, as one private sector interview respondent noted, the primary objective in overseeing a visioning initiative is to ensure that “all viewpoints are brought in early and often.” Yet, as a public sector respondent urged, “You always need to take into consideration – it’s not all of the residents who are involved in the planning process... There are a lot of unrepresented people that you are going to be [affecting].” For this reason, it is also important to qualify one’s understanding of community consensus by acknowledging that, “it is of course a function of who is involved in the process.”²⁶ Furthermore, in reflecting on the

²⁶ Another interview respondent pointed out that, “Consensus is a very interesting word because it doesn’t necessarily mean that 100 percent of the people have agreed. It’s the majority, basically, that you have to work on... When in the context of a planning process, it almost becomes a vote-counting exercise, like any democratic process.” Thus, in the words of another respondent, it is oversimplification to “[present] public opinion as unified.”

evolution of public participation from the reactive public hearing to the upfront and ongoing collaborative process, Eugene McCann (2001) notes that even visioning initiatives are not immune to “mere tokenism,” characterized by the “rhetoric of inclusion” in the face of continued top-down decision-making (p. 215).

Therefore, subsequent research should select and evaluate a number of visioning case studies, using a range of different metrics to assess the effectiveness of different collaborative planning processes. Of note, effectiveness should be interpreted through a lens of both process and outcome. To what extent do specific visioning initiatives achieve the procedural ethic of inclusive public participation? To what extent are the policy directives that emerge from specific visioning initiatives consistent with smart growth principles, and to what extent do these principles achieve the triple bottom line of sustainability? As noted by Rowe and Frewer (2004):

Evaluation is important for financial reasons (e.g., to ensure the proper use of public or institutional money), practical reasons (e.g., to learn from past mistakes to allow exercises to be run better in the future), ethical/moral reasons (e.g., to establish fair representation and ensure that those involved are not deceived as to the impact of their contribution), and research/theoretical reasons (e.g., to increase our understanding of human behavior). (p. 516)

Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that the vision that emerges from a collaborative planning process is just that, a vision. As one non-profit interview respondent noted, “The easy part is coming to the table and expressing ideas; the hard part is implementation.”²⁷ Subsequent research should explore the roles played by planners in assisting

²⁷ Another interview respondent differentiated between her experience working in affluent and economically-distressed communities on Long Island in the context of both visioning and implementation. In economically-distressed communities, although it may be difficult to build a trusting relationship with local residents, it is often easier to establish buy-in for smart growth because of the prospect of economic vitality and job creation. In affluent communities, the visioning process is potentially more challenging because “the baseline for [residents] is: life is pretty good.” Meanwhile, implementation of a vision in economically-distressed communities is often more complicated because “the market conditions are not right for private capital,” whereas it is often less challenging to attract private investment in affluent communities. These potential distinctions also warrant further scrutiny.

with implementation, which include establishing the support of the local elected officials, addressing community concerns, and securing private and/or public financing for development that is consistent with the vision plan. Following a local visioning process, planners must serve as “concept translators” or “interpreters,” converting broad ideas expressed by the public into specific text for an action plan and/or zoning ordinance. Having previously served as facilitators of the public process, the planners must now mediate with the local elected officials, who have the final say on the plan and/or code language that will guide implementation of the community vision. As noted by one public sector respondent, public officials tend to view redevelopment through a “prism of limitations,” whereas the lens of the community is often a “prism of possibilities.” As a result, planners can get “caught between” the expectations of the public officials and the goals, objectives, and strategies that emerged during the visioning process, and this balancing act is worthy of further scrutiny.

Furthermore, planners play an important role in working with the local community to achieve the necessary mental leap from “supporting [smart growth] concepts in the abstract to also supporting them...pinned down on a map.” Indeed, “fear of the unknown” tends to become more rampant as the discussion evolves from abstractions to proposed developments on specific lots. In order to overcome likely pushback, planners must have “a long-term commitment to build and sustain trust” with the local community. In contrast with the notion of “stop-and-go planning” in which the focus is to “put out the brush fire,” implementation of a long-range vision necessitates continued interaction with the public and an approach to planning that extends beyond a quick-fix mentality.

All three sectors of the planning profession play a role in promoting community buy-in

for specific smart growth developments that support the goals of a vision plan. Non-profit sector planners pride themselves on encouraging an ongoing and “lengthy engagement process” with the public. Furthermore, one private sector planner implored people to “look at consultants a little bit kinder,” in an effort to dispel the beliefs that private consultants are solely interested in the profit motive and do not care about the communities in which they work. Public sector planners arguably play the most central role, as noted by one public sector interview respondent:

A consultant comes in, does basically what you ask them to do, and leaves. As a public sector planner, you are really on the front line...because people come to your meetings, they meet with you in your office, they come to the counter...People call it, “in the trenches,” because you are really dealing directly with the people you represent. You don’t have the luxury of making a nice plan and leaving. You are the implementer.

This sentiment was also echoed by a private sector respondent, who urged fellow consultants to:

...constantly remind [themselves]...to go in with the humility of knowing that you do not live in the [community], you are not running for office, you are not appointed by the [chief elected official], you are not ultimately accountable or responsible, nor do you bear the consequences of these decisions.

Public sector planners have the challenge of serving first and foremost as “regulators,” and thus they cannot “unilaterally advocate” for projects. In order to be “above reproach,” public sector planners must give themselves “the protection of a scientist” to avoid arbitrarily advocating for projects. The question of how public sector planners approach this challenge is reminiscent of that which John Forester posed in his 1987 article, “Planning in the Face of Conflict: Negotiation and Mediation Strategies in Local Land Use Regulation.” In this case, however, public sector planners are confronted with development proposals that are intended to conform to a vision plan that emerged out of a collaborative planning process, so it would be worthwhile to explore the potential differences between planners’ experiences under these

circumstances as opposed to more conventional, developer-driven scenarios. Similarly, subsequent research should also investigate the role of coordination between municipal planners and public sector regional planners, as well as private and non-profit sector planning consultants, in advancing the implementation of a local vision.

Finally, a crucial dimension of implementation of a vision plan is the need for public and/or private financing for development. One private sector interview respondent categorized traditional vision planning as “a form of pandering” because it can be far-removed from reality.²⁸ For this reason, many municipalities, when sponsoring a visioning initiative, will hire real estate and economic development consulting firms to serve as sub-consultants to physical planners on an interdisciplinary team. These sub-consultants often conduct market analyses to understand demand potential for different uses, as well as financial modeling to assess whether the evolving vision plan is feasible from a private development standpoint. As noted by a private sector interview respondent, “During the planning stage, I think [these sub-consultants] certainly help to advance the cause,” but it is in the implementation stage where they “add the most value.” In order to establish a holistic understanding of the implementation process, subsequent research should delve into the roles played by planners in facilitating and mediating discussions between developers and public officials on such complex issues as cost-sharing for infrastructure.²⁹

²⁸ In an overview of the role of visioning in contemporary planning practice, Eugene McCann (2001) asserts that, “Critics of visioning...note that its focus on goals can be one of its greatest downfalls: ‘in the absence of strategies for achieving goals and the authority to implement them, visions risk devolving into inconsequential and expensive wish lists for the future’ ” (p. 210, quoting Myers and Kitsuse).

²⁹ Furthermore, it would also be instructive to study examples of zoning overlay districts that provide a major boon for developers by allowing them “to bypass the usual red-tape-burdened permitting process” (Regional Plan Association, 2010, p. 16). For instance, in the case of the Village of Mineola, the overlay district streamlines the permitting process for developments that conform to the goals of the Master Plan for the downtown area, which emerged from a visioning initiative. Specifically, the overlay district in Mineola enables developers to (1) submit their proposals directly to the Board of Trustees, and (2) violate the zoning ordinance – for instance, regarding height maximums – in exchange for the provision of negotiated municipal amenities.

CONCLUSION

In collaborative planning processes that promote compact development, do professional planners facilitate public engagement, or do they advocate for smart growth? The planning profession is defined by a dialectical relationship between process and outcome, and this thesis has demonstrated how a fundamental tension between communicative and new urbanist planning theories is reconciled in professional planning practice. Although these two planning theories seemingly offer competing views of the appropriate role for professional planners, in practice, facilitation and advocacy are not mutually exclusive. Using Long Island, New York as a laboratory, this thesis has explored how planners effectively balance the roles of facilitation and advocacy in collaborative processes by engaging in shared learning with the local participants. Planners can ethically advocate for smart growth by educating local participants about the benefits of compact development, which, in turn, can facilitate an informed decision-making process among the local participants about the context-specific future of their community. The interviews conducted for this thesis lend credence to the viewpoint that planners do not forsake their expertise or their own opinions in visioning initiatives, but rather collaborate with the local participants to jointly plan for development that is appropriately scaled and sensitive to the existing character of the community. In essence, this thesis broadly contributes to the planning profession by theorizing an increasingly common practice for planners, namely the goal to advance both the procedural ethic of public participation and the substantive outcome of smart growth.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. In your professional experience on Long Island, how do you perceive your role(s) as a planner in a collaborative planning process? For instance, do you see yourself as a facilitator, an advocate, an educator, etc.?
2. Do you perceive there to be a conflict between the roles of facilitation and advocacy for professional planners in a collaborative planning process?
3. Do you think that your answers to questions #1 and #2 are influenced by your affiliation in the _____ sector (*public, private, non-profit*)?
4. How do you reconcile any differences between your own preferences and the preferences of the community during your experience working with collaborative planning processes?
5. Do you think it is possible to be objective as a facilitator in a collaborative planning process?
6. What (if any) ethical considerations influence your approach to planning in a collaborative process?

APPENDIX B

ALPHABETICAL LIST OF INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS

Disclaimer: Each interview respondent, while targeted because of his/her present or former work with a specified planning agency/firm/organization, was asked to reflect upon his/her own personal experience as a professional planner, and was not asked to officially represent the particular agency/firm/organization at large.

- Alexander, Eric – Executive Director, Vision Long Island
- ¹Aloisio, Anthony, AICP – Director of Planning & Development, Town of Huntington
- Bhaumik, Shuprotim – Partner, HR&A Advisors
- *Bourne, Patricia, AICP – Executive Commissioner, Nassau County Planning Commission
- Burden, Dan – Executive Director, Walkable and Livable Communities Institute
- Fish, Frank, FAICP – Principal, Buckhurst Fish & Jacquemart, Inc.
- Fitzpatrick, Maura – Director of New York Office, Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates, Inc.
- Ford Wagner, Amy, AICP – Senior Planner, Parsons Brinckerhoff
- Freudenberg, Robert – New Jersey Director / Acting Long Island Director, Regional Plan Association
- *Isles, Thomas, AICP – Director, Suffolk County Department of Planning
- Jones, Ann Marie – Commissioner of Planning & Development, Town of Babylon
- Jones, Christopher – Vice President for Research, Regional Plan Association
- Kintala, Kumar – Director, HR&A Advisors
- *Lansdale, Sarah, AICP – Executive Director, Sustainable Long Island
- Lennertz, Bill, AIA, CNU-A – Executive Director, National Charrette Institute
- Levine, Michael A., AICP – Commissioner of Planning, Town of North Hempstead
- ²Polyzoides, Stefanos – Principal, Moule & Polyzoides, Architects and Urbanists
- *Rimmer, Jennifer – Deputy Director, Sustainable Long Island
- *Shapiro, John, AICP, PP – Principal, Phillips Preiss Shapiro Associates
- Speck, Jeff, AICP, CNU-A, LEED-AP, Hon. ASLA – Speck & Associates LLC
- Ward, Elissa, LEED AP BD+C – Sustainability Director, Vision Long Island
- Zamft, Eric, AICP – Project Manager, VHB Engineering, Surveying and Landscape Architecture, P.C.

Notes:

* Former affiliation

¹ Economic Development Finance Professional Certification from the National Development Council

² Co-Founder, Congress for the New Urbanism

List of Acronyms of Accreditations/Certifications:

AIA: American Institute of Architects

AICP: American Institute of Certified Planners

ASLA: American Society of Landscape Architects

CNU-A: Congress for the New Urbanism Accreditation

FAICP: Fellow of the AICP

LEED AP: Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Accredited Professional

LEED AP BD+C: LEED AP Building Design and Construction

PP: Principal Planner (in the State of New Jersey)