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**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN SUSTAINABLE DESIGN:  
A CASE STUDY OF THE OBERLIN PROJECT**

**by Amanda L. Goldstein**

**Submitted to the Environmental Studies Program in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for Honors in the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Environmental  
Studies at Oberlin College**

**April 25, 2011**

**Advisors Cindy Frantz and Md Rumi Shammin**

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

AI – Appreciative Inquiry

BES – Bureau of Environmental Services

CBSM – Community-Based Social Marketing

CCI – Clinton Climate Initiative

CNE – Chattanooga Neighborhood Enterprise

CPSM – Collaborative Problem Solving Model

CWSP – Community Watershed Stewardship Program

EPA - Environmental Protection Agency

LEED – Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design

POWER – Providing Oberlin with Energy Responsibly

PSU – Portland State University

USGBC – United States Green Building Council



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Oberlin Project is an unprecedented opportunity for the city of Oberlin, Oberlin College, and other participating institutions to work together to achieve sustainable development and carbon neutrality. How might these institutions engage Oberlin citizens in some of the planning decisions that will shape Oberlin's future? Collaborating with citizens is important because in theory, encouraging participatory, collaborative planning contributes to just, equitable, and diverse cities. Study of sustainability initiatives in Chattanooga, Tennessee, for instance, reveal that it is possible for cities to make great leaps at sustainable urbanism while simultaneously building up a strong base of social capital aimed at meeting sustainability goals. This social capital includes both public and private sector organizations, as well as a large percentage of active citizenry.

Based on a survey response involving interviews with twenty Oberlin citizens in the government, business, and community development sectors, the two greatest strains on citizen engagement in the Oberlin Project as of spring 2011 may be 1) existing social tensions between the town and College, and 2) a lack of widespread knowledge about the objectives of the Oberlin Project. Drawing from the theory and demonstration of collaborative planning, two means to overcome these difficulties are 1) establishing a culture and environment of listening and dialogue, and 2) creating outlets that allow citizens ownership in different projects. These are two policy goals that may prove useful to the Oberlin Project as it continues to evolve.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

*“Achievement of sustainable social structures and sustainable patterns of use of environmental resources will require the equitable and representative participation of all sectors and levels of society in decision making, implementation, benefit distribution, and evaluation.”*<sup>1</sup> – Marie D. Hoff

In light of cumulative scientific evidence for climate change, societies are increasingly inspired to adopt environmental mitigation strategies. Four years ago in a report released by the 2007 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), scientists reached a universal consensus that warming of climate systems is occurring, in part due to anthropogenic activities.<sup>2</sup> The rise in concentration of greenhouse gases is the most publicized evidence of climate change. The Keeling Curve demonstrates this change, showing an increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration from 310 parts per million (ppm) in 1960 to 390 ppm in 2010, the highest amount recorded in world history.<sup>3</sup> Further evidence for anthropogenic warming of the Earth comes from a corresponding increase in global temperature by about .74 degrees Celsius during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at the same time that carbon dioxide ppm concentration has increased. Though evidence such as this has produced consensus amongst scientists, climate change remains a politically contentious issue. The most recent gesture of contention is evident in the decision of all 31 Republicans on the United States’ House Energy and Commerce

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<sup>1</sup> Marie D. Hoff, excerpt from “Introduction,” in Marie D. Hoff, ed., *Sustainable Community Development: Studies in Economic, Environmental, and Cultural Revitalization* (Boca Raton, FL: Lewis Publishers, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report, Summary for Policymakers*, [http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4\\_syr\\_spm.pdf](http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4_syr_spm.pdf) (Mar. 2, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Scripps CO2 Program, *CO2 Concentration at Mauna Loa Observatory, Hawaii*, <http://scrippsco2.ucsd.edu/home/index.php> (Mar. 2, 2011).

Committee on March 15, 2011 to decline to vote in favor of a series of amendments acknowledging the scientific consensus around climate change.<sup>4</sup> Despite obvious partisan and political barriers, increasing evidence for climate change coupled with the environmental movement that has materialized over the past forty years has encouraged societies across the world to adopt environmental mitigation and adaptation strategies. Hundreds of cities worldwide are adopting sustainability plans, policies, and measures for lessening their ecological footprints in an effort to combat climate change and ecosystem degradation.

The Oberlin Project is one such plan. Located in Oberlin, Ohio, the Project is both a response to climate change and an attempt to create a sustainable, resilient city. Specifically, the Oberlin Project is “a collaborative venture among Oberlin College, the city of Oberlin, Oberlin city schools and private sector organizations to build a prosperous post-fossil fuel based economy.”<sup>5</sup> Initiated in 2007, the Project is representative of the recent trend in urban planning projects to encompass sustainability. As this *sustainable urbanism* takes root, a critical question remains: what role will the citizen play in planning for a sustainable future? This is a significant question that has not yet been answered in the Oberlin Project’s current formative stage. It is, nonetheless, a question to which this thesis provides tentative answers. However, while this thesis does provide some tentative answers relative to the Oberlin Project, recent interpretations of

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<sup>4</sup> Lucy Madison, “House Republicans reject climate change science”, *CBS News*, Mar. 16, 2011 ([http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544\\_162-20043909-503544.html](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-20043909-503544.html)).

<sup>5</sup> David Orr, “The Oberlin Project: A Clinton Climate Initiative Climate Positive Project,” <http://www.coolwilliamstown.org/sites/coolwilliamstown.drupalgardens.com/files/OberlinProject.pdf> (May 2010).

the current state of American cities and civil life reveal that there are certainly no simple answers to citizen engagement in general.

A lack of civic engagement in America has been a concern in the last half of the twentieth century. In his book *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam made the argument that America suffers from civic malaise and in some ways no longer exemplifies a participatory democracy. That is, there has been a recent decrease in civic engagement in public affairs, leading to a disinvestment in social capital, or “connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.”<sup>6</sup> At the same time that critics insist Americans are becoming disengaged from public institutions and community organizations, others insist that governmental bodies have themselves become disengaged from the reality of American life. In her pioneering book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs used the example of Boston’s North End in the 1960s to elaborate on the problems associated with modern city planning. According to Jacobs, the North End experienced a revitalization that was the result of meager private investments from its residents, who bonded together to improve their community in an exemplary demonstration of social capital. Despite its cultural renaissance, the North End was considered a slum amongst Boston’s city planners because of its high urban density and high percentage of renter- versus owner-occupied housing.<sup>7</sup> Had the city planners bothered to visit the North End, they might have seen the same vitality that Jacobs had purportedly experienced while visiting. Together, Putnam and Jacobs highlight two dilemmas: 1) there is a fundamental disconnect between

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 19.

<sup>7</sup> Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 10.

policymakers and the constituents they serve, particularly in urban planning, and 2) Americans appear to be disengaged from the process of providing input into the institutions that make important decisions regarding, for instance, the allocation of public space.

Perhaps because of these issues, postmodern urban planning theorists have begun to redefine the urban planning profession in a more public context, and have also begun to explore citizen participation in planning urban environments. Almost universally, planning academics claim, “we must explicitly aim to nurture and multiply social capital in order not only to preserve our stock of natural capital but also to improve our economic and social well-being.”<sup>8</sup> This emerging dialogue is extremely important in the context of sustainable urbanism because of the assumption that the preservation of natural capital is only possible if we can succeed at nurturing social capital. In other words, to combat climate change, we must first tackle the issues of unsustainable cities and the disinvestment of the individual in community affairs. The emerging field of *collaborative planning*, examined in more detail in chapter three, provides some ideas on how to solve these two issues at once.

### Citizens and the Oberlin Project

The purpose of this thesis is to cast the Oberlin Project in the context of the theory and practice of collaborative planning. More specifically, this study takes a portion of the planning literature on collaboration and community engagement, as well as case studies that reveal lessons relevant to the Oberlin Project, and asks the question “how might Project leaders engage the wider Oberlin community in the future of the Oberlin

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<sup>8</sup> Mark Roseland, “Sustainable community development: integrating environmental, economic, and social objectives,” *Progress in Planning* 54 (2000), 75.

Project?” As a planning project in the postmodern era that in its charter emphasizes collaboration between multiple participants, the Oberlin Project already embodies principles of collaborative planning. This paper explores specific practices and developments that the Oberlin Project can emulate to best achieve goals in relation to community engagement. Through analysis of literature and case studies that represent collaboration and involvement on multiple levels, this thesis presents strategies through which the Oberlin Project can theoretically enhance citizen participation in its planning, construction, and post-construction phases. These strategies are supplemented by the content and analyses of interviews with twenty Oberlin citizens involved in both the public and private sectors of the community. Citizens with varying levels of affiliation to Oberlin College offered a wide array of knowledge and perspectives on community engagement in the Oberlin Project. From both the literature and interview analyses, it is apparent that the average Oberlin citizen is not yet a defined participant in the Oberlin Project. However, the Project is rapidly evolving and opportunities in the near future may exist to intimately involve Oberlin community members from all walks of life.

Citizen participation in the Oberlin Project is important because of the Project’s implications for social justice in the Oberlin community. Particularly because the Oberlin Project is a joint venture between the city and the College, it is important that this development in Oberlin is viewed as equally serving the needs of both Oberlin citizens and the College community. With widespread community support, the Oberlin Project may contribute to Oberlin’s diversity, equity, and democracy, furthering Oberlin as what Susan Fainstein, who studies modern towns and cities, terms a “just city.” The Oberlin

Project will involve building and facilitating social capital, or networks, in order to maintain and nurture the natural capital in the Oberlin area.

### Thesis organization

In chapter two, I describe the methodologies I have employed to produce this thesis. The following chapters place the Oberlin Project in a historical context. Chapter three gives an overview of collaborative planning theory and a brief history of both the town of Oberlin and Oberlin College, with a particular emphasis on the interconnectedness of the two. It also explains the basic tenets of the Oberlin Project. Chapter four describes three models of community engagement strategies that may prove useful to the Oberlin Project. Each model draws from different academic and practical disciplines. Chapter five draws upon lessons learnt from urban planning projects with significant known public participation in Portland, Oregon, Vancouver, British Columbia, and Chattanooga, Tennessee. Chapter six presents the results and analysis of interviews about the Oberlin Project conducted by the researcher with Oberlin City Council members, downtown business owners, and citizens actively engaged in community affairs. Chapter seven integrates the interview results with the theory, methods, and case studies detailed in previous chapters to conclude with recommendations for how the Oberlin Project might include citizens in the future.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This research evolved from an interest in how communities are engaging in sustainable development and meeting the triple-bottom line of economic, ecological, and social progress. The Oberlin community is of particular interest because it has proved to be a progressive leader in the environmental movement. Both the town and college have embraced ecologically minded policies and development. The town has made significant efforts to address these issues. In 2008, City Council voted four to three against an agreement in which the town of Oberlin would obtain a considerable portion of its energy from a proposed AMP-Ohio coal-fired power plant. Now, just three years later, the City is on track to have an electricity portfolio that is 80-85% carbon neutral by 2015 through investments in renewable energy, primarily landfill gas and hydroelectric power. The town arguably has a more comprehensive and developed plan to achieve carbon neutrality than the College, which to date has yet to address in detail its coal-powered heating plant.

Despite this, the College has made considerable progress in generating sustainable infrastructure. Ten years ago the College finished construction of the Adam Joseph Lewis Center for Environmental Studies, one of the first ecological buildings to meet LEED standards. Since then, two additional LEED certified buildings have been built, the Kahn dormitory and the Kohl building for jazz studies. Other LEED certified building renovations by the College have resulted in a reduced carbon footprint for the campus. In addition, Oberlin was one of the first colleges to sign on to the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment, a charter addressing the twin challenges of



climate change and energy sustainability. Students have also been involved in numerous grassroots sustainability initiatives, such as the Green Edge Fund and the Dorm Energy Competition.

Portions of the College's plans for future development fall within the limits of the Oberlin Project. Notably, the Project will likely produce some of the comprehensive plans for addressing the remaining renewable energy challenges of both the town and the College. The Project will also spearhead the construction of the Green Arts District, which encompasses acreage owned primarily by the College. The last major component of the Project, the 20,000 acre greenbelt, will not only require collaboration between the College and city government, but also with surrounding Townships. Recognizably, the broad goals of the Oberlin Project require a multi-institutional approach. But beyond the involvement of local institutions, a primary question for Oberlin Project planners is the precise role of individual community members in meeting the goals of the Project.

Based on this question, the goal of this research is to understand how planners can create an environment for public participation in planning and development, how a variety of stakeholders (including the public) can achieve consensus on a common vision, and how stakeholders can motivate other members of the community to voluntarily change behavioral norms. Using a literature review of public participation in urban planning, models of community engagement across disciplines, and interviews with members of the Oberlin community, this thesis attempts to identify the current level of community engagement in the Oberlin Project. It also make recommendations for how Project planners might engage the Oberlin public in the future of the Oberlin Project.

### Method one: literature review

This thesis began with a literature review of the works of authors such as Julian Agyeman and Robert Bullard, who study broader environmental movements, environmental justice conflicts, and burgeoning sustainable city movements. I then honed in on the field of urban planning, researching the work of postmodern planning theorists Patsy Healey, Judith Innes, Susan Fainstein, and Barbara Gray. Each has written extensively on changes in the field of planning and public policy. In particular, they note a rise in the number of stakeholders in planning projects and the necessity of increased inter-organizational collaboration as a result. These authors also emphasize the necessity of citizen participation in planning to produce equitable, diverse, and just projects. It was important to study planning theory because the Oberlin Project falls within the scope of collaborative planning. This field is also relevant because of the emphasis postmodern planning theorists place on involving citizens in both grassroots and top-down planning processes. For background in the planning field, I also researched the evolving role of the planner in society over the past half-century.

Simultaneously, I researched cases of cities known to have engaged in planning that was both environmentally sustainable and attempted to actively engage citizens. Based on this research, I chose three exemplary case studies of sustainability efforts in urban planning and environmental management in Portland, Vancouver, and Chattanooga. The successes and stumbling blocks of these case studies provide significant guidance for the Oberlin Project. In addition, I also researched three methods of community engagement in planning and visioning processes: the EPA Collaborative

Problem Solving Model, Appreciative Inquiry, and community-based social marketing. Each method has key elements that the Project can potentially incorporate into its agenda in order to be more inclusive of the wider Oberlin community. The last major field I studied was manuals of community participation methods aimed at an audience of planners. These manuals detailed the intricacies, benefits of, and drawbacks to holding different types of community forums such as design charrettes, participatory editing, task forces, and visioning forums. Types of literature reviewed in the research process included books and articles accessible through online journal databases. Throughout the year I also collected publicly available information on the Oberlin Project. This included news articles, website articles, and documents produced by members of the Oberlin Project committees and architect and design teams. Appendix B includes an index of news articles about the Oberlin Project.

#### Method two: participant observation

To better understand the Oberlin Project and its planners, I attended several public events about the Oberlin Project. The public unveiling of the Project occurred at the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Adam Joseph Lewis Center for Environmental Studies on October 11-12, 2010. Many of the Project leaders were present at the event. After the initial celebration, two panels were held to discuss the main goals of the Oberlin Project. Soon after this event, on November 1<sup>st</sup>, several planners presented the Oberlin Project to City Council. On November 17<sup>th</sup>, these same planners also gave a presentation to the Board of Trustees for New Russia Township, which borders Oberlin to the north. I observed and took notes at these three presentations. After a relatively quiet period, there were several

similar presentations held on the College campus in the spring of 2011. I attended one of these on April 19, 2011.

### Method three: interviews

A significant component of this project included interviewing members of the Oberlin community. The goal of these interviews was to gauge the current level of knowledge and the opinions of people in the Oberlin community in regards to the Oberlin Project. Drawing from anthropological methods, I used a semi-structured interview process. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher asks the interviewee questions based on a prepared list of questions and topics. At the same time, the researcher encourages the interviewee to freely express ideas and provide information that the interviewee thinks is important. With this flexibility, the researcher can obtain unexpected significant information as well as answers for prepared interview questions. I formally interviewed twenty persons from Oberlin and the surrounding area. I had a list of fifteen questions relating to the person's background, his or her knowledge and opinion of the Oberlin Project, and his or her vision for future development of Oberlin in relation to the Project. (For a complete list of questions, please refer to Appendix A.) Interviews lasted approximately one hour in length and were largely qualitative in nature, adhering to the flexible schedule of a semi-structured interview.

I chose people to interview based first on judgment sampling, and later on snowball sampling. Judgment and snowball sampling also have strong ties to the field of anthropology. In judgment sampling, researchers first set the criteria for sampling and then look for individuals who meet the criteria. My criteria were ultimately to engage a subset of the Oberlin population who would almost certainly have prior knowledge of the

Oberlin Project. Originally, I had intended to engage a variety of people in the community in a shorter interview process. This plan would have involved a more quantitative focus, i.e. attempting to measure the quantity of people in the Oberlin community who possessed knowledge of the Oberlin Project. In effect, this process would have meant reaching out to the “average citizen.” However, the Oberlin Project has not had the publicity that I had anticipated. This, along with the difficulty in reaching out to a large population through no obvious means, led me to determine that the type of interview process I had wanted to conduct was beyond the scale of this research project. Thus, I chose to engage in judgment sampling by selecting target populations. I began contacting City Council members and downtown business owners, two groups in Oberlin that, by the time I began conducting interviews in January 2011, were likely to have had a working knowledge of the broader goals of the Oberlin Project. From the initial interviews, I engaged in snowball sampling. In snowball sampling, researchers ask individuals to name others who would be candidates for the research. From this method of inquiry, I generated a list of over sixty individuals in the community whom I could interview. I chose from this list based on the contact information I had for each individual and their availability. The snowball sampling allowed me to reach a wider variety of individuals in the Oberlin community than I had previously anticipated. Individuals on the list included leaders of community development organizations, land and property owners, farmers, school board representatives, pastors, and others known to be involved in community affairs.

Ultimately, the semi-structured interview process provided in-depth perspectives from many different community members. The nature of the interview process, along

with the questions asked, allowed personal narrative to be interwoven with the participant's views on the Oberlin Project and how the Project did or did not conform to their visions of future development in Oberlin. Unfortunately, the limited number of interviews conducted does not allow the research to be analyzed for statistically significant results. However, the interviews produced valuable qualitative results about perceptions of the Oberlin Project amongst a subset of the Oberlin population. In addition, some basic quantitative information accompanies these results. Chapter six provides an in-depth explanation and analysis of the results.

#### Method four: analysis and integration

The last method I incorporated into this study was an analysis and synthesis of all findings. In particular, I compared the information gathered in the literature review to the results of the interviews to arrive at several conclusions about the status of the Oberlin Project within the Oberlin community. The interviews reveal important information about perceptions of the Project in the community. From interpreting these perspectives, it is possible to make recommendations for which avenues the Oberlin Project might most successfully pursue to earn the input and buy-in of the community. The survey responses reveal that the three community engagement models examined in this research are appropriate *possible* avenues for the Project to pursue. The interview results and analysis allow a comparison of a subset of the Oberlin community's perceptions of the Oberlin Project to the ideals of postmodern urban planning theory that promote collaboration and citizen participation, as well as to other community case studies.

I analyzed interviews first by summarizing participant responses by table. Each question had a separate table with twenty entries. Using this organization I was able to

summarize and observe trends, as well as isolate key words, ideas, and phrases. The first four questions involved basic quantitative calculations, including calculating the average number of years that participants had lived in Oberlin and the percentage of participants who chose to live in Oberlin because of occupation, quality of life, both, or neither. The next ten questions involved categorizing participant's qualitative responses. For instance, I documented the number of participants who described the Oberlin Project using adjectives such as "green" and "sustainable." However, some questions elicited responses more difficult to assess. For example, in response to what participants would like to see included in the Oberlin Project that would contribute to Oberlin economically, some participants replied "green jobs," other simply said "jobs," and some replied with the vague term "increased economic opportunities." I chose to group these types of responses into broad, inclusive categories; in this instance, I grouped participants into the category "create new business, industrial, and/or employment opportunities, preferably ones that are 'green' and locally owned." The qualitative categorization of responses gave the greatest indication of participant's knowledge and perceptions about the Oberlin Project. Chapter six includes the interview analysis, and chapter seven discusses the relationship between trends observed in interview responses and the background research presented in chapters three through five.

## CHAPTER THREE

### BACKGROUND

*“Postmodern planning is about making connections among ideas and among people and that this connection process sets in motion a whole series of changes.”*<sup>9</sup> - Judith E. Innes

#### SECTION I

##### Social justice and sustainability

The modern environmental movement is multi-faceted and extends beyond principles of ecosystem preservation or resource conservation. Many environmentalists cite the 1992 world summit on the environment in Rio de Janeiro as the first significant global dialogue concerning the ‘human factor.’<sup>10</sup> At this summit, the mainstream environmental protection movement of the global north met the environmental justice movement often associated with indigenous peoples of the global south. The significance of the 1992 summit was the recognition that “neither economic development nor environmental protection can be achieved without consideration for the welfare of people at the grass-roots levels of society.”<sup>11</sup> Since the summit, sustainable development has emerged as one solution to bridge the divides between economic growth, environmental protection, and human health and wellbeing. In effect, sustainable development has the potential to draw together the discursive environmental agendas of the global north and south.

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<sup>9</sup> Judith E. Innes, excerpt from “Viewpoint: Challenge and Creativity in Postmodern Planning,” *The Town Planning Review* 69:2 (April, 1998), vii.

<sup>10</sup> Hoff, 7-8.

<sup>11</sup> Hoff, 8.



Environmental theorists have characterized the divides between the traditional discursive paradigms of the global north and south and have proposed new principles for action grounded in the concept of sustainable development. Today, groups from both the north and south adopt environmental justice agendas. Environmental justice is defined as a “local, grassroots, or 'bottom-up' community reaction to external threats to the health of the community, which have been show to disproportionately affect people of color and low-income neighborhoods.”<sup>12</sup> Julian Agyeman, who has written extensively about the nexus between environmental justice and sustainability, makes the distinction between three broad environmental movements that have emerged in recent years: the Environmental Justice Paradigm (EJP), the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP), and the Just Sustainability Paradigm (JSP).<sup>13</sup> Followers of the Environmental Justice Paradigm relate to a philosophy similar to the definition of environmental justice given above. They are often located in the global south or in low-income communities of color in the global north. The New Environmental Paradigm, on the other hand, adheres to philosophies of environmental stewardship and has less to say about equity or justice. It is composed of organizations that are typically associated with the environmental preservation movement in the north, such as the Sierra Club or the Nature Conservancy. Environmental justice activists criticize these organizations for being too hierarchical, centralized, and removed from community concerns with class, race, labor, etc.

While the two movements come from very different places, both the EJP and the NEP are reactive in the sense that they are focused on preventing environmental bads that

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<sup>12</sup> Julian Agyeman, *Sustainable Communities and the Challenge of Environmental Justice* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 1-2.

<sup>13</sup> Agyeman, 79-106.

may affect a community. Agyeman proposes that since the 1992 summit, a different paradigm, the Just Sustainability Paradigm, is emerging as a fusion between the EJP and NEP. What distinguishes the JSP is its framing of the EJP and NEP within the context of sustainability, or “the need to ensure a better quality of life for all, now and into the future, in a just and equitable manner, whilst living within the limits of supporting ecosystems.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, the JSP, or simply “just sustainability” encompasses the platforms of the differing environmental movements, acting as a bridge between the two. Additionally, movements within the JSP are not reactive so much as proactive, and are inherently concerned with sustainable development. Advocates of just sustainability promote the use of deliberative and inclusionary processes based upon visioning, collaboration, consensus building, negotiation, conflict resolution, and citizen's juries. The notion of just and sustainable development is translated from a paradigm down to many different fields and disciplines.

This thesis will frame the Oberlin Project within the context of just sustainability because the Oberlin Project embodies principles of sustainable urban planning and development. Like Agyeman’s interpretation of just sustainability, the Oberlin Project requires the input of groups concerned about both preserving the environment and creating a socially just and economically sustainable Oberlin. Because the Oberlin Project is a major urban planning project, the following sections will provide background on the theory and practice of urban planning, as well as the evolution of the urban planning discipline since World War II into its current postmodern emphasis on communication, collaboration, and participation. These three tenets of modern urban planning are

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<sup>14</sup> Agyeman, 6.

important in producing equitable, just, and sustainable planned environments. In a sense, postmodern urban planning theory is indicative of the blurring of boundaries in the environmental movement. No longer can planners proceed with purely environmental or purely social agendas. Many planning projects today adopt this emerging theoretical stance and emphasize the importance of collaborative efforts to produce urban environments that are both environmentally and socially just. Sustainable urban development is one current object of interest of urban planning theorists and practitioners.<sup>15</sup>

In terms of the built environment, cities have adopted approaches from three reform movements, and more recently, a fourth. *Smart growth*, the first movement, is a form of development derived from land use policies. These policies conserve and protect resources and land surrounding urban environments and sequester urban growth within defined boundaries. A second movement, *new urbanism*, is the practice of the Congress for New Urbanism (CNU), an organization initiated by a group of architects in 1993. CNU has excelled at constructing mixed-use neighborhood developments and public transit-oriented neighborhoods, and has pioneered tools for regional planning and zoning approvals, notably the town planning charrette.<sup>16</sup> Lastly, the *green building* movement is largely the work of the United States Green Building Council (USGBC). Since its inception in 1993, the USGBC has initiated a wide scale green architecture trend with its Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program. Over 14,000 building projects have received points towards gaining LEED certification for adopting energy

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<sup>15</sup> Scott Campbell, "Green Cities, Growing Cities, Just Cities? Urban Planning and the Contradictions of Sustainable Development," *Journal of the American Planning Association* (Summer 1996): 297.

<sup>16</sup> Douglass Farr, *Sustainable Urbanism: Design with Nature* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2008), 32.

saving measures and utilizing resources sustainably. The smart growth, new urbanism, and green building movements have collectively inspired *sustainable urbanism*, a movement that is particularly important in the context of this thesis. The “mission statement” of sustainable urbanism is to “redesign the built environment in a manner that supports a higher quality of life and promotes a healthy and sustainable American lifestyle.”<sup>17</sup>

In the literature review, I came across few sources that actively bridged the concepts of collaborative planning and sustainable urbanism. This is notable as collaborative planning is often a focus of environmental management case studies and authors writing on sustainable urbanism often tout the benefits of collaboration to build community capital. In part this literature gap may exist because both collaborative planning and sustainable urbanism are relatively new disciplines, and case studies that embody both principles may not exist or may not be realized. There are many case studies that have emphasized exclusively either collaborative planning or sustainable urbanism and may briefly mention the other. For instance, a study of university-community collaborations in the San Francisco Bay area found that collaboration was highly successful at addressing regional equity concerns and economic development. However, the study presents little evidence that this collaboration fostered a sustainable urban environment or contributed to improving urban ecological systems.<sup>18</sup>

Julian Agyeman’s Just Sustainability Paradigm, as well as a comprehensive study of the dozens of case studies of both collaborative planning and sustainable urbanism,

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<sup>17</sup> Farr, 28.

<sup>18</sup> Manuel Pastor, et al., “Bridging the Bay: University-Community Collaborations (San Francisco Bay Area),” in M. Paloma Pavel, ed., *Breakthrough Communities: Sustainability in the Next American Metropolis* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009), 243-255.

may provide a framework that can bridge the literature gap that may exist. Though I am proposing that this literature gap may exist, this thesis does not make an attempt to fill it. Because this thesis emphasizes citizen collaboration and participation, the following section partially abandons sustainable urbanism in favor of discussing the history of collaborative planning theory. However, sustainable urbanism is important because it is a paradigm under which the Oberlin Project falls.

### A brief history of urban planning theory and practice

This section examines the history of urban planning theory, with an emphasis on three paradigm shifts that have occurred since 1945 that have ultimately given way to modern urban planning theory and its emphasis on sustainable design. While planning for urban environments has been done for millennia, urban planning became solidified as a serious discipline at the end of the World War II. In its ‘first’ phase, planning in post-WWII Europe and North America was conceived of as an extension of architecture, or as a means to design the integration of physical space based upon blueprinted plans showing the configuration of land uses. Underlying design decisions made based on these plans was a set of economic, cultural, and social values unique to planners in different regions. For instance, design and construction of suburban settlements in pursuit of the ideal environment to establish a family increased dramatically in America following the end of WWII. While planning in the post-war era was more refined than planning had previously been, it faced a number of criticisms, of which a common theme was “the accusation that planners were insufficiently informed about the reality they were tampering with.”<sup>19</sup> In particular, this generation of planners demonstrated an inadequate

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<sup>19</sup> Nigel Taylor, *Urban Planning Theory Since 1945* (London: SAGE Publications, 1998), 53.

comprehension of the relationship between physical environments and social life. These criticisms, and the diagnosis that planners needed more detailed empirical understanding of communities guided by normative ideals in their decision making, led to radical shifts in the planning discipline in the 1960s.

During the 1960s, planners put forth a systems and rational process view of planning, derived from systems theory that had developed in other disciplines in the 1940s and 1950s. This new second paradigm posited that the environment of towns, cities, and regions should be seen as a system of interconnected parts. Planners saw the system as an object affected by planning practices rooted in the rational process of decision-making. That is, change in the urban environment could be implemented only with a full understanding of the complex interrelationships of activities and places in a city, and that implementation was only successful if planning was an ongoing process of monitoring, analyzing, and intervening in urban structures, rather than creating a static blueprint for a city.<sup>20</sup> In planning as a process of rational action, decisions to alter the urban environment were made following the scientific method. In this sense, planning reflected the popular theory at the time that ‘science’ could be applied to policymaking through quantification of various factors, and that if something could not be quantified, such as the beauty of a place, then it could not be scientific and therefore must be marginalized in policy-making.<sup>21</sup>

Simultaneously in the 1960s was a demand that the public should be allowed to engage in planning, since planning was inherently a political process, and citizens should have input in any political system purporting to be democratic. Planners proposed

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<sup>20</sup> Taylor, 63

<sup>21</sup> Taylor, 69.

theories of public participation that included ideas such as community forums and community development officers, and an entirely new subfield of planning was formed in which authors like Fagence and Burke wrote extensively on participatory approaches to urban planning. In practice, however, participation often remained as consultation, with professional planners retaining ultimate responsibility.<sup>22</sup>

The systems and rational process view of planning received much criticism in the 1970s. Notably, critics asserted that this type of planning was too much of an abstract analytical concept, and that planning needed to be treated as a sociohistorical phenomenon with political and social contexts. In addition to the vagueness and simplicity of rational planning, the planning discipline had failed in the 1960s to produce realistic models for implementation. Theorists recognized that effective implementation required interpersonal skills of communication and negotiation to deal with the complexity of public planning policies in a democratic capitalist land market. Jane Jacobs was one of the earliest critics, writing that “The practitioners and teachers of [city planning] have ignored the study of success and failure in real life, have been incurious about the reasons for unexpected success, and are guided instead by principles derived from the behavior and appearance of towns, suburbs, tuberculosis sanatoria, fairs, and imaginary dream cities.”<sup>23</sup> Some see Jacobs as one of the earliest postmodernists in the discipline of urban planning. Her emphasis on diversity and complexity is representative of the third planning paradigm examined here, the postmodern urban planning platform, which celebrates pluralism and validates the diverse ways in which

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<sup>22</sup> Taylor, 88.

<sup>23</sup> Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 6.

people experience urban environments. This most recent wave of urban planning practice draws from the theory of communicative action, which emphasizes inclusive, collaborative processes in urban initiatives, both in theory and practice. This “postmodern” paradigm will be the focus of the remainder of section I.

### The postmodern turn

Emerging urban planning theory focuses on collaborative planning as a solution to the problems faced by planning in practice, notably planning within an increasingly complex framework where many stakeholders exist. Collaborative planning is significant in the context of this paper because it encourages planning mechanisms that include many participants. It also seeks to establish a dialogue where all stakeholders, including citizens, are able to engage equally to establish an agreed upon vision for development. Planners across the world are increasingly adopting a variety of strategies to engage citizens in decision-making about developing their cities, in part because “local ownership and participation in planning to solve local problems maximize[s] lasting improvement in quality of community life.”<sup>24</sup> A project that seeks to be both environmentally and socially sustainable usually requires some form of citizen participation or input. This thesis compiles an investigation of collaborative planning as a means toward community engagement and supplements this in later chapters with an in-depth exploration of how other collaborative disciplines accomplish the objective of effective citizen participation.

Postmodern collaborative planning academics like Patsy Healey study “argumentative, communicative or interpretive planning” that recognizes diversity,

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<sup>24</sup> Hoff, 15.



consensus building, and planning as inherently embedded in its context of social relations.<sup>25</sup> Historically, planning has required extensive knowledge of national, state and local laws to navigate intricate zoning requirements. But now, by necessity, modern planning also involves communication between planners and policymakers, bureaucrats, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, and private sector organizations. Indeed, the planner cannot maintain the planning discipline in isolation from other organizations. By necessity, planning has become less about designing places and more about facilitating the creation and implementation of a collective vision.

Communicative, or collaborative, planning is defined by planning theorist Barbara Gray as encompassing 1) the pooling of tangible and intangible resources, e.g. goods, information, money or labor 2) by two or more stakeholders 3) to solve a set of problems that neither party can solve individually.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, Healey conceptualizes philosopher Jurgen Habermas's theory of communicative action in terms of planning. In her conception, "planning becomes a process of interactive collective reasoning, carried out in the medium of language, in discourse."<sup>27</sup> In other words, collaborative planning is grounded in the process and outcome of a group of individuals creating a common language with which to reason and build discourse. In a project planning scenario, the building of bonds of mutual trust and shared understanding between project stakeholders occur through sharing in a common discourse built around relational webs or networks, which work to create intellectual and social capital. For example, Oberlin Project stakeholders come from a variety of different backgrounds, and their current task is to

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<sup>25</sup> Patsy Healey, *Collaborative Planning: Shaping Places in Fragmented Societies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 29-30.

<sup>26</sup> Barbara Gray, "Conditions Facilitating Interorganizational Collaboration," *Human Relations* 38:10 (1985), 911-936.

<sup>27</sup> Healey, 57.

construct a discourse in which every player is on the same page about the goals and vision of the Project. From identifying a shared set of goals, stakeholders can begin to pool their resources to implement their common vision. Healey draws from Habermas's theory because it seeks to reconstruct dialogue in the public realm such that more powerful interests do not dominate public affairs. In the Oberlin Project scenario, this means that in the current process of arriving at a consensus for a clear and common vision, stakeholders will need to make considerable efforts to ensure that all voices are included in the dialogue. According to Healey, this occurs through continued critique of dialogue between groups; in the process of creating a common discourse, speakers and hearers routinely judge each other's exchanges and learn from them in a process of *inclusionary argumentation*.<sup>28</sup>

Inclusionary argumentation is a form of strategy making using an institutional approach, which is based on several underlying assumptions. These assumptions include knowledge that 1) collaboration occurs in a multicultural world, 2) stakeholders should emphasize the importance of local knowledge and the connections between culture, technical reasoning, moral attitudes and emotive concerns, 3) consensus requires active creation that bridges social factions of relevant stakeholders and generates enduring social, intellectual and political capital that builds institutional capacity, 4) this new institutional capacity is plagued by a field of struggle in which those who have power may easily control access, routines and style.

In the process of inclusionary argumentation, participants explore who is at stake in the issue and explore formal and informal arenas for strategy-making activities. In

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<sup>28</sup> Healey, 266.

addition to identifying stakeholders, participants observe opportunities for doing things differently or ‘reading the cracks’ in traditional institutional settings as well as identifying issues in new ways and recognizing deeper divisions amongst stakeholders. Stakeholders choose a style of discussion, such as using a facilitator, explore the languages of different cultural groups, and become wary of who is represented in a discussion and who is not. Then, stakeholders carefully translate through the outcome of such careful discussion, the emergent ‘argumentative jumble,’ by working through and analyzing the issues raised. This process leads to discourse creation, which, while proactive, is also a selective simplification of issues and can gain momentum by exaggeration. Because of this, participant groups have access to mediums in which reinterpretation and challenge of the newly created discourse is possible. Chapter four discusses concrete methods by which to accomplish these processes.

Similar to Healey’s process of inclusionary argumentation, Gray uses three categories to highlight crucial processes that are necessary to produce interorganizational collaboration: *problem-setting*, *direction-setting*, and *structuring*.<sup>29</sup> *Problem-setting* is facilitated by a diverse and continually adapting set of stakeholders that believe the benefits of collaboration will outweigh the costs. Stakeholders recognize their relative interdependence and are aware that historical relations amongst themselves will color their perceptions of legitimacy. Like Healey, Gray emphasizes the importance of a stakeholder or a third party acting as facilitator or convener to mediate and rally participation. *Direction-setting* is primarily a product of stakeholders’ ability to participate in a search to find coinciding values and shared desirable outcomes.

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<sup>29</sup> Gray, 916.

Additionally, stakeholders enhance collaborative ability by dispersing power so that all stakeholders can participate in direction-setting. In *structuring*, stakeholders continue to recognize their interdependence and select mandates to provide a structural framework for collaboration. Also like Healey, Gray asserts monitoring for changes and leaving opportunities for redistribution of power.

From Healey and Gray's criteria, several universal processes of community engagement emerge. The first step towards public participation involves identifying and building upon existing networks of community capital and creating a support structure, network, and tools for bringing groups together to collaborate (problem-setting). With this support network, the second step involves creating an environment in which this network can ideally communicate and establish a common vision (direction-setting). Thirdly, acting on this new functioning network, community groups can work together to create a sense of stakeholdership and motivation, to change norms, and to collectively utilize resources (structuring). With these three steps in mind, chapter four examines three concrete models that the Oberlin Project can consider in building a sense of participation and ownership not only for its current stakeholders but for the wider community as well.

It is important to recognize that communicative planning in theory and practice does not necessarily offer an easy way to achieve inclusive, participatory planning projects. According to Susan Fainstein, another planning theorist, achieving a "just city" is dependent on a moral basis of planning founded on principles of democracy, diversity, and equity. Fainstein goes so far as to criticize communicative planning for putting too much faith in the efficacy of open communication and ignoring the reality of structural

inequality and hierarchies of power. Democratic planning can function properly only in situations of equal opportunity, which even then may be colored by false consciousness. In these situations, stakeholders are unknowingly caught in existing social relations that may cause them to choose programs contrary to their self-interests.<sup>30</sup> In this sense, while the Oberlin Project may engage in the processes of collaborative planning outlined above, it may also not be entirely inclusionary. Thus, the element of inclusionary argumentation that requires stakeholders to be continually self-critical in the process of ‘reading the cracks’ and recognizing power structures is particularly important. Overall, though, the emerging field of collaborative planning is important because it can contribute to processes of public participation “that enables citizens to shape planning decisions and outcomes while increasing their levels of social and political empowerment.”<sup>31</sup>

## SECTION II

### The Oberlin Project

The Oberlin Project is an ongoing venture in sustainable development in the town of Oberlin, Ohio. David Orr, Paul Sears Distinguished Professor of Environmental Studies and Politics and Special Assistant to Marvin Krislov, President of Oberlin College, first conceived of the Project in 2007. Orr saw significant opportunity in conglomerating the development needs of the College and town into one large project. Downtown facilities, namely the Oberlin Inn and its encompassing block, are in need of renovation. Both entities are attempting to become climate positive through adoption of

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<sup>30</sup> Susan Fainstein, *The Just City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 31.

<sup>31</sup> Lucie Laurian, “Public Participation in Environmental Decision Making: Findings from Communities Facing Toxic Waste Cleanup”, *Journal of The American Planning Association* 70:1 (Winter 2004), 53.

renewable energy sources.<sup>32</sup> After Orr introduced the concept of the Oberlin Project to Krislov, they hired consultants in late 2007 to conduct a feasibility study. Orr also proposed his idea to Oberlin City Manager Eric Norenberg. After the feasibility study, Orr introduced the Project's concept to the College's Board of Trustees in the spring of 2008. After further feasibility studies conducted by BNIM Architects, Orr and other leaders began the first draft proposal of the Oberlin Project in the spring of 2009. Throughout this process, Orr introduced the concept to various parties and began to build a core planning group, which now exists of a number of different organizations and advisory groups shown in figure 3.1. In this thesis, the persons affiliated with the Core Planning Group are referred to as the Oberlin Project's *planners* or *leaders*.

As of early 2011, the Project has evolved into a “collaborative venture among Oberlin College, the City of Oberlin, Oberlin city schools and private sector organizations to build a prosperous post-fossil fuel based economy.”<sup>33</sup> Orr has described the project as one of the first attempts at sustainability that integrates a series of one-off projects to comprise a whole. Though it is a continually evolving project, it currently encompasses three primary goals. The first goal is the modification of a 13-acre block of downtown Oberlin into a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) platinum certified ‘green arts district’ with new performing and visual arts centers, sustainable student housing and retail spaces, and a retrofit or complete reconstruction of the Oberlin Inn into an eco-friendly four star hotel and conference center. This part of the project provides a spatial catalyst for the three remaining components: the transition of

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<sup>32</sup> David Orr, personal interview, October 13, 2010.

<sup>33</sup> David Orr, “The Oberlin Project: A Clinton Climate Initiative Climate Positive Project,” <http://www.coolwilliamstown.org/sites/coolwilliamstown.drupalgardens.com/files/OberlinProject.pdf> (May 2010).

both the city of Oberlin and Oberlin College to a carbon-free energy system, the creation of a 20,000 acre greenbelt for agriculture, forestry, biofuels, and carbon sequestration around the city of Oberlin, and the fostering of educational systems at all levels that prepare future generations for a post-fossil fuel economy. According to the official Oberlin Project proposal, the goals of the Project are to “(a) shift electrical use from coal to efficiency and renewable sources; (b) minimize auto-dependence; (c) catalyze sustainable land-use patterns in the surrounding area; (d) equip high school, vocational, and college students with the analytical skills, technical know-how, and vision necessary to become leaders in the transition to a prosperous and sustainable future; and (e) contribute to a deeper national dialogue about the challenges and opportunities of actually creating a sustainable world, one city and region at a time.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Orr,  
<http://www.coolwilliamstown.org/sites/coolwilliamstown.drupalgardens.com/files/OberlinProject.pdf>.

**Figure 3.1 Organization of Oberlin Project planners**



Critical to the evolution of the Project has been its partnership with the Clinton Climate Initiative’s (CCI) Climate Positive Development Program, a program designed in conjunction with the United States Green Building Council (USGBC) to “support the development of large-scale urban projects that will demonstrate that cities can grow in



ways that are ‘climate positive,’ striving to reduce the amount of on-site CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to below zero.”<sup>35</sup> The Oberlin Project, along with its multiple planners, was formally unveiled at the 10-year anniversary of the Adam Joseph Lewis Center (AJLC) for Environmental Studies at Oberlin College in October of 2010. Soon after, Orr and members from various advisory groups presented the Project to Oberlin’s City Council and the board of trustees of the adjacent New Russia Township.

Since its unveiling, the Project has been featured in articles in the Oberlin News-Tribune, in online news articles for regional publications and green online forums, and in several campus publications. The Oberlin Review has produced at least one article on the Project. In the Project’s publicity, the question of community participation has not been ignored. In “Projecting a New Oberlin,” an article produced by *Headwaters*, Oberlin College’s environmental magazine, Eliana Golding wrote, “The question is, will [the Oberlin Project] deepen the dialogue between city and College?” Similar challenges have been posted on online blogs. The Oberlin Project continues to evolve and has not fully entered the limelight of public consciousness and debate, and with an estimated date of completion more than 10 years down the road, there are not yet answers to these questions.

### Community, collaboration, and the Oberlin Project

Fundamental to the Oberlin Project is the notion that it can act as an economic, social, and cultural impetus for creating a “greener” community and “breaking down silos between institutions.”<sup>36</sup> This, of course, will require collaboration between the city,

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<sup>35</sup> Clinton Climate Initiative, *Climate Positive Development Program*, <http://www.c40cities.org/initiatives/climate-positive.jsp> (Feb. 20, 2011).

<sup>36</sup> Orr interview, Oct. 13, 2010.

College, and multiple other players. Accordingly, Oberlin Project planners hope that this collaboration “can be a model for politics and planning in other communities.”<sup>37</sup> Yet, the Project is in such a nascent stage that planners have not proposed any formal models of collaboration.

Oberlin is a community that demands collaboration and participation in city affairs. It is an active and progressive community. Both the town of Oberlin and Oberlin College have historically played a vigorous role in social justice movements. According to one Oberlin citizen, “When you look at a snapshot of the people in Oberlin, it seems a lot more likely that something like [the Oberlin Project] would happen in a place like Oberlin.”<sup>38</sup> The city’s contemporary progressiveness is reflected in the history of Oberlin and its people, and an examination of Oberlin’s history in the next section provides an explanation for why a large-scale undertaking like the Oberlin Project is possible to pursue in Oberlin. It also demonstrates why a succinct collaborative model between the Oberlin Project and Oberlin citizens will be necessary for the Project to be a success.

#### A brief history of planning in Oberlin, 1833-Present

Both the town of Oberlin and Oberlin College were born together in 1833 by settlers seeking to establish a Christian perfectionist community removed from the outside world and dedicated to education. Oberlin College was founded as a theological seminary, though by the 1870s it had expanded to encompass the liberal arts as well as the Conservatory, and secularism invaded both the town and College early on.<sup>39</sup> During

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<sup>37</sup> Orr, <http://www.coolwilliamstown.org/sites/coolwilliamstown.drupalgardens.com/files/OberlinProject.pdf>.

<sup>38</sup> Participant fifteen, personal interview, February 22, 2011.

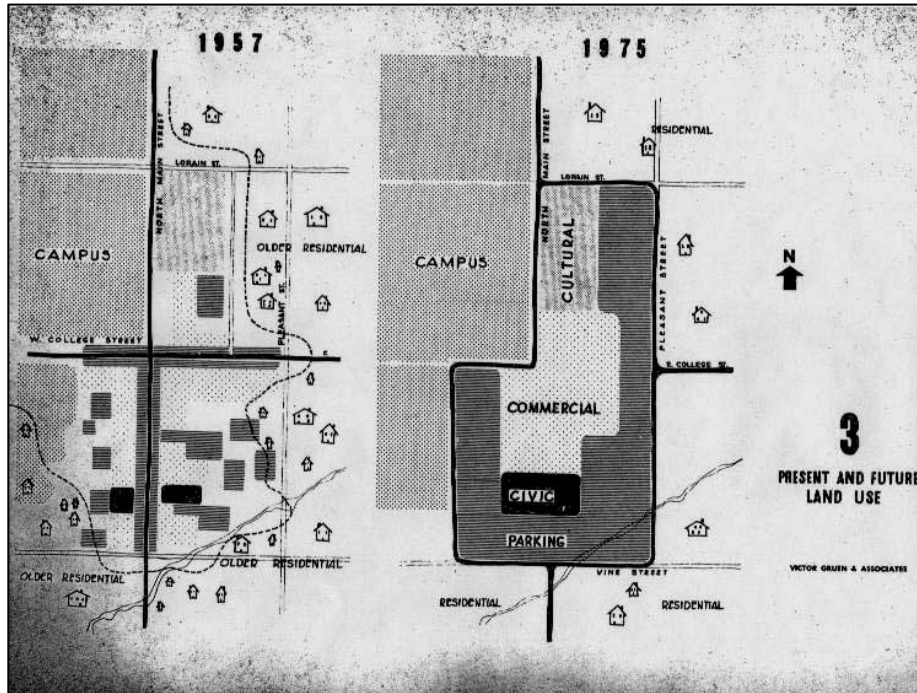
<sup>39</sup> Aaron Wildavski, *Leadership in a small town* (Totowa, N.J.: The Bedminster Press, 1964), 34.

the mid to late 1800s, the town and College garnered a progressive reputation for being located on the Underground Railroad and for strongly supporting the abolition movement. Beginning in 1835, Oberlin was the first college to have a policy of not discriminating against African Americans. Additionally, the College was the first institution of higher education to grant women Bachelors of Arts, with its first three women graduates receiving degrees in 1841. From its inception, Oberlin has been rooted in utopian ideals, and both citizens and students have been active in radical and progressive movements.

The level of activism in the community is inherent in city affairs and local governance. The Oberlin Project is operating in an environment where a particular emphasis on engagement in community affairs is both possible and expected. Given such an active citizenry, development in Oberlin has historically proceeded painstakingly and contentiously. Two prominent examples of contention included plans for an industrial park and the Gruen Plan of the 1950s. Aaron Wildavsky, author of *Leadership in a small town*, which details Oberlin's politics in the 1950s and 1960s, elaborates on these two instances of contention. In the 1950s, Bill Long, a well-known Oberlinian, attempted to create an industrial park in the northwest quadrant of the city. This event facilitated a fundamental division among participants active in Oberlin affairs. One faction consisted of people sharing a belief with Long in planning for the future of the community, while another element resisted, claiming that the proposed expansion of local government and industry would scar the face of the community. The "planners" faction was successful in rallying for the creation of an industrial park, which ultimately provided a valuable tax base for funding Oberlin's public schools. The planners were not so successful in rallying

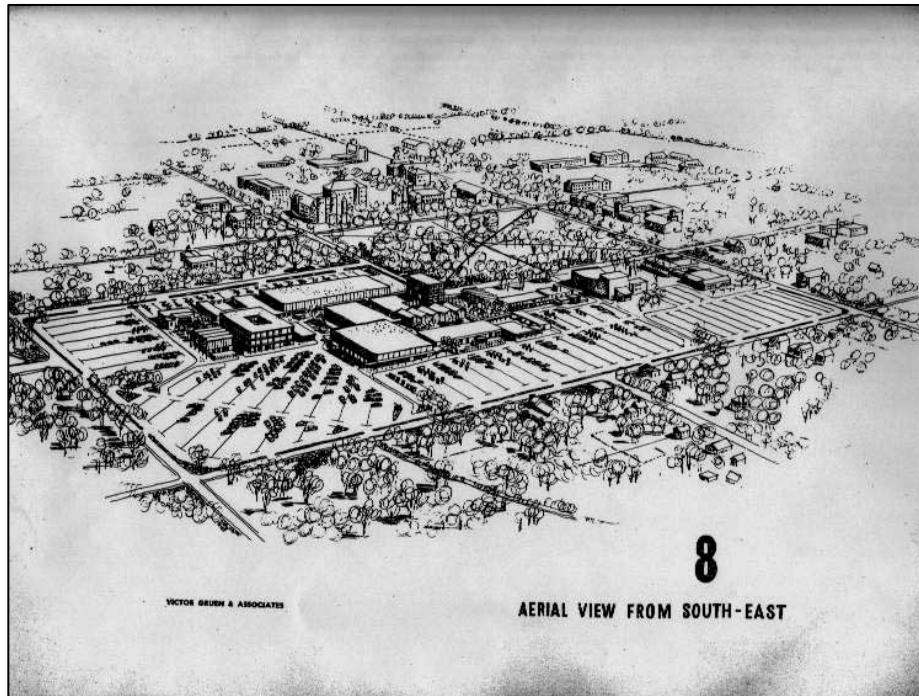
for another proposition, Victor Gruen's plan for an Oberlin Central District, a radical redevelopment program that involved coalescing the downtown area into a large shopping mall surrounded by acres of parking.<sup>40</sup> However, the number of voices in opposition was enough to nullify the plan.

**Figure 3.2 The Gruen Plan from above**



<sup>40</sup> The Gruen Plan for Oberlin, OH, <http://www.oberlin.edu/external/EOG/GruenPlan/imagesocds.html> (Mar. 15, 2011).

**Figure 3.3 The Gruen Plan from the southeast**



The examples of the industrial park and the Gruen Plan demonstrate two important characteristics of the Oberlin community. Firstly, the visions that have gone into development in the city are representative of the city's utopian ideals. While Gruen's plan may today be recognized as an attempt to commercialize Oberlin in accordance with the emergence of the shopping mall in the 1950s, it was at that time a collaborative and radical vision amongst planners and select community members based on ideals of modernization and development. Secondly, planning and development are contentious issues in Oberlin. As Wildavsky writes, "We find, then, a highly fragmented, pluralist community, with no one individual or faction dominant, moving slowly."<sup>41</sup> Oberlin's planning visionaries are often forced to contend with a divided and opinionated community, as reflected in the struggles of the more recent East College Street project.

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<sup>41</sup> Wildavsky, 46.

## Contemporary planning in Oberlin

Today, development in Oberlin attracts the same divide as fifty years ago; there are voices active in the community that ardently oppose development, and those who assert that it is indispensable. An example of this divide is manifest in the difficulties of the recently completed East College Street project. Completed in 2009, the East College Street project is a large development that faced considerable obstacles in its planning phases. Initially, three Oberlin graduates conceived of a plan to redevelop a vacant downtown lot of East College Street, and began assessing the feasibility of this plan upon their graduations in 2001 and 2002. Throughout the eight years of implementing their plan, Naomi Sabel, Josh Rosen, and Ben Ezinga founded Sustainable Community Associates (SCA), which raised over \$17 million for the project. During this time, SCA faced many challenges, including mandated EPA testing and navigating complicated financing mechanisms. Moreover, they encountered scrutiny from Oberlin citizens, particularly when they approached City Council about partnering with SCA through a tax-implementing financing (TIF) bond. An Oberlin citizen reflected in an Op-ed in the *Oberlin News Tribune* that, “What I have been sorry to see is how much of the opposition to East College Street and the entrepreneurs was neither principled nor practical but ad hominem. They are too young. They are outsiders. They come from allegedly problematical families.”<sup>42</sup> SCA also encountered protests from members of the Lorain County Labor Union, who complained that the SCA had intentionally not hired workers

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<sup>42</sup> Robert Stinson, “Oberlin Observations,” *Oberlin News Tribune* (<http://sustainableca.com/article-tribune/>).

from Lorain County labor unions in a time when jobs were scarce for construction workers.<sup>43</sup>

Yet, despite these objections, the East College Street Project stands completed today. The three-building, LEED-rated complex hosts 24,000 square feet of ground floor commercial and retail space, 1,000 square feet of publicly accessible green space, and 33 residential units, 13 of which are priced for low-income households. Furthermore, the Project has brought new activity to downtown Oberlin, particularly with spaces like the Slow Train Café, a hotspot for coffee and gatherings. Many Oberlin citizens have spoken of the East College Street Project as a resounding success that has brought economic stimulus to the downtown. According to an article in the *New York Times*, SCA hopes to usher in a new era in Oberlin's development, one that is not only about mixed-use development, but also about a mix of idealism and pragmatism.<sup>44</sup> The success of the East College Street Project speaks to the potential of the Oberlin Project to also act as a stimulus for Oberlin.

### Challenges to the Oberlin Project

The possibility of the Oberlin Project to act as a stimulus is particularly important because the Oberlin area contends with several significant challenges. Oberlin is an exurban community located 34 miles southwest of Cleveland in the heart of the rust belt. Duncan and Salant in their article "Development and Opportunity in Small Towns and Rural Communities" characterize towns like Oberlin as left-behind rural places that share

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<sup>43</sup> Christopher Gollmar, "East College Street Project Nears Completion," *The Oberlin Review*, Feb. 26, 2010 ([http://www.oberlin.edu/cgi-bin/cgiwrap/ocreview/20100226.php?a=n\\_east\\_college&sec=news](http://www.oberlin.edu/cgi-bin/cgiwrap/ocreview/20100226.php?a=n_east_college&sec=news))

<sup>44</sup> Lisa Chamberlain, "Young, Idealistic, and Now Developers," *The New York Times*, Oct. 18, 2006 ([http://sustainableca.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2009/01/nytimes\\_sca.pdf](http://sustainableca.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2009/01/nytimes_sca.pdf))

many of the same dynamics of race, culture, and power that created hollowed-out inner cities. They also note that these communities face a trend of out-migration, in part because of a declining number of people living on farms. 700,000 people per year left their farms between 1940 and 1970 in the U.S. Today, those who are younger and better educated are leaving rural Rustbelt communities at an especially high rate.<sup>45</sup>

Oberlin is no exception to the portrait that Duncan and Salant paint. The community has not experienced any significant growth in recent years; between 2000 and 2010, Oberlin's population grew by 1.96%. 19.4% of Oberlin's citizens are at or below the poverty line, compared to 9% for Lorain County, 10.6% for Ohio, and 12.4% for the U.S. The majority of Oberlin's poorest citizens live in the southeast quadrant of the town, which has historically been the case.<sup>46</sup> At the very least, the Oberlin Project can prove to be an economic boon to Oberlin and the surrounding area. At the most, it has the potential to address the community's most challenging economic problems.

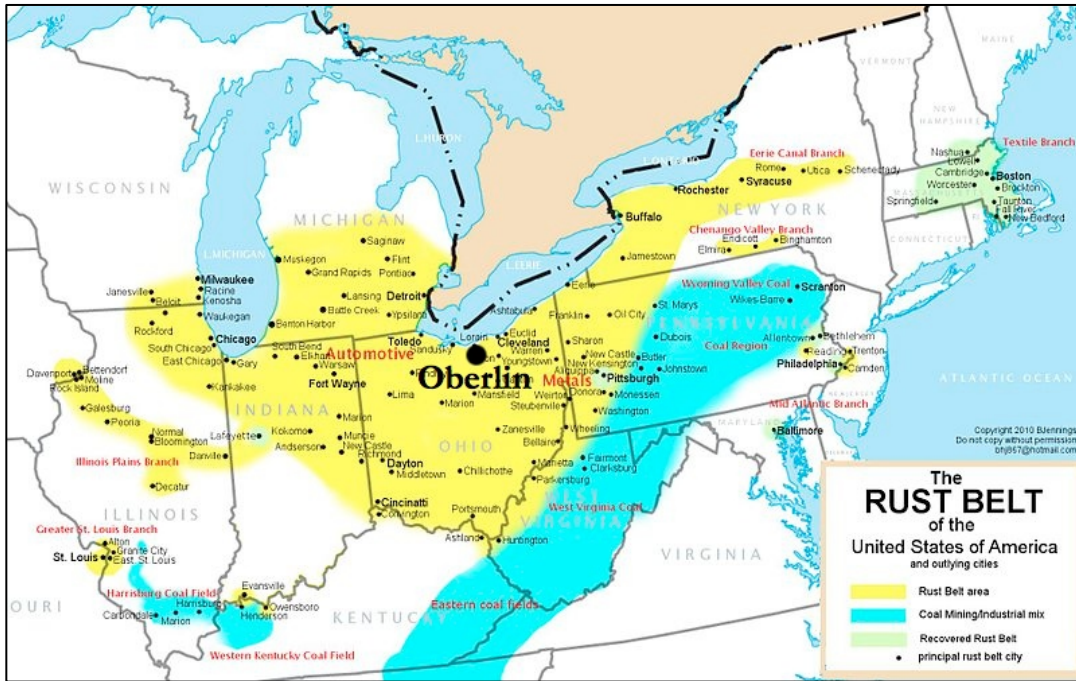
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<sup>45</sup> Cynthia M. Duncan and Priscilla Salant, "Development and Opportunity in Small Towns and Rural Communities," in M. Paloma Pavel ed., *Breakthrough Communities: Sustainability and Justice in the Next American Metropolis* (Cambridge, MA: the MIT Press, 2009), 69-73.

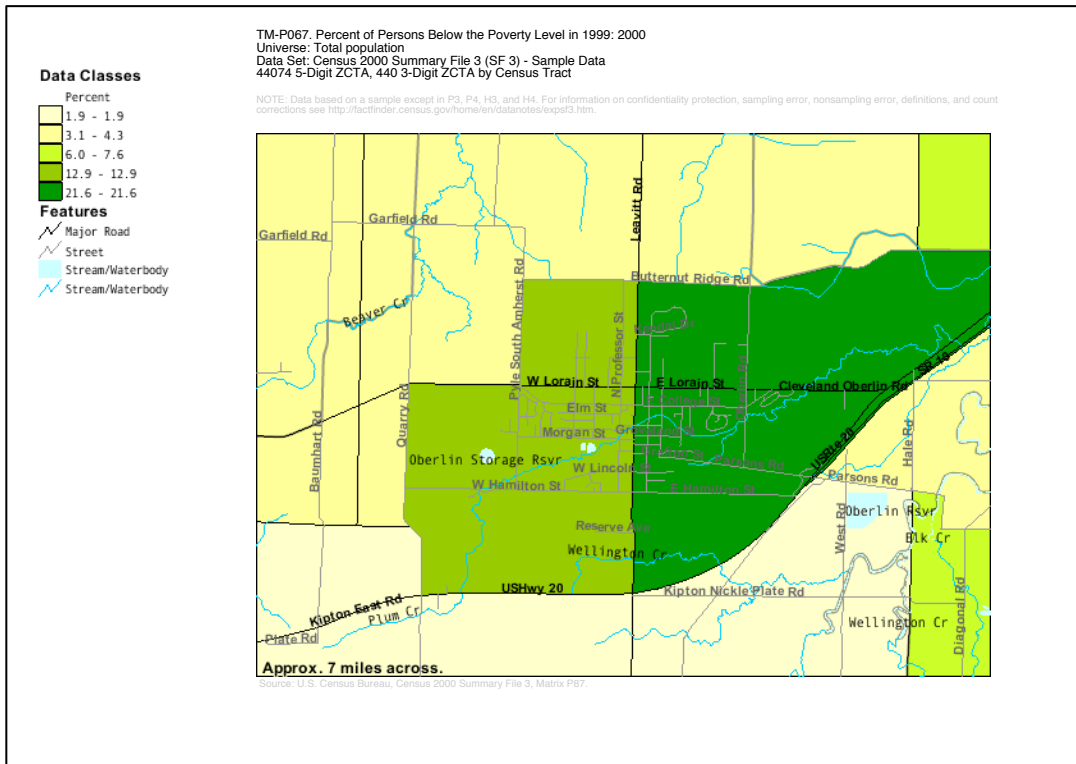
<sup>46</sup> The majority of substandard housing stock is, and has been for some time, also located in this section of town. In 1960, seven African American children were killed in a fire that demolished an apartment on Lincoln Street. This prompted swift enforcement of Oberlin's first comprehensive Housing Code, which took steps to ensure that all housing met a minimum standard.



**Figure 3.4 Oberlin in the Rustbelt**



**Figure 3.5 Oberlin poverty levels**



The historically tense relationship between the town and College communities is perhaps more of an obstacle than Oberlin's poverty or the community's divisiveness over development. Undoubtedly, the Oberlin Project, like the East College Street Project, will encounter opposition from a subset of the Oberlin community. Yet, it is necessary to understand the context in which the Oberlin Project is operating. While both communities have "grown up" together, the divide between the College and the town has become larger with time. This is manifest in Oberlin's architectural and planning history. There is an increasing physical divide between the town and the College campus, and this has not always been the case. Town buildings were once interspersed with College buildings, many of them located on or near Tappan Square. The removal of buildings from Tappan in the early twentieth century and the conscious orientation of all new College buildings located to the west and north of Tappan Square effectively created a physical divide between College and town that was solidified by the 1960s. At this time, the creation of a north-south axis with women's dormitories to the south and men's dormitories to the north, with Wilder Bowl as a social nexus located in between, concentrated students away from the town to the south and east of Tappan. Eric J. Low, who has documented Oberlin's architectural history, accurately summarizes this split: "In the first half of its history, the building of utopia in Oberlin reflected an architecturally unified college and town. In the latter half, Oberlin College attempted to project its reputation as a respectable institution in the form of an academic campus clearly separate from, though not necessarily antagonist to, the town."<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, Oberlin College attracts its fair share of antagonistic citizens.

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<sup>47</sup> Eric J. Low, "Town and Gown: Tappan Square as a Paradigm of Oberlin's Changing Vision."

Voices in the community will always exist to scrutinize any development that involves the College or College affiliates, such as the East College Street project. While the intent of the Oberlin Project is not to remedy the town-gown divide, nor to necessarily integrate the College with the community, the Project's call for collaboration between business, industry, city government, and the College itself will require unprecedented efforts at bridging the divide between the College and the town. Bridging this divide may come, at the very least, in the form of increased physical integration between College and town. Worries are already emerging amongst observers of the Oberlin Project that the Green Arts District will have few provisions or amenities that could be utilized by the community outside of the College. In response to this concern, I propose that there is potential in the Project to physically integrate the two communities, such as providing a north-south oriented walkable thruway in the Green Arts District to connect Lorain and College Streets. Physical integration may serve as an opportunity to bridge deeper gaps that exist between town and gown. While Oberlin's contemporary visionaries must contend with a small, opinionated faction in the town, there are also lesser-known voices, particularly in the southeast quadrant, that are also antagonistic to the College. A concerted effort to create a physical space where both communities are welcome, provided that the planning and establishing of such a place is inclusive of diverse constituents, might be one step to creating a more cohesive community that can more effectively address the region's economic challenges.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### METHODS FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING

*“Those anxious about community development, about increasing social polarization and social tension seek ways of making better links between economic opportunities, environmental conditions and the quality of social life.”<sup>48</sup> – Patsy Healey*

As postmodern urban planning theory continues to explore the deepening role of citizen participation, sets of criteria emerge for optimizing a network of participants in the planning process. Postmodern planning theorists such as Healey and Innes emphasize the value of collaborative participation in planning. This chapter expands upon the vision and criteria for collaboration set forth in these and other postmodern planning texts by exploring concrete methods to envision and achieve planning goals. In this chapter, methods of community engagement are divided into the three categories set forth in chapter three by the organizational behavior field: 1) *problem-setting*, or creating support structures and tools, 2) *direction-setting*, or generating a common vision, and 3) *structuring*, or utilizing social capital and newly built relationships to produce ownership in a planning project, to motivate community participants, and to change norms.

Problem-setting, direction-setting, and structuring are conceptual stages in modeling collaboration. These three stages are used here because the field of environmental management has adopted them as a useful framework for interpreting increased collaboration in solving environmental disputes and engaging multiple stakeholders in environmental management.<sup>49</sup> In problem-setting, parties involved in a

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<sup>48</sup> Healey, excerpt from *Collaborative Planning: Shaping Places in Fragmented Societies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

<sup>49</sup> Steve Selin and Deborah Chavez, “Developing a Collaborative Model for Environmental Planning and Management,” *Environmental Management* 19: 2 (1995): 189-195.

project identify stakeholders, perceptions of legitimacy amongst participating stakeholders begin to form, access to power is shared, and there is a general recognition of interdependence amongst stakeholders. In direction-setting, stakeholders identify common values and disperse power. Lastly, in structuring, stakeholders work together to produce external mandates, redistribute power if necessary, and recognize the significance of ongoing interdependence. Using these categories as an outline, this chapter investigates three participatory models sourced from different disciplines for the purpose of understanding how the Oberlin Project is and can be collaborating with a wide variety of stakeholders, including the Oberlin citizenry at large.

Each model outlines methods to create effective problem-setting, direction-setting, and structuring. The first model, EPA's Collaborative Problem Solving Model (CPS Model), provides a foundation for realizing the first set of criteria, that of problem-setting, or ensuring a project has the resources and tools upon which to base meaningful collaboration. Also important is the building of a base of different types of capital, including social, intellectual, human, cultural, and physical capitals. The second model, Appreciative Inquiry (AI), comes out of the management and business disciplines. Through its emphasis on communication amongst multiple stakeholders to solve issues and pursue visioning processes, AI theory provides a method for creating a common project vision. The third and final model, community-based social marketing (CBSM), is a rational scientific-based process that newly created networks can utilize to act upon a commonly generated vision. These models are divided into the three steps based on their relative strengths and weaknesses in providing measures for meeting each of the steps. The CPS Model deals well with problem-setting, AI is a unique tool for direction-setting,

and community-based social marketing structures engagement in sustainability-oriented projects. The CPS Model, AI, and CBSM could provide a means for managing and organizing the complexity of the Oberlin Project and for producing community participation. The following sections explore these three stages of community engagement in greater detail, along with the relative significance of the CPS, AI, and CBSM models.

#### Problem-setting: creating support structures and tools

##### *Collaborative model: EPA's Collaborative Problem-Solving Model<sup>50</sup>*

Community capital, or resources upon which a community relies, can provide the means to build a sustainable community. A number of sources of community capital exist, including environmental, human, social, cultural, and commercial capitals. Communities that are resilient tend to find a favorable balance amongst these different types of capitals, and in particular are able to bring these different capitals together to affect change.<sup>51</sup> All of these capitals together create 'wealth' in the broadest sense and are maximized by community 'civicness,' which contributes to a community's potential to act as an agent toward sustainable development.<sup>52</sup> Leveraging and bringing together the resources of these different capital sources provides a locally specific 'soft' infrastructure whereby the collaborative planning aspect of this 'civicness' is maximized. Utilizing community capital in planning a project has the added advantage of producing a positive feedback loop. That is, collaborative planning often leads to the creation of new forms of

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<sup>50</sup> All information on the Collaborative Problem Solving Model and ReGenesis are from the EPA CPS Model overview: *EPA's Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving Model*, <http://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/resources/publications/grants/cps-manual-12-27-06.pdf> (June 2008).

<sup>51</sup> Roseland, Mark, 73-132.

<sup>52</sup> Roseland, Mark, 85.

intellectual and social capital. The challenge lies in finding the appropriate framework for bringing different forms of community capital together to foster collaboration and additional capital.<sup>53</sup>

The EPA's Collaborative Problem-Solving Model (CPS Model) provides a structure for harvesting different sources of community capital to foster environmental planning. The CPS Model emerged from the best practices of a series of demonstration projects funded by the EPA's Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ) in 2004.<sup>54</sup> The model is structured to present communities with a viable method for dealing with environmental justice issues. Though the Oberlin Project is not a project with environmental justice issues per se, the EPA's model is applicable because of its collaborative nature. The model consists of the following seven interdependent elements:

- 1) Issue identification, community vision, and strategic goal setting
- 2) Community capacity-building and leadership development
- 3) Consensus building and dispute resolution
- 4) Multi-stakeholder partnerships and leveraging of resources
- 5) Constructive engagement by relevant stakeholders
- 6) Sound management and implementation
- 7) Evaluation, lessons learned, and replication of best practices

In its first five stages, the CPS Model emphasizes elements of problem-setting, such as relationship building and network creation. Because the CPS Model stages are abstract

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<sup>53</sup> Edith G. Callaghan and John Colton, "Building sustainable & resilient communities: a balancing of community capital," *Environment, Development, and Sustainability* 10 (2008): 933.

<sup>54</sup> Charles Lee. "Collaborative Models to Achieve Environmental Justice and Healthy Communities," *Power, justice and the environment: a critical appraisal of the environmental justice movement*. Ed. David Naguib, et al. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2005), 245.

in nature, I will supplement their descriptions with a summary of the actions carried out by an EPA CPS Model case study organization in Spartanburg, North Carolina.

Harold Mitchell, a Spartanburg citizen who found his neighborhood threatened by hazardous brownfields, created the ReGenesis Revitalization Project to redevelop several low-income communities of color in Spartanburg. The organization has served as a community-organizing tool for addressing several issues of environmental justice, including the location of the multiple Superfund and brownfield sites in close proximity to the communities. In the past decade, ReGenesis has successfully acted as a stakeholder representative for the revitalization and redevelopment of the Arkwright, Forest Park, and Mill Village communities by working closely with the EPA to clean up the polluted sites and develop a working model for solving environmental disputes. Included in its list of activities, ReGenesis has engaged in a proactive dialogue with a local chemical plant to establish more rigorous safety and control standards, has built a community health center, and over time has attracted over \$50 million in public and private investment. ReGenesis's successes are rooted in its efforts to collaborate with numerous private and public agencies, including municipal, county, and state governments as well as federal agencies, namely the EPA.

The first stage of the CPS Model offers advice for creating structure and tools in its promotion of strategic goal setting. Community groups engage in a visioning process to define an overarching goal, along with more detailed objectives for achieving this goal. The CPS Model categorizes objectives into practical components, such as infrastructure, housing, transportation, and environmental health, as well as an implementation objective. The Model recommends that at this stage, communities use tools like



Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to formulate goals. Also critical at this stage is the use of design charrettes to bring stakeholders together in the same space to collaborate. At this stage, Harold Mitchell created ReGenesis by merging existing neighborhood organizations and worked with the EPA to conduct tests on the polluted lands. ReGenesis worked with the community to develop a common vision and goals for community development, and then presented this to a group of over 100 individuals from local and national governments, businesses, and nearby universities.

The second element emphasizes community capacity building through education about the scientific, legal and policy matters of the project. In this second element, the stakeholders address organization and management issues and work to produce leadership. ReGenesis has worked with over 200 agencies to bring funds to the three communities, and has also encouraged local residents to city- or county-sponsored training to learn new job skills.

In the third element, stakeholders work on consensus building and if conflicts arise, participate in dispute resolution processes that are preferably consensual in nature. These include 1) unassisted negotiation, 2) facilitation, 3) mediation, 4) neutral fact-finding, and 5) the use of an ombudsperson. ReGenesis agreed to participate in a facilitated dialogue, rather than a legal battle, with a local polluting chemical plant, Rhodia, Inc. to negotiate environmental monitoring and facility beautification.

Element four is especially relevant because it promotes methods of engaging additional key stakeholders, who can be from the community, government, business industry, and academia. Techniques of engaging these other stakeholders include:

- Establishing dialogues that lead to possible partnerships with all relevant stakeholders/parties, including the community, businesses, and government.
- Ensuring clarity of common vision, goals, objectives, strategies, and actions among the partnership.
- Developing a clear, workable organizational structure and work plan to address communications and coordination needs of the collaborative partnership.
- Identifying and recruiting partners to address the resource needs of a project (e.g., human, institutional, technical, legal, financial).
- Strengthening partnerships as new issues and relationships are understood.
- Adding processes that allow for the inclusion of new partners as they emerge.

ReGenesis's success was largely because of its close relationship with organizations that could leverage resources in its favor, notably the EPA, Spartanburg Housing Authority, and the University of South Carolina Upstate. Expanding on this fourth element, the fifth element is concerned with ensuring stakeholders provide support in the appropriate form. Government agencies can provide facilitation, technical services, financial support, legitimacy, attention focus on a problem, or enforcement of laws and/or regulations. Academic, philanthropic, civic, faith-based, labor, public interest, non-profit groups, business, and industry groups can also become stakeholders or provide valuable assistance. Most of these stakeholders were involved in assisting ReGenesis realize the vision of the community it represents.

The last two elements of the CPS Model are more concerned with direction-setting than problem-setting, but nonetheless are relevant to the Oberlin Project. The sixth element, sound management and implementation, logically follows the fifth element by

recommending actions to solidify new partnerships. Actions include choosing leaders and defining the roles of partner organizations, establishing operating procedures and management plans that ensure proper communication and coordination, and creating action plans with clear objectives and a timeline. The seventh and last element calls for evaluation at all stages of a project's planning and development. This includes searching for and communicating lessons learned and replicating best practices.

Though both the CPS Model and ReGenesis are directly linked to environmental justice conflict and resolution, both the Model and ReGenesis as a case study demonstrate useful capacities for understanding how grassroots efforts and organizing can engage in problem-setting and also create a large amount of capital and energy for an urban planning project. The Oberlin Project is on the cusp of its first phase, which can draw from these organizing and capital-building models. Fundamental to creating the tools and support necessary to push a project forward is the efficient linking of community capital. To accomplish this task, the CPS Model particularly emphasizes the importance of vision and multi-stakeholder interactions that foster dialogue between potentially adversarial groups. These criteria are clearly embodied in the example of Spartanburg, where Harold Mitchell, the brainchild of ReGenesis, worked to build a relationship with the EPA and to settle disputes with local polluting industries through conflict resolution rather than legal battles. Though ReGenesis did not initially have the resources to engage in environmental remediation or community development, it engaged with hundreds of organizations that collectively provided the resources to accomplish these goals.

The Oberlin Project is currently at a stage where the CPS Model and Spartanburg's ReGenesis can act as a reference point for building community capital. Just as ReGenesis

was the brainchild of Harold Mitchell, the Oberlin Project is the brainchild of David Orr. Once a vision is put forth, there are several crucial problem-setting stages that the CPS Model points out. Most importantly, people from the community and from partner organizations must agree on a vision. Realizing the vision, however, requires linking various forms of community capital. The CPS Model points out a variety of capitals and organizations present in almost any community that have the opportunity to link to a nonprofit like ReGenesis, from housing grants to the resources of a local educational institution. The Oberlin Project is well on its way to realizing linkages between Oberlin's many forms of community capital. This is evident in the Project's foundational document, which highlights working with groups such as Policy Matters Ohio, which could likely provide advice for taking advantage of federal renewable energy incentives, and the Cleveland Foundation, which provides grants. Like ReGenesis, the important initial stage for the Oberlin Project will be in forming close bonds with the many stakeholders that have the potential to offer valuable resources. The CPS Model emphasizes "coming to the table," and the Oberlin Project is indeed already in the process of problem-setting by establishing that table. It will be important to ensure that organizations not just from the greater Cleveland area, but organizations from Oberlin that represent Oberlin citizens, such as Oberlin Downtown-Chamber or Zion Community Development Corporation, are also key players at that table.

The CPS model's most significant lessons for the Oberlin Project are evident in ReGenesis's experiences. This organization demonstrated the importance of leveraging resources, particular charismatic leadership and financial capital, to create a strong support system that optimizes various capitals. As a charismatic leader, Mitchell

optimized social and cultural capitals by uniting his community under a singular organization that worked towards the clear and common goal of improving the environment and health of the surrounding neighborhoods. The Oberlin Project is already on ReGenesis's track because it possesses the charismatic leadership of David Orr, and it too has the goal of improving the environmental and economic quality of Oberlin and the surrounding area.

However, the Oberlin Project has not yet had a community meeting to discuss its goals. One of the first actions Mitchell took in 1997 was to convene over 100 residents, as well as local government officials, to arrive at a consensus about their community's most pressing pollution issues. While the Oberlin Project differs from the Spartanburg case because it is not dealing directly with pollution issues, Mitchell's case demonstrates that it is important to convene the community early on to begin building consensus. The Oberlin Project should immediately initiate a public meeting to begin the consensus-building process.

Mitchell and ReGenesis optimized financial and commercial capitals by partnering the community with large organizations like the EPA, which provided expertise and grant funding. These capitals allowed ReGenesis to conduct environmental remediation and also to bring important services like healthcare to the community. David Orr is already building these capitals for the Oberlin Project, particularly by partnering the Project and the city of Oberlin with the Clinton Climate Initiative. A possible next step may be for the city of Oberlin to apply for a block grant to improve parts of downtown Oberlin near the Green Arts District. The Oberlin Project's initial steps towards acquiring financial resources indicate that it is already successfully engaged in creating the support structure

necessary for engaging in direction-setting.

#### Direction-setting: creating a common vision

##### *Collaborative model: Appreciative Inquiry*

The CPS Model provides details for bringing different stakeholders with different types of community capital together to effect positive changes within a community. An entirely different disciplinary model demonstrates an approach to the process of creating a common vision after stakeholders are brought together. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a school of thought originated in the 1980s by David Cooperrider, a professor at Case Western University's Weatherhead School of Management. AI asks “questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential.”<sup>55</sup> More specifically, AI is a mode of inquiry utilized to optimize management and organizational practices, to encourage sustainable growth, and to engage in an alternative type of dispute resolution process. Moreover, AI is about asking positive questions rather than focusing on a problem. It is also about new ways of knowing rather than new knowledge.<sup>56</sup> AI is more a *philosophy* than a *model* for visioning, but there are some processes involved that will be detailed here. Organizations in the United States have used AI extensively. To a lesser extent, worldwide organizations, ranging from private firms to schools to community development corporations, have also used AI .

The logic of Appreciative Inquiry is built around five fundamental principles:

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<sup>55</sup> David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney, *A Positive Revolution in Change: Appreciative Inquiry*, <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/uploads/whatisai.pdf>.

<sup>56</sup> <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/uploads/whatisai.pdf>.

- 1) The Constructionist Principle, which emphasizes the power of language and discourse of all types in creating a realm of positive possibilities. It emphasizes relationships and narratives, rather than objective observations about the world, as the locus of knowledge.
- 2) The Principle of Simultaneity, which is the notion that inquiry and change are a simultaneous moment, rather than change following inquiry. Asking questions generates stories and conversations.
- 3) The Poetic Principle, which portrays organization not as a metaphorical machine, but as a text that can be rewritten.
- 4) The Positive Principle, which states that the more positive an inquiry, the more it is enduring, productive and conducive toward collaboration.
- 5) The Anticipatory Principle, which asserts that positive change and positive action can generate collective imagining and discourse about the future.

The methodology behind Appreciative Inquiry is difficult to pinpoint because the visioning process is individually tailored to meet the needs of a client organization. In the process of AI, participants from the client organization engage in a series of visioning forums. AI is broadly based on a “4D cycle” of visioning that includes Discovery, Destiny, Dream, and Design. These philosophical qualities, along with the five aforementioned principles, provide the underpinnings for choosing and acting upon an affirmative topic choice for forums. In the Discovery phase of an AI project, participants interview each other in pairs about positive experiences they have had working in their organization. This phase seeks out the root of successes within an organization, rather than the root of problems, and is designed to initiate the visioning process. For instance,

participants ask, “What’s going right and how do we get more of it?”<sup>58</sup> In the Dream phase, participants use the stories and dialogue exchanged in the Discovery phase to generate questions concerned with imagining how the participant’s organization might appear if the successes from these stories were the norm. In the Design phase, participants work towards an agreement on principles by which all are prepared to follow. The final phase, Destiny, draws out action and implementation plans, allowing ample room for creativity on participants’ behalf. Each phase provides an opportunity for inquiry; within each phase there are opportunities to re-engage in the 4D cycle.<sup>59</sup>

The principles and philosophy of Appreciative Inquiry are useful to the Oberlin Project notably because they place an emphasis on positivity and visioning. AI is broad enough that it has been applied to a variety of organizations and situations facing a diversity of issues. Its applicability makes it an appealing model that the Oberlin Project can utilize. For instance, utilizing AI’s Principle of Simultaneity generates stories and conversations. In the interviews I conducted with Oberlin citizens, a few mentioned that there are many stories in the town’s history that go untold. Specifically, the histories of certain sections of town, particularly the southeast quadrant, are less documented than the history of the College and the families that have been associated with the institution. An AI-oriented forum could stimulate the appropriate citizens to tell these stories, which could then initiate conversations about incorporating this history into the repertoire of the Oberlin Project. AI’s emphasis on a unified future vision supported by multiple citizens with diverse experiences, rather than an emphasis on examining past conflict, is of

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<sup>58</sup> Muriel A. Finegold, et al. “Appreciative Inquiry and Public Dialogue: An Approach to Community Change,” *Public Organization Review: A Global Journal* 2 (2002): 239.

<sup>59</sup> Finegold, 239.



particular value to the Oberlin Project given the historical tensions between the town and the College. AI has the potential to generate momentum and positivity at both the large and small scales, from forming action plans to everyday conversation.

The positivity and inquiry inherent in Appreciative Inquiry practices could be incorporated into the repertoire of the Oberlin Project. AI begins with a meeting that includes a diverse set of participants, who then engage in interviews with each other that stimulate the visioning process. This is an option the Oberlin Project could consider in the short term. Participants in this “visioning charrette” could range from the core Project stakeholders to Oberlin College students to residents from the lower-income southeast quadrant of the city. Organizers of this charrette could arrange follow-up interview opportunities, meetings, and access to networking potential, all scheduled at appropriate times with appropriate support structures, such as daycare for participants’ children to maximize inclusiveness. The primary goal of this charrette would be to stimulate positive conversation, both formally and informally, about the goals participants envision for the Oberlin Project. In a sense, a visioning charrette would provide an opportunity to “break the seal” on dialogue about the Oberlin Project. The inclusive nature of the charrette, along with emphasis on arriving at common goals, rather than feuding over past issues, could produce positive direction-setting for the Oberlin Project and inspire a productive atmosphere.

Unfortunately, the official Appreciative Inquiry process is not currently feasible for the Oberlin Project. An investigation by members of the Community Advisory Council found that bringing an AI expert to Oberlin would be beyond the budget. The message of AI, however, is still of use. Design forums with a positive twist are a potential

method by which a community can reach collective agreements about its goals and vision. The Chattanooga case study in chapter five presents the results of a highly successful community visioning process. Vision 2000, undertaken by the city of Chattanooga in a joint public-private venture, created an avenue whereby over 2,000 Chattanoogaans not only envisioned the future of their city but also participated in a dialogue about how to turn their ideas into goals and actions.<sup>60</sup> There is much evidence to suggest that visioning charrettes ultimately lead to planning projects that garner wide approval and are inclusive of citizens. Because the Oberlin Project is still in a phase of problem-setting, engaging in a visioning process is likely an event that should occur once the Project moves on to direction-setting. What needs to happen immediately is a public meeting similar to Harold Mitchell's first meeting about community environmental issues that informs Oberlin's citizenry about the goals of the Oberlin Project. It is important that when visioning and direction-setting occurs, the Project directly engages an *informed* citizenry in this process, perhaps in a similar vein to Chattanooga's Vision 2000.

#### Structuring: community motivation, creating stakeholdership, and changing norms

##### *Collaborative model: Community-based social marketing*

Up to this point this chapter has emphasized the importance of representative, multi-stakeholder interactions in problem-setting and of collective visioning in direction-setting. The Oberlin Project is currently engaged in collaborative problem-setting by forming relationships between a variety of institutions. Though the Project already has an

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<sup>60</sup> David E. Booher, "Collaborative Governance Practices and Democracy," *National Civic Review* (Winter 2004): 37.

established vision, in the near future it will probably require direction-setting to ensure that its vision is synonymous with the vision of its stakeholders, and most importantly, the Oberlin community. In structuring, the last phase of collaboration, the Oberlin Project will need concrete methods of engaging the community to achieve the goals set forth from an agreed-upon vision. Community-based social marketing (CBSM) is one such method.

Community-based social marketing is rooted in the study of environmental psychology and offers pragmatic approaches to foster sustainable behavior in communities. It is a method developed by environmental psychologist Doug McKenzie-Mohr, who has written about its practice in his book *Fostering Sustainable Behavior*. According to Mohr, CBSM involves first identifying barriers and benefits to achieving sustainable behavior, and then (first in a pilot study) employing a variety of behavior change tools identified by social science research to foster the desired behavior.<sup>61</sup> The potential behavior change tools include commitment, prompts, norms, communication that creates effective messages, incentives, and the removal of external barriers. The Oberlin Project can employ a selection of behavior change tools in the process of structuring community ownership of Project goals. Before considering how, the following bullet points provide additional information on these tools.

- Commitment – Social science researchers have shown that using commitment strategies can help organizations to further their cause. Mohr uses many examples: for instance, 92% of individuals who had signed a petition in favor of a recreational facility for the handicapped made a donation, compared to 53% for

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<sup>61</sup> Doug McKenzie-Mohr, *Fostering Sustainable Behavior: an Introduction to Community-Based Social Marketing* (Gabriola Island, BC, Canada: New Society Publishers, 1999), 15.

those who had not been asked to sign the petition.<sup>62</sup> This behavioral tool can be translated over to environmental programs that request individuals to commit to recycling, using less energy in their homes, etc.

- Prompts – Individuals are likely to engage in sustainable behavior when reminded by prompts that target specific behaviors. Mohr uses an example where researchers made a litter receptacle more visually interesting, which resulted in double the amount of litter being deposited. One of the simplest ways to encourage sustainable behavior is to affix decals. For example, affixing a decal to a car window near the lock can help individuals remember to bring reusable shopping bags to the grocery store.
- Norms – Programs that seek to foster sustainable behavior should attempt to communicate what are accepted behaviors, preferably in the most obvious ways because they need to be internalized by people. For example, households are more likely to recycle when exposed to direct contact with a recycler. In one study, households visited by a volunteer who spoke to them about recycling were three times more likely to recycle than households that had only received informational flyers.
- Communication – Communicating the importance of sustainable behavior is contingent upon creating effective messages. Messages should be vivid, personal and concrete. They should also be delivered by an organization perceived to be credible by the intended audience, should have clear and specific instructions, should integrate personal or community goals into the delivery of the program,

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<sup>62</sup> McKenzie-Mohr, 47.

and should indicate what an individual has to lose by not acting rather than what an individual saves by acting.

- Incentives – Incentives are already well utilized in environmental campaigns. For instance, many cities have implemented user-fee systems for garbage disposal. The more garbage a household produces, the more it pays for disposal. Cities are also beginning to employ “traffic calming” techniques such as reducing the legal speed limit and adding signage and visual cues that slow speeds and discourage traffic and automobile use in general. Other simple incentives for fostering sustainable behavior include providing loans, grants, or rebates to foster installation of energy and water saving devices such as low-flow showerheads or low-flow toilets.

- Removing external barriers – Encouraging sustainable behavior is a moot point unless the behavior is possible to accomplish with existing facilities in the first place. Removing external barriers can be expensive but can have very effective results. For example, 99% of households participated in one composting pilot study when provided with curbside collection containers. If it is not possible to remove barriers, it is still possible to pursue the option of discouraging unsustainable activities through making them less convenient and more costly.

Urban planning projects have successfully used multiple components of CBSM to foster sustainable behavior. For example, beginning in 1989 the city of Boulder used a combination of communication, norms, incentives, and removing external barriers to increase ridership on its local bus system. In removing external barriers, the city provides free taxi rides in addition to the option of taking the bus to persons late at night and for

emergencies. There are many incentives to reduce the cost of bus fare. The city provides students and all citizens who work in Boulder with free bus passes, and offers discounts to others through neighborhood associations and various organizations. Between 1990 and 1994, there was a 6% modal shift from single-occupant vehicles to pedestrian, bicycle, and bus trips in Boulder County.<sup>63</sup> High initial ridership helped establish riding the bus as a social norm in Boulder. Additionally, the bus system uses creative communication tactics. Bus lines have names such as “Jump,” “Skip,” and “Hop.” Often, as in Boulder’s case, CBSM elements are used in tandem to optimize results.

The Oberlin Project may be able to incorporate elements of CBSM into its planning phase, though planners might find more opportunities to incorporate CBSM once the Oberlin Project is well underway. Because CBSM asks individuals to make behavioral and lifestyle changes, CBSM is a method that planners can use to obtain community buy-in not necessarily to the Project itself, but to the goals that the Project is aimed at meeting, notably carbon neutrality for both the town and College. For instance, by using commitment strategies, incentives, and prompts, the Project could expand upon the work of POWER and contract a greater number of citizens to retrofit their homes to be more energy efficient. With effective communication of the benefits of such a program, home retrofits could become the norm in Oberlin.

With enough capital, the Oberlin Project could jumpstart a transportation program similar to Boulder’s. Employing CBSM tactics to tackle the lack of sustainable transport in Oberlin could change norms, which would solve two problems at once: private vehicle

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<sup>63</sup> Pamela M. Pickens, “Community-Based Social Marketing as a Planning Tool,” Community and Regional Planning Masters Project, University of Oregon-Architecture and Allied Arts Department (Sept. 2002): 36.

travel would decrease, and the need for downtown parking would diminish. This could be accomplished through a combination of any of the CBSM methods. Perhaps parking needs in downtown could be ameliorated in the short term by asking able individuals to commit to riding their bikes downtown during the warmer months, and possibly supplementing this commitment with a small incentive, such as discounts at downtown shops. One external barrier that exists to bike riding downtown is the lack of bike lanes. Simple traffic calming techniques and the addition of bike lanes downtown, neither of which are very expensive, could be employed to encourage biking. These hypothetical examples demonstrate that CBSM is a pragmatic vehicle for encouraging grassroots sustainability.

### Conclusions

This chapter has explored strategies that the Oberlin Project can utilize to encourage the larger public to participate in its evolution and design. In problem-setting, the EPA's Collaborative Problem-Solving Model demonstrates that it is possible to rally a large number of community organizations, both public and private, around an issue or subject. In the Oberlin Project's case, sustainable development initiatives will require multiple collaborators working to build bonds of trust. Such a collective is likely to foster both monetary and social capital. However, as the ReGenesis case demonstrates, the Oberlin Project must work directly with the community in addition to larger stakeholder organizations to maximize the Project's social and cultural capital and to build a strong support system. This is why Oberlin Project planners must immediately convene a public informational meeting.

Appreciative Inquiry is a powerful direction-setting tool for the Oberlin Project collective and the community at large to envision together common goals for Oberlin's future development. After planners inform citizens about the Oberlin Project, they will need to hold visioning forums that focus on future goals rather than past conflict in order to effectively include citizens and generate community support.

Lastly, community-based social marketing offers pragmatic behavior change tools that the Oberlin Project can employ to achieve the goals set out in the visioning process. CBSM demonstrates both low- and high-cost methods that Oberlin Project planners can employ to achieve the Project's goals. One potential low-cost method to reduce transportation-based emissions in Oberlin would be to ask able-bodied citizens to commit to walking or biking downtown rather than driving in warmer months. Initiatives like these are important because they engage the community in tangible actions that contribute to a common goal. The next chapter examines several programs that have been at the forefront of building up their own collaborative initiatives to foster public participation-based sustainable development.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### CASE STUDIES

The previous chapters detailed modern collaborative planning, as well as potentially useful models for the Oberlin Project to utilize to fulfill the objectives of participatory-style planning. This chapter investigates three case studies where planners have incorporated these modern collaborative planning schemas into their projects. The first case study investigates the Community Watershed Stewardship Program (CWSP), a collaborative effort to manage an urban watershed in Portland Oregon. In the second case study, city planners in Vancouver, British Columbia encouraged active citizens to participate in planning projects and reached out to less active citizens to also participate. The last case study is the most in-depth, and examines the efforts of Chattanooga, Tennessee to completely reverse its reputation as one of the most polluted cities in the United States. City officials in Chattanooga have initiated a wide variety of participatory programs to foster environmental stewardship and sustainable economic development.

Hundreds of case studies detailing successful, community-based projects exist. The choice to study these three cities was based on their applicability to the Oberlin Project. Unfortunately, this chapter does little justice to the many other successful collaborative planning projects that would also have been valuable to include in this report. Yet, the case studies here have at least a few important take-away lessons relating to community involvement and collaboration. And, each case presents a scenario or an action to which the Oberlin Project can relate. For example, Portland's CWSP was born out of an important collaboration between the city of Portland and Portland State University, in much the same way as the Oberlin Project is the product of an agreement

between Oberlin College officials and Oberlin's City Manager. The following sections provide a brief overview of the collaborative projects in question, as well as the lessons that these projects bestow upon the collaborative potential of the Oberlin Project.

### Portland, Oregon

Portland is notable for its active citizenry, progressive leadership, and emphasis on the environment.<sup>64</sup> Portland's rapid urban growth in recent decades has forced planners to proactively forecast the future of development and plan accordingly. Ambitious planning has discouraged sprawl and developed an integrated mass transit system that includes bike pathways, bus routes, and light rail systems. While Portland is experiencing a period of urban growth and economic development, Oberlin differs considerably by nature of being located in an economically depressed region. However, Portland is not without its fair share of issues. The following case study demonstrates how Portland's government and citizens together have engaged in grassroots planning to assuage the problems of a major urban watershed.

### *Portland's Community Watershed Stewardship Program (CWSP)*

Portland's Community Watershed Stewardship Program (CWSP) is a joint venture between the regional community, Portland's Bureau of Environmental Services (BES), and Portland State University (PSU). The goal of the CWSP is to foster awareness and protection of Portland's urban watersheds while simultaneously meeting legal mandates of protection. The program has actively involved almost 40,000 citizens since

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<sup>64</sup> The American Architectural Foundation. "Back From the Brink: Saving America's Cities by Design." (Washington, DC. 1996.)

its inception in 1995.<sup>65</sup> The evolution of the CWSP was born out of watershed pollution problems, citizen distrust of the BES, and a statewide mandate requiring implementation of local watershed councils. The BES convened focus groups in 1994 to determine the best method of community-oriented watershed restoration and future wastewater collection. From the groups emerged (a) a stewardship grant program that solicits proposals for watershed restoration from citizen groups, (b) a BES/PSU partnership, and (c) a system for watershed and program evaluation.

A number of elements have contributed to the success of the CWSP. While the CWSP has evolved over time, four tenets have remained since its inception, including 1) BES and PSU evaluate priorities and interests each year, 2) community groups submit proposals for engaging in watershed restoration that if approved, are awarded up to \$5000 in funding, 3) graduate students are provided paid internships to assist community groups, and 4) community groups are required to submit midterm and final reports detailing their work. The nature of the CWSP “allows community groups to decide what is important to them and what needs to be done, and through the proposal process, to make a case for how their project will improve the urban watershed.”<sup>66</sup> Over the years, the CWSP has fostered a network of participants and better-informed citizens, enhancing the social capital of the community. The CWSP involves active collaboration between its constituents, including community members, has worked successfully to improve the local riparian habitat.

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<sup>65</sup> Portland Bureau of Environmental Services. *Community Watershed Stewardship Program*. <http://www.portlandonline.com/bes/index.cfm?c=43077> (accessed December 5, 2011).

<sup>66</sup> Vivek Shandas and W. Barry Messer. "Fostering Green Communities Through Civic Engagement." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 74, no. 4 (Autumn 2008): 413.

### *Lessons from Portland's CWSP*

The CWSP case study is especially useful to the Oberlin Project because of a few striking similarities. The most important lessons that emerge from the CWSP are:

- 1) engagement of stakeholders early on
- 2) creating ownership in the program
- 3) encouraging multiple small-scale projects, each with a tangible result,
- 4) responsiveness and flexibility on behalf of the BES, the implementing agency,  
and
- 5) collaboration between the Bureau of Environmental Services and Portland State University.

Students from PSU acted as a resource for community groups undertaking restoration work. Graduate and undergraduate PSU students provided technical assistance to community groups and PSU provided paid internships for graduate students to assist groups and also involved CWSP programming in some of its courses. The Oberlin Project can look to this model to involve Oberlin College students in outreach efforts to the community. To an extent, Oberlin College students are already contributing to the Oberlin Project. David Orr made the Oberlin Project the theme of his Spring 2010 and 2011 Ecological Design courses, and students who took the course during these two semesters wrote research reports aimed at an audience of Project planners on topics relating to the Oberlin Project. However, many students outside of the course have expressed interest in becoming involved with the Oberlin Project, and Oberlin Project planners should utilize these students, who could provide valuable research and outreach assistance.

Secondly, the Oberlin Project can learn from the citizen distrust and dissatisfaction with the BES that prompted the Bureau to reevaluate its program and create the CWSP. The CWSP has managed to not only meet the requirements of effective watershed management and restoration, but has actively engaged thousands of Portland citizens. There is a marked distrust of Oberlin citizens toward Oberlin College as an institution. If the College organizes a community involvement program similar to the CWSP in size and scale, it might be able to not only educate a wider Oberlin constituency about the Oberlin Project, but also actively engage them in the design and implementation of the Project's goals. Yet, citizens need an incentive to participate. The CWSP was successful in creating a sense of ownership by letting community groups decide what projects were most important to them. The BES was flexible enough to allow this to happen, and had created a framework that allowed both itself and citizen groups to meet their needs. The Oberlin Project planners could create a program similar to the CWSP and through it, create a sense of ownership by handing over more control to Oberlin community members. For instance, if Oberlin public schools' Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) expressed interest in initiating a campaign to educate children about the Oberlin Project, planners could allow the PTAs significant freedom in developing lesson plans. The Project would only need to supply a liaison to ensure lessons contain accurate information. Of course, collaboration between Oberlin Project planners and community organizations would have to be accompanied by clear guidelines and oversight. Portland's BES developed criteria that community groups had to meet to ensure their projects accomplished watershed restoration, and Oberlin Project planners

would need to develop similar guidelines to ensure that partnerships meet both the College's goals of sustainable development and the community's goals.

### Vancouver, British Columbia

Like Portland, Vancouver is a growing city on the Pacific Rim. Political, economic, and social factors have contributed to Vancouver's growth from 43,206 residents in the downtown area in 1981 to 87,975 in 2006.<sup>67</sup> Politically, a liberal political agenda permeated the city in the 1970s and continues today. Economically, the World's Fair Expo in 1986 attracted significant economic investment to Vancouver's downtown. For instance, at the time of the Expo the city constructed a regional rapid transit system to connect suburban communities to the urban core. When it sold part of the Fair property, Vancouver demonstrated its liberal agenda by brokering a deal that future development there would "provide an array of public amenities, including child care and community centers, parks, playgrounds and land for schools. Another goal was to set aside 20 percent of the housing units for low-income residents, and 25 percent for family-size units."<sup>68</sup>

Yet, Vancouver's economic and political boons alone do not account for its modern vibrancy. Collaborative planning has been a part of urban planning practice in Vancouver since at least the 1980s.<sup>69</sup> In 1988, there was a community-wide consensus that the future of Vancouver's development rested in its ability to attract people to live in the inner city. In an interview excerpt, Larry Beasley, former Director of Current

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<sup>67</sup> Jill L. Grant, "Experiential Planning: A Practitioner's Account of Vancouver's Success." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 75, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 362.

<sup>68</sup> *New York Times*. Dec. 25, 2005.

<sup>69</sup> Grant, 359.

Planning for the city, commented on Vancouver's successful process of public consultation,

*“Let's take the disadvantaged community of indigent men who live in small hotels. We put the staff person down in the lobby of the hotel and just sit and talk to the men as they come in and have their coffee. It is a much more informal engagement process.... [Planning] is not about just having focus groups and a superficial level of marketing analysis...[it] takes advice from a number of different perspectives and overlays that advice to create the choices that need to be made by the decision makers. There is an urban design perspective from the urban design panel...there is the community's view. There is the special needs view. There is the heritage view. Each one has their own process to engage the public and that is overlaid and put into the public report.”<sup>70</sup>*

Beasley also coined the term “experiential planning” to refer to what he sees as a unique planning phenomenon in Vancouver. According to Beasley, if citizens are able to see and experience the result of just and equitable planning that simultaneously meets their needs, they will be able to draw an emotional connection to their city. Not only will citizens find a fulfilling city, but they will also be more likely to participate in the planning process.

#### *CityPlan and Talk Green Vancouver*

Collaborative or experiential planning in Vancouver has taken on several forms over the years. From 1992 to 1995, planners engaged thousands of citizens in a long-term visioning process for Vancouver known as *CityPlan*. What was exceptional about the plan was that it was not simply a forum to harvest opinion, but was meant to be a learning process in which planners encouraged citizens to envision the future of Vancouver through a moral framework and an emphasis on equity planning.<sup>71</sup> *CityPlan*'s most recent successor, *Talk Green Vancouver*, has an environmental spin. *Talk Green* ambitiously

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<sup>70</sup> Grant, 363-366.

<sup>71</sup> Grant, 363.

reports that Vancouver will become the “greenest city” by 2020.<sup>72</sup> Talk Green began with the Greenest City Action Team in early 2009, chaired by a number of sustainability consultants. Today, however, Talk Green has finished hosting two phases of public input. According to the Talk Green website, 3,700 citizens attended in person events and discussions and over 3,000 citizens participated in Talk Green online forums. City staff worked to respond to online comments, questions, and conversations. Working groups reviewed online submissions and included many of the ideas in the Greenest City 2020 Action Plans. According to the website, the public input session was

*“an important part of the process - to ensure that dialogue was happening on these critical issues, and also to demonstrate the City's accountability to the thoughtful feedback coming in from people throughout the community.”<sup>73</sup>*

CityPlan and Talk Green are indicative of the Vancouver planning community’s emphasis on participatory processes and demonstrate Vancouver’s success in engaging citizens in a back-and-forth dialogue. Though Oberlin does not possess Vancouver’s economic or geographical advantages, namely population growth and large-scale investments, it does have politically progressive leadership in both the public and private sectors. The Oberlin Project certainly possesses leadership that is interested in equity development, and this means that it may be possible for Oberlin to adopt measures similar to Vancouver’s. Talk Green is a particularly useful model to which to turn because of its web-based participation strategy. It would be relatively simple for the Oberlin Project to create an online forum that educates about the Project, but is also for soliciting public input. The biggest challenges to this forum will be to ensure that there is

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<sup>72</sup> The City of Vancouver and Vancouver Green Capital. *The Greenest City Story*. <http://www.talkgreenvancouver.ca/greenest-city-story> (accessed March 30, 2011).

<sup>73</sup> <http://www.talkgreenvancouver.ca/greenest-city-story>



a representative from the Project to provide proper responses to public feedback, and that citizens make an effort to provide constructive feedback. For the Oberlin Project, an effort like Talk Green could initiate greater participatory processes. Moreover, the Oberlin Project should consider Beasley's strategy of informal citizen engagement. Oberlin Project planners and interns could meet with citizens in their regular work environments to informally discuss the Oberlin Project. While the success of such actions may be difficult to measure, they would demonstrate that Project planners are eager to reach out to the community. Incremental strategies to incorporate participation, in combination with the beginning construction phases of the Project, may motivate the wider Oberlin public to engage in a process of experiential planning.

#### Chattanooga, Tennessee

##### *A brief history*

Chattanooga, a city of 170,000 citizens, presents a case study in urban revitalization efforts born out of a considerable citizen visioning process. Much like the Rustbelt region, Chattanooga faced serious deindustrialization problems in the 1960s. Previous decades of industrial pollution within the city's limits led the EPA to declare Chattanooga's air quality the worst in the United States. Faced with a legacy of significant industrial air, ground and water pollution, recession in the late 1970s, and increasingly strained race relations, city leaders in the 1980s decided to act. Chattanooga's renaissance began with the creation of the Air Pollution Control Board, a local board comprised of citizens, government, industry and environmental leaders. This board made considerable efforts to educate the public about environmental and health

issues while simultaneously requiring industries to adhere to new EPA standards.<sup>74</sup>

Following the success of this public-private ownership of a local problem, a group of city officials and business and civic leaders, together with the Lyndhurst Foundation, created Chattanooga Venture, a nonprofit organization. In 1984, Chattanooga Venture initiated Vision 2000, a visioning process intended to engage citizens in reimagining Chattanooga's future.

### *Roots in sustainability*

Over the past three decades, Chattanooga has reversed its reputation to become one of the leading cities in sustainability efforts. Chattanooga's environmental quality has improved significantly; since 1989 the city has met or exceeded federal primary health standards for the six nationally monitored pollutants (particulate matter, ozone, nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and lead).<sup>75</sup> This is the result of significant clean up efforts, as well as the decline of the domestic steel industry. While bringing air quality improvements, the deindustrialization that began in the 1970s led to disinvestments in the city's economic base, creating substantial economic problems. Thus, a component of Vision 2000 was aimed at engaging citizens in defining new paths toward economic development.<sup>76</sup> The city's sustainable roots were planted in this component of the program, as leaders and citizens did not want to see economic development undermine the quality of life in Chattanooga as it had in previous decades.

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<sup>74</sup> Ted Bernard and Jora Young. *The Ecology of Hope: Communities Collaborate for Sustainability*. (Gabriola Island, B.C.: New Society Publishers, 1997), 64-65.

<sup>75</sup> Mary E. Rogge "Toxic Risk, Community Resilience, and Social Justice in Chattanooga, Tennessee." In *Sustainable Community Development: Studies in Economic, Environmental, and Cultural Revitalization*, edited by Marie D. Hoff. (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press LLC, 2000), 108.

<sup>76</sup> Kent Portney, "Civic Engagement and Sustainable Cities in the United States." *Public Administration Review* 65, no. 5 (September/October 2005): 589.

The participatory models that led citizens to emphasize both economic and sustainable development over the past 25 years have been simultaneously celebrated and criticized. In the following sections, an explanation and analysis of these models will demonstrate lessons from which the Oberlin Project can draw.

### *Chattanooga and Oberlin: a basis for comparison*

Several similarities between Chattanooga and Oberlin make this case study relevant. Chattanooga has a long history of volunteerism, economic uncertainty, and a more recent history of rising environmental ethics. Oberlin is an innovative community currently faced with the Rustbelt's strained economy. Despite its much smaller size, Oberlin also has a large active citizenry, many of whom have indicated an interest in sustainability efforts. Oberlin citizens have also expressed concern over the city's aging population, "brain drain," and lack of young leaders. Chattanooga also grappled with this issue, though post-revitalization, "most young people don't think about moving away."<sup>77</sup> Economically, Chattanooga's public-private partnerships have been key in attracting sustainable investments and engaging citizens. The partnership between Oberlin College and the city in the Oberlin Project is representative of this public-private model. What lessons, both positive and negative, does Chattanooga demonstrate in its recent effort to improve its economy and environment based on input from its citizens?

### *Success: The Chattanooga Process*

Chattanooga Venture's Vision 2000 spawned what John Parr in *The Consensus Building Handbook* has called the *Chattanooga Process*, a form of collaborative problem

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<sup>77</sup> John Parr, "The Chattanooga Process: A City's Vision Is Realized." In *The Consensus Building Handbook*, edited by Lawrence et al. Susskind. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1999), 963.

solving.<sup>78</sup> In the Vision 2000 process, over 1,700 Chattanoogaans participated in a dialogue about how to turn their ideas into goals and actions.<sup>79</sup> From Vision 2000 emerged six broad categories in which citizens desired improvement: people, places, play, work, government, and future alternatives.<sup>80</sup> Key to the success of the Chattanooga Process was Chattanooga Venture's techniques of infusing citizen participation into the planning process. In Vision 2000, citizens were asked, "What are your goals, hopes, and dreams for Chattanooga?" From the responses, facilitators outlined the categories mentioned above and over 40 goals for the city by the year 2000 in a community commitment portfolio. Chattanooga then used this portfolio as a road map to determine the projects, task forces, and organizations it would create and incubate.<sup>81</sup> Since its inception, Chattanooga Venture has given momentum to numerous organizations aimed at revitalizing Chattanooga in a variety of ways. These range from private enterprises, such as Advanced Vehicle Systems, Inc., which is one of three electric bus manufacturers in the United States, to public-private partnerships like the Chattanooga Neighborhood Enterprise (CNE), which in 1995 was the largest single producer of affordable housing in the United States.<sup>82</sup> Collaboration between the private, civic, and government sectors has been key to Chattanooga's revitalization process.

More than sustainable economic development, though, has been Chattanooga's emphasis on citizen engagement and collaboration at all levels. The work of Vision 2000

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<sup>78</sup> Parr, 952.

<sup>79</sup> David E. Booher, "Collaborative Governances Practices and Democracy." *National Civic Review* (Winter 2004): 37.

<sup>80</sup> Kent Portney. "Civic Engagement and Sustainable Cities in the United States." *Public Administration Review*. September/October 2005, Vol. 65, No. 5, 589.

<sup>81</sup> Parr, 965.

<sup>82</sup> Timothy Beatley and Kristy Manning. *The Ecology of Place: Planning for Environment, Economy, and Community* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1997), 191.

was so successful that Chattanooga Venture initiated Revision 2000 in 1993. In Revision, 2,600 participants, matching almost exactly the demographic composition of the city, produced 27 goals and 122 recommendations that reinforced the dream of Chattanooga as “America’s environmental city.”<sup>83</sup> Planners in Chattanooga regularly use written questionnaires, visual preference surveys, and public planning sessions to form policies, rewrite zoning and other regulations, and engage in development practices. Most recently, an organization called Stand engaged in the world’s largest survey-based community visioning effort, collecting over 26,000 individual survey responses to the following four prompts:

- 1) What do you like about the Chattanooga region?
- 2) Imagine the best possible Chattanooga region. Describe it.
- 3) What challenges must be addressed?
- 4) What actions, big or small, can you take to help?

City councilman David Crockett has described Chattanooga as the volunteer city in a volunteer state, where it is expected that people will be involved in processes like Revision, and also with their church, social, and civic groups. Part of Chattanooga’s success can be attributed to the large-scale distribution of the concept that citizens should at most control planning decisions and development, and at the very least provide input in the form of visioning events and surveys.

Building leadership is one example by which Chattanooga has provided incubation for grassroots initiatives aimed at meeting identified community needs. In Vision 2000, over 50 citizens, from CEOs and government leaders to “regular” citizens,

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<sup>83</sup> Bernard and Young, 69.

received in-depth training in collaborative techniques. These new facilitators were then able to disperse what they had learned into the community. 150 citizens received similar training in Revision 2000.<sup>84</sup> This type of leadership training was introduced at an early stage in Chattanooga's revitalization efforts.

What distinguishes the Chattanooga process from normal planning and development is the placement of the citizen's voice. Chattanooga's development followed the input of its citizens, a hallmark of participatory planning. Traditional planning often involves a group of planners making decisions about development based more on rational economic and demographic models than on direct citizen input. Only later in the planning process do local governments schedule often poorly attended public hearing processes. Unless a project garners widespread public opposition, citizen input is usually minimal. More so than in other cities, an unusual amount of Chattanooga's voices have contributed to the city's development.

At this point in time, the Oberlin Project has the potential to include citizens in a process similar to Chattanooga's Vision and Revision. If done correctly, a visioning forum could give citizens a stake or sense of ownership in the Oberlin Project. An important component of fostering a sense of ownership is to engage the visioning process early on, before major decisions have been made. Then, not only Oberlin Project planners, but also the goals of the wider community would inform later planning decisions. In addition, simultaneously creating a network of citizens similar to Chattanooga Venture's facilitator bank would promote leadership in the Oberlin community. Facilitators in Oberlin could come from local churches, community

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<sup>84</sup> Parr, 961.

development corporations, businesses, and schools, including both teachers and students from nearby educational institutions (such as the Lorain County Junior Vocational School). These informed citizens would be able to educate the greater Oberlin community about the Oberlin Project and the potentials for involvement. Chattanooga's early and earnest involvement of many of its citizens was important to producing comprehensive urban renewal initiatives. However, as the following section reveals, Chattanooga is still struggling to include some of its most disenfranchised citizens.

### *Remaining Challenges*

Chattanooga has made considerable progress in its goals of ecology and economy, but its efforts to promote its third goal, equity, have not shared the same success. A number of predominately low-income, minority neighborhoods in Chattanooga have not experienced the same level of economic and environmental revitalization as in other parts of the city. In particular, the neighborhoods of Alton Park and Piney Woods have remained comparatively disenfranchised. The two neighborhoods are home to 5,300 individuals, 98 percent of whom are black. The neighborhoods are also home to many of the city's most polluting industries<sup>85</sup> In the 1980s, the EPA designated eleven Superfund sites in the two neighborhoods, six of which border Chattanooga Creek. It was not until the mid-1990s that these sites were restored. Today, pollution along Chattanooga Creek persists.<sup>86</sup> Even where citizen groups and non-profit organizations have been involved in neighborhood development, the amount of decision-making allotted to these groups has

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<sup>85</sup> Elliott, Michael. "When the Parents Be Cancer-Free: Community Voice, Toxics, and Environmental Justice in Chattanooga, Tennessee." In *Making Sense of Intractable Environmental Conflicts*, edited by Barbara Gray, Roy J. Lewicki and Michael Elliott (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2003), 311.

<sup>86</sup> Elliot, 317.

in some instances been questionable. In the Historic Southside District, residents claim that community building came at a time when other neighborhoods were already experiencing revitalization. At the same time that the community building initiative in this district was being designed, developers expanded downtown amenities into this area, including an extension of the convention center, a parking garage, a business facility, shops, and middle and upper income housing. Residents feared that many older people and others in poverty would not be able to remain in their neighborhoods because “everything [was] happening too quickly.”<sup>87</sup>

Academics like James Fraser, a professor at Vanderbilt University who focuses on urban environment and expression of community, have questioned the amount of actual citizen participation in development of areas like the Southside District. Middle class groups often hailing from nearby districts more easily took advantage of opportunities for participation, and the voices of citizen groups representing the local poor that did participate in planning were usurped. Further yet, the city claimed success in participatory planning simply from the very existence of these groups, and not necessarily by what they accomplished. According to Fraser, “The dilemma is that community building has worked in tandem with the development goals of the city and private foundations/corporations rather than providing a strategic plan to ameliorate poverty.”<sup>88</sup> The message that emerges from Chattanooga’s issues is that any community undertaking citywide revitalization efforts should be wary of neglecting a commitment to equity and fair representation.

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<sup>87</sup> James C. Fraser, Jonathan Lepofsky, Edward Kick, and J. Patrick Williams. "The Construction Of The Local And The Limits Of Contemporary Community Building In The United States." *Urban Affairs Review* 38 (January 2003): 428.

<sup>88</sup> Fraser, Lepofsky, Kick and Williams, 435.



At the same time, disenfranchised neighborhoods in Chattanooga have not wholly been ignored. Though Chattanooga has failed to bring wide scale revitalization efforts to some of its poorest neighborhoods, this issue is increasingly being addressed by a number of organizations. For instance, in 1996 the Westside Community Development Corporation, operating in an African American neighborhood on the edge of town, transformed a closed school into a community center for agencies and community-based organizations, helping to realize its aggressive agenda of job creation and retention, small-business development, job training, and child care development.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, certain grassroots organizing efforts have in recent years brought equitable and representative environmental remediation and sustainable development to neighborhoods like Alton Park and Piney Woods. In these two neighborhoods, two events occurred that resulted in changes in both environmental quality and the relationship between residents and on site industry. Velsicol Chemical Corporation, a significant polluter in the area, came under new ownership in the late 1980s. New leaders invested considerably in the environmental performance of the Velsicol facility, and also made efforts to meet directly and negotiate with a community advisory panel. On the other side of the board, the community was willing to listen to the new ownership, and since then, have referred to their former antagonists in more accepting terms. While there are still considerable environmental issues in Alton Park and Piney Woods, negotiations with Velsicol have ultimately resulted in the beginnings of a “more collaborative identity [within the minds of community residents]...as well as concrete improvements in environmental quality.”<sup>90</sup> In contrast to the lack of communication between developers in the Southside District

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<sup>89</sup> Parr, 966.

<sup>90</sup> Elliot, 331-332.

and its residents, this example demonstrates the benefits of more holistic and direct communication between disenfranchised citizens and the industrial and business sectors of Chattanooga.

### *Conclusions*

The difficulties facing districts like Alton Park, Piney Woods, and Southside are the result of social and environmental inequalities. Had Chattanooga approached these communities first, revitalization and environmental cleanup efforts may not have been so prevalent, constant and arduous. A key emphasis of the Oberlin Project has been the potential to engage low-income residents in green collar jobs. Thus, the Oberlin Project has targeted an important community in a manner inconsistent with Chattanooga, and will hopefully avoid approaching the most disadvantaged communities last. In addition to green collar jobs, however, the Oberlin Project should also consider investing significantly in alliances with organizations in Oberlin's southeast quadrant, which has the lowest per capita income compared to other sections of the city. By investing in citizen participation in this area, the Oberlin Project can identify the needs of its most vulnerable citizens. Accordingly, the Oberlin Project can achieve more equitable solutions than were seen in Chattanooga.

The successes of Chattanooga, however, should not be undermined. Chattanooga's economic and environmental renewal can in part be attributed to early and widespread efforts to include citizens in planning decisions. Planners of almost every large initiative in Chattanooga now incorporate some variety of public input. For instance, Chattanooga recently released a Climate Action Plan that included a public input session in which 500 citizens of all ages engaged in roundtable discussions about alternative energy, food and

agriculture, green infrastructure, etc. One goal of the Oberlin Project should be to foster a tradition that encourages large-scale citizen participation in portions of the planning process for all of Oberlin's significant future developments.

At the same time that Chattanooga was engaged in large-scale citizen participation initiatives like Vision and Revision, it encouraged the formation of neighborhood organizations and built leadership training and green industry initiatives. The Oberlin Project will also need to engage in these activities. Neighborhood organizations would be a means to channel community input into initiatives like the Oberlin Project. Oberlin Project planners should consider building up a group of community members to act as liaisons between neighborhood organizations and Project stakeholders, much like how Chattanooga created a "facilitator bank." These liaisons would undergo some form of leadership training sponsored by the Oberlin Project. Planners must be cautious, however, to ensure that citizens are willing to act as liaisons and are not being forced into compromising positions as intermediaries. Attracting green industry like Chattanooga's Advanced Vehicle Systems, Inc. will also be an important method for including the community in the Project. Project planners are already attracting attention from the Cleveland-based Evergreen Project, which supports the establishment of green businesses cooperatively owned by employees from disadvantaged backgrounds.

## CHAPTER SIX

### ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESPONSES

*“We are trying to transform our relationship with the environment, the goods we consume, and the food we eat. If we aren’t transforming our relationships first, how will a true transformation happen?”* – an Interview Participant

Oberlin Project leaders formally unveiled the Project to the public in October 2010. Since then, online and printed journals have published articles on the Project, and planners have given several presentations to city government, township officials, and the campus community.<sup>91</sup> The purpose of the twenty in-depth interviews conducted for this research project was twofold. Firstly, the interviews sought to gauge participants’ depth and accuracy of knowledge about the Oberlin Project. Secondly, participants informed the researcher of their opinions about the Project, particularly in relation to citizen engagement and their vision for the future development of Oberlin. The results of the interviews are summarized question-by-question in this chapter, and reflect the qualitative nature of the interview survey. In this chapter, the persons who participated in this survey are referred to as *participants*. There were fifteen questions on the interview form; all questions were open-ended (without multiple choice options).<sup>92</sup> For clarity and consistency, I have classified responses into categories as displayed in the charts and tables below. For more information on interview methodology, please refer to method three (interviews) in chapter two (project methodology).

#### Interview Constituents

Seventy percent (fourteen) of interview participants are either city government officials or citizens invested in a downtown business. This percentage reflects my

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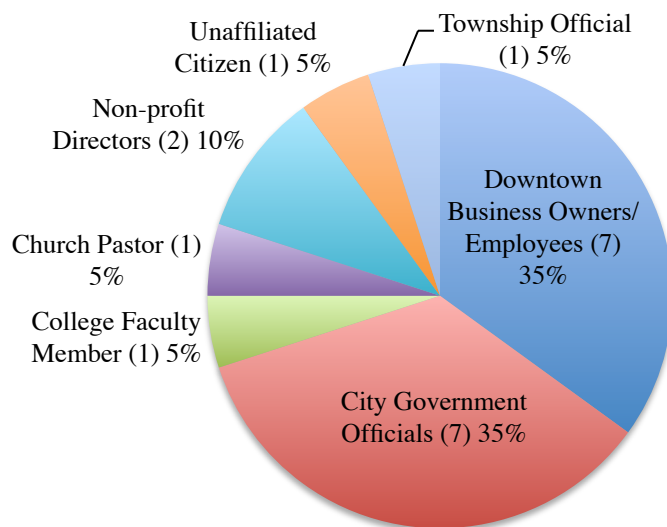
<sup>91</sup> Appendix B includes an index of news sources featuring the Oberlin Project.

<sup>92</sup> Appendix A lists the questions in interview form used by the researcher.

intention to select individuals from these two constituencies, more so than others in the town, because they are likely to be directly involved in or affected by the Oberlin Project in the near future. The other thirty percent of participants represent sectors of the Oberlin community that may or may not be involved in the Project in the near future, such as community-based organizations and churches. To represent these sectors as accurately as possible, I interviewed a pastor, an official from a surrounding township, a citizen living but not working in Oberlin, a college faculty member involved in Project plans, and two directors of community development and service organizations.

Seventeen of the twenty participants live in Oberlin, and the other three live nearby. Five of the twenty participants have lived in Oberlin or nearby in Lorain County their whole lives, not counting time they may have spent in college elsewhere. Four of the twenty participants are graduates of Oberlin College.

**Figure 6.1 Participant constituencies**

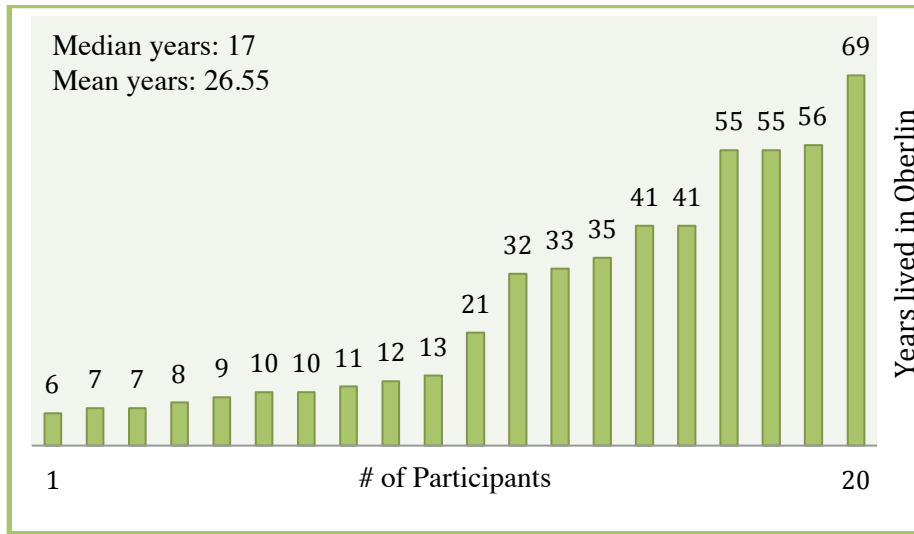


Question 1: How long have you lived in Oberlin [or nearby]?

I found significant variation in the number of years participants have lived in Oberlin. About one-third of participants have lived in Oberlin less than 10 years, and another third have lived in Oberlin over 40 years, with the last third in between. This is likely due to the fact that 1) I interviewed several citizens who have graduated from Oberlin College within the last ten years, and 2) a few participants involved in business ventures or working for city government are older citizens who have lived in Oberlin since birth or youth.

The average (mean) number of years that participants had lived in Oberlin was ~27. The median number of years lived in Oberlin was 17. The fewest number of years that a participant had lived in Oberlin was 6, and the highest was 69. Of the seven participants who have lived in Oberlin less than 10 years, three are Oberlin College graduates. Of the eight citizens working with local governments, five have lived in or near Oberlin for over 30 years. Of the twelve participants involved in business ventures in Oberlin, only three have lived in Oberlin less than ten years. This data demonstrates that nearly all participants are well established within the Oberlin community; that is, to most participants, if not all, Oberlin is home.

**Figure 6.2 Participants' number of years lived in Oberlin**



**Table 6.1 Participants' number of years lived in Oberlin (categorized)**

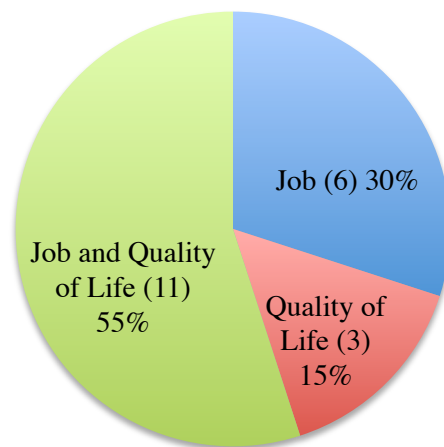
Number of years lived in Oberlin	Number of Participants
0 – 10 years	7
11 – 20	3
21 – 30	1
31 – 40	3
41+	6

Question 2: Why do you live here?

This was an open-ended question, but 85% of participants answered that they live in Oberlin because their jobs are located in the community. 70% of participants reported living in Oberlin because of the quality of life. “Quality of life” is a term chosen by the researcher that encompasses the variety of participant responses. More precisely, participants cited reasons for living in Oberlin such as:

- “diverse, rich, complex community”
- “liberal political environment”
- “people who like books and the pursuit of knowledge”
- “it is an art-friendly community”
- “it is a cool place to be around”
- “it is home, and we have got it good here”
- “it is a unique place with a lot of opportunities that are not available anywhere else”
- “it has a small town neighborhood feel”
- “it has socially progressive views”
- “it is an interesting place to do projects”
- “there is stimulation from the College”
- “it is a town that engages problems with great energy”

**Figure 6.3 Participant reasons for living in Oberlin**





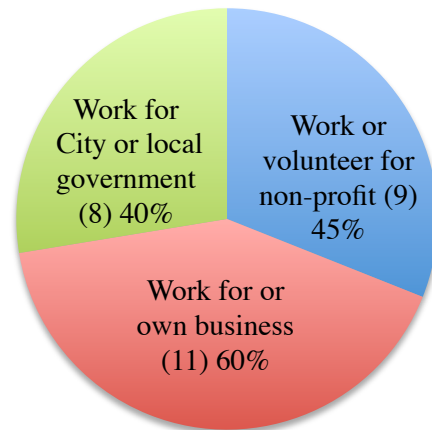
Question 3: What role do you play or job do you hold in the community right now?

Sixty percent of participants responded that they work for or own a business in Oberlin. Forty-five percent of participants reported to work or volunteer for a non-profit organization in Oberlin. Forty percent of participants said they work for the city or local governments. Often citizens reported working in two sectors at once. For instance, several citizens who reported working for city government also reported owning or working for a business.

The responses to this question are not incidental; the distribution of participants working in the private and public sectors reflects a conscious decision on the behalf of the researcher to engage citizens from these two sectors for the reasons mentioned previously in this chapter and in chapter two. Additionally, I chose participants because other citizens had mentioned that they were well known or active in the community, and because of this they were likely to have knowledge and opinions of the Oberlin Project.

The purpose of question three was to understand how participants identified their formal roles in the community, and whether or not this understanding coincided with the role that other community members and myself had perceived for these participants. The results of this question, notably that 45% of participants reported volunteering or working for a non-profit organization, indicate that citizens are often even more engaged in the community than expected. The results of question three are summarized in figure 6.4.

**Figure 6.4 Participant self-identified role in the Oberlin community**



Question 4: What do you know about the Oberlin Project?

Responses to this question were varied. In retrospect, this question was too simplistic, and should have been a two-part question, asking participants *how* they knew about the Oberlin Project. This would have made it possible to locate the most popular sources of information for the Project. Were participants knowledgeable about the Project because they had read about it in the *Oberlin News Tribune*? Did they know about it from speaking to their peers? While this study does not make it possible to locate the most common sources of information about the Project, answers to this question demonstrate that participants overall had a working knowledge of the Project's core principles. The table below displays the number of participants that mentioned the different goals of the Project.

**Table 6.2 Participant knowledge of Oberlin Project components and goals**

<b>Project component/goal</b>	<b>Number of participants mentioning component</b>
Constructing the Green Arts District	11
Achieving energy efficiency/carbon neutrality	8
Creating a greenbelt around Oberlin	6
Rebuilding or renovating the Oberlin Inn	6
Being a model/demonstration for other communities seeking to lower their ecological footprints	5
Collaborating with the Oberlin Public Schools, Lorain County Community College, and other local educational consortiums	3
Increasing local organic food production	3
Being a part of the Clinton Climate Initiative	2

Six participants described the project as “sustainable” and four participants described the project as “green.” Two participants, one from a non-profit organization and one working for city government, replied to this question that they did not know enough about the Project. On the other hand, five participants, one working for a non-profit, one working with city government and three involved with downtown businesses, reported knowing more than most people about the Project. Two participants, both working for city government, informed the researcher that the Project was in need of funding. Seven participants of various professional backgrounds mentioned that it was a project associated with Professor David Orr. Two mentioned that the Project had formed committees to structure and organize itself. One participant had knowledge of the green corridor that will run from Lorain County Joint Vocational School on Route 58 to the south to Lorain Street in the north. Lastly, one citizen thought that industry would be a key player in the Project and one citizen knew that Project planners were currently in the process of hiring a Project Director.

Participants who were downtown business owners mentioned the Green Arts District more than other participants. Five out of the eight participating downtown business owners mentioned the Green Arts District, while only two of the eight participants involved with city government mentioned it. This trend could be because downtown business owners may be more inclined to pay attention to development of the Green Arts District because it is a large project in close proximity to their source of livelihood. Specifically, plans to retrofit or rebuild the Oberlin Inn are one example of how the Green Arts District may affect the downtown at large. According to one participant, shutting down the Oberlin Inn may negatively affect Oberlin's Chamber of Commerce, which is important for downtown businesses:

*“Normally we get \$40,000 bed tax annually which we would lose if [the Inn] were closed for the year. Of the \$40,000, \$30,000 goes to Main Street – Chamber and \$10,000 usually goes to other organizations to advertise. Though the closing might not be as Draconian as it sounds, it is a bit of a concern...part of what makes Oberlin so special is its downtown, with its locally owned businesses.”*

Question 5: What do you think about the Oberlin Project?

The majority of participants expressed simultaneous enthusiasm for and skepticism of the Project. Thirteen participants expressed enthusiasm for the Project using descriptors such as, “great idea, ambitious, exciting, fan of, wonderful, fantastic, amazing, bold.” On the other hand, eight participants expressed either major or minor skepticism of the Project. Reasons given for this skepticism included the Project's perceived lack of funding and the abstract nature of the Project's goals. Two participants described the Oberlin Project as a realistic endeavor, while one participant labeled it unrealistic.

The responses to this question reflect the often-diverse opinions of the Oberlin community. For instance, one participant expressed criticism because the Project does not have a plan for incorporating unions. Another was dissatisfied that the Project had not actively addressed parking in the downtown area. The mentality towards the Project is perhaps summarized best by this quote from one participant:

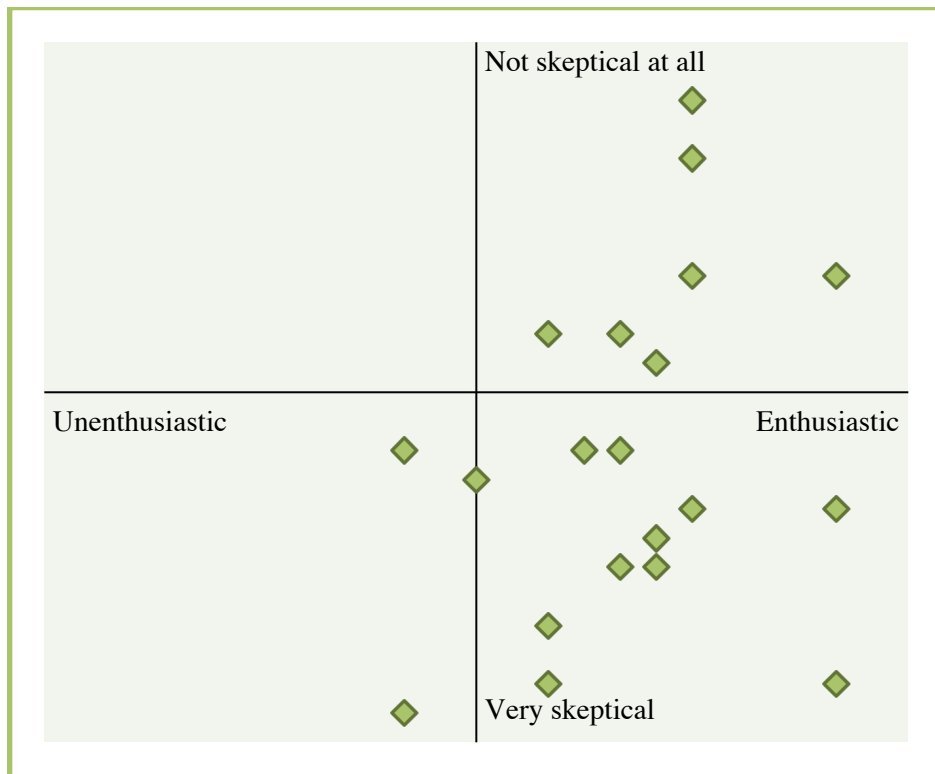
*“I’m a fan...we’re in a community where something like this could happen because of the College and the Environmental Studies department, public ownership of utilities, etc. We have direct forms of community engagement...[and] we have to engage in serious social engineering. We’ve got to make some pretty dramatic changes, but the practice of democracy makes the necessity of what needs to be done pretty challenging.”*

Another participant’s response best encapsulates the main issues this question stimulated:

*“It seems to me like the Project to this point has been heavy on the concept. Certainly in terms of planning, the Project was not a grassroots type of thing. I think there are challenges with all of that. I think it’s important to be able to get more understanding and involvement from the community.”*

Figure 6.5 approximates participants’ attitudes towards the Oberlin Project. It should be noted that these results are my interpretation of participants’ cumulative tone and expression throughout the interview and are not necessarily representative of participants’ true feelings. The purpose of figure 6.5 is to visually demonstrate that taken together, the interview results show that despite varying levels of skepticism, participants were also generally enthusiastic about the Project.

**Figure 6.5 Participant enthusiasm for and skepticism of the Oberlin Project**



Question 6: What is your vision for the development of downtown Oberlin? In terms of development in general, what is your vision for the city of Oberlin?

The most popular response to this question was that development and general economic growth is the most important objective for Oberlin. Participants listed different priorities for what they felt this growth should include. It was difficult to distinguish between responses to the two parts of the question because participants often interwove their answers. For instance, one participant’s characteristic response:

*“I would like to see balanced development, and by balanced I mean development that takes into account the needs of the entire community. We have a downtown area that logically orients itself to the needs of the College. I would like to see stores provide goods and services to those who are not within the College community...[and] development that reaches across class, that expands a population of working people with strong jobs.”*

Because of this, I have broadly summarized the results, which appear in table 6.3. The important component of this question, however, was simply to observe whether or not participants' visions compared to the overall vision of the Oberlin Project. This question, along with questions ten and thirteen, elicited responses indicative of a shared vision between the Project and this participant subset of the Oberlin community.

**Table 6.3 Participant priorities for development of Oberlin**

<b>Priorities for Oberlin's future development</b>	<b>Number of participants mentioning priority</b>
Grow downtown	9
City growth should be urban infill (brownfield and greenfield redevelopment, etc) rather than expansion beyond current city limits	5
Retrofit and make existing building and housing stocks more energy efficient	4
Grow industrial park	3
Replace Oberlin Inn	3
Create new community gathering space	3
Develop downtown to provide basic needs	3
Ensure downtown retains local flavor/keep businesses local and independently-owned	3
Expand parking downtown	2
Increase tax base feed	2
Increase access to public transit, at a minimum to downtown areas	2
Limit downtown parking	1

In addition to these priorities, two participants simply wanted Oberlin to be carbon neutral and sustainably designed. One participant mentioned that development should be centered on job growth. Three participants mentioned that they would like to see shop space built in the Green Arts District, and one participant cautioned that there should be no replicas of existing downtown amenities in this new shop space. Another

participant wished to see more minority-owned businesses downtown. Other singular responses included the desire for Oberlin to be a destination city, for more population growth within city limits, for Oberlin to be more inclusive of surrounding communities, and for all College professors to live in Oberlin.

Question 7: To your knowledge, how are Oberlin Project stakeholders including the Oberlin community?

Eighteen out of twenty participants had a clear idea of the outreach activities in which Oberlin Project leaders are currently involved. Most of these participants also responded that information about the Project had not been spread adequately to the general public, but that Project planners had given presentations to City Council and had formed a number of organizational committees. Fourteen citizens were aware of one or more of the following: City Council presentations, presentations to surrounding Townships, the participation of local government officials in the Oberlin Project, Project committees, and newspaper articles about the Project. Twelve participants expressed doubt that the wider community had been involved in the Project thus far. One participant, for instance, said

*“If there’s been an effort beyond the newspaper right now, I’m not aware of it. I’m sure there are discussions between individuals after the Sunday service at church, but I haven’t seen a lot of community outreach. Most people who pass me in the grocery store know from what they’ve seen in the newspaper.”*

On a similar note, three participants thought that there needed to be more inclusion of the wider Oberlin community, and that knowledge within the community came primarily from the few news articles that local papers have published about the Project. On a different note, one citizen stated that the Project’s plan to incorporate



development of the city and the public schools made it a project inherently inclusive of the community. Overall, participants were appreciative of the fact that planners have been spreading information and forming alliances, particularly with city government.

However, at least four participants suggested at some point in the interview process that they would like a public update about the Project’s status.

**Table 6.4 Participant awareness of leader outreach**

Type of outreach by Oberlin Project leaders	Number of participants mentioning outreach type
City Council presentations	6
Citizen membership on Project committees	3
Media/newspaper articles	2
Township presentations	1
Hiring Project Director	1
Plans to include City and public schools	1
<u>Summary of participant awareness</u>	
Citizens aware of one or more of the above:	
<b>14</b>	
Citizens that have not hear anything about outreach to the public or as members of the public, are unsure of specific types of outreach on behalf of planners, OR expressed the belief that planners are not including the community well:	
<b>12</b>	

Question 8: In your opinion, how do you think Oberlin Project stakeholders might include the wider Oberlin community in the future?

At least two participants expressed frustration at one point or another during the interviews that the same citizens appear at public meetings, and it is difficult to bring new

faces to the table. Because of this, as one citizen put it, the Project leaders thus far have been “preaching to the choir” of citizens that frequent City Council and city committee presentations and who are likely either ardent supporters or ardent critics of large-scale projects like the Oberlin Project. Participants with community organizing backgrounds made the argument that it is difficult to engage citizens beyond the select few because they live hand-to-mouth. Environmental projects that depend on voluntary engagement and upfront capital investments are unlikely to attract the attention of the majority of citizens struggling to meet their daily needs.

When inquired for specific recommendations for how Project planners might engage the wider community in the future, participants offered the recommendations listed in table 6.5.

**Table 6.5 Participant recommendations for Oberlin Project community engagement**

<b>Community engagement strategy</b>	<b>Number of participants mentioning strategy</b>
<i>Focus groups/public presentations</i> (includes open events, i.e. community picnics and closed events, i.e. meetings with the Historical Society, Rotary Club, etc.)	5
Talks and discussion forums at <i>local churches</i>	3
Create <i>website</i> or blog with information and forum	3
Presentation on Oberlin’s <i>cable channel</i>	2
More <i>newspaper articles</i>	2
Form <i>neighborhood organizations</i> centered around Oberlin Project goals	2
Open up Project <i>committees</i> to increased membership	1
Employ with <i>unions</i>	1
<i>Advertise/demonstrate</i> benefits of the Project	1
Presentations at <i>public schools</i>	1
Publish <i>newsletter</i>	1

Other than these concrete recommendations, participants offered multiple viewpoints. Two participants were insistent that Oberlin Project planners should solicit the input of the wider citizenry specifically in relation to their needs. These two participants believed that Oberlin Project planners should approach various groups and ask, “What can we do to help you be more sustainable in what you do?” According to one of these participants,

*“It’s about listening and responding to needs [and] addressing the root issues that people have in their lives, like the need for energy, transportation. That’s what has to be at the foundation of reaching out to the community because then people respond, like, ‘wow, that would save me a lot of money,’ like what POWER is doing!”*

In a similar vein, one respondent recalled an experience listening to a lecture by Van Jones, a popular environmentalist, in which he emphasized the necessity of leaders showing up to meetings without an agenda to discuss. According to this participant, Oberlin Project leaders should hold a number of meetings in which the primary objective is to listen to the ideas and feedback of citizens in attendance, rather than spend the majority of meeting time informing citizens of the Oberlin Project’s major plans. On the other hand, one participant with experience in Oberlin’s real estate development noted that it was crucial for leaders to meet the public with an established plan and tweak it according to community feedback. Otherwise, public demands might be too unrealistic given the financial and spatial limitations of the Project, leading to a Project stalemate.

Participants addressed the town-College separation many times in answering this question. A few participants were adamant that there is a perception in Oberlin that the College is the primary driving institution behind the Oberlin Project and it will put forth its best interests over the town and surrounding communities in the development

decisions it makes. These participants emphasized that this perception should be minimized quickly before the Project becomes well known lest the majority of Oberlin's public adopt a similar attitude. Two participants recommended holding meetings and forums about the Oberlin Project in a public space not exclusively dominated by the College or the city. This would decrease perceptions that the Project is entirely College-driven and would provide a less restricted atmosphere than City Council meetings at City Hall. Other recommendations included more immediate publicity, large-scale involvement of community-based organizations, a discourse about the Project that is in less abstract and more concrete terms, and greater transparency of the Oberlin Project committees.

Interview responses in which participants expressed enthusiasm for organizations like POWER indicate that Oberlin Project might best reach out to the community using methods that encourage and reward small, meaningful lifestyle changes such as choosing to ride a bike instead of driving. One participant cited the work of Doug McKenzie-Mohr and community-based social marketing as a means to accomplish this. Various types of forums may be the most optimal method by which to inform the community of the Project and solicit design feedback for the Green Arts District and different policies. But moreover, community-based social marketing may be the most effective way to encourage the greener way of life that the Oberlin Project, advertently or inadvertently, requests of Oberlin citizens.

Question 9: Would you be interested in getting involved in the Oberlin Project? If so, how do you think you might do this? (I.e. through an organization you are involved in, like a church, or through traditional forums, like the public hearing and approval process.)

Most participants were wary but willing to become involved in the Oberlin Project. They expressed a willingness to bring back the message of the Project to their respective communities, but were unsure of how effective they would be or how they would accomplish this. Six citizens, however, reported to already being involved in the Project, either directly or from the periphery. Three of these citizens work for city government, and the other three are either involved in projects related to the Oberlin Project or are directly involved in the Project. Nine participants expressed an interest in getting involved as liaisons or through organizations in which they are already involved. Only two participants immediately stated that they would not be interested in getting involved in the Project. The remaining three citizens did not present clear answers to this question.

**Table 6.6 Participant interest in involvement in Oberlin Project**

<b>Response to “Would you be interested in getting involved in the Oberlin Project?”</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Yes, in some capacity or on certain terms	9
Already am	6
Not sure/did not address question	3
No	2

The answers to the second question of this section varied amongst those who answered yes to the first question. One citizen declined involvement in the Project as

long as the College dominated its leadership. Another citizen volunteered to hold a forum about the Project with her organization. The dominant response of these citizens was that they would work with the Oberlin Project through their employers. This result may be a product of the judgment sampling I used to choose participants. That is, I chose to interview citizens who are engaged in organizations with close ties to the Oberlin Project, such as city government.

Question 10: What would you like to see included in the Oberlin Project that would contribute to the betterment of Oberlin economically, socially, and culturally?

Ultimately this question acted as a follow-up to question six, as many responses matched the development visions and goals citizens had put forth. Similarly to question six, question ten elicited responses about the priorities that participants had for Oberlin's future development that will result from the Oberlin Project's initiatives. For this question, participants provided visions about the investments they desired the Oberlin Project to make. These are summarized in table 6.7.

**Table 6.7 Participant goals for sustainable development through Oberlin Project**

(number in parentheses = number of participants mentioning goal)

<p><b>Social</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Encourage youth to stay in Oberlin/Prevent brain drain (2)</li><li>• Transform relationship between town and College (1)</li><li>• Increase communication between Oberlin and nearby towns (1)</li><li>• Promote Oberlin as a regional destination (1)</li><li>• Increase Oberlin’s population (1)</li><li>• ‘Over-include’ citizens and organizations in the Oberlin Project (1)</li></ul>
<p><b>Cultural</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create new space for community gatherings (2)</li><li>• Rebuild the Oberlin Inn (1)</li><li>• Construct conference center (1)</li><li>• Improve theater facilities (1)</li><li>• Make the architecture of the new Inn iconic (1)</li></ul>
<p><b>Economic</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create new business, industrial, and/or employment opportunities, preferably ones that are ‘green’ and locally owned (9)</li><li>• Develop sustainable local public transit, including one or more of the following: downtown bus transport, regional bus transport, public bike system, bike paths, and encourage walking (4)</li><li>• Provide incentives to invest in infrastructure and/or energy efficiency measures for Oberlin’s building and housing stock (4)</li><li>• Develop green curriculums in all local educational institutions (2)</li><li>• Invest in green energy and/or shut down the College’s coal plant (2)</li><li>• Make Oberlin a self-sufficient town able to provide it’s own needs (2)</li><li>• Preserve and create greenspace (2)</li><li>• Promote local foods (1)</li><li>• Improve downtown parking (1)</li></ul>

The responses to questions six and ten are particularly notable because they illustrate the similarities between the goals of the Oberlin Project and the goals of the twenty participants. Some of the primary goals of the Oberlin Project include minimizing

auto dependence, adopting renewable energy sources to achieve carbon neutrality, rebuilding the Oberlin Inn, developing a conference center, catalyzing regional sustainable land use practices, renovating old arts facilities and constructing new ones, and creating new green jobs and businesses.<sup>93</sup> All of these goals are in line with participant goals. In fact, there are only two participant goals that have not been clearly addressed in the Oberlin Project's draft proposals. These are updating downtown Oberlin's parking facilities and addressing sustainable public transportation. Four participants mentioned this latter issue as a significant priority. Two participants expressed hope that Oberlin would someday be a more bikeable and walkable city, and one of these participants recommended that there be public bike stations located across the town. One participant mentioned implementing a hybrid bus system downtown, particularly to remedy the perceived lack of parking. Lastly, one participant expressed the need for increased regional public transportation. There is indeed a concern that the Oberlin Project may not adequately address transportation issues. This was a concern brought forth by at least one City Council member when the Project was formally presented to City Council in November. According to one of the Oberlin Project leaders, however, the Project now has a transportation working group.

The responses to this question indicate that achieving consensus on a broad development vision between community members and Oberlin Project leaders is likely possible. The economic, social, and cultural goals of the Project are fairly synonymous with the goals of at least a subset of Oberlin's community. However, as the Project's more detailed physical and policy blueprints emerge, citizens may have more criticisms.

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<sup>93</sup> Oberlin Project 4.0



Question 11: Should the average Oberlin citizen play a role in the Project? If so, what should this role be and how do you envision citizens participating in the Project?

The unanimous response to the first part of the question was yes; the average citizen should play a role in the Project. The most popular response to part two was that citizens should be given the opportunity to attend some format of public presentation or forum about the Project. Or, at the very least, participants stated that there should be provisions for readily accessible public information about the Project. Ten participants mentioned a proposal for some kind of public forum. Ideas ranged from creating neighborhood associations that would collaborate with a representative of the Oberlin Project to implementing small-scale demonstration projects to show the benefits of, for instance, insulating one's house. The second most popular answer was that the Oberlin Project should provide incentives for citizens to participate in programs similar to POWER. Four participants mentioned the necessity of making citizens feel that they could contribute to Oberlin's green portfolio in small but meaningful ways, such as retrofitting their homes with subsidized energy-efficient appliances or riding a bike to work instead of driving. This may be feasible in the near future because the Vermont Energy Investment Corporation will be implementing an "Energy Smart" initiative in Oberlin.

**Table 6.8 Participant proposals for citizen engagement**

**Public forums and education**

- Zion Community Development Corporation, the Lorain Metropolitan Housing Authority, and OMLPS have green teaching sessions and programs
- Presentations about the Project at the Public Library, the High School, and to parent-teacher organizations at the public schools
- Public picnic presentations
- Presentations to/with the following groups:
  - Oberlin Community Services
  - Zion CDC
  - Rotary Club
  - The Historical Society
  - City Club
  - Spectrum
  - 19<sup>th</sup> Century

**Economic incentives**

- Energy efficiency programs through
  - AMP – Ohio/OMLPS
  - POWER
- Incentives for riding bikes or walking instead of driving

The responses to this question are significant because they expose the debate about whether the Oberlin Project will be engaged in bottom-up or top-down decision-making. At least three participants were critical of the perceived direction in which the Oberlin Project is moving. For one participant, the major concern was that

*“The Project is going to get too out in front of the community for [the community] to feel a part of it and the community will become disengaged. If [Project planners] are including the wider community now it’s purely telling them what they are doing. What needs to happen is full inclusion...allowing the Project to be informed and rethought by what the community thinks, but that is not happening to the best of my knowledge.”*

The issue currently at stake seems to be the degree to which the community will be allowed to participate in shaping the Project's major plans.<sup>94</sup> Some participants felt that

*“[Project stakeholders should] be showing up without an agenda in place and having a conversation and getting input...[because people's resentment] is that too often they are asked after the fact, and then there is no way to be included in the planning.”*

Citizens with knowledge of the Project's Community Advisory Council's status were particularly critical. It is well known that some of the Project's committees are more developed than others, and at the time the interviews were conducted the Community Advisory Council had yet to find a co-chair. At least three participants were unsure of the specific role that citizens could play in the Project. One participant expressed doubt that citizens could play a significant role at all, and that most of the decision-making and authority would come from an elite few.

There were also words of caution in choosing how citizens participate in the Project. Four interview participants emphasized that citizen input should come only after Project planners have developed a fairly detailed plan that includes some of the 'nuts and bolts.' Otherwise, citizens might come to the table with unrealistic recommendations; engaging the community without an established agenda would be chaotic. According to one participant with experience in sustainable development projects,

*“There needs to be a vehicle for community input, but this should be a means to an end...there needs to be a strong hand on that process or it really devolves into personal issues.”*

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<sup>94</sup> The researcher informally interviewed several additional Oberlin Citizens who also expressed criticism about the Project's current perceived lack of citizen inclusion.

Because the goals of the Project are largely predetermined and appear in the Project's foundational document, there may be little opportunity for citizens to engage in a visioning process to determine the goals of the Project. The question remaining to be asked, then, is how much opportunity will exist for citizen input within the framework of full spectrum-sustainability. In this case, when the time does come to solicit input, dialogue should be structured in a fashion such that it does not "devolve into personal issues."

Question 12: How do you think the role of the community will differ in the design, construction, and post-construction phases of the Green Arts District part of the Project? What phase is most important for the community?

Participants were confused by this question. There were multiple interpretations of this question, particularly because participants had varying levels of knowledge about the Green Arts District. In retrospect, it may have been more constructive to inquire about each stage of the Arts District using separate questions. My objective was to understand whether participants felt the design processes or the physical end products of the Oberlin Project were more important for the community. In other words, did citizens care more about providing input into what would go into the Green Arts District, how the construction would affect the local economy, or was it that these two facets of the project did not matter as long as the Green Arts District was constructed thoughtfully? Some participants addressed this objective and others did not; responses were widely varying. Many responses reflected the fact that participants tended to hover around a certain theme throughout the interview process, such as the immediate need for citizen participation in the Project or the educational opportunities that the Project presents.

Four participants clearly stated that the post-construction phase was most important because at this point citizens would be able to take advantage of the new amenities in the Green Arts District. Five citizens saw citizens benefitting most from the post-construction phase of the Green Arts District. On the other hand, seven participants emphasized the importance of the design phase. Results of phase priorities with reasons given for choosing one phase over another are summarized in table 6.9.

Despite the failure of some participants to directly address the question, they did make the following comments in response to question twelve:

- One participant felt that the Oberlin Project should request input from citizens who are not the normal players in city affairs, and should accomplish this by increasing awareness that the Project is not just a College venture.
- Two participants thought that people would put up less of a fight if the Project maximized transparency in its decision-making.
- One participant mentioned that the new downtown storefront property that what the Green Arts District will likely offer will be important, especially because “at some point utilities will be entirely unaffordable for older space downtown.”
- One participant recommended that for citizen engagement each part of the Project be broken down into its own community outreach project, with the appropriate community members becoming involved. For instance, designing a green curriculum for the schools would include teachers, parents, and students. These same citizens would not be involved in providing input into

the decisions made about the Oberlin Inn, but downtown business owners would.

**Table 6.9 Participant opinions on most important phase of Green Arts District for the community**

Phase	Number of participants
<p><u>Design</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why most important?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Value of local knowledge to contribute to design</li> <li>○ People need ownership and input to feel involved</li> <li>○ Necessity of diverse opinions</li> <li>○ Necessity of community buy-in or else the Project will run in to too many obstacles</li> <li>○ To build strong support system</li> <li>○ To rally for rebuilding rather than renovating the Oberlin Inn</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	7
<p><u>Construction</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why most important?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Project should hire local citizens</li> <li>○ Children will value observing construction process</li> <li>○ To minimize the inconvenience construction will have on peoples' lives</li> <li>○ At this point, Project details will have been worked out so people can respond with praise or criticism</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	3
<p><u>Post-construction/finished product</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why most important?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ It will demonstrate what it means to be green</li> <li>○ Hopefully there will be a space for community gatherings</li> <li>○ The finished product will not be criticized or bogged down in minutia like the design and construction phases</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	4
<p><u>All phases equally important</u></p>	1
<p><u>Response unclear/did not address question</u></p>	5

Question 13: Are there any issues in the community (i.e. needs that are not met) that you think the Oberlin Project has the potential to address?

The responses to this question parallel the responses to questions six and ten. Inadvertently, this question was also a visioning question. Responses are summarized in the table below. A number of participants also simply stated that they would like to see Oberlin become a more self-sustaining, resilient community.

**Table 6.10 Community issues participants desired for the Oberlin Project to address**

<b>Participant responses</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Increase number of jobs and grow local business, particularly for low-income citizens	7
Create an integrated College-town space or conference space	4
Lower energy costs, become a climate positive community, or educate about energy usage and climate change	4
Encourage population growth	3
Encourage professors to live in Oberlin; provide employer assisted housing to all Oberlin employees; organize, encourage, or provide incentives for neighborhood renovations	2
Improve quality of and access to food, particularly local food	2
Increase tax base	2
Manage downtown parking issues	1
Provide assistance to community-based organizations	1
Prevent foreclosures	1
Increase connections/communications/programs between educational institutions	1
Improve community-College relations	1
Provide public transportation	1
Provide incentives for infill projects	1
Increase foot traffic downtown	1



Question 14: Do you have any recommendations for who else I might interview?

I asked this question to the first sixteen participants. I did not ask this question to the last four participants because by the time of their interviews I already had generated a list of over 60 possible citizens to interview from the previous sixteen participants, and had already made arrangements to interview the last four participants. The first sixteen participants gave lists of potential interviewees ranging in length from a few to up to fifteen citizens. If the citizens' contact information was available, I requested it. For more information on this process, please refer to method three (interviews) in chapter two (project methodology).

The first sixteen participants mentioned citizens to interview in the following categories: business owners (many of whom have businesses located downtown), property owners (many of whom own downtown property), live at Kendal, involved in community nonprofit organizations and development corporations, involved in the public schools, involved in city government, involved in Oberlin College's administration, or professors at the College.

Question 15: Do you have any more comments or questions?

This question was optional; twelve out of the twenty participants chose to respond. Four participants mentioned that despite the negativity towards the Project that they had expressed throughout the interview, they were excited about it and respected its goals. Four participants responded that they were looking forward to hearing more about the Project or desired an update on its progress. Eight of the twelve participants who responded to this question responded by reiterating their important points and expressing concerns, which are summarized in table 6.11.

**Table 6.11 Participant concerns (quoted)**

“I am very hesitant for the College to put in retail space because it’s not an area that they know a lot about. Instead they should help a commercial developer figure out how to do that.”
“You can only do [projects] right once.”
“Better communication is definitely needed.”
“[The Project] is very yuppie-ish. So, that automatically excludes people...I think people have narrow visions not intending to.”
“This country is not in a position to make a huge rapid shift away from fossil fuels as our primary energy source...carbon sequestration is a hell of a good concept but there is not the existing technology out there to do it.”
“The greenbelt will be a hard sell...people still don’t want to believe that global warming is true and real...make [the Project] relevant in a broader way other than a liberal agenda so people don’t see it as a liberal issue.”
“There’s a lot of interest in environmental education in schools...[if the Oberlin Project engages in] basically involving kids, and if parents knew kids were involved, their potential buy-in would be greater.”
“Ultimately private entrepreneurial efforts are the only way [the Project] is going to get done.”
“If we are actually serious about the Project, the Trustees have to be a part of it.”
“We should be targeting slum lords and making them fix up their houses or running them out of business.”
“We should congratulate anyone who puts themselves out there with a vision. Oberlin is so reactive in a critical kind of way.”

### Summary

There is both great enthusiasm and great skepticism about the Oberlin Project revealed through this survey. Interview participants were wary of the danger of the Oberlin Project falling prey to the same issues that have plagued past projects between the town and the College, in which tensions between the two entities became manifest. And yet, participants were enthusiastic about the possibilities that the Oberlin Project could afford to a small rustbelt town’s efforts to go green. Drawing from the literature and methodology reviews of chapters three through five, the next chapter investigates

opportunities for how the Oberlin Project might balance these tones of skepticism and enthusiasm to engage in development that is equitable, just, and representative of Oberlin's diversity and progressiveness.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has framed the Oberlin Project in the context of planning that aims to achieve equitable and sustainable development through citizen-inclusive processes. This concluding chapter solidifies the collaborative planning potential of the Oberlin Project by tying together the literature review and the interview results. In other words, how can the overview of collaborative planning, case studies, and engagement methodologies in the first part of this thesis and the interview results together inform the Oberlin Project of future participatory opportunities?

The current Oberlin Project plan characterizes the concept of sustainable urbanism. The Project embodies the principles of sustainable urbanism because it calls for environmental, economic, and social reform in and around Oberlin. It is an *urban* project because it seeks to alter an existing human settlement. It is also an environmentally *sustainable* project because it will pursue alterations to the Oberlin region in a carbon neutral manner. Sustainable urbanism is a relatively new concept, and the Oberlin Project is significant not only because it is a project that seeks to embody these emerging principles of sustainability, but also because it seeks to accomplish sustainability using a collaborative, multi-lateral approach. In more ways than one, the Oberlin Project is pioneering and innovative. This is evidenced by the fact that the Project is one of only nineteen projects worldwide under the Clinton Climate Positive Development Program.

What remains to be determined is whether the Oberlin Project will take an innovative approach in its decision-making about urban development plans and policies.

Democracy is traditionally infused into decisions about urban development through city government. Planners present development portfolios to City Council, who as representatives of the city's population, vote in favor or in opposition to the proposed plan. Collaborative planning theorists argue that this and other legal frameworks of government decision-making – public hearings, review and comment procedures - do not achieve genuine participation in planning or other decisions.<sup>95</sup> In Oberlin, as demonstrated by the trials and tribulations of the East College Street Project, development is never as simple as following the legal process anyway. Citizens want a say in what future development in Oberlin will or will not include. The evolution of the planning discipline over the past half-century indeed demonstrates that this desire is universal. John Forester, an oft-cited planning academic, writes of the planner as a “deliberative practitioner” who can “nurture public hope or deepen citizens’ resignation.”<sup>96</sup> By necessity, planning today is not so much about development based on rational decision-making that harnesses the approval of a signatory City Council; it is about working collaboratively with institutions in the private and public sectors to promote development that is ultimately in the citizen's best interest and “incorporates not only citizens, but also organized interests, profit-making and non-profit organizations, planners and public administrators in a common framework where all are interacting and influencing one another and all are acting independently in the world as well.”<sup>97</sup> In theory, collaborative planning encourages just, equitable, and democratic decision-making.

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<sup>95</sup> Judith E. Innes and Booher, David E. “Reframing Public Participation: Strategies for the 21st Century,” *Planning Theory & Practice* 5:4 (December 2004), 419.

<sup>96</sup> John Forester, *The Deliberative Practitioner: Encouraging Participatory Planning Processes* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), 1.

<sup>97</sup> Innes and Booher, 422.

Translating this theory into practice is a difficult task, but fortunately there are many opportunities for the Oberlin Project to attempt this translation.

One purpose of this thesis was to present a few of those opportunities. Case studies like Portland's Community Watershed Program and Vancouver's informal engagement process and Talk Green program exemplify participatory planning and can contribute to a better understanding of how the Oberlin Project can best achieve the principles of collaborative planning. The success of Portland's CWSP suggests that the Oberlin Project should use Oberlin College students as a resource. Though using students as community liaisons may not be immediately appropriate, students at minimum can perform background research and work on bringing in outside resources for the Project. The CWSP also reveals the importance of fostering a sense of ownership and awareness about projects. One of the greatest opportunities available to the Oberlin Project is the potential to partner with the large number of active citizen organizations in Oberlin that are concerned about social and environmental justice. Indeed, when asked how Oberlin Project planners could reach out to the community, interview participants suggested approaching organizations like local churches and clubs. At the same time that these partnership opportunities exist, Project planners should also engage in a significant amount of informal engagement by approaching citizens in their regular environments, much in the same fashion as Vancouver's planners fostered the experiential planning process.

Chattanooga's successes also present lessons for the Oberlin Project. Three interview participants expressed enthusiasm about the potential of the Project to attract green industry to Oberlin and two participants mentioned creating neighborhood

organizations to channel citizen input into the Project. Like Chattanooga, Oberlin Project planners should consider encouraging the formation of neighborhood organizations, creating facilitator banks and fostering leadership programs, and attracting green industry and businesses like the Evergreen Project to Oberlin. Furthermore, Oberlin is currently engaged in a comprehensive public input process that is similar to Chattanooga's Vision and Revision processes. The Oberlin 2025 Strategic Plan, "a plan to ensure that the City, its residents, and businesses grow and prosper into the future," may provide information about citizen goals regarding development. This is important for the Oberlin Project because it is a major development in Oberlin, and it should incorporate the results of the Strategic Plan survey to enhance its collaborative potential. Chattanooga's successful citizen visioning processes indicate this importance.

In addition to case studies, Oberlin Project leaders can also look across disciplines to adopt methodologies such as the EPA's Collaborative Problem Solving Model, Appreciative Inquiry, and community-based social marketing to encourage citizen participation in the problem-setting, direction-setting and structuring phases of the Oberlin Project. Borrowing from ReGenesis, an example of the EPA CPS Model in action, it appears that the Oberlin Project is already engaged in some direction-setting activities that will create a strong system of support. Notably, like Harold Mitchell, David Orr is making important intra-community financial and organization connections. To build additional support closer to home, Oberlin Project planners should consider immediately convening a public meeting detailing the intentions of the Oberlin Project in order to facilitate consensus-building and maximize the Project's potential to build a strong support system of social and cultural capital. This is particularly important because

more than half of interview participants (twelve) mentioned that they had not heard of any attempts by Oberlin Project planners to reach out to the public. In the future, Project planners can use modes of thought like Appreciative Inquiry to align the visions of the Project's multiple stakeholders, including the community, in order to produce concrete directives. Lastly, Project planners can draw from CBSM tactics to create initiatives that include the community in tangible actions that work towards achieving the Projects goals.

The interview results indicate that the two biggest challenges confronting the Oberlin Project in terms of engaging the Oberlin community might be

- 1) lack of widespread knowledge about the Oberlin Project, and
- 2) preexisting tensions between the town and the College.

In comparison to this latter issue, filling the knowledge gap will be relatively easy. Once its plan is more developed, the Oberlin Project should likely begin its outreach to the Oberlin public with an informational campaign. McKenzie-Mohr is skeptical about the success of informational campaigns to affect behavior, so this campaign would be primarily educational in nature, asking citizens to consider the goals of the Oberlin Project rather than commit to individual action to help achieve the goals.<sup>98</sup> This campaign could take on many forms, from online discussions to presentations at the Oberlin Public Library. An online forum like Vancouver's Talk Green might be the easiest, most cost effective, and most prompt method by which to reach the Oberlin community. Similar interactive tools like Geographic Information Systems (GIS) have emerged as facilitators of collaborative planning and could be useful to the Project as

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<sup>98</sup> This could, however, be a stage in which community-based social marketing pilot projects are implemented.



portals for citizen input.<sup>99</sup> Preferably, there would also be several articles in the *Oberlin News Tribune*. The significance of such a campaign is that even if it does not solicit the community for input about the Project, it would likely demonstrate that the Oberlin Project leaders are eager to inform the community about the Project's impact on future development in Oberlin. A campaign like this also has the potential to dispel the rumors that are already circulating about the Project, and moreover, it is one step towards ameliorating the town-gown tension that will inevitably be a force that affects the Project.

The existing tension between the College and town is a significant issue in the context of the Oberlin Project. The case studies presented in this thesis are examples of how to counteract such forces and also of what situations to avoid. As demonstrated in chapter five, citizens in both Portland and Chattanooga expressed a marked distrust of local institutions, even when the objectives of these institutions were economic and environmental improvement. For example, in late 1980s and early 1990s, Portland citizens strongly opposed the Bureau of Environmental Service's (BES) management of urban waterways. In Chattanooga, citizens residing in primarily low-income communities of color like Alton Park and Piney Woods felt left out of the revitalization efforts occurring in other neighborhoods. Indeed, the persistence of EPA-designated Superfund sites near these neighborhoods well into the 1990s exemplifies this exclusion. Similarly, citizens in Chattanooga's Historic Southside District witnessed the construction of a city conference center and similar amenities in their neighborhood, which "arguably transformed these areas from predominantly spaces of use by inner-city residents into a

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<sup>99</sup> Shivanand Balram and Suzana Dragicevic, "Modeling Collaborative GIS Processes Using Soft Systems Theory, UML and Object Oriented Design," *Transactions in GIS*, 2006, 10:2 (2006), 199–218.

site for capital accumulation.”<sup>100</sup> Perhaps Chattanooga’s greatest development flaw was that revitalization efforts between relatively well-off neighborhoods and disenfranchised neighborhoods were not realized equally, which initially contributed to preexisting environmental justice issues and perpetuated social tensions. In all these situations, even though both public and private organizations had the best intentions in mind, historical tensions and situations persisted.

However, these institutions were able to partially overcome citizen distrust by

- 1) establishing a culture and environment of listening and dialogue, and
- 2) creating outlets that allowed citizens ownership in different projects.

In Portland, for example, the BES created the Community Watershed Stewardship Program, which flexibly allowed citizens to choose and structure their own programs towards improving local watersheds. The BES, in partnership with Portland State University, provided the necessary oversight, funds, and assistance to ensure that watershed improvement was practical and measurable. In Chattanooga, “racial integration, cooperation and working together” through joint problem solving between neighborhood residents, local polluting industries, nonprofits, and government led to site cleanups and the implementation of environmental safeguards.<sup>101</sup> In the policies and programs it chooses to adopt, the Oberlin Project can incorporate awareness about citizen distrust in Portland and Chattanooga’s struggles to include its most disenfranchised citizens. Ultimately, policies that promote dialogue and allow ownership should take precedence.

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<sup>100</sup> Fraser, et al., 428.

<sup>101</sup> Elliott, et al.

The Oberlin Project's collaborative nature suggests that building up social capital around the Project is a requirement for the Project to succeed. This is because a sustainability framework is not only dependent on minimizing natural resource consumption and enabling the efficient use of urban space, but also in facilitating participatory democratic processes and multiplying social capital.<sup>102</sup> For instance, the involvement of Oberlin Main Street – Chamber in the Project may be crucial to inform downtown businesses of progress with the Green Arts District. Oberlin Main Street – Chamber could be a valuable partner with the Oberlin Project because it leverages downtown resources and has a membership of over 100 businesses and organizations that include educational institutions, non-profits, retail, industrial, restaurant, and service providers.<sup>103</sup> Additionally, it has a fully developed website that advertises downtown and community-wide events. Informing and collaborating with Main Street – Chamber and as many organizations as possible will help planners to spread knowledge about the Project to constituents whom it will both directly and indirectly affect.

The interview results indicate that using a tool like Appreciative Inquiry could be a valuable component to engaging the community in the Oberlin Project. Appreciative Inquiry promotes a visioning process and also stresses the importance of maintaining a positive viewpoint to overcome past issues and conflicts. The interviews presented two pieces of evidence that give Appreciative Inquiry particular applicability. Firstly, most participants mentioned the existence of the tense town-gown relationship. Secondly, consciously or not, many participants themselves expressed frustrations with parts of the College, not necessarily with students or faculty, but with the College administration. In

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<sup>102</sup> Roseland, 104-105.

<sup>103</sup> Oberlin Main Street-Chamber, *Membership*, <http://www.oberlinchamber.org/index.html> (Mar. 3, 2011).

essence, they allied themselves with the town, thereby confirming this tense relationship. From the interviews, it is evident that Oberlin citizens *may* have a tendency to stress negative histories, particularly when exposed to new development that is perceived to be College-driven, as is the Oberlin Project. For reasons rational or irrational, many of the citizens I interviewed who are currently informed about the Oberlin Project are skeptical and wary.

However, the interview results also reveal that participants were excited about future development opportunities, and more importantly, that the goals of these participants for future development under the Oberlin Project – increased job opportunities, a thriving downtown, a community space, sustainability – are nearly identical to the goals outlined by Project leaders in the Project’s foundational document. This is a significant connection that should be developed clearly through processes like Appreciative Inquiry. Forums that emphasize goals, rather than dwelling on resolving past conflicts, have the potential to contribute to the Oberlin Project’s execution in a manner consistent with the needs and desires of the wider community. (In designing community forums with an emphasis on collaborative planning, there are several useful manuals to which Project leaders may refer.)<sup>104</sup> Firstly, though, Project leaders need to establish communication with citizens not currently involved in the Project. Additionally, Project leaders should carefully assess participatory methods before

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<sup>104</sup> These are:

- 1) Nick Wates, ed., *The Community Planning Event Manual: How to use Collaborative Planning and Urban Design Events to Improve your Environment* (London: Earthscan), 2008.
- 2) Nick Wates, ed., *The Community Planning Handbook: How people can shape their cities, towns and villages in any part of the world* (London: Earthscan), 2000.
- 3) Henry Sanoff, *Community Participation Methods in Design and Planning* (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2000).

choosing, and the community should likely play a role in determining how it will be involved in providing input to the Project. The community and Project leaders should choose participatory methods that encourage ongoing and consistent dialogue, and both the Project and the community must be willing to listen carefully to each other.

## APPENDIX A

### LIST OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How long have you lived in Oberlin [or nearby]?
2. Why do you live here?
3. What role do you play or job do you hold in the community right now?
4. What do you *know* about the Oberlin Project?
5. What do you *think* about the Oberlin Project?
6. What is your vision for the development of downtown Oberlin? In terms of development in general, what is your vision for the city of Oberlin?
7. To your knowledge, how are Oberlin Project stakeholders including the Oberlin community?
8. In your opinion, how do you think Oberlin Project stakeholders might include the wider Oberlin community in the future?
9. Would you be interested in getting involved in the Oberlin Project? If so, how do you think you might do this? (I.e. through an organization you are involved in, like a church, or through traditional forums, like the public hearing and approval process.)
10. What would you like to see included in the Oberlin Project that would contribute to the betterment of Oberlin economically, socially, and culturally?
11. Should the average Oberlin citizen play a role in the Project? If so, what should this role be and how do you envision citizens participating in the Project?
12. How do you think the role of the community will differ in the design, construction, and post-construction phases of the Green Arts District part of the Project? What phase is most important for the community?
13. Are there any issues in the community (i.e. needs that are not met) that you think the Oberlin Project has the potential to address?
14. Do you have any recommendations for who else I might interview?
15. Do you have any more comments or questions?

## APPENDIX B

### INDEX OF SELECTED NEWS SOURCES ON THE OBERLIN PROJECT

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