Narrative Work in an Emergent Democratic Process
Neighborhood Planning in Belknap

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Belknap Area Lookout, a mixed income neighborhood in Grand Rapids, has worked through intense conflict over neighborhood planning to address gentrification pressures. Between November 2007 and February 2010, this politically engaged community undertook several waves of work on an Area Specific Plan for their neighborhood. The original community planning effort collapsed amidst competing claims about whether it had or had not been adequately participatory. Oppositional factions gathered in support and against the draft plan, a new neighborhood organization formed and produced an alternative plan, and planning stopped altogether as people were paralyzed about whether and how to move forward. Such stories of conflict, stalemate, and loss of legitimacy in public decision-making processes are familiar to any practitioner or scholar of civic engagement. In Belknap, the damage was repaired. Neighborhood leaders, city staff, elected officials, and community foundations mapped out new paths to restore the legitimacy of the neighborhood planning process and work together. They adopted a consensus-based plan that is allowing all of the players to move forward.

This chapter uses narrative analysis to explain the showstoppers and successful resumption of inclusive neighborhood planning in Belknap. I conceptualize public engagement as a process narrative, in which people both enact a narrative through their actions and account for actions through narratives. In the analysis, I highlight common and divergent narratives of engagement, the consequences of the narratives being illegible or legible to the public, and the practices of narrative work for accomplishing a collective orientation to a community process. I focus on *practices* through which narratives are constructed, including narrating, plotting, storytelling, and other sense-making practices.

Following a review of the literature and introduction of the key constructs for the analysis, I briefly describe my ethnographic data collection and analysis methods, and set the context for the planning process through a brief description of the neighborhood. I then analyze several key episodes to highlight key narrative practices. I explain the explosive community meeting in terms of people finding that they were operating under multiple narratives of neighborhood engagement that had become incompatible. I explain the engagement process becoming stuck as a lack of a coherent narrative logic to help people move forward together to the next step. I then show how the planning process was restored through constructing, via inclusive plotting practices, a narrative

of engagement. Finally, I show how hopeful storytelling practices enabled players to move from us vs. them to deliberative policy-making and to enact their planning efforts as an ongoing, inclusive process. I conclude that actively narrating an emergent democratic process is a form of leadership practice that may enable a public to construct an inclusive policy-making process.

Constituting Political Processes through Narratives

This analysis contributes to our understanding of the role of narration in constituting and guiding political action, and how narrative work may facilitate inclusive public processes. In this section, I develop several key constructs for the narrative analysis from social theory, public policy, and planning literature. I conceptualize narration as an active process of interpreting ongoing public processes as they are unfolding *and* of enabling present and future action. Political science, public policy, and planning scholars have found that narrating frequently plays an important part in interpreting political action (Roe 1994; Yanow 2003; Smith 2005; Polletta 2006; Slater, Rouner, and Long 2006). Stories told about political processes may account, for example, for why policies are or are not controversial, why political actors sometimes face distrust that they are not revealing the real motivations for their actions, and how political actors evaluate decision-making processes. Through these narratives, the legitimacy and meaning of prior political action and policy-making are constructed retroactively. As Abolafia (2010: 349) points out, however, narration may be understood as a "preceding constitutive process" in which a "narrative is constructed to guide action" in policy-making. In other words, narration has a prospective role as well as a retrospective role in sensemaking in political processes. Narration is not specific to the political domain, of course, but my focus is how narration represents and organizes political action.

The question of *how* narratives enable communities to work together is central to this analysis of how inclusive policy-making is enacted. Narration constructs the logic for interpreting and enabling the unfolding of events in such processes, serving as the way in which we "construct *and* represent the messy domain of human interaction" (Bruner 1991: 4; emphasis mine), in a recursive relationship among narratives and actions enacting them. Narratives have "a kind of circular teleology that is not given *a priori* but is created by the narrative," and furthermore that all actions must have a narrative accounting for them, that account being "an inseparable part of action itself" (Czarniawska 2004: 15, 24). The flow and causality of a narrative is not determined exogenous to the participants in action; instead, "the connections between events… are enacted…

by the contingent actions of the participants" (Pentland and Feldman 2007: 788). Thus a narrative logic is needed to connection one action and the next into a narrative, and the actions come together to establish the logic of the narrative.

I build upon these concepts to explore several aspects of narratives of engagement. I consider *public engagement as a narrative*, viewing engagement as a particular form of social organization constituted through narration. I characterize public engagement as a process narrative having a temporal sequence and a logical connection between its events. In public engagement, "narrative necessity" means that the next steps of an engagement process must have narrative connection to the prior steps, but the next steps also provide the narrative. I consider *plotting* as a practice for constructing the *narrative logic* that connects aspects of a public engagement process.

Second, I consider *"public engagement" as a master narrative*, a narrative that serves as a kind of "operating model" (Abolafia 2010) that people utilize to infer how a process will unfold, or a script of expectations about how things work. Frequently master narratives are referenced in a taken-for-granted way, but there is no such thing as a "master recipe" through which to enact any master narrative. Rather, "events need to be constituted in light of the overall narrative" (Bruner 1991). Multiple versions of common master narratives – such as capitalism (Harvey 1990) and love stories (Swidler 2003) – attest to the interdependence of master narratives and their instantiations. Ruptures in the enactment of the master narratives, in the form of anomalous cases, confusion about how to proceed in order to enact the narrative, and conflicts over whether one version or another is more legitimate, make legible the existence of the master narratives and their malleability. Related to master narratives are narrative norms, such as the sense that a story should have a beginning, middle, and end.

Similarly, to reference "public engagement" without elaboration, for example, assumes that people have a common understanding of what that means. There are many possible interpretations of engagement, however, and their conflation often leads to disappointment and conflict (Feldman and Quick 2009). In Belknap, breaches in the public engagement process point to a diversity of narratives about what "public engagement" is, what it is a narrative of (e.g., an identity of working together, a desired input, or a narrative norm about how participation is normally done), and what its beginning, middle, and end should be (i.e., how it should be concluded, or when it is done). Analyzing the narratives and how they come into conflict makes

visible the cognitive and normative "logics of appropriateness" (March and Olsen 2007) operating in the different narratives of engagement. It also makes visible the narrative work that is necessary to maintain or reestablish coherence in a public engagement process.

Several scholars have addressed the importance of narratives in deliberation, one of the hallmarks of inclusive processes. They have found that it may be necessary for participants in a policy-making process to co-construct meta-narratives in order to work together (Schön and Rein 1995), or to join different domains of ideas and discussions into "discourse coalitions" that create new narratives as arenas for exploring and deciding policy (Hajer 2003). Several scholars highlight storytelling as a practice helpful to deliberation. It has been found to enhance participants' expression of their preferences, encourage empathy, and support groups' reaching understandings and agreements, yet its value for policy-making is unrecognized because the storytelling rhetorical form is discounted as "personal" and irrelevant to policy (Polletta and Lee 2006).   Healey (1992) recommends that planners facilitate "inter-communicative" processes in which, through storytelling in public deliberations, publics "start out" and "go along" together, establishing a framework for coordinated action. She asserts,

> [The purpose of storytelling] is not …doing analysis, telling stories, rhetoric… but *doing something,* i.e. 'acting in the world.' For this, we need to discuss what we could and should do, why and how (Healey 1992: 151, italics in original).

My focus is not how storytelling practices enhance deliberation, but how they help to construct policy processes and outcomes. Managers inside public institutions have been observed to share and interpret a lot of stories about their work with one another, and this storytelling "does a great deal of work: framing agendas of discussion, shaping reputation, identifying important new issues, and more," helping to instantiate "practical judgment" (Forester 1999: 3).

> Planning is performed through story…. in process, in foundational stories, in stories as catalysts for change, in policy, and finally, in academic stories, as method, as explanation, and as critique. (Sandercock 2003: 14)

Storytelling about a desired direction for a community is both persuasive and constitutive of planning and the future (Throgmorton 1996), so that competing versions about what a proposed policy change or development will be like, if implemented, vie to "try to control," legitimate, and "emplot" possible future courses of action (Mandelbaum 1991).

In this analysis, I focus on storytelling that enables positive community change, which I have identified as a key consequence of inclusive public leadership practices (Quick 2010:

Chapter 1). Sandercock (2003: 18) points to the importance of hopeful narratives in community transformation, describing planners' using storytelling to catalyze change, shaping "a new imagination of alternatives," and "organizing hope." Healey (1983: 156) similarly suggests that we must act "with hope and ambition to achieve future possibilities" in order to accomplish transformative planning. These perspectives resonate with anthropologist Hirokazu Miyazaki's conceptualization of hope as a method, rather than a subject. He suggests that hope lies in "acts of the reorientation of knowledge" (Miyazaki 2006:116), particularly a reorientation of the directionality of knowledge, towards the future. Miyazaki is not speaking of narratives, but I bring his perspective into this analysis to explore how *hopeful narrating* as a practice may be a means of hope as a method, enabling a remapping of knowledge to catalyze action in a desired direction. I characterize several examples of hopeful narrating in this case as inclusive public leadership practices because they enable transformative community change through inclusion.

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

The unit of analysis for this case study requires explanation, as the literature references a wide range of possible candidates, including accounts (cf Abolafia 2010; Feldman and Sköldberg 2002), narratives (Bruner 1991; Quinn and Worline 2008), stories (Sandercock 2003; Czarniawska 2004), and storytelling (Healey 1992; Forester 1999; Polletta and Lee 2006). Indeed, there is no common unit of analysis in narrative analysis (Feldman, Sköldberg, Brown, and Horner 2004). I examine several units of analysis because of their presence in the empirical phenomena I am studying and their relevance to my theorization of how narratives organize political processes. I examine specific *accounts* of who did what, when, where, and how – from interviews and other texts. I identify *master narratives* – e.g., "a participatory process" or "Developers cannot be trusted"– that provide momentum and interpretability in the action. Most importantly, I focus on *practices* - narrating, plotting, and storytelling – and how they construct narratives. I recognize not only actions related to "telling" a story as narrative practices, but also sensemaking practices through which actions accrue into narratives.

The ethnographic data analyzed here come from observations, interviews, and documentation relating to the Belknap neighborhood conducted as the process was occurring.[1] Between June 2008 and October 2009, I visited the neighborhood frequently. I toured Belknap

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[1] This paper is part of a larger ethnographic research project, the methods for which I describe in detail in a separate paper. I am glad to share that paper or address questions regarding the data collection and analysis methods.

three times with neighborhood residents and city staff, interviewed study participants in their homes or offices, observed four public meetings about the Area Specific Plan, and attended a community fair in the local park. I corresponded with study participants and conducted 56 interviews concerning the Belknap neighborhood and planning process with 26 study participants. To protect the confidentiality of participants, in this text I do not associate a name, pseudonym, or role with quotations from research interviews. Participants include eight activists or community organizers in Belknap, six city employees (primarily senior managers), three current or former commissioners City Commissioners or Planning Commissioners, three persons involved in redevelopment of the neighborhood, and six persons involved in consulting, philanthropic, and other nonprofit organizations that work in Belknap. Eleven study participants were interviewed more than once about the process, including six informants, representing a diversity of viewpoints, who were interviewed at least four times. They are primarily white, balanced in terms of gender, and diverse in terms of their income, ages, and length of involvement in the neighborhood.

I selected narrative analysis as the method for this case due to several features of the events in Belknap that my data collection methods brought out. By watching the neighborhood planning efforts unfold over time, I was able to recognize the work that went into moving the process from stuck to unstuck. In tracing back to uncover how the process became unknotted, I discerned the role of narration in providing a way to move forward, and turned my attention to narratives and narrating practices in the data collection and analysis. The multiple versions of events and prognoses for the process expressed among study participants surfaced the plurality of narratives, particularly different master narratives of how "neighborhood participation" should be done. Their multiplicity made it clear that there not merely were multiple versions of events, but in fact multiple processes. While I rendered the events in Belknap into sequential phases or concurrent tracks to simplify my own account of "the process," in reality a complex multi-directional dynamic involving many different processes being narratively constructed was occurring. The ways in which study participants competed to establish the legitimacy of their narratives made legible the consequences of how different narrations of events enable different courses of action and potential policy outcomes. Points at which it was difficult to continue the storyline of where the neighborhood process was going, and even whether it should move forward at all, revealed the value of having a publicly legible narrative in order to move forward in a coordinated way

The Belknap neighborhood planning processes were protracted, complex, and conflict-ridden, involving shifting assemblages of engagement approaches, topics, participants, and venues. I analyze selected episodes to unearth particular aspects of the presence of absence of inclusive public leadership practices in the form of narrative work. The descriptions of these episodes are built from of a detailed and lengthy account that I assembled from emic interpretations of the events. The interpretations were drawn from research interviews, media coverage, meeting minutes, planning documents, and participant observation. Data include the logic people attached to these actions, their feelings about events (e.g., anger, surprise), and thoughts about what could or could not subsequently happen. Using a combination of a chronological ordering of events and study participants' indexing of key points in the neighborhood planning process, I segmented the account into episodes (Figure 1).
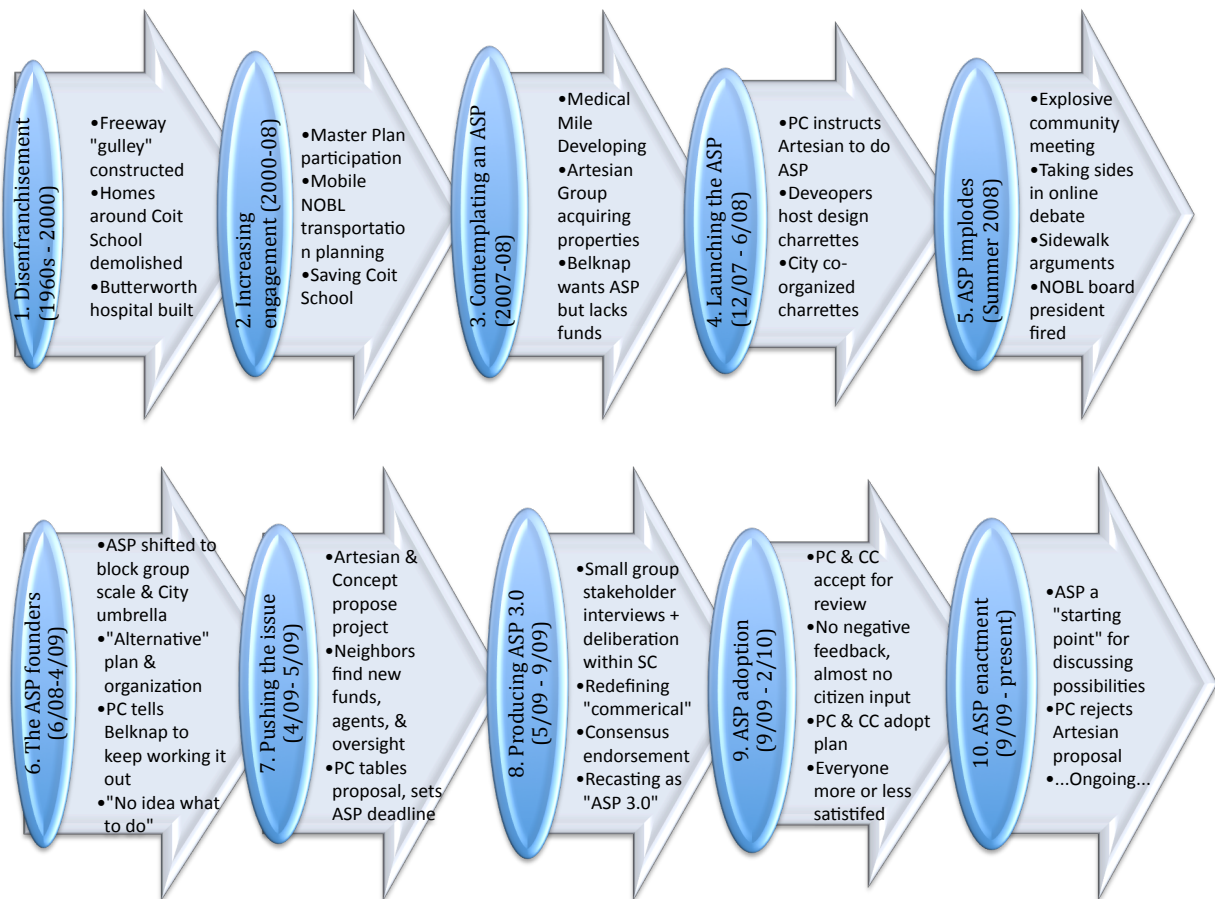

1. Disenfranchisement (1960s - 2000)
- Freeway "gulley" constructed
- Homes around Coit School demolished
- Butterworth hospital built

2. Increasing engagement (2000-08)
- Master Plan participation
- Mobile NOBL transportation planning
- Saving Coit School

3. Contemplating an ASP (2007-08)
- Medical Mile Developing
- Artesian Group acquiring properties
- Belknap wants ASP but lacks funds

4. Launching the ASP (12/07 - 6/08)
- PC instructs Artesian to do ASP
- Deveopers host design charrettes
- City co-organized charrettes

5. ASP implodes (Summer 2008)
- Explosive community meeting
- Taking sides in online debate
- Sidewalk arguments
- NOBL board president fired

6. The ASP founders (6/08-4/09)
- ASP shifted to block group scale & City umbrella
- "Alternative" plan & organization
- PC tells Belknap to keep working it out
- "No idea what to do"

7. Pushing the issue (4/09- 5/09)
- Artesian & Concept propose project
- Neighbors find new funds, agents, & oversight
- PC tables proposal, sets ASP deadline

8. Producing ASP 3.0 (5/09 - 9/09)
- Small group stakeholder interviews + deliberation within SC
- Redefining "commerical"
- Consensus endorsement
- Recasting as "ASP 3.0"

9. ASP adoption (9/09 - 2/10)
- PC & CC accept for review
- No negative feedback, almost no citizen input
- PC & CC adopt plan
- Everyone more or less satisfied

10. ASP enactment (9/09 - present)
- ASP a "starting point" for discussing possibilities
- PC rejects Artesian proposal
- ...Ongoing...

Figure 1. Chronology of key episodes in the Belknap planning process, 1960s - present.

Situating Neighborhood Planning in Belknap

The Belknap Lookout neighborhood is centrally located in Grand Rapids and overlooks the Grand River and downtown from a 160-foot high bluff. It is primarily a residential neighborhood, comprised of single-family homes and duplexes, including many structures built during the neighborhood's original development from the 1870s through 1920s. Surrounded by the bluff on the western side, a reservoir and large city park to the north, and a freeway and major hospital complex to the south, Belknap is physically set apart from the rest of Grand Rapids (Figure 2). Residents describe it as an "island" and "our village in the city," and highly value its central location, sense of community, and green space.
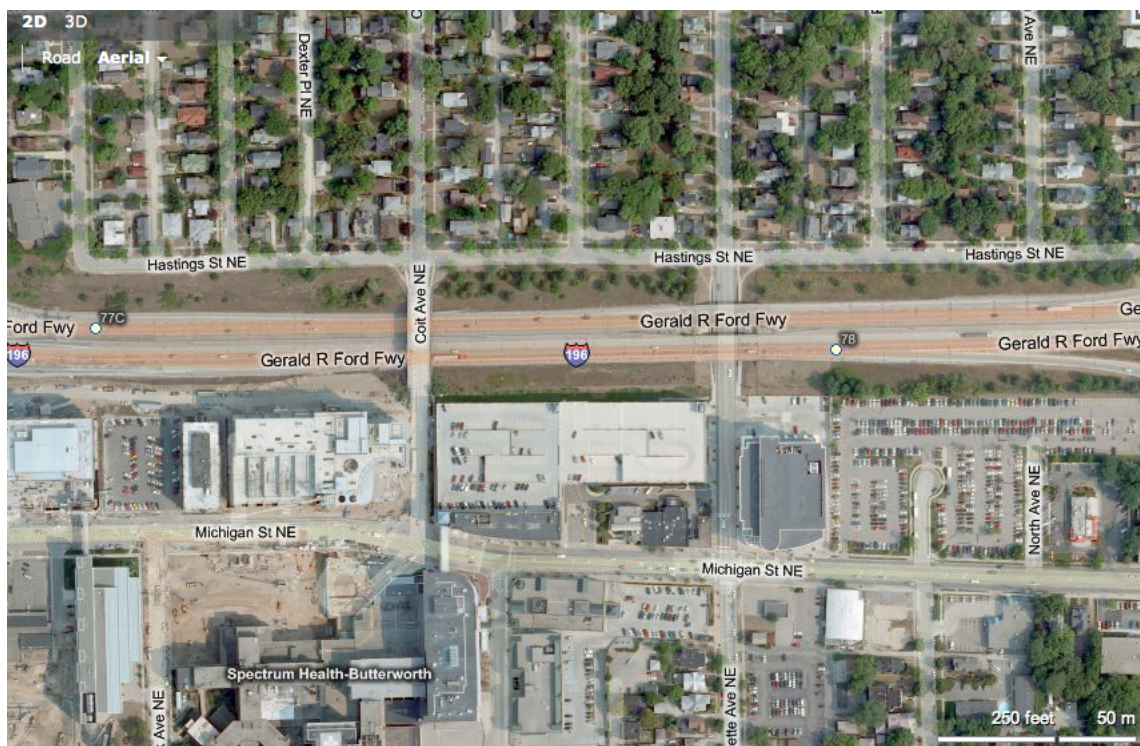
Figure 2. Belknap, to the north of the freeway and the Medical Mile complex to the south
(Source: Photos by the USGS on http://bing.com/maps, copyright 2010 Microsoft, 2009 NAVTEQ).

The neighborhood is less than one square mile in area, densely populated, and pedestrian in scale, with small blocks, narrow streets and alleys, low-rise structures, and front doors facing the street. Two thirds of households are renters. In the 2000 census, 53% of its 4,200 residents were White, 23% African American, 16% Latino, 2% Asian Pacific Islander, and 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native, reflecting an increase in Latino residents and decrease in White

residents since 1990. Many residents are proud to live in one of the city's most internally diverse neighborhoods in terms of ethnicity, income, occupation, household types, and housing choices.

There are several indicators that the neighborhood is undergoing socioeconomic stress. Residents' greatest concerns about Belknap include blight, rundown homes, a lack of pride in the physical upkeep of the neighborhood, crime, alcohol and drug abuse, and the lack of a commercial business district. Between 1990 and 2000 the neighborhood's population declined by 6%, relative to growth rates for the city and county as a whole of 5% and 15%. Over one quarter of all neighborhood residents live in households at or below the federal poverty level, and while the rate of rate of reported violent crimes has been dropping, it remains 60% higher than for the city as a whole. The maintenance and structural quality of homes has a "hit or miss" quality with a mixture of "gorgeous historic homes and ghetto rundown homes," but even on the most run-down streets, "Some people have lived there for 80 years. They love the uniqueness of their street and it's their home."

In early 2007, some Belknap residents began proposing a neighborhood planning process to create an Area Specific Plan (ASP), for two reasons: neighbors' generally high level of interest in civic engagement, and mounting gentrification pressures. Beginning around 2000, the neighborhood began mobilizing to participate in decisions about what happens in Belknap, which has several neighborhood organizations devoted to increasing civic involvement and strengthening relationships in the community. The neighborhood's political mobilization is partly a response to a history of having been left out of previous policy-making processes which effected them, including the neighborhood's being bisected by a "manmade canyon" in the form of a new interstate highway, having entire blocks of housing taken and demolished for a new school (never built) and a medical complex (still expanding), and losing a once-thriving neighborhood commercial district for construction of a hospital. By 2007, however, a few collective triumphs – including alleviating drug dealing in the park, working together to locate an autistic child who became lost in the neighborhood, saving the historic Coit School, building a neighborhood health clinic, and taking part in planning charrettes to improve mobility into and out of the neighborhood – had made them proud of their resilience, political efficacy, and cohesiveness as a neighborhood. They identify "passionate people," "participation," "activism," "people who care," and "sense of community" as among their greatest assets as a neighborhood.

Belknap neighbors were among the most enthusiastic participants in the citywide Master Plan update (2002) and zoning ordinance (2006), and they were among the first to contact the city about getting involved in Green Grand Rapids (Chapter 2). Through these experiences, many Belknap residents have become sophisticated in their knowledge of planning issues and invested in inclusive planning processes. Political leaders of Grand Rapids and city staff consistently assert that Belknap is one of the most civically engaged neighborhoods of the city, one that cares lot about their community, has a level of participation in planning issues that the Planning Commissioners "do not often see," and consistently "takes the time to understand and do some critical thinking" when it comes to local policy issues.

An inclusive planning process was therefore appealing to residents as a way to address gentrification pressures. These stem from the rapid transformation, accelerating since 2000, of the Spectrum Hospital area on Belknap's southern edge into a life sciences center known as the Medical Mile (Figure 2), in which $1 billion has already been invested in a "technology boom" unprecedented in Grand Rapids' history and a "concentrated magnitude" of medical investment unparalleled anywhere else in the U.S. at this time. City leaders hope that between 2,050 and 2,5000 new, skilled medical and technology jobs will encourage highly educated, high-income people to relocate to or stay in Grand Rapids. The Belknap community expects their neighborhood to be attractive to these employees due to its walkability, its proximity to the medical complex, and the quality and affordability of housing. Many residents and neighborhood organizations have said explicitly and repeatedly that they are not anti-development, but they wish to anticipate and manage the change. They are concerned about displacement of renters and low-income households, commercial redevelopment (especially if it displaces housing), and a loss of neighborhood diversity in terms of ethnicity, income, and types of housing choices.

Multiple Narratives of Neighborhood Engagement

The first period of neighborhood planning in Belknap was marked by numerous concurrent narratives of how to play out a process for neighborhood engagement. I describe the early planning efforts, characterize the different narratives that were operating, and analyze their relationship with the participatory and inclusive dimensions of civic engagement theorized by Quick and Feldman (2009). I identify two phases of this period: in the first, participants seem to be proceeding under more or less the same narrative of working together, but by the second their narrative had shifted to an "us vs. them" dynamic of competing narratives of engagement. At that

point, competition amongst different *process* narratives of how *planning* should be done exacerbated competition amongst *outcome* narratives of what the *plan* should be. An important aspect of the analysis in this section is its juxtaposition with the concluding period of neighborhood planning, when there was more cohesion and momentum (described in Sections 3.5 and 3.6). In the latter period, inclusive leadership practices helped to make a narrative of engagement publicly legible, but in this period, there was no such public narrative.

Launching the Area Specific Plan

The Belknap community correctly discerned investors' interested in the potential for residential and commercial redevelopment of their neighborhood. By the fall of 2007, several developers had slowly acquired the equivalent of six city blocks worth of properties. At that point, the Artesian Group ("Artesian"), a small group of property owners specializing in urban infill development, requested rezoning to redevelop several properties with higher density housing. City staff and the Planning Commission were reluctant to permit rezoning of a few properties at a time, in "piece-meal decision making," and invited Artesian and their design consultants, Concept Design ("Concept"), to come to a working session of the Commission. The Commissioners responded positively to their ideas, but informed them that before Artesian could bring forward rezoning applications, they would first "need to go work on a neighborhood plan with the neighborhood" and emphasized that "neighborhood participation" would be required.

Artesian agreed to undertake a planning process with the neighborhood, and noted they had already contracted Concept to facilitate the effort. Concept reported that they had already begun discussing their plans for commercial development with the neighborhood and wanted to provide services that the community desired. They also indicated that consultation with the neighborhood had "become very laborious," that had formed a committee but could "barely get them to meet," and that they could not "get a critical mass of interest in the neighborhood." The Commission agreed that they could scale down the ASP to a smaller geographic scale and advised them to work with the Neighbors of Belknap Lookout (NOBL, the neighborhood association), to engage the community.

At the time, there seemed to be common narrative among the players that they were working together to produce the neighborhood plan. At the Plannign Commission meeting, for example, one requested clarification from the about or elaborated what "neighborhood participation" would entail, perhaps assuming that everyone understood and accepted what it

involves, since there is a longstanding culture of residents, city staff, and political leaders expecting the public to be involved in decision-making. It seemed to the city's planning staff and Commissioners that having Artesian pay for the neighborhood planning effort was a win-win approach to advancing Artesian's projects and to preparing an ASP, which the neighborhood and city felt was a priority, but for which no other funding or city staff resources were available. Artesian put together an ASP Steering Committee charged with overseeing the process. It is not clear how the 11 members were selected, but they included staff and board members of NOBL, other neighborhood residents, 2 members of Artesian, and a representative of Coit School.

In retrospect, it seemed that people had *not* been working together to produce the plan. After the fact, it was considered a mistake for all of the parties involved to have given Artesian so much responsibility for and discretion over the process, but this was only *publicly* recognized as a misstep much later. Some people had had concerns from the outset, such as that Artesian had too much influence over the selection of the Steering Committee, that "friends" of one of the developers on the Steering Committee "erased opposition" to Artesian's preferences, that the Steering Committee did not represent an adequately diverse range of opinions, that there was not enough time and thought invested in planning *how* to involve the neighborhood, and that the Steering Committee had not been involved in choosing the consultant for the ASP. Some tried to improve the situation by getting involved in the process, while others withdrew. They did not voice these concerns publicly, however, because they did not see how talking about it would make a difference. There was no public dialogue about what the public engagement process and role of the developers should be, nor was there public evaluation of how it was going.

Community meetings were held between March and June 2008 in the gymnasium of Coit School and involved 128 unique participants. Flyers were prepared to advertise the meetings, but it is not clear how they were distributed. Concept's staff facilitated the meetings, which involved large and small group discussion, dot voting on preferences, and presentations of iterations of the draft ASP as it was being developed. Most discussions about change centered on what alterations the community might like to see in areas of deteriorating housing identified by the City or Concept.

These meetings generated a lot of information, but some people who had been involved in other design charrettes or had more experience with community organizing in Belknap described the ASP meetings as "so rushed it was uncomfortable." The developer strategically placed a few

proponents at each discussion table, which "pissed people off" when they realized what was happening, because it seemed to "throw things off unfairly" and felt like a "roll over" to residents. For example, at one meeting people were asked to apply color-coded dots to maps of the neighborhood to show what kinds of land use they would like to see in different areas:

> What happened was the developers got all of their people together and distributed them around the tables. There were arguments over who held the dots. It was a flawed process from that point on. Instead of actually engaging and listening, it was more, "This is what we're going to do. I yelled the loudest."

At the request of neighbors who became "nervous" about the developers' role, the Planning Department became more involved in organizing the neighborhood gatherings after the third meeting. Concept had originally planned on three neighborhood meetings, but Concept and the City ended up co-organizing an additional three meetings, in which the City helped with organizing and facilitating the discussions, but Concept continued to have responsibility for documenting the input and producing the ASP. After the fifth meeting, the planning director reported to the Planning and City Commissions, "The process has been a little bumpy but overall progress is being made." They called a sixth meeting for June 9 to present the draft ASP, which Concept said they had revised several times based upon neighbors' input. At that point the ASP was 83 pages long, two thirds of which consisted of detailed records of participants, discussion materials, and feedback from the five prior meetings. The Steering Committee felt the draft was ripe for community acceptance, and had already scheduled a final meeting at the end of the month for the community to formally endorse taking it to the Planning Commission for adoption.

Their confidence was misplaced. It would be another 18 months before an ASP was adopted. On June 9, the ASP process took a precipitous turn towards chaos and conflict in what a local TV news broadcast stated was, "by all accounts, a very heated" meeting. Although no one expected so much conflict, there had been some warning signs. In advance of the meeting, the owner of the neighborhood convenience store cautioned the City Commission that his customers were complaining that the outreach flyers "do not fully educate the public" regarding the importance of the meetings and that the meetings were just "for show." A neighborhood resident and advocate became concerned that not everyone had been properly invited to the meetings. Feeling that every Belknap resident should participate, she made and distributed her own flyer.

She then turned up for the meeting with approximately 30 angry people, who vociferously challenged the legitimacy of the process. As Concept Design later reported to the Planning

Commission, as of that moment the ASP discussions "turned away from the Plan" as participants' attention turned to "the process and fears about change." The new participants complained that meeting notices should have been circulated in Spanish to avoid excluding Latino residents, and observed the absence of people of color at the meeting relative to the diversity of the neighborhood. Artesian and Concept's staff countered that everyone "had been informed" or "should have known," and pointed out that nearly one hundred people had participated in five meetings. They appealed to the Steering Committee, which had met nine times to oversee the planning effort, to back them up on how open and participatory the process had been. Committee members did not defend the process.

Some people then began "hollering," "name calling," and directing obscenities at people who disagreed with them. The meeting became a vehicle to express all kinds of longstanding resentments towards the city government, big business, and fellow neighbors. People began to speculate that "the City would come in with a bulldozer using eminent domain," indicate their "strong suspicion of developers and their intentions," voice suspicions that "this is a plot for Spectrum to take over the neighborhood," and complain that "change has taken 20 years to finally get to Belknap" because the city government always neglects it. Afterwards, Concept's consultants slipped out through the back door. Other people "had to drink alcohol" afterwards to wind down, and their families were worried by how distressed they were when they got home.

In the following weeks, people staked out their positions in an increasingly dichotomizing dynamic. City police were called out several times to intervene in sidewalk shouting matches between neighbors arguing over the ASP. NOBL's board members forced their president to resign for using obscenities at the meeting. Neighbors logged 150 comments in an online forum related to a local TV news broadcast about the controversy, where they asserted that the process, the city, and/or the developers were moving too precipitously; that outreach had not been sufficient to inform everyone in the neighborhood; and that Artesian and/or the city was not being straightforward or had "already had their minds made up" before the meetings.

Months later, an attendee described the ongoing fall-out:

I went to a few meetings. I haven't gone back. I thought it was the worst process I've ever seen. People were screaming at each other, calling each other names. I don't want to imply by being there that this is acceptable. And nothing good is coming from this. Those meetings were damaging. People are divided. They are hostile. They're name calling and not listening. No one trusts each other.

It was at this point that participants in our study of civic engagement in Grand Rapids suggested we look at Belknap as a counter-factual case. They explained, "It is all about 'when neighborhood plans go bad,'" pointed to it as "the exception to the rule that the neighborhoods should do their own planning without city involvement," and identified it wryly as an "interesting" example of "civic engagement gone awry."

Analysis

Many people in Belknap were evoking a narrative in common - "neighborhood participation" – but evoking the narrative was not sufficient to provide collective cohesion to their actions. Instead, there were many different interpretations and enactments of the Planning Commission's charge to plan "with the neighborhood." Individuals' varying narratives of engagement – how they were enacting it, their accounts of what it should be like ideally, and their evaluations of how it was being implemented – reflect varying expectations in terms of what Quick and Feldman (2009) characterize as the inclusive and participatory dimensions of civic engagement (Table 1).

Table 1: Narratives of engagement expressed about the first phase of neighborhood planning, mapped in terms of inclusion and high participation (per Quick & Feldman 2009).

Civic engagement models	Interpretations of Belknap process
Qualities of a highly participatory process: – Many people are invited to and/or do participate. – Efforts are made to make the process broadly accessible and representative of public at large. – Community input is collected and influences decisions. – The focus is frequently on a particular proposal or topic, and the process may be conducted on a one-time basis.	*Participation was high enough and legitimately executed:* – The Steering Committee represented the community. – Many meetings were held. – Anyone who wanted to participate was welcome. – Many people – 128 unduplicated individuals – did participate. – All input, including comments, SWOT analysis results, drawings and vision statements, and dot votes, was faithfully logged. – Items with the highest number of votes won democratically. – Community-wide meetings were held and advertised, which makes the process participatory because it is available to anyone who wants to come and legitimate because it is transparent. *Participation was not high enough or not legitimately executed:* – "Everyone" in the neighborhood should be involved, and was not. – Participation was not adequately diverse. Participants did not represent the socioeconomic diversity of the neighborhood. Outreach strategies and meeting facilitation did not welcome people with limited English skills. – Developers were not responsive to input; they did not change their plans in response to the feedback.

Civic engagement models	Interpretations of Belknap process
	– Some participants did not legitimately belong in the dialogue. They are not part of the neighborhood, or they were not transparent about their relationship with the developers. – The Steering Committee and community meetings were not representative. They were "stacked" with developers' affiliates. They also controlled the dots in dot voting exercises. Other participants felt it was a "roll over," "unfair" and biased to whoever "yelled the loudest."
Qualities of a highly inclusive process: – Diverse views are engaged. – The process is deliberative, yielding new understandings of problems and opportunities for action. – The participants in the process take part in defining the problem, the process for decision-making, and the decision outcomes. – Individual processes are part of an ongoing stream of issues, not one-time or one-issue discussions	*Inclusion was high enough or legitimately executed:* – The process was open-ended. The developers put their particular plans aside in order to honor the Planning Commissions' request for an inclusive process, and to avoid soiling or swaying community input by focusing it as a response to their ideas. *Inclusion was not high enough or not legitimately executed:* – The planning charrettes were too rushed to allow dialogue and processing. – Developers pre-set the agenda and did not change it in response to community involvement. Some people resent the premise of the planning process that change must happen, and would prefer preservation. Differing preferences for the boundaries of the planning area the location of commercial zones were not addressed. – The implementation of the dot voting set up a competition among positions, stifling deliberation. – The deliberation did not involve a civil dialogue. People were "hollering" and "name-calling" and using obscenities. Some people will not participate again because they don't want to "condone" this as acceptable civic engagement.

Low levels of inclusion and *medium* levels of participation characterized this phase of the process. This is my evaluation, and it is not exactly a ringing endorsement of the quality of the implementation of engagement, but I do assess participants' intentions about engagement more positively. For the most part, the different actors were faithfully enacting, to their best abilities, their narrative of what "neighborhood participation" should be. This finding is based upon repeated, off-the-record conversations with study participants representing a wide variety of positions and interests. It lends a different perspective to some of the points of friction among the participants than their own interpretations that the people with whom they disagreed were behaving irrationally, illegitimately, or with ill intent.

To illustrate, let us reconsider Artesian's strategically distributing their employees, relatives, and other supporters across the breakout groups and dot voting tables at community

discussions. Some residents were incensed by this, interpreting it as a subversion of the democratic process akin to stuffing the ballot box.   Another interpretation is that Artesian was enacting a different narrative of engagement, not acting with ill intent. Artesian's narrative was oriented to high participation: policy outcomes depend upon individuals' bringing their interests to the table and having their input counted, so parties must mobilize representatives of their views to take part in a democratic process. Their critics' narrative was oriented to high inclusion: policy outcomes are developed through deliberation, so people come to the table prepared to learn and change their views through dialogue and generating new understandings together.

The two narratives come into friction over "stacking" the discussion groups. Artesian's narrative was a stakeholders-bearing-their-interests numbers game. Artesian was convening the ASP consultations and organized them according to that narrative of engagement. According to the logic of that narrative, they felt that their goals for development would be left behind if they did not maximize their input. The practices through which they enacted that narrative included bringing out large number of advocates, "stacking" each group with a representative who tried to persuade others to take their position, and recording their preferences with as many dots as possible. Those preferring inclusion thought that sending out devoted advocates with a mission to defend their position made Artesian affiliates' participation in a "deliberative" dialogue disingenuous. According to the logic of inclusion, appropriate practices in that setting are to exchange views and possibly change perspectives. The tension over whether the charrettes were or were not rushed is similar: not much time is needed to express one's opinion and deliver it as input to a consultant who is enumerating the different positions, whereas more time is needed for the public to process input and from it together develop new opinions and options.

The conflict over whether the community consultation process hosted by Concept was legitimate "neighborhood participation" foregrounds the multiplicity of narratives and instantiations of engagement. This is not a unique feature of this case. Narratives are not deterministic; narratives and their instantiations are mutually interdependent components enact and interpreting actions (Bruner 1991), just as the ostensive and performative aspects of a routine are mutually constitutive and interdependent (Feldman and Pentland 2003). During this period of planning in Belknap, the multiplicity of narratives became a problem when the narratives became incompatible. There was no *public construction* of a narrative of engagement through which the different narratives were made visible and probed. In issuing their charge to implement

"neighborhood participation," the Planning Commission and staff took it for granted that there was a universally understood version of "neighborhood participation," perhaps due to the longstanding commitment of political leaders, public managers, and the public to make decisions in inclusive ways in Grand Rapids (Quick and Feldman 2009).

The Steering Committee, though charged with overseeing engagement, did not intentionally construct a narrative of engagement. When criticisms did pour forth at the June 9 community meeting, the Steering Committee's response was silence. This was read as their passive disavowal of the process, but an alternative explanation is that they lacked a narrative for explaining how the process was designed and what they were trying to accomplish. In their nine meetings, they did not develop or advise Concept about how to design the overall engagement process or endorse particular engagement practices, other than brainstorming and assigning outreach tasks to advertise the community meetings. There are several possible explanations for why they did not develop a narrative of engagement. Many of the parameters – the boundaries of the planning area, the membership of the Steering Committee, the sponsors and facilitators of the neighborhood process - had already been determined by Artesian. The majority of Steering Committee members may have been comfortable with this, and those who were uncomfortable may have felt that critiquing Concept's design was fruitless, since "friends" of Artesian "erased opposition" in the Steering Committee.

Those who had reservations about Concept's organization of neighborhood participation did not express them. One of the explanations they give for this is that they did not believe that there was a way for them to make a difference. There was no public discussion about the engagement process in which to participate. The Steering Committee might have been a platform for expressing concerns, but they did not make the engagement process part of their agenda. The Planning Commission was another potential venue since it had issued the call for neighborhood participation, but it seemed an inappropriate place to hammer out the implementation. It had declined to provide detailed instruction, is charged with policy setting rather than policy implementation, and meets infrequently. Belknap community members had prior experience with the Planning Department as a facilitator of inclusive engagement processes, but the Planning Department had signaled that it did not have capacity to manage Belknap and relocated that responsibility to Artesian and Concept.

This is not to say that there was no public narrative. There was, but it was not a narrative of inclusive engagement. It was another master narrative from our cultural repertoire: an us vs. them, winners take all, competitive version of interest politics. I have described this as the narrative of engagement that Artesian was enacting by stacking discussion groups with its advocates. It also manifests in the raging debate over whether the process was or was not legitimate "neighborhood participation," which was an "us versus them" competition for whose narrative would win favor from the Planning Commission.

The emergence of that debate marks a shift from narrating the planning process as "we are working together" to narrating it as "us versus them." At this point, people who had been taking part in meetings began to withdraw, like the participant who said, "I went to a few meetings…. I thought it was the worst process I've ever seen. People were screaming at each other." This account both points to a particular moment – "screaming at each other" - and extrapolates from that perspective-shifting incident to a retrospective narrative about how "a few meetings" and "the process" as a whole had been going. This was a common phenomenon in the interviews. While study participants expressed surprise about "how bad" that particular meeting was, they did not narrate it as an anomalous event. Instead, it was a tipping point when a series of actions – Artesian's selecting the Steering Committee and consultant, participants' feeling rushed or dominated in the charrettes, poor outreach, and hollering – fell out of a "we are working together" narrative of engagement into a "working together is not working" or "us versus them" narrative of engagement. This tipping point constituted not only a shift in how people interpreted prior actions, but how they organized their behavior going forward. The meeting set off a cascade of reactions that brought additional attention to the neighborhood planning process and more heat to the "us versus them" narrative, marked by the sidewalk and online arguments. People began to draw upon "us versus them" narratives to make sense of what they observed. These included narratives from Belknap's history (e.g., our properties will be taken by eminent domain; the hospital will take over the neighborhood; the city will neglect us) and readily available master narratives for making sense of political and development conflicts everywhere (e.g., developers cannot be trusted; government cannot be trusted). These narratives damaged the neighborhood's ability to proceed in a collaborative process.

Not having an operating model for how different ideas about the neighborhood plan would be aired raised the stakes for expressing opinions about redevelopment. Differences of opinion

about how to organize engagement did not create differences of opinion about what kind of neighborhood changes should be encouraged, but it exacerbated the competitive framework within which they were aired. Public debates about the direction of community change that the plan would enable first came to the foreground *after* the explosive community meeting. At this point, anxieties about the displacement of "low income folks, black folks, asian folks, spanish folks, old folks, disabled folks, retired folks on tight budgets" by gentrification were expressed, and angry exchanges arose between those praising redevelopment for getting rid of "low-life renters" and people proudly identifying themselves as long-term renters with a strong commitment to the neighborhood.

The "pro-development" versus "anti-development" narrative began to gather a lot of energy, with people trying to paint others with whom they did not agree into those camps. Several who supported development suggested that residents who were concerned about development were "ignorant," should accept "progress," or move out   Indeed, some of the most acute conflict occurred when writers attempted to classify other people as "anti-development." Both those who had raised questions about the planning process or Artesian's qualifications adamantly and repeatedly resisted being labeled "anti-development" and insisted that they simply wanted to be involved in the decision-making. Although they did not articulate it in this way, what they were trying to do was to refocus attention on building a narrative of an inclusive process as a precedent for building a narrative of outcomes. They were calling for a process narrative of plan*ning* prior to an outcome narrative of a *plan*.

Narrative Logic for Engagement to Proceed

The next period of neighborhood planning was marked by inaction. Conceptualizing public engagement as a process narrative, I interpret the neighborhood becoming stuck as a lack of a narrative logic that they could use collectively to connect to a next step. In this section, I describe the different narrative logics that individuals evaluated as ways to construct a coordinated neighborhood process, and consider whey they were not successful. In the following sections, I describe inclusive leadership practices that helped to establish a narrative logic for how to proceed and conclude the ASP process (Sections 3.5 and 3.6), but in this period, such narrative work was not done.

Getting Stuck: "I know I need to do something, but I don't know what to do."

Over the summer, people retreated to lick their wounds privately. A city staff person who was not involved in the process but was a confidant of many of the parties observed months later, "*Everyone* is upset about Belknap. It's gone very badly, despite good intentions." For the first time ever in this research project, which by that time had been ongoing for ten years and involved over 50 study participants, people were reluctant to be interviewed. Some explained that Belknap was such a mess, and they were so embroiled in trying to address it, that they found the additional step of processing and scrutinizing the problem in our interviews too exhausting. Others were worried that I would not maintain their confidentiality; amidst the acrimony of their environment, they had a fear of having their words used against them and their intentions misconstrued. Those who did participate during this period imbued interviews with a flavor that our research team had almost never experienced in over one hundred prior interviews in the city. The interviews frequently felt like therapy and occasionally like exorcisms, as various parties explained to me what they had been trying to do, expressed how painful it was to be misread as having bad intentions, and acknowledged that they were "way burned out."

People whose roles – as senior public managers, the developers, political leaders, members of the steering committee, or staff of neighborhood organizations – would normally position them to provide leadership to address community impasses did not have the legitimacy to do so. The city's planning director, a person who had overseen previous civic engagement efforts that had "almost sainthood status in terms of process and inclusion," was now considered suspect. Her recommendation to have Artesian sponsor the plan seemed to be such poor judgment, and so inconsistent with the city's usual pattern of actively fostering neighborhood empowerment, that it aroused suspicion that some sort of shady "deal" between the city and the developers was compromising her work. Artesian was in a double bind. Having run up tens of thousands of dollars in expenses doing what the Commission told them to do in order to advance their proposals, the stalling of the process made them unable to move forward. In fact, they were further behind than when they had started. As the sponsors of the ASP they were perceived as "bad guys" and now found themselves at a unique *disadvantage*, in terms of community opinion, relative to other potential developers who might propose projects without the ASP history bogging them down.

By this point, many neighbors had lost faith in the Steering Committee. Artesian ignoring suggestions to withdraw at least temporarily from the Committee. This was so damaging to the credibility of the process that some neighbors formed a new organization and began putting together an "alternative" plan. NOBL's board and staff, previously happy that the ASP was bringing in new constituents whom they hoped to enroll in their other work, began to feel that the bad taste ASP had left in people's mouths, and the drama and upheaval that it caused within their board, was weighing them down. They wanted to be "left *out* of the politicking over the ASP," fearing that becoming embroiled in the push to "take sides" (e.g., for or against redevelopment, Artesian, the draft ASP, the alternative plan) would damage their ability to provide other neighborhood services, which require them to "build trust among *everybody*."

Belknap was collectively stuck. There was a sense that the process was not ready for closure, and indeed needed to be slowed down. As one participant put it, "We'll get there, it's just more of a process, more thinking, more strategy…." But what that process or strategy should be was not clear. Therefore, in what was carefully staged as an "informational meeting" rather than an occasion to "adopt a plan," all of the parties went back to the Planning Commission in September. The intention was for the Commission to give direction for "next steps," get everyone aligned behind "the next task and whatnot," and "set the clock" to keep the process moving forward. Over one hundred people turned out for the hearing, far exceeding usual attendance for Planning Commission meetings and the seating capacity of the room, and by a show of hands they indicated that they were "about evenly split" in their support or opposition to the draft ASP produced by Concept Design. The Commissioners commended the neighborhood on their tremendous level of participation, advised the ASP organizers to improve their outreach to be as inclusive as possible, and sent the ASP back to the neighborhood to keep trying to work things out. While affirming the value of community engagement, they conveyed their weariness with the protracted process and recommended compromise to resolve the ASP and reach closure.

Six months after *that*, however, the process was still "on hold" and people were still "taking a break." They were taking a break because they were burned out from the intensity of the conflict, and also because they were uncertain about how to move forward. In interview after interview, city staff, city commissioners, developers, neighborhood association members, community foundation staff, and journalists alluded to their inability to figure out how things had gone so far awry. It was abundantly clear to them that things had gone wrong, but they were

uncertain how to move forward. Looking back on this period, a Belknap resident shared a story with me that conveyed people's inability to make sense of how this could be happening: several friends had confided to him that the neighborhood process was intractably mired because there had always been some kind of "devil's curse" on Belknap Hill. It was the kind of explanation that the situation seemed to call for.

The situation also seemed to call for action, but it was not at all clear what that action should be. Study participants frequently asked me to work through the problem with them. People from whom I had been learning for years asked me for the first time for my advice. These conversations were always inconclusive about what the study participants individually or the neighborhood collectively should do: Should they lay the whole process down and let the storm pass, or should they push through to closure to try to put it behind them? If they were to pick the effort up again, should they start over with a new process or try to patch up the old process? Who should be involved? What kinds of relationships, personal emotional reserves, finances, trust, technical expertise, etc. could they use?

The planning director, who felt responsibility for helping to heal, call a recess, put a stop to the effort, or somehow move the process forward, put it succinctly, "In Belknap, I have no idea what to do next. I'm going to have to do something but I don't know what to do." Having no clear plan of action was both comfortable and uncomfortable for her. On the one hand, keeping an open-ended, improvisational approach to a public process is her familiar and preferred style, and she jokes that she would get bored if everything was predictable. On the other hand, the experience of having no clear sense of how to lead people to the next step was unfamiliar and unsettling. Her usual pattern, as I have observed, is that she improvises as public processes unfold, not always having a sense of where the process will ultimately go, but not faltering over helping people to the next step. She gathers the sense of where a group of people are – in terms of the content and process of their work and her sense of what they are trying to accomplish – and based upon that, articulates for them what the next steps should be and gets their buy-in about that before proceeding to the next step. In Belknap, there was no clear next step in part because there was no clear overarching sense of what people were trying to accomplish in the engagement process. She could not discern a path forward based upon community consensus, and instead used her own professional judgment to recommend actions, which rarely satisfied anyone. She told a

colleague from the neighborhood, "I can't win," suggesting there was no clear way for her to guide the community forward or out of the conflict.

Analysis

When different versions of "neighborhood participation" came into friction within one another in Belknap, a breach occurred in the narrative: action stopped and sensemaking was ruptured. Such breaks ruptures or paradoxes in a narrative can be generative, when they have "the positive effects of questioning received ideas" and enabling change (Czarniawska 2004: 95-97). In Belknap, however, the friction did immediately not generate a positive outcome. When the narrative of "neighborhood participation" did not unfold as expected, the players could not figure out how to interpret what was happening, and were unable to plot their way forward.

The most obvious sign of a lack of narrative logic to organize and enable neighborhood engagement include the repeated hiccups in the process, which stalled for 10 months. The disastrous June 2008 interactions created a "logic of appropriateness" (March and Olsen 2007) that made sustaining or continuing the previous approach to "neighborhood participation" untenable. Even though some supporters of the draft ASP continued to defend the efforts and advocate adoption of the plan, most of the player considered their approach illegitimate and the process irreparable.

It was less clear how to transform the process. At an individual level, people were faltering for a compelling narrative logic of what to do next. In research interviews, they puzzled through different logics for proceeding, engaging in what Abolafia (2010: 349) describes as a "preceding constitutive process" of constructing a narrative "to guide action." They were as likely to experiment with narratives for quitting as for refreshing the process. Badly as they wanted the problem to go away, they were not sure how best to finish it off: by calling it off, fixing it, starting over, or simply letting it die. None of their attempts at narrative logic were realized.

I suggest that they were not successful in carrying the narrative of engagement forward for several reasons. First, the previous phase had been so damaging to trust and relationships that the community was too fragmented to come together into an inclusive public space to discuss how to move forward together, much less begin deliberating the redevelopment issues. Second, no one was in a position to enact public leadership. The disintegration of neighborhood participation for lack of a public narrative, and the ensuing oppositional dynamics, tarnished everyone's legitimacy as a public-minded individual. No one had the standing to reconvene a public process and lay out

a collective path forward. Most felt so browbeaten and sandbagged by the fall-out that they lacked the stamina to step into the fray. Even those who had the courage to step up felt, "I can't win," and ended up providing guidance on the basis of their technical expertise rather than their capacity to provide a platform for public engagement.   Those who did try to pick up the planning effort did so in a separate track, setting up a new neighborhood group and sponsoring an "alternative" plan.

Plotting a Narrative of an Inclusive Process

In the first period of neighborhood planning (described in Section 3.3), there was no public narrative of the engagement process. In this period, inclusive leadership practices helped to make a narrative of public engagement legible. This is one way of helping collective action to proceed, and it did reenergize the neighborhood planning process in Belknap. The precipitating event occurred in April 2009, when Concept Design pushed the issue of their right to development and the prognosis for the ASP by bringing a new rezoning request to the Planning Commission. The planning director helped the Belknap community members plot a path forward together by breaking their request into two stages, and previewing and negotiating an approach for the deliberation with all of the parties. The Commission then managed a deliberative conversation and worked with the parties to map out a timeframe to provide momentum. I identify the plotting practices through which this narrative work was accomplished and analyze *how* they enabled the subsequent and final phase of the ASP's preparation (Section 3.7) to be an inclusive policy-making process.

<u>Getting Unstuck: Staging a Hearing and Process</u>

In April 2009, the Artesian Group and Concept Design garnered even more community censure by proposing to raze a single-family home and four residential duplexes and replace each with a six-unit residential building.   Several people questioned the developers' real motives in bringing the request to the Planning Commission. As one put it, "What does that accomplish? Is it just to rile up the neighbors to freak out? They don't even have a full proposal!" It is not clear whether "riling up" the neighborhood was Concept's primary intention, but their actions did have that impact. People moved beyond their ambivalence, neutrality, or reluctance about whether they should complete an ASP; they came to realize that the neighborhood "wants closure," stated their support for a renewed ASP effort, and began acting to make it happen. With development proposals on the table, neighborhood residents secured funds from the Grand Rapids Community

Foundation and two property owners in the neighborhood to renew the process, and started recruiting some of the most outspoken critics of the previous efforts to the Steering Committee.

Planning staff members told me, worn down themselves by all of the stops and starts *and* concerned for all of the other participants, "We all need to get through this process," and took the rezoning request as an opportunity to move the process forward. They immediately put the item on the agenda for an informal working session of the Planning Commission. In that venue, the project proponents, supporters of completing the ASP in an inclusive process, the Commission, and planning staff pre-negotiated the approach for a formal hearing to be held the following month. Commissioners allowed the discussion to extend far over their scheduled meeting time in hopes of heading off yet another heated, inconclusive public hearing. Everyone was acutely attentive to the planning director's suggestion when she suggested a way to shape the context for the May deliberation. She proposed that Artesian and Concept would first need Commission approval to have the project excused from the ASP process, and would only then be allowed to bring forth the content of specific project proposals for review. The director was exercising her positional and technical authority in recommending this route, since there was also an option of taking the project proposal entirely out of the ASP track and Commission's domain by referring Artesian and Concept to the Zoning Board of Appeals for a variance.

When that option was floated at the meeting, Steven Fry, principal of Concept, rejected it on the grounds that it would aggravate anxieties about the ASP and Artesian's intentions. He explained what they were trying to accomplish with the proposal:

> One of the things that we sensed and kept hearing from people during the first steps of the ASP plan was, "Well, what's it going to look like? What's it going to be?" Trying to be a neutral party in that process, we kept trying to say, "We want to hear what *you* want it to be." It kind of all fell apart at that point. So now, because it did sort of stall, there's a new committee that's going forward to still listen to the neighborhood and define what they want it to be and look like. We've divorced ourselves and said, "Well, we think the best we can do is to say, 'This is what we think it should be,' [in] sort of a two-pronged approach. We've boiled it down to the smallest scale: an infill residential project. We think that's the cleanest way to make this go forward and expose what we think it should be.

Concept passed around floor plans and preliminary exterior elevation drawings, but did not push any other details. Andy Guy, a resident active in reconstituting the ASP Steering Committee, conveyed his confidence that the neighborhood had regained traction on the ASP and started trying to convince the Commission to deny the ASP exception at the upcoming hearing. Fairly

amiably and easily, all parties agreed to the approach of a two-step decision, beginning with whether an exception to the ASP could be allowed.

Having already discussed, been updated about, or taken formal action on Belknap on seven occasions in the preceding 18 months, the Commission took several steps, with staff, to welcome participation and manage it effectively at the hearing. The Commission consulted their attorney about what they could do to advance the process, and he assured them that they could "impose a reasonable timeline" for completion of the ASP. Planning staff asked city employees to park elsewhere to facilitate citizens' access to the hearing. A large crowd did turn out, including many who had taken time off from work to attend, impressing everyone with their level of commitment to Belknap. Commissioners were concerned that having a large number of people testifying would not only wear everyone out, but also possibly motivate speakers to stake their positions in exaggerated ways that would exacerbate the conflict. So they suggested another approach to people gathered in the hallway before the meeting, and finding that group receptive, the Commissioners structured the meeting to have a smaller number of speakers represent the different positions, and gave each of them more time to speak and had them stay at the podium to address questions.

According to the script to which they had agreed in April, all parties handled the May hearing as a strictly procedural question. The planning director introduced the discussion by making a point of clarifying to the Commission, applicants, and audience that she had insisted upon dividing the decision into two parts and sequencing them in two separate meetings, and at one point interrupted the Commissioners to remind them:

> I don't want to have you get hung up on the dimensions of what would and would not be allowed for these projects. Your choice today is whether or not an Area-Specific Plan is required or whether you'd be inclined to waive that.

Similarly, when Commissioners requested clarification about the proposed projects, Steve Fry actively pushed them to closure on the ASP by persistently asking that they defer consideration of the project details until the next meeting and first move on the ASP. Andy Guy, speaking on behalf of those recommending against the exception, began by stating that they were "not present to evaluate a proposal but to support an Area Specific Plan." He assured the Commission that they could complete the ASP by September, and unabashedly expressed his confidence in the validity of the renewed ASP efforts:

The ASP process is now stronger than it has ever been. It is more transparent. It is more democratic and is building trust and credibility within the neighborhood. It has a much more diversified funding stream and budget. We have expanded the leadership of the Steering Committee: some leadership emerged in reaction to some of what you have been presented here that needed to be heard and they now have a seat at the table, and the Steering Committee has been empowered to a new degree to make decisions. Concept Design may have started the project but the neighborhood has taken ownership of this project and is going to finish it.

The Commission then began discussing a wide range of options they might take, including tabling Concept's request, denying it outright, or allowing them to come to the next meeting with a plan. Ultimately, they used their position to accelerate the community's work on the ASP. They acknowledged the division of opinions about the process and redevelopment plans in the room, stated their desire for the parties to "figure it out and agree with each other," and opined, "A deadline should be imposed to both force the hand [of the ASP process] and also give it a chance." Commissioners warned that if the neighborhood could not come together to complete the ASP, "the Commission will need to take control of it," and allow developers' proposals to move forward on their project-specific merits. They then unanimously tabled Artesian's request for exceptions and proposal review until September 1 or the ASP was completed, whichever came first, indicating that their first goal was to move the ASP along, not vote yeah or nay on the merits of the project.

Concept protested only weakly. Neighborhood residents, planning staff, and Commissioners were more upbeat about the process than they had been for some time, expressing their satisfaction not only with the decision but their confidence that they could now get to some point of closure. One person who had found the conflict particularly trying told me repeatedly, with evident relief, "I think it's all going to work out." They praised the Commissioners' handling of the complexity of the issue and open-ended consideration of many options. They felt that Concept and Artesian had "not really lost anything," whereas letting them move forward would have reopened "all these complications" about their the next steps and possibly forced them to ask, "Do we have to start all over again?" They were particularly glad for the deadline, which they described as "tight but useful" and "fair."

Analysis

In Belknap, getting the process "unstuck" was accomplished through artfully constructed narratives of possibility. At this stage in the neighborhood planning effort, inclusive public

leadership practices began to emerge. They manifested in the form of narrative work to facilitate adaptive community change through inclusive processes. Abolafia (2010) describes the constitutive process of constructing a narrative to guide policy-making action via "plotting" to create a plausible narrative that both justifies and maps out a policy choice, a phenomena that he identifies through ethnographic analysis of transcripts private meetings of the Federal Reserve Boards' governors. I observe the same phenomena happening in Belknap, with two notable differences: the Belknap discussions were public, and the plotting work was oriented towards creating narratives of public engagement in policy-making rather than narratives of policy outcomes.

The plotting sessions began with the planning director convening a meeting and proposing to stage the project review into two parts and two timeframes, the second contingent upon approval of the first. I characterize her action – and the responses to it by others involved -as inclusive public leadership practices occurring in the network of actors involved in the Belknap controversies. They were inclusive practices because the parties, with their diverse perspectives, collaboratively framed the problem (e.g., variance vs. ASP exception), the planning director proposed an approach which they deliberated about and refined together, and they even begin previewing some potential policy outcomes. They are public practices because the Commission business meeting was an open and transparent venue for the discussion, as opposed to a small group meeting of the parties with the planning director, for example. The parties at the table oriented the discussion towards public considerations of what would best serve the community at large, as marked for example by Concept's refusing several potential approaches to the process which would have expedited its project approval but compromised the ASP process. More importantly, they are public practices in that they constructed a narrative of engagement that was publicly available and legible for people to react to by enacting it, agreeing with it, disagreeing with it, and coordinating their actions.

The May hearing was also marked by inclusive public leadership practices. The inclusive practices included the Commissioners' running the meeting in a far more deliberative fashion than a typical public hearing, in which the problem is pre-defined, participants state their interests and typically there is no facilitation or dialogue to promote learning, and policy outcomes are pre-determined. In this hearing the Commissioners intentionally avoided a numbers game in which the position represented by the most speakers gains an advantage by instead selecting compelling,

trusted spokespeople for each position, giving them more time to develop their ideas, and engaging them in dialogue. They requested and modeled deliberative practices such as not repeating what others had already said. They were public practices in that the Commissioners and staff also made their process transparent, making the narrative logic of how the hearing would unfold transparent by explaining how and why the rezoning request was being broken into two stages.

The plotting practices were inclusive in that the Commissioners explored different options in reference to what they had learned from the prior dialogue, pausing to checking in with the parties to the discussion about how different options would work for them, and persistently articulating their commitment to an inclusive neighborhood engagement process. In so doing, they were enacting the kind of democratic practice described by American pragmatists: one of collective inquiry, in which a desired future is constructed intentionally via action in the present, and the ethical, moral, and democratic implications are part of practical judgment about how to proceed (Dewey 1927; Talisse 2001; Alexander 1990).

Both hearings were marked by leadership practices because those present used the "problem" of Artesian and Concept's rezoning request as an opportunity for adaptive community change to address the problem of their inertia and neighborhood discord. People sitting on the fence about the ASP recommitted themselves to the process, ASP advocates used the proposals to secure funding and new participation in the Steering Committee, Artesian and Concept improved their relationships with the other parties by shoring up the ASP, and the Planning Commission and planning staff affirmed the ASP and sped it forward.

The narrative that the hearings built was a narrative of engagement that was *inclusive*: specific projects may not be considered outside the context of a neighborhood planning process; the ASP process will resume, with neighborhood "ownership" and a democratically legitimate Steering Committee and process of deliberation; the disputing parties will work together to try to "agree with each other," and there is a deadline in order to be fair to Artesian and both "force the hand" and "give a chance" to the ASP process. They were plotting a narrative of a *process* of public engagement in policy making. Whereas Abolafia's Federal Reserve Bank deliberators were constructing a narrative through which to justify and map out a policy decision, the Belknap players were constructing a narrative through which a policy choice about projects could only be justified and mapped via an inclusive process.

As I have argued about the previous two episodes of the Belknap planning process, the parties to the conflict were thirsting for a process narrative. The satisfaction that they articulated after the hearing highlighted the value of having a restored narrative: they were relieved that they would not have to ask, "Do we have to start all over again?" and that they did not need to face "complications" about the next steps to take. Such questions and complications, with which they were by that time uncomfortably familiar, are the manifestations of the absence of a narrative logic to proceed to the next steps of an emergent democratic process. At this point, however, the parties plotted a way forward through establishing and modeling a public narrative of how engagement would proceed as a process and co-constructing the next steps in an inclusive venue. This restored cohesion and momentum to enact the process inclusively (Figure 3).
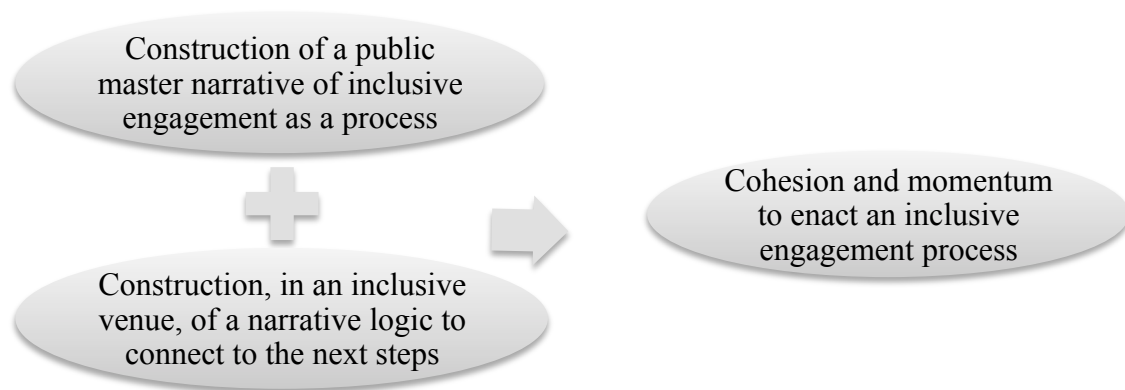

Figure 3. Dual sources of cohesion and momentum in an inclusive engagement process.

Hopeful Storytelling to Enable Inclusion

From this point, the momentum and cohesion of the ASP process improved. Storytelling practices helped to accomplish this shift. Storytelling in the network of people and organizations involved in Belknap planning helped to gain buy-in for the ASP Steering Committee to resume and complete its work, to organize new means of neighborhood engagement, and to work through knotty disputes over planning and redevelopment outcomes. Hopeful narrating enabled adaptive and transformative community change. Hopeful narrating addressed bottlenecks about redevelopment outcomes that the parties needed to get through in order to adopt the plan and move forward. It also created a platform for ongoing collaboration work to interpret and enact the ASP once it was adopted.

Hopeful storytelling about how the ASP could be conducted in an inclusive way and concluded in a timely manner began at the May 2009 Planning Commission hearing described above. This storytelling was a kind of marketing of the proposed process, and it was in fact done primarily by a person who is a public relations professional specializing in planning and government relations, Andy Guy. Andy sold the revamped ASP process to the Planning Commission as a rectification of what had been wrong with the previous efforts, which would be accomplished through three shifts in actors: a) new leadership on the Steering Committee; b) a new consultant to replace Concept as the facilitators of community consultation; and c) the third relocation of the institutional home of the ASP, previously under the umbrella of Artesian, then the City, and now a community organization.

These stories did not suggest a complete break from prior efforts, however. Both Andy and the planning director presented the effort as a correction of an ongoing effort, rather than a new process. Andy's story, quoted in the previous section, was that Concept had started the effort but the neighborhood would finish it. The planning director also framed the ongoing work as a culmination of an ongoing effort, explaining to the Planning Commission:

> This new version coming out is viewed as a continuation of the planning work that's already been done, but then finalizing it and finishing it. It's not starting over and building a whole new plan, it's going to try to work and build on the discussions that have already taken place.

The process was also sold explicitly as an effort to work together and build a "consensus-based" plan. Andy suggested "an alternative to dukin' this out before the Planning Commission" among disputing parties, telling the Commissioners:

> There is a table and a space that has been created to sit around and have a respectful, civil conversation and identify mutual interests and figure out how we can develop a plan that everybody can buy into.

Having gotten the Planning Commission's blessing and urging to proceed, the Steering Committee reconstituted itself and began working on "a pretty aggressive timeline" to "right the ship" of the ASP and complete it over the summer. Storytelling was part of organizing how the work would proceed. The practices of neighborhood engagement changed radically, and storytelling was a way of making the logic of the change transparent and attractive to the community. The Steering Committee announced, persistently and publicly, that there would be "no more big gym dot voting" because they "had had enough of that." While the community had

been indecisive the previous winter about whether and how to proceed, there had been a fairly common sense that whatever the next pass at the ASP might be, it should "not be community-wide meetings, but something very much more local." Steering Committee members felt the dot voting and large group format made participants more likely to "stake out positions that create their own gravitational pull."

They switched to "direct, personal outreach to citizen groups, block clubs, land owners and developers in the neighborhood" in the form of "investigative interviews" with small groups of stakeholders on porches, in kitchens, and in offices. The Steering Committee and consultants shuttled back and forth among these small groups to try to build a sense of what the whole community could accept, gathering information "through various feedback loops facilitated directly by the steering committee and its interface with various neighborhood groups and stakeholders." The Steering Committee then interpreted the stakeholder input, worked intensively to surface differences of opinion within the community and among themselves, and generated new options to try to massage the different perspectives into a plan that could be accepted by consensus among its own members. They supplemented this with a website, flyers, and outreach at community meetings and fairs to inform people of what was going on and ask for their ideas.

The Committee also changed the content of the ASP discussion in several ways, in part through storytelling. Recognizing that the neighborhood had become "polarized around density and change," the committee members intentionally used storytelling to "talk people off the ledge" by "putting density in terms people can understand." They attempted to renew dialogue by deliberately trying to "steer the conversation away from density" to a discussion of "building types and uses" for particular areas and other options for managing the scale of the uses, such as regulating buildings in terms of size, setbacks, and lot coverage rather than the "number of families" they could house. Through this storytelling, the Steering Committee found new language for accomplishing planning goals. For example, when they disagreed about whether multi-family housing would change the character of a street with most of the neighborhood's most attractive old houses, Artesian's members asked about defining "traditional housing" as housing that "looks like single-family housing" but could actually contain up to three units. The group agreed and articulated another aspect of "traditional housing": parking lots should be behind the buildings, not facing the street. This storytelling was about content, not process, but it had process implications in that it removed a bottleneck in the Committee's ability to work together.

A stickier area of negotiation was over commercial use. The conflict was not over whether there should be retail development, since it was strongly supported in the neighborhood, but rather in terms of its overall amount, form, and locations. One of the Steering Committee's foremost concerns was what to do at the corner of Coit and Hastings (see upper left quadrant of Figure 2). Artesian's proposal to rezone lots there from residential to commercial had generated most of the content-related opposition to the previous draft ASP; it was "the flashpoint that submarined that ASP." It remained an unresolved topic of debate right up through the Steering Committee's final meeting:

> It came down to that corner. There were people that were dead-set against mixed use at that corner. We basically called the question in the Steering Committee meeting and said, "Look, is there any way that we can come to some compromise? If it stays mixed use, we're going to turn out a whole bunch of entrenched neighborhood people against it and sink the whole plan again. And if we turn it completely residential, one property interest is going to rally their troops and try to do the same thing." I was convinced we had to pick whom to fight.

Steering committee members repeatedly stressed, "We need to get the final ASP passed" and urged compromise in order to do that. Still, they seemed stuck, until:

> The consultant said to some of the people who were more opposed to mixed-use stuff, "Is there any way you could see mixed use happening in a residential-style building type?" "Well, yeah, you know I guess if it looked like a house, it might be okay." So he goes back to the developer, the landowner, and says, "Is it really that hard to create a commercial-style business in a building that might look like a residence?" "Oh, no I guess we could work with that." Out of that pretty simple conversation came out of this idea that is now colored on the map and defined as a special district called "Cottage Retail."

With that settled, the Committee immediately concluded its work. The consultant asked if everyone could accept the plan and the entire Steering Committee agreed and also decided to attend the Commission meeting together to show their support for it. The swiftness with which this was resolved surprised people:

> We were able to find some compromise on that corner that we didn't even begin to scratch the surface of on the first time around. It was one example of how a little better structured process and the right people kind of facilitating the conversation led to finding some common ground that nobody foresaw. I was blown away that we were able to get to that compromise in the end.

Finally, storytelling helped to constitute the ASP as an ongoing project. Sometime in the course of the summer, the Steering Committee recast their work as "ASP 3.0," and framed itself as

"utilizing the previous input and stakeholder efforts of the ASP 1.0 and ASP 2.0, while also building a strong neighborhood consensus for the resulting vision (ASP 3.0)." In this schema, ASP 1.0 referred to the initial three community meetings hosted by Artesian and Concept. ASP 2.0 referred to the remainder of the previous summer's efforts, when the Planning Department and NOBL took a stronger role in trying to manage a more inclusive process, beginning with the fourth large community meeting through the efforts to reorganize via block captains. This schema conceptualized ASP 1.0 and ASP 2.0 as initial and inconclusive phases of the process, and ASP 3.0 as a culmination of those efforts (not an alternative plan or new start). The Executive Summary stated:

> This Belknap ASP therefore is the culmination of all of the diligent work which came before and represents the neighborhood vision for the future – it should be considered as simply the Belknap Area Specific Plan.

The "ASP 3.0" language was also a story about the ASP itself being an unfinished, ongoing project. First, the 1.0 / 2.0 / 3.0 narrative is explicit that there is no endpoint of the neighborhood's identity, development, or the decision-making process, so that continuing public engagement is necessary to realize the plan. Second, it helped the Planning Department and Commission to accept a document that might otherwise have been considered incomplete or immature. Specifically, the Planning Department was concerned that the plan might accommodate too much change, but the Steering Committee repeatedly asserted that they were comfortable with its high level of openness. They consider it not as a "blueprint" of what will happen, but rather as a "balance of flexibility and rigidity" that serves as an indication of where things "could happen, if proposed," a guide for people who would like to enact change in Belknap, and a "record" of prior discussions to frame forthcoming deliberations.

Just as the Steering Committee had reached a tipping point where many members were willing to compromise in order to "get the ASP passed," the Planning Department was also eager to get it done, despite some reservations. The Steering Committee's "ASP 3.0" image helped the Department to endorse it as a platform for continuing work. As a planner explained to me:

> They seem to have the consensus of the key stakeholders of the neighborhood. The challenge is then on City staff to help implement a plan that doesn't have all of the details fleshed out as much as we would like, but it is likely that this is as good as it is going to get. It isn't worth rocking the boat. We'll find out how truly successful the process was and whether the neighborhood really understood what they were supporting when a project is proposed. I'm going to have to trust that my previous experiences with Belknap holds true through this process and that they were given

the proper tools to help them in their decision-making. Based on what I've seen, I think that they were.

The full Steering Committee turned out to show its support for the "ASP 3.0" at its first hearing before the Planning Commission on September 10, a full year after the Planning Commission had tabled the original draft ASP and urged the neighborhood to "keep trying." This time, the Commission promptly and unanimously approving sending the ASP to the City Commission for approval for a public comment period, following which each body would need to approve the plan. Having deferred consideration of specific projects until there was an ASP, on September 24 (i.e., even before the ASP was formally adopted), the Planning Commission allowed Artesian and Concept to return with the infill projects they had tabled in May. The Planning Commission rejected their proposals. Remarkably, neither Artesian nor Concept protested the subsequent adoption of the ASP. Following a public review period, the Planning Commission considered its adoption in January 2010. Few people attended the hearing, none made any comments about the content of the plan, and after ten minutes the Planning Commission unanimously recommended sending it to the City Commission for adoption, which the City Commission did, unanimously, on February 23. Staff, residents, and developer are generally happy with the final document, regarding it as "a compromise we can work with" and "a way to move forward."

Analysis

Like plotting, storytelling is one of the practices of narrative work through which new possibilities for action are created. Storytelling is a way of enabling a desired future: stories about desired outcomes are a way of narrating the way towards them. Telling the story of a desired future is itself not enough to constitute that outcome, but it may reorient knowledge and action so as to lay out the pieces of a narrative that lead towards that future. Realizing the story, "We can build a consensus-based ASP," occurred through the sedimenting of actions, across a network of players involved in the controversy, which brought that narrative to life. Saying something will happen does not make it so, although motivational maxims are frequently a successful strategy to create the desired outcome (Weick 1979). Saying something will happen may well help it to happen, if the audience will both "supply and accept" that story (Feldman and Kolbert 2002: 287). The fact that the story was *inclusive*, "We will work together," helped mobilize the players to "supply and accept" the story by stepping up to enact it.

Similarly, I characterize actively narrating the renewed planning efforts as ASP 3.0 as an inclusive leadership practice because it enabled inclusive policy-making in the following ways. Like the Web 2.0 narrative that it indexes, the ASP 3.0 narrative is about working together, iteratively, for continuous improvement. Storytelling about ASP 3.0 explicitly enabled a process that was emergent (not fixed) and ongoing (not concluded). It constituted ASP 3.0 as a wiki: a platform for user-generated content that is produced in an interactive, ongoing way. These actions are consistent with the 50/50 rule for inclusive processes evoked by Grand Rapids' public managers: 50% of the goal of a process is to produce the project at hand, and 50% of it is to generate relationships among people and issues that enable ongoing civic engagement (Quick and Feldman 2009). The ASP 3.0 process narrative serves as a frame within which pieces of the process such as the parties, mechanisms, and timeframes for community consultations could shift. The adopted ASP is thus a foundation for ongoing deliberation about development choices as they come up, not a blueprint for what will happen.

These storytelling practices constituted hopeful narratives. They were thus leadership practices in that they enabled transformative, adaptive community change in processes and outcomes, like the hopeful storytelling evoked by Sandercock (2003) and Healey (1983). Andy's story about "a table and a space" for "civil conversation" and building consensus as an alternative to "dukin' things out" presented a vision of a way for people to work together, overcoming the impasse by repairing their relationships. Storytelling about physical structures – finding the way from disputes about high-density housing and retail use to a new vocabulary of "traditional housing" and "cottage retail" was hopeful storytelling that shaped "a new imagination of alternatives" (Sandercock 2003: 18). Finally, the ASP 3.0 storytelling practices constituted a hopeful narrative in the sense theorized by Miyazaki (2006), in which hope is a method, rather than an entity, accomplished through reorienting the directionality of knowledge towards the future. Recasting the hated "big gym dot voting" as a feature of "ASP 1.0," now replaced by new methods in ASP 3.0, reinterpreted the foregoing efforts into a narrative of ongoing improvement an learning, reorienting knowledge of past practices away from judging the past and towards possibilities for action in the present and future.

The most outstanding feature of the 3.0 story, of course, is that it allowed the process to move forward – a hopeful shift from the inertia and discord of the preceding months – while staying open. In the ASP 3.0 model, the community will continue to furnish the logic and

legitimacy – or illegitimacy – of the community's next move, without predetermining what it will be. The next steps must have a logical connection, narratively, to the adopted ASP and the work done to produce it, but the next steps will also furnish the narrative.

Conclusion

Dissonant narratives of engagement in Belknap generated diverging opinions about what it means to implement such a process and whether actions were or were not proceeding according to that narrative, which in turn produced inertia and conflict. Two things may be observed from this. First, it cannot be assumed that everyone has the same master narrative of engagement, so it is important to articulate the narrative of a process in order for it to proceed and for people to take part. Second, at each juncture, actively and publicly narrating the engagement process so a to construct the narrative logic is necessary for action to proceed.

Actively narrating an inclusive policy-making process is important. Public engagement can proceed without intentional public narration of what the process is – as it did in the first period of Belknap planning – but quality and consequences of engagement may be diminished by the lack of a public narrative. Engagement may become fragmented, the public may experience difficulty participating in a meaningful way, or conflicts over the legitimacy of the process may arise. This is particularly important in inclusive policy-making because it is by definition is emergent, involving co-production of the process through which people engage to address a public policy problem (Quick and Feldman 2009). Narrative work to provide a logic for an ongoing engagement process is one way to keep an inclusive process open and moving forward.

Accomplishing cohesion and momentum in an inclusive process does not simply involve calling for "an inclusive process." Even if there had been some common understanding of how to design and implement the Belknap planning process in an inclusive way, those efforts would still require active, ongoing narration to maintain their cohesion.

Some practices for actively narrating engagement include providing legible traces of where the process is going so that people can make sense of what is happening. This foregrounds the roles of "telling" and "acting" in construction narratives: words and signposts are important, as are actions that assemble the narrative. Part of the legitimacy of a process being inclusive rests in showing how it has been transformed by the participants' deciding on its direction and participatory mechanisms. Frequently civic engagement practitioners talk about "transparency" in processes in terms of making the process available for scrutiny. Another aspect of transparency,

however, is making the process visible so that people can see what it is about and how to participate, i.e., so that the narrative logic is accessible to be understood and implemented. I am suggesting that actively narrating a process is one of the ways of providing that transparency. It does so when it involves participants in deciding how to organize engagement, ensure that that they know how to take part, and to provide guideposts and traces that legitimate it as an inclusive process.

I have considered the roles of narratives, actions, and narrative logics to connection actions in accomplishing a coordinated public policy-making process. I have demonstrated the necessity of actively and public narrating emergent democratic processes to maintain their cohesion and momentum. I have *not* suggested that *a* shared narrative is necessary, and I want to conclude by considering whether it is even desirable in an inclusive public policy-making process. Pentland and Feldman (2007) note that individuals can assemble different actions or events to the same narrative, e.g., by making a flight reservation in several different ways. Conversely, different actors may impute different narratives to the same series of potential actions and events by making different connections among them, transforming the context and the possibilities that it enables. Individuals do this work, but social order is constituted in part via "joint narrative accrual," through which people "construct a history, a tradition, a legal system, instruments assuring historical continuity if not legitimacy" (Bruner 1991: 20). Coordinated *collective* action appears to necessitate a "narrative of collective action" to provide a sense of "collective identity and a coordinated plot" (Quinn and Worline 2008: 509).

We might assume that civic engagement – a public activity that by definition involves questions of public problems, public good, or public impacts – necessarily involves "collective action," but this does not necessarily imply having the same understanding of a problem or reaching a consensus-based policy recommendation. The narrative that was necessary to repair rifts in the neighborhood and re-start a mired process was not a cohesive, unified version of "This is the kind of community that we want to be," or "This is where we want development to end up." The narrative was instead, "This is how we work together to decide what kind of community we want to be." People could agree to disagree about their identity and end goal, within the narrative of how to keep talking about it. In other words, what was needed is a shared narrative of engagement – of neighborhood plann*ing*, not of the neighborhood or of the plan. Its work was to stabilize a process as an emergent one, not to stabilize the steps of the process, an identity for the

community, or an endpoint for what kind of outcomes the adopted policy will effect. Inclusive public leadership practices are a way to develop that narrative collaboratively, and make sure that it is publicly accessible for people to rewrite and enact. From a shared narrative of process, a shared narrative of policy *outcomes* is then more likely to result.

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