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Zoned Out: Conflict and Perceived Threat in a Rural-Urban Fringe Area

Jennifer Chambers

**Thesis submitted to the
Eberly College of Arts and Sciences
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**Corey Colyer, Ph.D., Chair
Melissa Latimer, Ph.D.
Jennifer Steele, Ph.D.**

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ABSTRACT

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Jennifer Chambers

Zoning and other restrictive land use policies are quite common in the United States and are frequently enacted as a response to the rapid growth and change within a city or county. Past research on zoning has primarily examined the positive and negative consequences of zoning ordinances, often focusing the analysis on neighborhood change. This study inductively examines the conflict that emerged in one county when new zoning ordinances were proposed through an in-depth analysis of nearly 300 newspaper forums, observations of three public hearings, and interviews with key informants. Concerned with activists on both sides of the zoning issue, this study explores reasons for support and opposition to zoning in rural-urban fringe county. Findings illustrate how perceived threat is associated with what individuals in the community recognize the goals and consequences of zoning policy to be. Implications of the findings and future research are also discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

Every Thursday the Levy County¹ Commission holds a public hearing to discuss issues and policies that are developing in the county; time is allocated at the end of these meetings for residents to speak in support or against any proposals on the agenda. One Thursday in March of 2008, six members of the Levy County Commission took their seats at the panel, ready to begin the afternoon's public hearing on the proposed zoning ordinance. With most residents of Levy County at work on weekdays, the crowd of less than 25 residents was not surprising for a 2:00 p.m. commission hearing.

Minutes turned into nearly an hour, and after the lengthy drone of commissioners taking turns discussing detailed budget matters and tax codes, past levies and recent number-crunching, it became unclear whether the hearing would touch on the matter of zoning at all. Suddenly, the droning stopped; it was time to hear comments from the public. A tall, thin elderly man approached the panel, leaned his wooden cane against the podium, pulled a wad of paper from his back pocket, and began to address the Levy County commission. His tattered, white utility jacket was adorned with the hand-written phrases "Local Powers Act" and "Zoning" in bold, black lettering, circled in bright red paint with the "ban" slash through each phrase to signal the man's dissent.

His hands began to shake, crinkling the wad of paper as he slowly read his concerns with the zoning proposal in a stern, surprisingly cordial voice. Less than five minutes later as the elderly man continued to voice his grievance, one commissioner stood, folded his planner closed

¹ Name of county changed to protect anonymity of the community of study.

with a “smack,” and turned to exit the commission chambers. Moments later, the president of the commission began to follow his colleague toward the exit.

“Let the record show that two of the county’s commissioners are walkin’ out in the middle of the meetin’!” The man’s voice echoed into the microphone. An inaudible response was tossed back at the man from the exit directly behind the commission panel. Perhaps just as shocked as he, the deafening silence from the audience offered him little comfort as his eyes jolted from the remaining commissioners back to the audience in disbelief. The man’s face faded from a colorful rage to complete hopelessness within seconds. He raised his voice as he declared, “And let the record show that the president just yelled at me!” The chamber door slammed shut, rattling a plaque of the state seal inscribed with “Montani Semper Liberi” (*Mountaineers are Always Free*).

This understandably frustrated “anti-zoner” speaking at the commission hearing is Randy Hayes, a retired, 69 year old property owner and resident of Levy County for more than four decades. He has literally watched the county grow and change since the early 1960s. Over the years he has witnessed small businesses close, large businesses set up shop, and local farmers sell their land to real estate developers. Randy has also seen many close friends, relatives, and countless other Levy County natives move out of the area while new residents continue to move in.

R.H.: ...we have the newcomers, the ‘high society,’ the retired government workers, I don’t know how to describe ‘em but they have stepped in and those people, they want to enjoy all of the things that Levy County has to offer—but they don’t want to put up with the natives of Levy County. That to me—that’s the biggest difference between Levy County now and what it was back in the ‘60s.

Randy’s voice was just one of many residents’ voices echoing into the commission’s microphone in protest of the county’s new zoning proposal. In the subsequent commission

hearings, their arguments were met with equal force by the advocates of the zoning ordinance, including the county commissioners themselves. In January 2008, one Levy County commissioner even proclaimed to a local news reporter, “I think it’s pretty much 50/50. I don’t see really any big landslide in this election for or against zoning...if it’s defeated I think it’ll be by a narrow margin.”² His assumption could not have been more wrong. The final vote in May 2008 showed Levy County’s disapproval for the commission’s proposal by almost 2 to 1, with 66.4% voters against zoning and only 33.6% in approval. If zoning would “fix” Levy’s biggest issues as the commissioners had assured, then why were so many residents opposed to the countywide zoning proposal?

Drawing on data gathered from local editorial archives, observations at public hearings, and interviews with key informants, this research illustrates how the conflict over zoning in Levy County had very little to do with the policy’s content; the zoning debate was a public response to three individually perceived threats: developers, neighbors, and the county government. The purpose of the conceptual outline presented with this study is twofold. Primarily, the goal is to identify the meaning of zoning in its proposal stage. Since individuals have their past and current experiences within the community from which to draw when considering a land use proposal, what did residents believe the policy would achieve, or fail to achieve, if passed? What is the understood purpose of the zoning policy? Secondly, a perceived threat model relates this attached meaning to not only residents’ positions within the conflict, but their values and preferences for the future of the county.

Both sides of the zoning conflict indicate some level of discomfort with the “excessive” development in the area. The pro-zoning movement perceives the neighbors themselves as the

² “Draft of Proposed Zoning Ordinance Passed By Planning Commission,” Reported by Erin Wolfe, Jan 17th 2008

primary threat to the community, and thus views the local government as an ally; these residents see the zoning policy as a necessary tool to protect them against the actions of their neighbors. The anti-zoning movement perceives the “corrupt” county government as the greatest threat to the community, and thus views the zoning proposal as a “blank check” with which the government will most definitely misuse. Residents’ values and preferences for the future of the county also appear within the conflict as contingent upon the individuals’ trust in local government authority.

This conflict over zoning renders visible the concerns of a community in transition; the community is concerned with maintaining property values, revenues, property rights, aesthetics, and quality of life in the face of unprecedented, rapid growth and development. This transition that Levy County is experiencing is best described by examining exactly what it means to be a resident of the rural-urban fringe.

THE LITERATURE

The literature surrounding zoning policies, as well as past research of community conflict, provide an important framework for understanding the present case study. While many limitations surround the characteristics of this past research of which I aim to address, these studies provide a conversation of important findings and illustrate key attributes of community conflict and land use controversies.

Community Conflicts

Past research explains the severity of community conflict by exploring common variables, specific attributes, which are shared among a number of communities experiencing various types of conflicts. Gamson’s (1966) quantitative analysis of eighteen communities

contrasts “conventional conflict” with “rancorous conflict,” finding that certain communities are more structurally prone to one type of conflict. He suggests that a conventional conflict involves activists on either side of the argument recognizing one another as pursuants of divergent but *legitimate* goals. In contrast, the “rancorous” conflict is “characterized by the shared belief that tactics used to influence the outcome are ‘dirty,’ ‘underhanded,’ ‘vicious,’ and so forth” (Gamson 1966: 71).

What Gamson’s research does not provide, however, is the contextual relevance of the conflict experienced within the community. His analysis is based on eighteen communities experiencing a wide variety of conflicts, with a number of the conflicts based on fluoridation yet not experienced by all communities studied. This approach to community conflict claims structural relevance—politically and socio-demographically—of a community with respect to the specific type of conflict emergent, while disregarding what the subject matter of conflicts may provide contextually. In other words, his approach carries the assumption that a conflict over fluoridation and a conflict over abortion would produce similar rancor if embedded in the same community, due to its political structure and socio-demographic composition.

While Gamson disregards the relevance of the central issues of the conflicts in his study, his analysis provides a vital structure for understanding the emergent peripheral issues, beliefs, and perceived goals found in the present case study. His findings based on the conceptualization of divergent goals and the political climates emphasize the necessity for exploring the process of legitimation as it contributes to the collective understanding of community conflicts. As I will discuss later, this research confronts the process of legitimation as a contributing factor in sustaining conflict within Levy County.

Community conflicts have also been contextually geared, focusing on the central issues of debate and resident responses. Specifically, studies of public reaction to land use planning often focus on environmental activism or community concerns with the implementation of wind power sites, forestland regulation, timber harvesting, proposed quarries, and water resource management efforts. Many scholars frame studies of these conflicting attitudes and perceptions in accord with the NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) theory, which proposes that while individuals may support development of agricultural land, noxious facilities, or LULUs (Locally Unwanted Land Uses) in general terms, such proposals face opposition “in the backyards” of those same individuals (Lach 1996; Litmanen 1996; Steelman and Carmin 1998; Eser and Luloff 2003).

Other scholars reject such conclusions entertaining the NIMBY hypothesis, stating that conclusions based on a NIMBY explanation of public support for certain land use decisions such as wind farm siting are an oversimplification of more complex issues and attitudes such as fairness and equity in the decision making process (Bell, Gray and Haggett 2005; Wolsink 2006, 2007).

Researchers studying environmental activism in Alberta, Canada found value orientations to be a better predictor of attitudes than social structure or socialization (McFarlane and Boxall 2003). In their research of attitudes toward timber harvesting, Schaaf, Davis and Broussard (2007) employed a national survey to find that the attitudes of the general public are not different than the attitudes of forestland owners. Studies also show that motivation for afforestation of private landowners is primarily due to their value of the land as private residence and the desire to preserve the land for future generations (Ross-Davis, Broussard, Jacobs, and Davis 2006).

Furthermore, researchers cannot ignore the institutional factors when considering public support for specific land uses that often shape the outcomes (Wolsink 2000). One study of

forestland ownership and conflict within an urban fringe area indicates that consistently communication management intentions and acknowledging neighbors' concerns reduced active opposition to policy and regulations (Edwards and Bliss 2003).

This study takes into account all factors deemed important by previous land use conflict research, i.e. in-groups, out-groups, community values, individual goals, and institutional factors to analyze the conflict surrounding a proposed zoning ordinance in a rural-urban fringe area.

Zoning

Research on zoning policy typically takes the form of policy analysis and assessments (Freidheim 1981; Doron and Davidi 2006; Liebig, Koenig and Pynoos 2006; Boyd 1980) where a number of quantitative analyses reveal the negative effects of these codes on particular classes and populations (Neiman 1980; Krefetz 1979; Proudfoot 1979; Clingermayer 1993; Pasha 1992; Shlay and Rossi 1981; Hamilton 1975).

With his analysis of 39 suburbs in Wisconsin, Neiman (1980) contends that zoning policy is a significant influence on community change with respect to both physical and socioeconomic community features. Other studies argue that zoning creates a class divide within communities by restricting housing availability for marginalized populations and segregating low-income housing from high-priced districts (Proudfoot 1979; Boyd 1980; Freidheim 1981; Shlay and Rossi 1981; Palen 2005).

Studies reflecting the ill consequences of zoning policy are not limited to American experiences. In the U.S., zoning regulations are demonstrated as inhibiting of dwelling units commonly associated with multigenerational housing, extended families, and housing arrangements of co-residence for eldercare (Oakley 2002; Liebig, Koenig and Pynoos 2006). Likewise, a study of the aging population in Israel finds that amendments to zoning policy

passed by the Israeli Supreme Court of Justice allowing “old-age homes” to operate in residentially zoned areas that had been previously forbidden, experience resistance and have been largely ignored since their implementation (Doron and Davidi 2006).

This characteristic of limitation in prior studies is that they tend to focus on the goals and specific codes of zoning policies. The goal of this study is not to evaluate regulatory codes in order to develop a complete understanding of the formal goals of exclusionary zoning policy. The goal of this research is to explain the meaning the policy carries with respect to the local residents. This approach is a key contribution to understanding zoning policy and its consequences, primarily because, as Doron and Davidi (2006) illustrate, the intended goals of the codes within these policies do not always translate the same way in their outcomes.

Another limitation of the zoning literature is that it tends to be one-sided. Although zoning is considered a broad land use tool, much of the research focusing on its opposition emerges only when specific parties wish to override unfair exclusionary zoning policy (Krefetz 1979; Oakley 2002). This research hints toward the idea of an underlying community conflict behind these land use policies, but fails to provide an objective analysis of a community conflict because of its direct concern with anti-zoning parties and their attempt to override the specific regulation or code of interest.

Case studies on zoning policy suggests that local government and political climates cannot be disregarded as an influence when considering whether the price of land determines zoning policy in the community or whether the policies when implemented, determine the price of land (Fowler and White 1979). With this factor in mind, a comparative-historical analysis of four communities in Connecticut provides a picture of how the developers, real estate professionals, and local officials are included in the process of land use policy, formulating the

outcomes in great detail (Rudel 1989). Recent changes in Levy County provide a closer look at the importance of including these factors, i.e. developers, real estate, and local government officials in this analysis of perceived threat within the zoning conflict.

BACKGROUND

The conflict over zoning in Levy County brings to the foreground the distress of a community undergoing transformation; the community is concerned with maintaining property values, revenues, property rights, aesthetics, and quality of life in the face of unprecedented, rapid growth and development.

I think for many folks in West Virginia if asked ‘why do you need zoning,’ their knee jerk response would be ‘no way’... but with the phenomenal growth we’ve had we think we need zoning to maintain a quality of life and also to enhance our prosperity in the county... for one person’s gain there could be 25 people suffering. Do you protect that one individual and allow the other 25 people to lose their property value? I think not. I think what we’re trying to do is to get a balance. We’re trying to protect as many people as we can. (Chief Commissioner: Levy County, 2008)

Levy County, WV is a small metropolitan county located approximately an hour from the nation’s capitol and is part of the rural West Virginia countryside. This rural-urban fringe area has rapidly experienced urban sprawl³ in the last decade, and is one of the nation’s premiere “bedroom communities,” a term often applied to the area by local residents and real estate professionals due to the high percentage of commuters moving into the county from the District of Columbia and metropolitan areas. Due to such rapid migration, rural-urban fringe areas are confirmed as notorious for having certain socio-demographic traits, such as changes in workforce composition, high percentages of commuters, and spikes in both income and housing

³ Sprawl is the term commonly used to refer to the automobile dependent low-density housing and commercial development taking place in the outer reaches of metropolitan areas (Palen 2005: 117).

units and values. These areas are also known for their inadequate “factors of accessibility,” mainly insufficient utility services, lack of public transportation, few available workplaces, and overpopulated schools (Pryor 1968; Sharp and Clark 2008).

Table 1 illustrates that Levy County, exemplifying the previously researched and defined concept of a rural-urban fringe area, composes a key location for understanding land use conflict within the fringe (See Appendix A). Since April 1, 2000, Levy County has experienced a percent change in population of 28.5%. In 1990, the total population was 59,523; ten years later the population had jumped to 75,905 residents. Today, Levy County is home to 97,534 people, making it one of the highest populated counties in the state. In 2000, almost a fourth of the county’s population had lived in a different county at least five years prior, and 16.5% reported they had lived in a different state.

Both the composition of Levy County’s labor force as well as its housing market have drastically changed over the last decade and a half. The percentage of residents holding a management or professional occupation has increased, while the percentage of individuals working in farming, fishing, forestry, and the production industry has declined. This apparent shift from blue collar to white collar occupations is indicative of the transition experienced in a rural-urban fringe area, and is particularly interesting in that it appears to support many long-time residents’ theory of Levy County becoming a “D.C. suburb.” The increase in construction occupations can be attributed to many new homes and businesses being built over the recent years. From 1990 to 2006, the total number of housing units increased drastically from 25,385 to 41,339 housing units. More recently, the price of homes in Levy County has staggeringly skyrocketed; in 2000, the percentage of homes worth \$200,000 or more in the county was a mere 5.9%. Today more than 50% of the homes in Levy County are worth \$200,000 or more.

Also, when comparing the characteristics of Levy County to the adjacent counties in 2000 (See Appendix A, Table 2), a pattern can be observed with respect to each county's distance from the D.C. metropolitan area. Union County, closest to D.C., has the highest median household income, the lowest percentage of workers in blue collar occupations, the greatest proportion of government workers, and the most expensive housing. Mountain County, furthest from D.C., has the lowest median household income, the highest percentage of workers in blue collar occupations, the least percentage of government employees, and the least expensive housing. Levy County falls in between these counties both geographically and with respect to these socio-demographic characteristics. This pattern is important to understand given the fact that Union County already has county-wide zoning policy, Levy County proposed it, and Mountain County has not... yet.

With so much growth and change in such a small amount of time, it is no surprise that zoning has become a central issue in Levy County. In fact, this particular election is not Levy County's first attempt to enact a zoning ordinance. In the 1996 Levy County primary election, the anti-zoning movement was successful in defeating zoning, along with the help of the anti-zoning position's front-man, Randy Hayes. Randy's first-hand experience of the drastic changes in the county is not uncommon to long-time residents of the rural-urban fringe. When zoning was proposed in Levy more than a decade ago, Randy and his anti-zoning group fought diligently to counteract the workings of the most vocal proponents of zoning in the county, the "Ridges Ramble" group.

The Ridges Ramble group is composed of citizens living in northern Levy and the adjacent county, and was formed in 2005 when a local dairy farm in the historic, unincorporated, community of Ridges, WV went up for sale. Claiming to be primarily "concerned with the

future of the community and the preservation of the landscape,” the residents met at a local church to discuss what needed to be done so that the 310 acre farm would not be purchased by any model home developers. Led by Catherine Gosling, the group invited a few Levy County commissioners to attend the meeting, and just a few days later, less than a dozen citizens collectively purchased the entire farm for \$3.6 million in an effort to keep unwanted land development out of Ridges’ back yard.

A year later with the promise of zoning as a tool to manage growth—and not to mention the supportive network developed a few years earlier with the local commission, the Ridges Ramble group became central to the pro-zoning movement in Levy County’s 2008 primary election. According to Randy, when it comes to growth issues and zoning proposals, the only group he watches more closely than the Ridges Ramble group or the “newcomers” are the local government officials.

R.H.: ... I’ve lived in West Virginia all my life and I’ve never been controlled by zoning. ‘Bout ten years ago when they first proposed zoning, I had enough common sense to know that it needed to be looked at—it was government controlled and it needed to be looked at...I caught wind, and checked the code... It said if they adopt zoning, they could do it without a vote... couldn’t be enforced if it wasn’t on the ballot... and since they weren’t putting it on the ballot; I told people and had everybody ready. We could sign a petition in a 60 day period and then it would *have* to be put on the ballot... we had to get 15% of the number of votes cast...that was like 1800 signatures—we got 2300 signatures, we run it like a well-oiled machine. It was like an ant colony, everybody had a job--we had colonels and captains and sergeants, every page had a number on it... we had the petition printed and asked for approval, we planned very much and very hard to get ahead of this thing...

That vigilance, meticulous organization, and hard work paid off for Randy and the anti-zoning movement in 1996 with the zoning proposal’s first rejection by Levy County voters. With zoning once again on the county commission’s agenda at the first public hearing in November 2007, Randy and many other Levy County natives came together once more to combat the policy’s proposal and actively take control of the county’s future. Everyone was on

standby, just waiting for a copy of the newly drafted ordinance to become available, and then the opposition could plan its “attack.”

The new zoning ordinance was drafted this time by a group of seven individuals appointed by the county commission. Said to have been intentionally created by the local commission to include ordinary Levy County citizens in order to make the proposal as fair as possible, the Zoning Advisory Committee (“ZAC”) was composed of one farmer, a handful of county officials, a few developers, and the front-woman of “Ridges Ramble,” Catherine Gosling. The appointment of Gosling to the ZAC fueled the skeptical fires of the anti-zoning movement, setting the tone for lively debates that followed. Tempers flared as blue and white “Vote No to Zoning” signs sprung up yards away from one another along miles of the rural route running through Levy County.

This research takes an in-depth look at arguments presented at the public hearings and community meetings, local newspaper editorials and forums, and interviews with key activists following the introduction of the zoning proposal in late 2007. Presented here is an attempt to explain why a community seemingly in such need of “smart” or “managed” growth—with *both* sides of the conflict expressing a degree of alarm in overcrowding and congestion of their neighborhoods—would reject a zoning ordinance marketed as a “tool” to alleviate these issues.

DATA AND METHODS

Three different types of data were analyzed to explain resident perceptions in the zoning conflict: archives of the local news forum, observations of public zoning meetings, and interviews with key informants.

The Country Crossing

Local newspaper forums provide a pool of community opinions and concerns on community developments and current policy. The data for this analysis comprise 300 editorials⁴, extracted from the local newspaper. This newspaper covers and editorializes on the proposed zoning ordinance and provides a forum for community response to headlines and current issues. The community's local forum, "The Country Crossing,"⁵ is open to all residents to call in and place a comment on neighborhood issues for publication, or submit a much longer statement via email. The initial proposal of the zoning ordinance was published in this newspaper in late September 2007 and a final vote concluded the issue in May 2008; therefore all editorials from October 2007 to May 2008 are included in this analysis.

One major strength of the forums is the anonymity of the residents when making comments, particularly when commenting on controversial issues within the community. Also by using this type of forum, my data will be drawn from a collection of opinions likely to be most invested in the conflict. It is unlikely that anyone who is ambivalent or indifferent about zoning would make the effort to submit their view on the issue to the local newspaper column. These forums provide us with a rich archive of discourse concerning the proposed zoning ordinance. The comments are anonymously submitted to the forum, and therefore it is impossible for this study to link opinions to individuals' social positions within the community.

⁴ Data includes eight months of daily editorials, excluding Sunday editions. Each day of the "Country Crossing" publishes between 12-45 comments from Levy County residents. This research analyzes more than 5,000 comments from all over the county.

⁵ Name of news column changed to protect anonymity of community of study. As with any periodical source, due to space limitations, the editor notes that not all comments submitted to the column are published.

Public Hearings, Community Meetings, and Key Informants

Public hearings are a prime environment for understanding how the meanings of local issues such as zoning policies are negotiated and defined by both the residents of the community and the local governing body. For this research, I attended three formal county commission hearings where the zoning proposal was the primary item on the day's agenda. These formal hearings were advertised in the local newspaper encouraging citizen participation, and were a vital addition to my study because they provided the local government's position on the zoning issue. More importantly, residents of Levy County presented their thoughts to the county commission at these hearings as well.

The fourth source of observation came from a much larger and informal community meeting concerned with the zoning proposal, held in a debate format by the local newspaper editors at the local high school's auditorium. The structure of the public debate pitted four opponents to the zoning proposal against four advocates, and allowed for a public question and answer session after the debate. Observing this meeting also provided me the opportunity to meet individuals who identified themselves as major parties within the conflict surrounding zoning. From this snowball sample, five interviews were conducted with individuals who attended this public debate and all three public county commission hearings. Interviews were not included in the initial stage of analysis and were more for discussion purposes with respect to the findings from the archival data.

Sampling

Methodologically, my approach to these three "slices of data," newspaper forums, public hearings, and interviews was rooted in the grounded theory tradition (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Corbin and Strauss 2008). Throughout the duration of this study, from the introduction of the

initial zoning proposal draft until the final vote eight months later, I was continuously engaged in a circular process of collecting, coding, and analyzing the data. Following the grounded theory paradigm, analysis of these transcripts and editorials began with a phase of open coding allowing for close analysis of the statements, claims, arguments, and ideas articulated on the debate. Subsequent phases of coding found common threads and contrasting views. As the study progressed and a substantial portion of the archival data and observations had been coded and analyzed, I used theoretical sampling to choose key informants, to modify interview guides, and to add data sources as they became available (last-minute meetings or observation sites).

This methodology was most useful and logically appropriate for my study primarily due to the conflict's temporal nature: when themes emerged from the discourse of the Country Crossing in the preliminary stage of data collection, I was able to explore these initial findings and investigate their significance within the particular scheme of each argument by interviewing key informants I recruited from the first public hearing. During these interviews, I was able to acquire contact information of other residents who were not present at the public meetings due to work schedules, etc. This sampling approach also allowed me to make use of unexpected events; given the timing and subject matter of the zoning proposal, meetings were often held on short notice or as a response to new developments.

During all stages of this research, I sought contradictions to each emerging theme and argument in order to dimensionalize my core concepts, and fully explain while using the negative cases rather than ignoring them. The final phase of these analyses produced a model that demonstrates the role of residents' perception of threat as it pertains to both sides of the zoning debate, what these arguments may have in common, and what sets them apart.

RESULTS

Consensus within Conflict: The Need for Protection

The central theme emerging from this analysis is the need for protection. The conflict in this case study separates and unravels in three directions from this point of consensus. To explain the conflict, I present a formal model that organizes it in terms of perceived threats and necessity of protection. This perceived need for protection reflects many levels of meaning that residents assign not only to the proposed policy, but the current state of the community and even one's preferences for the future of the community.

The model is based on three key questions:

1. **Who** does the community/this individual need protection from? Who is the threat? This will be referred to as the “perceived aggressor.”
2. **Who** is threatened? Is it the individual? Is it the community as a whole? Is it a certain group or class of individuals? This is referred to as the “perceived victim.”
3. **What** is “at stake”? What is in such need of protection? What is this individual trying to defend by calling into this forum or speaking at this hearing? This is the multi-dimensional concept of “perceived issue.”

The perception of threat, derived from past or current experiences within the community, thrusts an individual to either side of the zoning conflict. Variations in response to these three questions help us make sense of the community conflict over the proposed zoning ordinance by revealing dominant arguments.

These three arguments explain how perceived threat influences the side of the zoning debate in which individuals chose to support (See Appendix B, Chart 1). The pro-zoning movement perceives neighbors as the central threat to the quality and aesthetics of life in the community, as well as a threat to their own personal revenue and property value. The anti-

zoning movement perceives the local government as the fundamental threat to autonomy, individual property rights, and the quality of life in the community.

Conflicting Perceptions of Threat: Perceived Aggressor(s)

Both sides of the conflict surrounding the zoning ordinance use defensive vocabulary and martial language at times, almost as if the community were at war. Whether zoning is seen as a “tool” or a “weapon,” the observation remains that the policy is a reaction to an attack, and the need for protection implies there must be a *perceived aggressor*. This model unfolds which direction arguments tend to take and with what meanings individuals attach to the proposed policy.

This study reveals that there are three modes of perceived aggressors: neighbors, developers, and the local government. Some individuals perceive this “attack” as coming from a combination of assailants, i.e. developers *and* their local planning commission. Therefore, these modes are interrelated but for the purposes of discussion, I will treat them separately.

Neighbors as Perceived Aggressor(s): Ethics vs. Aesthetics

The rapid population change and development within the county has cast an interesting backdrop for the conflict surrounding zoning, and an increasingly heterogeneous population fuels unfamiliarity with neighbors. Research on trust in neighbors has shown crime rates to be negatively associated with trust (Garcia, Taylor and Lawton 2007), that attitudes toward racial stereotypes play a major role in perceived threat (Timberlake 2000), and trust in neighbors has a negative effect on victimization (Ludemann and Peter 2007). However, the study of zoning conflict places the mode of perceived neighbor aggression not in terms of socio-demographic differences or the fear of violent crime, but in terms of goal and value orientations; the concepts of “aggressors” and “victims” here are examined in the non-physical threat context.

Past research of values among neighbors in land use conflicts emphasizes the differences between the value orientations of newcomers and native residents (Eser and Luloff 2003; Krannich and Smith 1998; Schnaiberg 1986; Shumway and Lethbridge 1998). This opposition of values is often seen as a source of animosity between neighbors and a fuel for confrontation (Coleman 1957). Although Levy County is home to many newcomers and a prime environment for such animosity, Example 1a implies that even long-time residents are perceived as a threat to the community. Many individuals express their concerns with issues facing the county or their positions with respect to the policy proposal in terms of local residents “selling out” to the development of the county:

Example 1a:

“... your only sacred rights are to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Why do you feel that you have the right to sell your property to a developer so that everyone else will suffer on our already overcrowded infrastructure and with higher taxes? The common good should matter to everyone. Quit being selfish.”

This particular resident perceives the community as the victim of the self-centered property owner, which ultimately results in a congestion headache for the community as a whole. The reference to “the common good” here suggests this resident believes that property owners have an ethical obligation to the rest of the community. Selling property to developers becomes a “breach” to this ethical obligation, and thus the community is threatened by the greed of land owners. Residents with this view sided with the pro-zoning movement in the public debate (See Chart 1).

Other individuals argue that the poor taste of adjacent property owners is reason enough for a zoning ordinance:

Example 1b:

“...yes [zoning] will take away the right to stick a dilapidated mobile home wherever someone feels like. Maybe your neighbor doesn’t want to look at a dilapidated mobile home...”

The important distinction between Example 1a and 1b is that 1a is concerned with the effect of structural strain on the entire community, whereas argument 1b distinguishes his/her meaning given to the zoning policy as a “poverty mop,” that would wipe away an eyesore that is a nuisance for the individual property owner. Why would residents of Levy County care about what their neighbor does or does not do with his or her own property? The argument further unfolds with the next resident’s perception of the situation:

Example 1c:

“There was an article in Thursday’s [Crossing] about cluttered lawns concerning neighbors. If we had zoning in [Levy] County, you wouldn’t have to worry about junky looking places, which would diminish your property’s value.”

With the neighbor as the perceived aggressor, just as in 1b, this argument takes an interesting spin, from an eyesore concern (Example 1b) to an investment issue, now referring to lessening property values. The argument becomes clearer in this portion of the discourse surrounding the policy; to support zoning under the assumption that an individual’s property value is under attack, this individual must perceive their own neighbor as the aggressor in the zoning conflict. Here, the zoning ordinance becomes a shield, a protection from the actions of others; to protect their investments these residents support Levy County’s zoning proposal.

Developers as Perceived Aggressor(s): Resources vs. Aesthetics

Other residents express their views of the proposed zoning ordinance in terms of the need for protection against developers and big businesses. When expressing concern for the community as the victim of this attack, strain on local infrastructure and resources once again becomes an issue:

Example 2a:

“I just got a flyer about the new Wal-Mart, advertising ‘produce straight from the farm.’ Call me old fashioned, but it seems to me that if [Levy] County had fewer mega-housing developments and Wal-Marts, we might save a few more family farms and be able to eat local produce, not Chinese imported food.”

The claim made in Example 2a places development and business investment at the root of the problem for the depletion of *productive* farmlands. Example 2b also indicates the assailant as an outside development regime, considering the community as a holistic victim:

Example 2b:

“...If we have zoning, we’ll have the local planning and development tools in our toolbox that can prevent the senseless pillaging of our rural, scenic landscape.”

The difference between the two arguments here is that 2b expresses the need to preserve the *scenic* landscape, rather than a productive one. To preserve land for its scenic value, this resident has sided with the pro-zoning movement. Aside from this frustration with the community’s congestion and “junky” lawns, other residents express more specific concerns with respect to the *types* of establishments being built in the community. Some residents voice their discomfort in that they value certain lifestyles and choices that are not in agreement with the abrasive establishments that are “springing up” recently in the county:

Example 2c:

“Zoning: Farmers may want to preserve their right to develop their land as they see fit, but as a homeowner, I wish to reserve the right to protect the value of my property by limiting undesirable commercial development such as billboards, gambling parlors, and adult entertainment clubs. As a county resident, I want to have the same zoning protection afforded the residents of the city...”

The argument in Example 2c still views the commercial development as an aggressor, so long as it fits the “undesirable” definition set forth by the individual’s own moral values which ultimately reflects on the residents’ need to protect their property investment, as these types of establishments will drive down property values. Now the victim has become the individual, and therefore the perceived issue at stake is the threat to the individual’s own property value.

Regardless of the issues and values “under attack,” residents viewing the zoning policy as a shield from the development tend to side with the pro-zoning movement. This perception requires some level of confidence in the intentions and capability of the local governing body and its ability to properly implement the policy for the “common good.” The following mode of aggressor shows how the lack of this confidence in the local government can influence residents’ perceptions of the zoning policy.

County Government as Perceived Aggressor(s)

Many individuals see the new zoning ordinance as one more utensil to be added to an already corrupt commission’s toolbox that may be used to implement higher tax levies, extract more property rights from the local population, or carryout other “underhanded” or “hidden” agendas:

Example 3a:

“What a surprise: the county commissioners reject an idea that would give people the right to vote on zoning changes. They know that once it is in, they will have the right to change it whenever they want. Another reason to vote “no” on zoning.”

This particular individual views the actions and proposals of the local government to be sneaky, and that zoning is just a policy proposed to extract civil liberties from the local population. This argument considers the entire community to be a victim of the local government’s schemes to take away the residents’ right to be involved in the decision-making process. The perceived issue in this mode of discourse is the threat to democracy, specifically the fear of losing it. The view in Example 3b shows that some individuals pinpoint that the real threat is not all government in general, but their particular governing body:

Example 3b:

“Why doesn’t the county commission concentrate on cleaning up the county by getting old houses fixed up, getting rid of junkyards and unlicensed vehicles? Then maybe we can vote in a new bunch who will not make us feel like prisoners of our own property. Look out [Levy] County, this is what you’re about to vote for.”

Example 3b illustrates a very important distinction within the discourse. Most opponents of the zoning policy that view the local government as the aggressor do *not* claim that zoning is a poor planning tool. In other words, just because an individual might side with the anti-zoning movement does not necessarily mean that the resident is against the idea of a zoning policy altogether. Instead, the data shows how residents are influenced by perceived threat when choosing which side of the debate to support. Therefore, views were commonly expressed such as 3b, that indicating that with a new set of individuals to implement the tool, the proposal may not have met such opposition.

Furthermore, the lack of available information surrounding the policy is reason enough for some residents to question its intended consequences:

Example 3c:

“Yes, a vote on zoning is a good thing, and when the people are informed about what the zoning ordinance will and will not do for them, a vote on zoning will be a better thing. Ask your county commissioners to have some public debates.”

Example 3c considers democratic input with respect to the zoning proposal optimistically, while Example 3d expresses an even further skepticism of this particular attempt to pass legislation by the Levy County government:

Example 3d:

“There is just no way that the [Levy] County Commissioners should have ordered that zoning be placed on the ballot when they have not finished writing the zoning ordinance. Is that legal?”

Example 3d not only claims that the real issue or threat to the community is insufficient information, the resident feels that it may even be intentional on the commission’s behalf in that the ordinance was not even completed. All three examples of community victimization by local government aggressors illustrate that a “No” vote to the zoning proposal on a ballot may not

have had much to do with the ideas or regulations held within the policy, rather a decision based upon the perceptions of the local government and their management practices.

A few residents held the view that zoning was an unfair tool, but still in reference to an unfair governing body:

Example 3e:

“To the caller from [Levy] County: zoning is a tool to help the county commissioners increase your property taxes. Actually it’s a multipurpose tool... It can be used to segregate the low income from the rich, and it can be used to take your property rights away. A zoning tool is not cheap.”

Example 3e summarizes quite a bit of the discourse with respect to the local government aggressor. Some residents felt individually victimized, as if their property rights and freedoms were under fire or that their all ready empty pockets were being “picked” by their own legislators. Other residents saw the government aggressor as victimizing the entire community. These individuals perceived the zoning policy as a way to sweep marginalized populations out of the way, and making it more difficult for the native residents’ children to purchase homes near their families. These perceived issues of attack influence how residents view the local government, and directly result in opposition to the local zoning policy proposal (See Chart 1).

On the other hand, individuals perceiving the zoning policy to be a beacon of positive change also perceived the local government as a capable implementer:

Example 4a:

“If you are tired of driving throughout Levy County and seeing uncontrolled development, don’t blame the county planners, commissioners, or the school board. Their hands are tied. Vote ‘yes’ for zoning and give them the tools to manage the growth.”

This finding illustrates the difference between power and authority. Scholars hold that power becomes authority only when it is perceived as legitimate (Weber 1968; Gummer 1996), not implemented coercively (Turler 1980), and leaders must invoke the means to be perceived as

legitimate in order for citizens to support government policies and practices (Dondelinger 1994; Kellev 1990).

The view of the resident in Example 4a expresses the need for zoning to combat the aggressor (developers) by supporting the local governing bodies. Now, the conflict over the zoning policy becomes clearer; to evaluate zoning and develop the perception of the policy as a valid tool, one must be confident in its management. With the perception of a legitimate governing body, one gives a positive meaning to the commission's *legitimate* zoning policy proposal.

Looking back at Examples 3a through 3e, the researcher can observe a disregard for the validity of zoning in relation to a perceived threat of local government, not viewed by these particular residents as wielding a legitimate power or authority. Example 3e in particular claims that zoning "can be used" for the wrong reasons, implying that there must be intent to do so. The primary conflict within the discourse depicting this mode of aggressor seems to be centered on a conflicting perception of the local county government and commission as an authority, while the components and attributes of the policy proposal itself become of peripheral integrity.

DISCUSSION

The model of perceived threat empirically maps how individual experiences in Levy County influence legislation during public debate. If the conflict were based solely on the content of the zoning proposal, and residents were aware of the effects and consequences of zoning policy, then the researcher would expect a bulk of the discourse within the conflict to refer to the specific regulations of which residents either disagree or concur. Furthermore, a community conflict solely based on the zoning ordinance would produce advocates in support of

zoning's beneficial consequences, as well as opponents in disagreement with the proposal's potentially harmful consequences for the individual and/or community. This was not the case in Levy County; while a portion of the discourse argued zoning's consequences, residents of Levy County were swayed to take a side in the conflict based on a perception of threat from past or current experiences within the community. The two movements that emerged in the community were products of not only different experiences and polarized interests, but also varying levels of trust in the local government. The results of this study explains how a community, seemingly in such need of planning, would refuse the opportunity to implement countywide zoning by illustrating how perceived threat influences the side of the zoning debate in which individuals chose to support.

When referring to “neighbors as perceived aggressors” in the discourse, more than one “breach” by neighbors is observed. Not only do residents express concern with the “ethical breaching” of native “sell-outs” as illustrated in Example 1a, but this mode of aggressor also demonstrates resident concerns with the breaching of adjacent property owners that do not conform to a “common” standard of maintenance of their own personal property. Both forms of breaching are seen as harmful to the aesthetics of Levy County and ultimately lead residents to side with the pro-zoning movement (See Appendix B, Chart 1).

Aesthetically displeasing neighboring property lessens individual property values, while a community losing aesthetically pleasing landscape due to native “sell-outs” runs the risk of becoming overcrowded by development and strained for local resources. Therefore, for a resident concerned with a neighbor's breach of “standard maintenance,” zoning is seen as acting as not only a “poverty mop” but a protection for individual property and investments. For residents concerned about disappearing scenic value, scarce resources, and productive farmlands

due to “ethical breaching,” zoning is seen as a protection for the “common good,” preserving Levy’s moral values and quality of life.

Perceiving a neighbor as a threat to your individual rights as a property owner, a threat to your individual land value, or a threat to your scenic community presents an interesting situation for community cohesion and attachment. If individuals seek policy to protect themselves from their neighbors, what does this do to the collective understanding of goals and values? Just how “different” do neighbors feel they really are from the families and individuals living next to them? Robert Putnam (2003) provides an alternative to joining activist groups to resolve such disagreement based on differing goals and values:

It’s called relational organizing... Unlike activist organizations that develop a public agenda first and then try to attract people who support it, the IAF encourages the emergence of local agendas... Although people come together because they have similar concerns, building relationships is the first priority, the foundation for defining and acting on public issues that represent an accumulation of personal and local concerns (P. 13-14)

Getting to know one another through this “relational organizing,” residents in the community may begin to see that their concerns and values are not different, but much the same. What some residents deem a threat to property value may just be an alternate phrasing of what other residents perceive an attack on their rights as a property owner. Moreover, by getting to know the values of neighbors by building relationships, residents may even conclude that a zoning policy is irrelevant to their concerns.

Considering “developers as perceived aggressors,” it must once again be noted that this threat is often in conjunction with one of the two other modes of aggressors. In the eyes of most Levy County residents, developers must be *enabled* to inflict harm by either the ethical breaching of a local landowner, the mismanagement of local government (considered a consequence of ignorance), or the “good ol’ boy” system of exchanging favors between the local

government and big developers (considered intentional). In this respect, while big businesses such as Wal-Mart as well as large commercial and residential developers are perceived as exploiting the county in various ways and clearly worthy of blame during the zoning debate, most residents view either individual residents or the county government as the primary culprit. As a result, both the meaning given to the zoning policy and which side of the movement residents chose to support became highly contingent upon the enabling party identified when residents perceived developers as aggressors (See Chart 1).

Aside from relationship building, a “relational organizing” type of association could act as a safeguard against manipulation by private or government interests, of which so many residents claim to be a threat issue in the county. While studying the influence of real estate professionals on a community in the Midwest, Bouma (1962) found that by manipulating both sides of controversial community issues, the real estate board was able to achieve economic advancement and legitimating power in the community. When a particular group has a stake, it is not completely unheard of for that group to strive to sustain a conflict to produce desired results. Meeting without preconceived agendas, residents in the community can foster relationships and understanding primarily, and in turn, find common ground through discussion that may ultimately lead to resolution without government policy.

Residents fearing further scarcity of affordable housing perceive the local government as an aggressor with the intent to use the zoning policy as a tool to segregate low-income residents from certain neighborhoods, with many individuals expressing concern with the possibility of losing low-income housing altogether. Other residents also sided with the anti-zoning movement in order to prevent future impact fees and additional tax levies, considering the zoning policy as an attempt to expand an already inflated, misappropriated county budget. Many individuals felt

ill-informed about the proposal's contents and consequences, and because residents would have no input in changes to the policy once adopted, many viewed the zoning proposal as undermining their right to make an informed decision—both currently and with future amendments. Along with this threat to democratic principle, autonomy was also at stake for many residents perceiving the government as an aggressor. For these individuals, supporting the zoning proposal would mean supporting having their own property rights taken from them (See Chart1).

Accumulating wealth, property and home ownership are the iconic components for achieving the American Dream (Mayer 1953; Newman 1993; Barnes and Jaret 2003; Freeman and Hamilton 2004). Individual interests of residents in the community, what some researchers might refer to as the “selfishness” of those residents, is to be expected of any American who believes in the American Dream, and spends each day working to achieve it. Each perceived issue with respect to the American Dream, i.e. lessening property values, lack of affordable housing, heightened property taxes, was found in this study to be an issue of perceived victimization of the individual. In other words, what was “at stake” with this new zoning legislation could be considered the American Dream itself.

Randy Hayes, front-man of both the 1992 and 1998 anti-zoning movements, perceives the zoning proposal as a continuation of his past negative experiences:

R.H.: I... was in the house here probably 3 years and due to a government screw-up, it was almost taken out from under us... from that day on...I've been involved—lookin' over the government's shoulder and watching how much control and what they do to the people—cause I experienced first-hand exactly what can be done to the people... I never let up on the government after that, I kept watchin' over their shoulder. And so when the zoning come into play, that is what I was seein' again: people that can't do the job honestly in the first place wanted more power to put people in these awful positions...

Randy finds his opposition to the zoning proposal in his past experience with the local government's inability to treat him fairly. His view of his local government illustrates the need for residential *vigilance*, keeping track of the government's every move. Suspicions of government corruption are not uncommon with respect to the decline of some American's ability to maintain homeownership and wealth, and essentially maintain the American Dream (Newman 1993). To a resident like Randy who sees the local government as the primary threat in the zoning debate, vigilance is necessary in order to maintain the fruits of the labor of which he has worked his entire life to establish.

Even if manipulation of conflict by interest groups is not present, most residents agree that adequate information was not provided to the general public in order to make an informed decision about the zoning ordinance (See Examples 3c and 3d). The local newspaper, the Country Crossing, held a public debate in March over the proposed ordinance at the local high school. Nearly 200 residents showed up to the meeting to listen to four individuals that the newspaper had asked to publicly debate, two in favor of the policy and two opposed to the ordinance. Residents' reactions to the debate were more about the relief that someone was finally *discussing* the policy, rather than the points made about the policy itself:

N.G.: [The zoning proposal] was suppose to be posted on the internet but now, I don't have a computer...so now I don't know. Uh, I guess we'd go to the courthouse...I assume that's where you'd go to get it. But I already knew, from what was being said...you know... to satisfy me, they'd need to do a little bit more explaining. I don't even remember any members of the commission being at that meeting. There were more of my neighbors there. And um, that was a good way for me to find out—what was they thinkin? Maybe I'm wrong to think what I'm thinking? As it turned out, I wasn't wrong. But you know that was a good way to find out. So I think that...that was good.

Nancy Green, a 67 year old property owner, expresses her gratitude for the local newspaper holding the debate. She appreciates the information she was given, and the opportunity to discuss the proposal with her local community. However, this meeting of which

she is so grateful was a *debate*—it was polarized; two parties arrived at the high school that night to defend their interests. What if Nancy were able to discuss her interests, plans, and goals with others in the community, as neighborly discussion? Did Nancy disagree with *everything* in the zoning proposal, or would she have supported some portion of its ideas?

N.G.: Well, my first instinct was to say no. Because government interference, you know, in anything. Um, but you know I like to think of myself as being open minded... But, as soon as I heard that there would be no...um, reasonable way to get rid of it if you didn't like it—um, that really drew the line there for me I really think. And we woke up. And there was all this building and everything going on. And I do believe that some zoning is called for...but under the rules that they [raises her eyebrows] had... I do believe that they need to work on the rules and those regulations.

For Nancy, the conflict over the proposal was not solely about supporting zoning or opposing zoning at all. Nancy realized that there were some aspects of the policy that would benefit her goals as a property owner; however, she was swayed by the most striking argument of opposition at the debate, an argument that entailed aspects of which she also mildly concurred. Nancy, along with residents of a similar circumstance, may have benefited from a relational organizing meeting far more than a polarized debate held by any third party.

CONCLUSION

The discourse surrounding the proposed zoning ordinance in Levy County reveals that much of the conflict had very little to do with the content of the zoning proposal. The data illustrates that since the residents were not formally informed and the specific effects and consequences of this particular zoning policy and the regulations within the codes were never formally explained, individuals were forced to base their perceptions of zoning initially on their current and past experiences within the county. In addition to which side of the debate appeared more “in tune” with their initial concerns and experiences, perceptions of the authority of the

local governing body became the key factor when siding with either movement within the conflict over zoning.

The conflict over zoning in Levy renders visible the concerns of a community in transition; the rapidly growing community is concerned with maintaining property value, revenues, property rights, aesthetics, and quality of life. Finding information on the effects of zoning, the consequences of specific regulations written in the policy, and access to the written proposal, were problematic for residents. Due to this circumstance, 1) residents of the county must initially base their positions on zoning policy off of past and current experiences in the community, 2) with this, individual voters were then forced to evaluate a “gray area” such as zoning against the black and white descriptions given by polarized interests, and 3) even though some might have been interested in the “positive aspects” of zoning, residents distrustful of Levy County’s government—due to past experience—refused to take any chances on giving more power to a group of individuals that they believed had no legitimate authority.

Given the context of this conflict surrounding zoning policy in the rural-urban fringe, the dynamics uncovered with this study must be addressed in order to develop an approach to future policy proposals and decision making that would be more representative of public opinion and promote solidarity within Levy County; Furthermore, implications of this specific conflict within Levy County, WV may resonate with other rural-urban fringe areas and any community experiencing similar issues with respect to growth issues and land uses. If similar contexts of threat can be observed in those areas, it is logical that local governing bodies would require informational meetings and neighborhood systems similar to the proposals outlined in this research.

Although we cannot reverse the “damage” of what past negative experiences have done to an individual within the community, nor can we stifle the emergence of polarized interest groups with respect to community issues, building stronger connections among neighbors and local institutions might heal the current “fragmentations” evolving as a result of rapid changes and distrust. Wuthnow (1998) offers that by understanding how the *meaning* of civic involvement has changed, and its contrast with the role of politics found in American communities today, we can develop an idea of what needs to be done in order to help individuals reach out and become involved in communities in light of social changes:

The idea of being a good neighbor has been partly replaced by homeowners’ and neighborhood associations... they obviate the need for some neighborly interaction, such as settling disputes about improperly maintained lawns... but [they] often promote little community involvement... How relevant politics is perceived to be varies from one type of community to another. But there is an implicit understanding that civic involvement and politics are quite different... This capacity to separate the two is partly attributable to Americans’ long-standing tendency to be skeptical of government compared to efforts by citizens to help themselves... newer ways of thinking about civic involvement help people make sense of that they are doing and regard it as a legitimate form of community service, even if it differs from the way their parents or grandparents thought about service in their communities. (P. 53-57)

Wuthnow’s assertion of homeowners’ associations and residents’ skepticism of government is important when considering the conflict in Levy County. Due to the heightened level of distrust in local government, many residents viewed such associations preferable to a county wide policy that would give the local government control over such aspects of their property. The problem with these types of associations, however, is that they are “loose” and provide very little structure for establishing or maintaining close personal relationships with residents outside of a monthly bulletin. In other words, Wuthnow’s research might suggest that Levy County’s zoning conflict exemplifies a community already severely “fragmented,” and that these commonly accepted forms of associating would do very little to correct this disintegration

of community ties and involvement. Essentially, the creation of these associations within the county would be like placing band-aids on broken bones.

Perhaps the most important point that Wuthnow provides, in terms of the conflict in Levy County, is concerned with the idea of what it means to be a *good neighbor*. In the rural-urban fringe area, this concept has been shaken by the turbulence of rapid social change. Some residents may feel that good neighbors are the type that “leaves you alone,” while others may wish their neighbors were not so “anti-social.” In either scenario, a certain level of trust must be maintained in order to foster and sustain any healthy relationship. This trust is not easily built and maintained in the rural-urban fringe.

In terms of the various communities *within* Levy County, a county-wide zoning proposal from the onset seems to disregard the residents’ needs and preferences as they pertain to each individual community. Perhaps the resolution to conflict over county-wide zoning lies in the ability of researchers and community organizers finding an association that marries both civic involvement and local politics. Individuals do not want to be represented by Levy County government; rather they want to represent themselves. Therefore, this resolution would of course, look different depending upon which community an association originates. As Newman (1993) suggests:

...we lack an understanding of what the [economic] megatrends mean in the daily lives of middle-class Americans. Statistics, graphs, and bleak headlines tell us how serious the damage is, but they cannot tell us how the numbers translate into rage, disappointment, and a sense of drift in communities across the land. (P. x)

With the 2008-09 housing market catastrophe and what politicians continue to call “the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression,” Levy county and many others are experiencing the local effects of these megatrends. Newcomers continue to migrate to Levy because housing is less expensive in West Virginia, than for the surrounding metro area. This

migration, when coupled with massive residential and commercial development, rings the zoning bell for the local county commission. Long-time residents of the county wanted to understand zoning and its possible benefits, and they most certainly wanted change from the paths that their communities were currently on. Looking to the local commission for answers only proved to be more befuddling. The county government passively described the conflict over zoning to the news media and current residents much like a parent would inertly explain the curious noises heard in an old, drafty home to a young child. The foundation of Levy County is changing and settling; the disturbing creaking of the floors and the violent gusts of wind are just rudiments of the process, figments to be tolerated and expected. This is “our home,” and if the wind rustles its structure too aggressively to bear or the creaking becomes more disruptive than tolerable, we must continue about our daily lives because this is a course that cannot be reversed; eventually the noises will subside.

The noises did not subside, and residents of Levy refused to believe the policy would provide support for the foundations of their communities. Levy County residents are frustrated with their representatives and fear losing property rights and investments. These are legitimate fears that must be addressed, because it is this fear that ultimately guided voters during the 2008 election. Moreover, the rapid change within Levy County in such a short amount of time challenged the construction of stable neighbor relations.

For the future planning of Levy County, law makers and community leaders will most likely find their proposals in a similar gridlock or out-right failure unless they alter their overall approach to community involvement in land use planning. The county commission allowed residents to express their views on the proposal, but residents didn't just want to be heard; they wanted to have their opinions to have *influence*. In the case of the zoning proposal in Levy

County, the commissioners could have accomplished the very same goal of honoring public opinion by placing a “suggestion box” outside of the commission chambers and taking an early lunch. Residents knew this. Social research has shown that political trust, particularly in municipal governments, increases only when residents believe that their voice has influence, rather than just being heard (Ulbig 2008). Furthermore, “a voice that is perceived to have no influence can be more detrimental [to trust] than not perceiving a voice at all” (Ulbig 2008: 523). Looking at the zoning conflict in Levy County in terms of trust and perceived influence of voice, it is not incomprehensible why a rural-urban fringe area seemingly in such need of planning, would refuse policy created to alleviate growth issues.

To begin to heal the perceptions of threat, individual fears, and fragmentation within Levy, the county planning commission must take a step back from the idea of county-wide policy. First, rebuilding neighbors’ trust in one another and the political process must begin on a fundamental, neighborhood level. Gordon Bunker is a 50 year old railroad worker who has been a resident of Levy County for nearly fifteen years. Although Gordon works between 60 and 70 hours a week, he made sure that he attended one of the few public hearings on the zoning proposal at the local commission. Two new housing developments have been built within the last three years in his neighborhood, making his initial concerns focus on traffic congestion and the need for a new traffic light at the end of his road. Gordon summarizes a commonly held view with his opinions on property restrictions, neighbor relations, and what would get him to attend an organized meeting in his neighborhood:

G.B.: I can’t control whether or not they sell it, so why should I care what they do while they own it? I wouldn’t want anybody dictating what I can do with *my* property. As far as bein’ involved, we’re not as close knit as some places...the detachment from one another leads to not caring...I’d have to get to know them first, I’m not really what you’d call a team player [laughs] ... but a good neighbor

to me, reciprocates...they don't come seek me out and I don't come and seek them out—I'm not the welcome wagon you know. If the people on my street wanna' talk about getting cable run back here, utilities, a new stop light, or what's going on in the school—I'd have to go to that meeting. My kids are grown, but I've got grandchildren you know.

If the idea of “planning” in Levy County started in the neighborhoods—it would have to begin by socializing residents. Homeowners associations and related organizations that focus on what color residents can or cannot paint a garage, fence etc. does very little for building attachment to a community. If meetings were geared toward relevant issues that emerged from focus groups, it is possible that more residents would become interested in making it to meetings, and as a result, getting to know one another. For example, a focus group in Gordon's neighborhood might reveal that many residents *do* want cable internet and would be willing to split the cost of cable lines. While this topic of interest is far from the conflict over zoning, it is an ice breaker, a “jumping point” from which other more important issues can be discussed in the future. Gordon and others in the neighborhood might agree that a new traffic light is necessary, and organize a strategy to get the request to the local authorities. Residents can work together to achieve a shared goal, and on a base level, become acquainted. Individual neighborhoods with organizational meetings like this may have been beneficial during the zoning proposal for not only discussion of concerns, but the sharing of information to which most residents did not have access. Moreover, together with neighbors, residents may have been able to decipher what zoning would have meant *literally* for their particular neighborhood and then voted according to their preference in light of that information.

By building stronger ties among neighbors and allowing residents' voices to be of influence in their own neighborhood, trust in political process and local initiatives would most likely increase. Likewise, with organized meetings of this type, fear and perceived threats would

most likely decrease allowing for more informed voters and establishing clarity in the decision-making process. Maybe serving the “common good” as far as county-wide planning is counterintuitive. Treating each neighborhood individually with its own “plan of care” would still achieve the goal of the “common good” while recognizing that each community is different. Future research in this venue should center on local neighborhood focus group initiatives, paying close attention to the detail of particular neighborhoods as separate, varying entities with very different concerns and social dynamics.

This case study discovered a breadth of concerns that emerged from the discourse in Levy County during the countywide zoning proposal; the focus during the analysis stage was concerned with only data confronting the zoning conflict and the proposed policy. Other concepts emerged from the discourse within the county that illustrates the difficulties and social positions, dynamics, etc. of life in the fringe. These concepts were coded and filed for future analyses to explore the dynamics of threat and context of these social problems in more detail. Future chapters to be explored will focus on the dynamics between long-time residents and newcomers to Levy County. Additional analyses will also center on how skepticism and mistrust in the local government is associated with the perceptions of the federal government and other authorities of American experiences.

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APPENDIX A

Table 1: Change in Population and Housing Characteristics of Levy County (1990-2006)*

	1990	2000	2006
Total Population	59,253	75,905	97,534
OCCUPATION (%)			
Management/Professional	18.9%	25.9%	30.1%
Service	10.1%	13.7%	13.5%
Sales/Office	24.2%	25.1%	21.9%
Farming/Fishing/Forestry	2.1%	0.4%	0.3%
Construction/Extraction/ Maintenance	11.3%	12.7%	17.4%
Production/Transport	33.1%	22.4%	16.5%
Median Household Income (\$)	27,412	38,763	54,097
RESIDENCE 5 YRS. AGO (%)⁶			
Different County	6.2%	22.2%	5.7%
Different State	16.9%	16.5%	2.7%
Born in a Different State (%)	42.2%	49.5%	53.3%
Commute to Work (%)	59.4%	61.7%	47.6%
Total Number of Housing Units	25,385	32,913	41,339
VALUE OF THE HOME (%)			
Less than \$50,000	23.6%	5.8%	5.5%
\$50,000 to \$99,999	56.4%	44.5%	7.8%
\$100,000 to \$199,999	17.7%	43.8%	31.3%
\$200,000 or more	2.0%	5.9%	54.1%
YEAR HOUSEHOLDER MOVED INTO UNIT (%)			
2005 or later	16.5%		
2000 to 2004	39.6%		
1990 to 1999	25.7%		
1980 to 1989	9.2%		
1979 or earlier	8.7%		

⁶ Information acquired from U.S. Census Bureau, 2008. Statistics in this category from 2006 Census Data are based on "Residence 1 year ago" rather than 5 years ago.

Table 2. Characteristics of Levy and Adjacent Counties⁷

	Mountain	Levy	Union
Total Population	14,943	75,905	42,190
Median Household Income	\$35,016	\$38,763	\$44,374
Lived in a Different County 5 years ago	22.0%	22.2%	24.5%
Lived in a Different State 5 years ago	17.4%	16.5%	19.9%
Occupational Composition			
Management/Professional Sales/Office related	42.0%	51.0%	55.7%
Service	17.1%	13.7%	17.1%
Farming/Fishing/Forestry Construction/Extraction Maintenance/Production Transport related	40.9%	35.5%	27.1%
Class of Worker			
Private Wage and Salary	77.1%	77.6%	71.9%
Government	15.8%	16.8%	21.1%
Self-Employed/Unpaid	7.2%	5.6%	7.0%
Housing Characteristics			
Total Housing Units	8,076	32,913	17,623
Built After 1990	24.4%	28.9%	24.6%
Moved in After 1990	57.2%	66.2%	63.1%
Value of the Home			
Less than \$50,000	13.7%	5.8%	3.9%
\$50,000-\$99,999	47.8%	44.5%	36.0%
\$100,000-\$199,999	35.0%	43.8%	46.1%
\$200,000 or more	3.5%	5.9%	14.1%

⁷ Information acquired from U.S. Census Bureau, 2008

APPENDIX B

