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Planning, Participation, and Power in a Shrinking City: The Detroit Works Project

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Planning, participation, and power in a shrinking city: The Detroit Works Project

Gregory B. Markus and Amy Krings

Abstract

Scholars and practitioners have argued that authentic public participation is crucial in developing strategic plans for so-called shrinking cities, not only for informing the content of the resulting plans but also for fostering public support, civic capacity, and equitable outcomes. The Detroit Works Project, launched in 2010, provided an opportunity to examine the crafting of a high-profile strategic plan for a major U.S. city challenged by decades of population loss and disinvestment. We find that the project was yet another instance of urban planning that began with an assurance that public involvement would play a central role but then failed to fulfill that promise. Transparency and accountability were compromised as a result of the privatization of public responsibilities. The resulting plan did not reflect the priorities, insights, or needs of most Detroiters. Justice was subordinated to the perceived imperative of the market within an ideological frame of neoliberal austerity.

Introduction

Scholars and practitioners have long advanced cogent arguments for integrating public participation into planning and policymaking (Dietz & Stern, 2008; Innes & Booher, 2004; Laurian & Shaw, 2009; Shipley & Utz, 2012). Public input can inform and improve the substance of plans (Burby, 2003; Creighton, 2005). When conducted fairly, participatory processes can enhance the legitimacy and public acceptance of outcomes (Hibbing & Alford, 2004; Tyler, 2011). They can also develop the capacity of citizens and planners alike to engage in future planning and implementation, particularly if the participatory processes are co-produced, ongoing, and utilize multiple ways of knowing (Healey, 1998; Quick & Feldman, 2011). In addition to these instrumental considerations, conducting public engagement with integrity honors democratic norms and, more deeply, one's fellow human beings. As Fiorino (1990, p. 239) put it, "the case for participation should begin with a normative argument—that a purely technocratic orientation is incompatible with democratic ideals."

Robust public participation can be particularly important in developing strategic plans to rightsize cities that have experienced substantial and probably permanent population loss and persistently high levels of property vacancy (Hollander & Németh, 2011; Németh et al., 2020; Schilling & Logan, 2008). The central thesis of rightsizing is that so-called shrinking cities should reconfigure land use and infrastructure to fit reduced needs (Schilling & Mallach, 2012). Rightsizing strategies emphasize concentrating public and private investment in vulnerable but still-viable neighborhoods while discouraging such investment in neighborhoods deemed least likely to rebound, as evidenced by chronically low market values of properties and high levels of vacancy within them (Mallach, 2012). Particularly in the latter neighborhoods, environmentally friendly alternative uses may be proposed for cleared land.

Public involvement is crucial in planning for rightsizing, Schilling and Logan (2008, p. 453) noted, because the paradigm "raises issues of social equity, as residents in neighborhoods with high concentrations of vacant properties are often predominately low-income and people of color." In view of this fact and "given the legacy of urban renewal," they advised that "residents must be actively engaged in developing plans and relocation alternatives." In the same vein, Silverman et al. (2019, p. 4) argued that "citizen control of the planning process" is of paramount importance "in places that have experienced systematic, structural decline" if there is to be a reasonable expectation of promoting equitable outcomes. Hackworth summarized the need for participatory planning of rightsizing bluntly: In view of the backlash against planning in the era of urban renewal, "even the suggestion that rightsizing has adopted any part of … the idea of muscular, top-down planning … is rightly seen as an epithet" (Hackworth, 2015, p. 768).

The Detroit Works Project (DWP), launched publicly in 2010, provided an exceptional opportunity to observe of the role of public participation in the crafting of a rightsizing strategy for a major U.S. city. The project and its setting are significant in several respects. As R.

Beauregard (2015, p. 920) observed, "Detroit occupies a central position in the public debate about shrinking cities" due to its extreme population loss, vast expanses of vacant land and blighted housing, and devastated industrial landscape. As for the Detroit Works Project, the 3-year-long, multi-million-dollar urban planning initiative funded primarily by the Kresge, Ford, and Kellogg Foundations was one of the most ambitious and well-financed efforts of its kind (Davey, 2013; Hackworth, 2015). In announcing it, city officials emphasized that public engagement would be key to the undertaking (MacDonald & Nichols, 2010). Moreover, after its completion the project was praised as much for its elaborate civic engagement effort as it was for the strategic plan it produced (Kirkpatrick, 2015, p. 264; Schindler, 2016).

We took advantage of the research opportunity presented by the Detroit Works Project with two goals in mind. First, we sought to advance scholarly and practical understandings of how and why public participation matters in local planning and policymaking, particularly in shrinking cities. To what extent did DWP planners succeed in building public trust in the undertaking, surfacing stakeholders' values and priorities throughout the planning process, and crafting a strategic plan that reflected those values and priorities faithfully? Second, we aimed to comprehend the power dynamics that shaped the Detroit plan, as did Flyvbjerg (1998) in his influential study of planning in Aalborg, Denmark. More specifically, we sought to determine whether the planning process or the resulting strategic plan manifested systematic biases, and if so, what were the nature of those biases and how might they be explained. Our study is thus responsive to the call of Aalbers and Bernt (2019, p. 167) to "bring back agency and power to the analysis of urban decline and its management."

With regard to both of these goals, it is no secret that despite compelling arguments for fostering robust participation in planning—and ubiquitous pronouncements of officials, planners, and other policy elites that civic engagement is among their top priorities—the public's role in such processes is often restricted to relatively powerless, largely symbolic functions, as Arnstein (1969) observed more than half a century ago. Some of the reasons why the realities of public participation often fail to live up to its possibilities are mundane, even if they may have important consequences: budgets are too small, time is too short, the public is not much interested, the issues are presumably too complex for nonexperts to understand, and so on (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Moynihan, 2003; Roberts, 2004). Other reasons lie at the heart of politics: the opening up or closing down of public participation involves strategic considerations about who gets what and how. As Schattschneider (1960, p. 3) observed in his classic book, *The Semisovereign People*, "The most important strategy of politics is concerned with the scope of conflict."

From the perspective of policy elites, which includes influential individuals, interest groups, and policy entrepreneurs as well as public officials, any potential upside of sharing power with the general public is weighed against its potential costs in terms of impeding or compromising the advancement of elite interests.[1] Policy elites can encourage effective democratic governance, or they can foster what has been called a tyranny of participation (Cooke & Kothari, 2001) that shapes public sentiment to serve private purposes, channels public involvement into largely ineffectual, "safe" modalities, and co-opts community leaders into active support or, at a

minimum, acquiescence. They can structure participatory processes to provide a gloss of legitimacy to decisions that are in fact determined outside of such processes. Public participation can become yet another setting that advantages the resource rich over the resource poor, where relevant resources include such things as social status, articulateness, familiarity with technical terminology and information, and time (Cornwall, 2008; Tauxe, 1995).

To achieve our research goals, it was essential to study not only DWP's planning process but also the content of the strategic plan it produced. To what extent did the plan comport with the priorities and preferences that Detroiters expressed? Also, considering the history of injustice in Detroit, including in past plans and their implementation (J. M. Thomas, 2013; Sugrue, 1996), we deemed it important to assess the plan in terms of its likelihood of advancing just outcomes. Susan Fainstein (2010, p. 13) asserted that justice should be "the first principle by which to evaluate urban planning and policy." Just policies, in her view, are ones that promote "a distribution of both material and nonmaterial benefits … that does not favor those who are already better off at the beginning" (pp. 35–36). They tend to "shift the balance" to favor "groups most lacking in political and financial power and most subject to disrespect" (p. 56). From Fainstein's perspective, as well as that of proponents of what came to be known as equity planning (Krumholz & Forester, 1990, pp. 48–50) and our own, although it is desirable that a plan be developed through an inclusive, collaborative process and that it use resources efficiently and effectively, what matters most is whether it promotes a more just city.

Our case study makes three contributions to theory and practice. First, it provides a cautionary example of how even well-intended planning professionals can end up managing civic engagement to insulate a largely predetermined plan from critical examination, thereby resulting in a plan that fails to reflect the priorities and insights of most residents and thus fails to win their much-needed support. Second, it demonstrates how private-public partnerships to develop strategic plans can compromise transparency and accountability. In the case of the Detroit Works Project, a private foundation leveraged its position as the project's principal funder to assert substantial control over the planning process and resulting strategic plan, to the detriment of both. Third, it reveals flaws in the rightsizing paradigm as manifested in the strategic plan produced by the project, a plan that is similar in many essential features to ones produced in other cities and that manifests an ideology of neoliberal austerity that has pervaded much recent thought and action on urban policy.

The remainder of this report proceeds as follows. In the next section, we summarize our research methods and the information upon which our study is based. Then we outline the context in which the Detroit Works Project was initiated and how it proceeded. We continue by providing a critical assessment of the project's civic engagement process and its public accountability and transparency. Then we discuss the consequences of the planning process in terms of (1) building public support for the strategic plan and capacity for subsequent planning and implementation and (2) influencing the content of the plan itself. We conclude with a reflection on key lessons and insights that emerged from our investigation.

Methods

Members of our research team attended five DWP public sessions and viewed videos of three additional sessions. We also attended two post-project forums at which DWP staff and community leaders discussed the project and the plan it produced. We interacted with other attenders and took contemporaneous notes during the meetings we attended. We conducted 16 semi-structured interviews, seven with key DWP staff, project volunteers, and City of Detroit planners, and nine with a diverse set of community leaders not affiliated with the project but who had participated in one or more aspects of it. The community leaders worked at nonprofit community development corporations, as community organizers, or with neighborhood groups. We identified them through our networks in Detroit, by observing DWP events, by reviewing relevant media coverage, and through suggestions provided by other informants we interviewed. Interviews were recorded with the informant's consent and varied in length from approximately 30 minutes to nearly 2 hours. By interviewing key designers and implementers of the project as well as thoughtful participants in it, we sought to obtain a well-rounded, well-informed perspective on the planning process. We believe we achieved that objective.

We supplemented our observations and interviews with extensive analysis of primary and secondary source materials. We read and annotated the 757-page project report issued in January 2013, entitled *Detroit Future City*[2] (Detroit Works Project, 2013; referred to hereafter as *DFC*), and the subsequently issued 310-page *Civic Engagement Appendix* (Michigan Community Resources [MCR], 2013), which has not been generally available. We collected and reviewed DWP policy audits, plans, maps, videos, and press releases. We also reviewed hundreds of news articles about the project as well as relevant documentaries and videos, websites, blogs, academic articles, and books.

Detroit Works Project: Context and overview

The Detroit Works Project aimed to address the city's complex economic and social challenges. Those challenges are well known. In 1950, Detroit was the fifth most populous city in the U.S., with one of the country's highest average wages and highest rates of home ownership. Over the next 50 years its population fell by half as corporate decisions and technological advances shrank industrial employment in Detroit along with other Rust Belt cities (Bluestone & Harrison, 1982) and government subsidized, racially structured suburban sprawl siphoned off most of the city's White residents and, later, many of its middle-class Black residents (Farley et al., 2000; Sugrue, 1996). Residential abandonment and population loss accelerated in Detroit with the collapse of the U.S. real estate bubble in 2007–2009. As real estate values and employment tumbled, so did revenues from property and income taxes (Sands & Skidmore, 2014). Dramatic cuts in state revenue sharing intensified Detroit's plight (Turbeville, 2013). Beginning with Mayor Coleman A. Young in the 1970s, successive administrations trimmed municipal services in an effort to balance the budget (Bomey & Gallagher, 2013). The cutbacks, along with hikes in local tax rates that rose to become the

highest among large U.S. cities, only fueled the exodus of residents with the means to move (Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2012, pp. 1–2). Between 2000 and 2010, the city's population plummeted by another quarter (Linebaugh, 2011).

When the Detroit Works Project was launched, half of city residents aged 16 and over were neither employed nor seeking a job (Gallagher & Seidel, 2012). Another 18% were unemployed, the highest rate among the 50 largest cities in America (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Median household income was half that of the nation as a whole, and the city's official poverty rate was a stunning 41% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Political malfeasance had compounded the city's problems. In September 2008 Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick pleaded guilty to a charge of obstruction of justice and resigned from office. He and some three dozen other individuals would later be convicted of multiple crimes for their roles in a web of corruption and cover-ups (Dolan, 2014; Yaccino, 2013).

Former professional basketball star and businessman Dave Bing and his wife moved from their suburban home to Detroit soon after Kilpatrick resigned, and Bing declared his intention to run for mayor. He pledged to bring integrity and sound business practices to government (Riley, 2008). In his first campaign ever for public office, Bing defeated interim mayor Kenneth Cockrel, Jr. in an election the following May to complete Kilpatrick's term. Voters then elected Bing to a full term in November. During the fall campaign, Bing said that if elected he would take dramatic steps to address Detroit's dire condition (Kaffer, 2009)—a "hellhole," he later called it (Patton, 2010a). He warned that those steps would entail downsizing not only city services but even the geography of the city itself.

Around the same time, Rip Rapson was observing Detroit's situation from his post as head of the Kresge Foundation, located in the comfortable suburb of Troy. As had Bing, Rapson had concluded that extraordinary measures were required to alter Detroit's dismal trajectory. "Virtually every dimension of the city's social, economic, environmental, and physical landscape has to be reimagined and retooled," Rapson (2010) declared. "That can happen only if those outside city government step forward and become meaningful, powerful partners." Rapson's philanthropic audacity converged with Bing's political authority, and the Detroit Works Project was born. In January 2010, Nancy Kaffer (2010) reported that "in four to six months, Detroit could have the broad-brush outlines of a land use plan that encompasses the principles of shrinking the city by consolidating investment in key neighborhoods—if Detroit Mayor Dave Bing accepts an offer from a metro Detroit foundation to fund the creation of such a plan."

Rapson proposed to Bing that the foundation hire prominent urban planner Toni Griffin to lead a project to develop a strategy for reconfiguring the city. "That the city must shrink is beyond debate," Rapson asserted (Kaffer, 2010). Kresge would also pay for a team of technical consultants. Bing accepted Rapson's offer (MacDonald & Nichols, 2010). The Detroit Works Project was housed not in City Hall but within the nonprofit Detroit Economic Growth Corporation (DEGC). Although that choice may have had administrative advantages, it compromised the Project's transparency and accountability, as we discuss later.

Even as the project was getting under way, Bing had concluded that the solution to Detroit's problems was to cut public services in struggling neighborhoods and encourage their residents to relocate elsewhere in the city—and the sooner, the better. "If they stay where they are, I absolutely cannot give them all the services they require," he announced in February (MacDonald, 2010a). "There will be winners and losers," he warned, "but in the end we've got to do what's right for the city's future" (Oosting, 2010a). Bing's pronouncements elicited scathing objections from residents and community leaders alike (MacDonald, 2010b). Even if they rejected his proposed solution, however, most Detroiters accepted that urgent measures had to be taken to arrest a cycle in which the city's budgetary challenges and neighborhood abandonment propelled each other (Hedgpeth & Agiesta, 2010).

In August, Bing unveiled what he said would be an 18-month effort to devise a plan to address Detroit's shrinking population and glut of abandoned real estate. He emphasized that community engagement would be central to the process, beginning with five public meetings to be held around the city over a 9-day period in September (MacDonald & Nichols, 2010). The first meeting was held on a Tuesday evening at Greater Grace Temple on the city's west side. Many in the overflow crowd of 1,000 people were there to hear from Bing and to tell him about problems in their neighborhoods, but he was nowhere to be seen. The conveners asked attendees to adjourn to breakout sessions to discuss among themselves their visions of a future Detroit. People were confused, frustrated, and angry (MacDonald, 2010c). "I didn't come here for breakout sessions," someone shouted. "I came here to hear from the mayor" (Oosting, 2010b). Bing eventually showed up and assured participants that there was no plan to shrink their city. Many people had left by then, however, and many of those who had stayed were unconvinced.

Chastened by the tumult at Greater Grace, the project team eliminated the breakout sessions for the subsequent four meetings in favor of a town hall format in which Bing addressed the audience at the outset (Dolan, 2010). Nearly 1,000 people came to the second meeting, held two nights after the Greater Grace event. The remaining three meetings were heavily attended, as well. Those meetings were less contentious than the first, but no dialogue or collaborative planning occurred. We observed attendees expressing skepticism and even fear. Other eyewitness reports confirm our observations (Nichols, 2010; Patton, 2010a, 2010b; Binelli, 2012, Ch. 5). Dan Kinkead, a leader of the project's technical team, provided his assessment of the September meetings. "It didn't go off very well. That's probably the most polite way to put it" (Kinkead, personal interview, November 28, 2012). In December, Kresge terminated its contract with the Washington, DC, consultants who had planned the meetings (Kaffer, 2011).

Although the mayor insisted there was no plan, Detroiters remained skeptical. Their skepticism was justified. In December, Bing said his goal was to concentrate residents in seven to nine "population centers" within the city (Gerritt, 2010). "We're going to be encouraging them to move … into a more dense area so that we can provide them with the services they need," he said. He cautioned that residents should not expect the city to offer economic incentives for them to relocate. Even some members of DWP's advisory task force were taken aback. "We

haven't had a conversation close to that," said Charles Williams II, pastor of Historic King Solomon Baptist Church. "It's obvious that the mayor already knows what he wants to do" (MacDonald, 2011a).

Amid the turmoil, city staff and local consultants labored during the first half of 2011 to fulfill Bing's promise of 40 community meetings by spring (Gerritt, 2010). Although they succeeded in reaching their numerical goal, the sessions left much to be desired in terms of engaging the public meaningfully (E. T. Campbell, 2011). For example, the 11 Planning Cluster meetings held over a two-month period employed an identical format: a lengthy slide presentation in which a spokesperson posed multiple-choice questions to attendees, who responded via handheld devices placed at each chair. Consultants had recommended the clickers as a crowd control measure (Montgomery, 2015, p. 533). The clear intent of the presentation was to convey the message that the city lacked the resources to provide adequate services uniformly across Detroit's 139 square miles, and so residents in low-density neighborhoods should either relocate or else accept service cuts. "No one will be forced to relocate," city official Karla Henderson stated at the first of these meetings. "However, we can't sustain the level of service for all" (Wattrick, 2011).

Many of the clicker questions were vacuous (MCR, 2013, pp. 48–50). One asked, "What is the best way to reverse the city's population loss? A. Retain existing residents. B. Attract new residents. C. Both attract and retain residents." Unsurprisingly, nearly everyone selected the last option. In the city with the highest unemployment rate in the nation, another item asked, "How important is it that Detroiters have access to jobs in Detroit?" Maggie DeSantis, president of the influential Warren/Conner Development Coalition (now Eastside Community Network), voiced a sentiment shared by attendees we interviewed. "People are not stupid," she said. "They know when they're being manipulated" (Yeoman, 2012). Shea Howell (2011), a professor and journalist, was equally critical:

> Citizens are forced to endure a presentation designed to push the rationale for the foundation-driven plan to shrink the city. Then … comes … a series of nearly meaningless multiple-choice questions loaded with assumptions that require discussion. But instead of engaging in conversation about the assumptions and the ideas behind the questions, people are told to click their answers in isolation from one another. This is not a process of community engagement. It is an insult to democratic discussion.

A member of DWP's Mayoral Advisory Task Force and, subsequently, the project's Steering Committee whom we interviewed also questioned the authenticity of the series of community meetings:

> The original conversations, where they went to the communities and asked them to come participate, were really structured. It wasn't about participation. They were just pushing the participation button to say, "See? We did it. We had the meeting. All right? Can we get out of here now?"

Meanwhile, tensions between the foundation and city officials had been mounting behind the scene (Thomson, 2019). They erupted publicly in the *Wall Street Journal* in July. Reporter Matthew Dolan (2011) revealed that Rapson had suspended funding for the project at the beginning of the year after disagreements with City Hall over the role of outside consultants. Dolan quoted Bing administration official Marja Winters: "People want to know that their interests are being represented. Someone who doesn't live here can't accurately represent their interests." Rapson saw things differently. "The idea that the folks who have been trained a certain way for the last 20 years and who have never had the opportunity to apply that training in another community could figure all that out *de novo* seems crazy," he said, referring to the city's planning staff.

Ultimately, Kresge Foundation officers and city officials reached an agreement in which the project was split in two (*DFC*, p. 708). A spinoff directed from and financed by City Hall would focus on immediate actions in three targeted geographic areas. Meanwhile, the core of the original project, now called Detroit Works Long Term Planning (DWP-LTP), would continue to craft a framework intended to guide city development for the next 50 years.

Bing announced the launch of his Short-Term Actions strategy in July 2011. The actions—tree-trimming, street repairs, stepped up code enforcement, and the like—struck many observers as being far less bold than Bing had intimated (Hackney & Neavling, 2011). City staff said that services in three demonstration areas would be tailored to their "market type" as determined primarily by a Market Value Analysis conducted by The Reinvestment Fund, based in Philadelphia, and paid for by the Kresge Foundation (J. Akers, 2015, pp. 1847–1848). They said they would track data in the demonstration areas over a one-and-a-half-year period to evaluate the strategy (City Planning Staff, personal interviews, November 1, 2012). The report they released in early 2013 revealed little discernible impact upon real estate values (Henderson, 2013). By then, the city was grappling with the prospect of state-imposed emergency financial management and quite possibly bankruptcy, both of which occurred within a matter of months. The short-term intervention strategy fell victim to more immediate priorities.

With the mayor's office focused on short-term actions, the foundation-funded strategizing about transforming Detroit over the long-term began anew.[3] DWP-LTP, housed within the Detroit Economic Growth Corp., worked largely independently of City Hall. It established a 14-person steering committee of foundation representatives, leaders of Detroit institutions, and one representative each from the mayor's office and the city council (*DFC*, pp. 8, 746). During the summer of 2011, Toni Griffin was re-hired to provide overall leadership of the technical consultants. University of Detroit Mercy professor and architect Dan Pitera joined the project later that year to lead the civic engagement effort (Gallagher, 2011).

During April, May, and September of 2012, Pitera convened a series of Community Conversations (*DFC*, p. 711). Our impression of four such meetings we observed comports with those of Clement (2013, pp. 88–89), Howell (2012), and Safransky (2014, pp. 195–198): they were highly structured, with much of the available time devoted to technical presentations.

Clement (2013, p. 89) wrote, "In my experience the Community Conversation series left attendees feeling more like subjects than participants." To supplement the Community Conversations, Pitera rolled out a variety of tactics, including a cadre of Process Leaders who led discussions with small groups, a Street Team that distributed flyers to businesses and residents in selected areas, and a collapsible Roaming Table staffed at strategic locations to provide information to passersby. He also commissioned Detroit 24/7, an online game in which players earned points by offering ideas about the city's future. The civic engagement team ramped up a presence on social media and convened two conference calls in which callers listened to presentations and a few posed questions. Other tactics included making presentations at meetings of local organizations and hosting visitors at the DWP office (*DFC*, pp. 720–721; Pitera, 2013).

Reflecting a skepticism about the project that many Detroiters shared, Warren/Conner's Maggie DeSantis observed, "You don't have to have a fancy community engagement process. What you have to have is a substantive one where people have actual influence over the final product" (Gallagher, 2011). As we will show, any such influence was limited at best.

Assessing DWP's civic engagement process

The Detroit Works Project characterized its civic engagement effort as being "one of the most exciting, inventive, and comprehensive public planning processes in the United States and beyond" (*DFC*, p. 707). It defined civic engagement as "open and ongoing two-way dialogue among all stakeholders" (*DFC*, p. 689). As for the purpose of such engagement, "For some, becoming more engaged means less resistance or fear toward an idea or an initiative. For others, engagement means moving from passive indifference to active involvement or advocacy" (*DFC*, p. 689). Overcoming public resistance to a project and fostering advocacy for it may be rational objectives for a project's sponsors and consultants. What residents and other stakeholders want, however, is for their input to be considered seriously and, preferably, for the outcome to reflect their values and priorities (Tyler, 2011; Ulbig, 2008). As Arnstein (1969, p. 216) observed in the most cited article ever published by the American Planning Association, "There is a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process."

Most Detroiters were wary of DWP from the outset, and for good reason. They had experienced several planning initiatives in the recent past that had ended up accomplishing little or nothing (J. L. Bockmeyer, 2000; J. M. Thomas, 2013, 2015). For many of them, DWP's inept rollout transformed wariness into distrust and even outright opposition, as virtually all of our informants noted. According to Pitera, DWP succeeded in regaining public confidence by using "a mosaic of tactics" to engage people (Pitera, 2013). Moreover, he and other DWP champions insisted that public input played an important role in shaping the strategic framework (*DFC*, pp. 13, 707–721; Griffin et al., 2014; Rapson, 2017). We disagree with those claims, and we set out below our reasons for doing so.

DWP used two measures of its civic engagement: "reach" and "conversations." According to the project's *Civic Engagement Appendix*, compiled by nonprofit Michigan Community Resources (MCR), the project "reached out to people approximately 165,000 times" (MCR, 2013, p. 2).[4] That figure includes the number of flyers distributed, robocalls made, e-mails sent, and any other method of public communication the project employed. It is not a count of unique individuals, as any one individual may have been reached multiple times. "Reach" is a useful metric for a marketing campaign, but it provides no information about the extent to which residents and other stakeholders played any active role in the planning process. DWP could have achieved 100% reach by mailing a flyer to every household in Detroit.

The project also reported it "had approximately 30,275 conversations with participants" (MCR, 2013, p. 12). That figure greatly overstates the volume of meaningful interactions that took place. Nearly half of those "conversations" consisted of brief comments people made via Facebook, the DWP website, an online game, or two Telephone Town Halls, in which a conversation was counted if a person remained on the line for at least 5 minutes (MCR, 2013, p. 31). An additional 5,000 conversations consisted of the number of attendees at the five mass meetings held in 2010, meetings that even *DFC* concedes "did not yet allow for interactive dialogue and participant-focused engagement" (*DFC*, p. 708). The count also includes nearly 1,700 interactions in passing between DWP Street Team or Roaming Table workers and individuals to whom they handed flyers and an aggregate headcount of 680 DWP staff and volunteers who attended project trainings or meetings. A more plausible yet still generous estimate of meaningful interactions would be the headcount for the various DWP-LTP face-to-face meetings and open houses. That total is 2,031, or less than 7% of the official topline number. Project staff also spoke at meetings organized by other groups, with a reported total attendance of 3,390. Bear in mind that individuals who attended multiple meetings were counted multiple times, and more than a quarter of registered participants took part in more than one engagement (MCR, 2013, p. 14). The bottom line is that, counting generously, perhaps 5,000 individuals in all sat through presentations by DWP staff, responded with handheld devices to questions posed to them, or conversed briefly in breakout sessions.

Who were those participants? A substantial fraction of them were non-Detroiters: fully one-third of the 6,657 registered participants listed a non-Detroit Zip Code as their place of residence (MCR, 2013, p. 22). The *Civic Engagement Appendix* also indicates that 47% of DWP participants were Black, 30% were White, and 14% were Hispanic, leaving 9% in miscellaneous other categories (MCR, 2013, p. 25). That profile diverges markedly from that of the city as a whole, which at the time was just under 83% Black, 11% White, and 7% Hispanic. The racial/ethnic disparity between DWP participants and all city residents matters, because residents of neighborhoods designated in *DFC* to become "Innovation-Productive" (i.e., agricultural plots) or "Innovation-Ecological" (meadows, retention ponds, etc.) are overwhelmingly African American, while neighborhoods designated for investment and improvement contain some of the highest concentrations of White residents in the city (Clement, 2013, p. 75).

The *Civic Engagement Appendix* catalogs in granular form the public feedback gathered during the project. It provides no indication that the feedback influenced the strategic plan materially, however. Any potential influence was constrained from the outset because the project's civic engagement process was not structured to facilitate productive dialogue. Pressure from funders to finish the initiative after it had missed multiple completion dates also limited the opportunity for public influence. The Community Conversations were the primary vehicle through which residents might have been able to engage in meaningful discussions with planners, but those meetings did not occur until much of the final report had already been drafted (*DFC*, pp. 709–711; Clement, 2013, pp. 88–90). Griffin et al. (2014, p. 723) acknowledged that "resource and timing constraints—and sometimes unjustified deadlines … inhibited the ability to incorporate community input." Pitera did, as well. "We rushed through a lot of this," he said (Clement, 2013, p. 100). During DWP's public rollout in September 2010, Bing stated that up to three options would be created by the planning team, which would then lead to a new round of resident input (Dolan, 2010). None of that happened. Instead, only one plan was produced, and as we discuss below, it hewed closely to core tenets of the rightsizing paradigm that Rapson and Bing had been advocating before Detroit Works was even launched.

We asked DWP consultant Dan Kinkead how he and his colleagues made use of feedback from the civic engagement sessions. In response, he described how they pored over transcriptions, looking for comments that validated their recommendations. "We've been able to take … the more salient responses that come through, [and] we can actually put them in here [the draft of the strategic plan] and relate them back to the points we are trying to make," he said. "They're not going to hit it on the head," he continued, "but people will say something that is related to this" (Kinkead, personal interview, November 28, 2012). In accord with Kinkead's remarks, speech bubbles containing brief comments from participants emanate from silhouetted figures throughout *DFC*'s pages. In sum, as a consequence of a flawed conception of the purpose of civic engagement in planning, an inadequately designed process, and severe time constraints, public input functions in *Detroit Future City* mostly as an ornament.

There is no way of determining conclusively whether or how DWP's civic engagement process would have differed had the city administration directed it rather than the private consultants. Having said that, our interviews with a number of city officials and planners indicate that the process probably would have ended with the controversial clicker sessions they had managed (thereby fulfilling Bing's pledge of holding 40 public meetings). This inference comports with Thomson's (2019, p. 562) observation that the Bing administration preferred "a less intensive engagement process" to the more elaborate, if not necessarily more influential, one that foundation officials favored. Individuals we interviewed who had been involved in DWP from the outset concurred. In the same vein, J. M. Akers (2013, p. 240) noted that the Bing administration felt intense pressure to take "immediate action" guided by the Market Value Analysis and to spend previously allocated federal funds before the grant period expired.

Assessing DWP's public accountability and transparency

Six months before the Detroit Works Project held its first public meeting, Berman and MacDonald (2010) observed that some residents were alarmed at what they perceived to be "an emergent power shift." "They wonder whether foundations, with their wealth and the opportunity created by crisis, are reimagining themselves so completely they're becoming a fourth branch of government, reaching into city politics, land-use planning and Detroit public and charter schools in unprecedented ways," they wrote. Such concerns are entirely appropriate. As Thomson (2019, p. 553) noted, "when government becomes dependent upon foundations for accomplishing social goals, it is reasonable to expect the processes for allocating foundation resources toward those goals to evince democratic standards— transparency, equity, accountability, and citizen input."

Looking back, Rapson (2017) acknowledged that "Kresge has been called to task for its lack of accountability" and "accused of acting like a private legislature or shadow government." To such criticisms he responded, "What's the point of being unaccountable if we don't use it?" Perhaps as a concession, he added, "We have to create our own facsimile of accountability by being utterly transparent."

Rapson's response was inadequate in two respects. First, in both private and public life accounting for one's actions and taking criticism seriously is essential to promoting trust (Dietz & Stern, 2008, pp. 132–135; Kearns, 2015). More fundamentally, being accountable demonstrates a basic respect for others who are affected by your actions (Dubnick, 2003). Foundations certainly insist upon accountability from their grantees. Second, although transparency—the full and timely availability of relevant information to stakeholders— facilitates accountability, it is neither a substitute for nor a "facsimile" of it (Fox, 2007; Gaventa & McGee, 2013). In any event, DWP left much to be desired in terms of transparency as well as accountability.

As noted above, the project was housed within the DEGC, an arrangement that enabled it to skirt state "sunshine" laws requiring governmental meetings and contracts to be public (Felton, 2014). Meetings of DWP's mayoral advisory task force and, later, the DWP-LTP steering committee, were not publicized, and minutes were not posted publicly (MacDonald, 2011a). When the *Detroit News* filed a request under the Freedom of Information Act for copies of contracts with companies paid to work on the project, the DEGC informed the newspaper that it was not obliged to comply because it is not a public body (MacDonald, 2011a). The *News* also requested copies of the technical audits that consultants had submitted to DWP in late 2010. That request was rebuffed, as well. Months later, the audits were posted quietly on the DWP website (MacDonald, 2011b).

Transparency was lacking in the five town hall meetings that launched Detroit Works, as well. Those meetings were widely criticized for the unwillingness of the Bing administration and consultants to level with the public about studies and plans they had been discussing for more

than a year (MacDonald & Wilkinson, 2010; Rapson, 2009). Nor did the smaller community meetings do much to dispel a pervasive sense of secrecy about what the project intended to accomplish, who was running it, or where residents fit in. Our informants judged the meetings that Pitera coordinated to be more respectful, but even those meetings did not allay their concerns. For example, when we interviewed two Process Leaders who facilitated DWP's Community Conversations, both of them criticized the project's transparency and accountability. One of them said:

> I have really mixed feelings about the project. … The Detroit Works Long Term Planning has different teams. There's the technical team, which are urban planners and architects. And then you have the [Mayor's Advisory] Task Force. Over it all, there is the Detroit Economic Growth Corp. … It's still so convoluted. … We don't get to talk to DEGC. We don't see them.

Another Process Leader was equally critical:

> As far as having a sustained dialogue with folks about their neighborhoods, I don't think that was done very well. … They largely failed to get the neighborhood voice by not having an organized conversation in a productive way. … There was no effort made in the planning process to ensure stakeholder buy-in. The attitude was "We're this big foundation, and we know what to do."

Accountability was further constrained because local organizations were dependent for their funding upon the philanthropies that financed Detroit Works. Leaders of a number of community organizations told us confidentially that they avoided criticizing DWP for this reason. Clement (2013, pp. 102–103) learned the same thing when he interviewed a board member of Community Development Advocates of Detroit (CDAD). The board member said, "CDAD, in no uncertain terms, was basically told … '[I]f you want money from those funders, stop complaining about DWP.'" Heil (2018, p. 1142) concurred, noting that Detroit's nonprofit community development corporations (CDCs) "are deeply beholden" to financial backers of the right-sizing coalition, thus limiting "the politics" of those CDCs. Similarly, in her study of DWP, Montgomery (2015, p. 546) reported that artists and cultural workers told her "they fear speaking out about the power of corporations and foundations in the city because they might not get the funds that they need to put food on the table and to run their projects." We have no evidence that the foundations that underwrote DWP directly pressured local nonprofits to toe the line. Potential power can be as effective as manifest power in manufacturing consent, however (Gaventa, 1980).

Community organizations were not the only institutions that felt that power. According to Thomson (2019, p. 564), some local foundations disagreed with DWP's priority of land use over "job training, health, education, and social service needs." "Yet even these foundations acknowledged that the people and money behind the plan made it a powerful force that caused them to consider adapting their programs to accommodate the new reality," Thomson wrote.

Consequences for public support and civic capacity

An essential preliminary to an initiative intended to transform an entire city is to establish mutual respect and trust between planners and public (Hajer, 2003, p. 184). For DWP, this step was crucial. After all, the project involved a new mayor who had moved into the city only recently, a suburban-based foundation headed by a relative newcomer to the area, and a group of consultants, many of whom had only the slimmest experience with daily life in Detroit. The region's history of race-based exploitation haunted the initiative from the outset. Bing's alarming rhetoric made matters worse. Detroiters' grudging acceptance of the undertaking, let alone their support, would be hard earned. Under such conditions, Sandercock (2003, p. 16) emphasized the importance of starting out by surfacing the "core stories" of a community and engaging in a "public telling of the story in a way that accepts its truth and acknowledges its power and pain." "To imagine the future differently, we need to start with history," she counseled.

The Detroit Works Project did not do that. Kwamena Mensah, a founding member of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network and a member of DWP's Mayoral Advisory Task Force, emphasized this point at a forum in February 2013, shortly after DWP's strategic plan, *Detroit Future City*, was released:

> The document [Detroit Future City] does not address or answer the question of who is to blame for the intentional deindustrialization of this city … . Detroit has a unique racial dynamic. This should be addressed and has not been addressed. … There must be an honest, in-depth analysis of the devastation that has occurred and is still occurring in this city. Who is this document directed toward? Who will benefit from the transformation of this city? (Mensah, 2013)

Providing space in which residents can share their stories and planners can acknowledge them is only a start, of course. Building trust takes time and effort. It requires repeated actions that demonstrate mutual respect (Ansell & Gash, 2007; C. W. Thomas, 1998). However benign its intentions, DWP did not accomplish this. It got off on the wrong foot, internal tensions delayed much-needed course corrections, and the resulting time crunch all but eliminated any opportunity to achieve much in the way of collaborative, equitable planning. As a result, and irrespective of the good intentions of its funders and implementers, many Detroiters felt offended by the project. To them, it was yet another instance of outsiders presuming to know what was best for their city, their neighborhoods, and them.

This sentiment was evident in nearly all of our interviews with community leaders. It was also conveyed vividly in 2014, not long after the release of DWP's strategic plan. At that time, The Greening of Detroit (TGD), a nonprofit organization that received substantial funding from the Kresge Foundation, had begun ramping up an ambitious tree-planting project throughout the city. To the surprise of non-Detroiters, which included most TGD volunteers, the project met resistance from many residents (Mock, 2019). Who wouldn't want free trees? As Carmichael

and McDonough (2018, 2019) discovered, the issue for many affected Detroit residents was not so much about the trees; it was that they felt they had not been consulted adequately. "Power dynamics" were "a key reason" behind the resistance, Carmichael and McDonough (2018, p. 221) concluded.

A Southwest Detroit resident made the point more plainly, contrasting her neighborhood with those of the mostly White suburbs: "I say you're doing this only because we're Black people. You would never go into Ferndale and do this. You would never go into … a Birmingham playground and just start digging and treating people like guinea pigs" (Associated Press, 2014). When Carmichael and McDonough (2018, p. 227) interviewed TGD staff and board members, they found that "very few" of them "noted how the current process … could *contribute* to resistance by continuing to exclude residents and their values from the decision-making process." Instead, staff and board members "primarily believed that residents required education about the general benefits of trees and the 'urban appropriate' species selected by the organization."

Getting back to the Detroit Works Project, we conclude that while a stated goal of the Project was to strengthen the civic capacity of residents and community organizations (*DFC*, p. 695), the testimony from the participants we interviewed, our observations of DWP events, and evidence from other studies and eyewitness reports (J. Akers, 2015; Clement, 2013; Howell, 2012, 2013; Montgomery, 2015; Yeoman, 2012) all indicate that the project left many Detroiters feeling disrespected and deeply wary of participating in future planning and implementation. That happened because of DWP's counterproductive civic engagement tactics, its lack of transparency and accountability, and its failure to produce a strategic plan that reflected the priorities and values of most Detroiters. We turn to that plan now.

Consequences for the strategic plan

It is beyond the scope of this study to delve into the intrinsic merits of rightsizing as a strategy for addressing the complex challenges of so-called shrinking cities. It is within its scope, however, to reach a tentative judgment as to whether the strategy articulated in *Detroit Future City* would have benefited materially had the project conducted a genuinely participatory planning process and had its report reflected faithfully the insights obtained from that process. There is, of course, no way of knowing definitively what any such counterfactual plan would have contained. Side evidence from public opinion surveys of Detroiters, from another planning process that overlapped temporally and substantively with Detroit Works, and from feedback that DWP participants and our informants provided all support the conclusion that it would have been quite different, however. We lay out our argument below. First, though, we offer a brief review of the strategic plan to make clear its origins and its deficiencies.

Detroit Future City

Detroit Future City's substantive recommendations derived directly from the rightsizing model that the Center for Community Progress and its precursor, the National Vacant Properties Campaign (NVPC) had been advancing for a number of years (R. A. Beauregard, 2013). They parallel closely those of a 2008 report produced by an advisory team that worked in Detroit under the auspices of the American Institute of Architects and that also followed the NVPC model (Mallach et al., 2008). *Detroit Future Ci*ty is organized into five "planning elements" plus a chapter on civic engagement. Its principal recommendations are as follows:

- Assemble and transform vacant land in ways that increase its value and productivity, promote sustainability, and improve public health.

- Align and re-size infrastructure and service delivery systems to promote efficiency and performance. Reductions in capacity in low-density areas and even decommissioning of systems in certain areas will reduce costs.

- Through zoning and planning, promote a range of residential densities, including Live+Make zones that permit a mix of uses.

- Capitalize upon Detroit's higher education and medical complexes and legacy industrial capacity and foster growth in the city's small but growing digital/creative cluster. Encourage minority-owned businesses and entrepreneurship.

- Develop effective transportation systems to connect workers to jobs, and consumers to businesses.

Some of *DFC*'s recommendations are uncontroversial. For example, economic development plans universally acknowledge the role that "meds and eds" can play (Adams, 2003); and as the only major metropolitan area in America still lacking regional rapid transit, Detroit obviously needs to upgrade its transportation systems. Detroiters would concur, too, that their city's abandoned land should be put to productive use. Indeed, beginning long before DWP appeared on the scene, they have been acting on their own to repurpose vacant lots into vegetable gardens, performance spaces, art installations, and gathering places, maintaining them with their own resources (Dewar & Linn, 2015; Kinder, 2016).

It is one thing to encourage selective re-use of abandoned property. It is quite another to propose, as *DFC* does, that vast sections of the city *occupied by more than 88,000 residents* be turned into meadows and retention ponds, along with decommissioning water systems, streets, and lighting and reducing or eliminating trash collection and bus routes within them.[5] *DFC* asserts that this transformation can occur "all without residential displacement" (p. 26). That claim is implausible on its face. What would happen to the 88,000-plus Detroiters, most of them impoverished, living in proposed open-space areas? *DFC* is vague on this crucial matter. True, residents would not be forced to leave. They would experience increasingly severe service cutbacks under the plan, however, and homeowners would almost certainly be unable to sell their homes to private buyers. Who would buy a house in a neighborhood slated for abandonment? The city would not buy them, either. As Bing stated repeatedly, invoking

eminent domain was out of the question. Leaving aside the considerable legal obstacles, the price tag would be prohibitive (Pitera, 2013; Reindl, 2013). Even if funds materialized somehow, critics question whether such an effort would be worth the financial cost, let alone the human disruption and hardship it would engender (Kirkpatrick, 2015, pp. 270–271; Schwarz, 2012).

DFC's proponents might counter that residents of hollowed-out neighborhoods would hardly be better off if the city continued to fight a losing battle to provide adequate services to Detroiters as currently configured. Perhaps so, but *DFC* provides not even a cursory analysis to show that the cost of reconstituting neighborhoods and infrastructure would yield a positive return, that this approach is superior to alternative uses of scarce resources, or that it is even feasible. Even at a far smaller scale, Youngstown, Ohio, tried and failed to move residents voluntarily from one neighborhood to another (Rhodes & Russo, 2013; Ryan & Gao, 2019). No other U.S. city has done appreciably better.

A misguided plan

The Detroit Works Project described itself as "an ambitious effort to re-imagine a better future for one of the world's most important and storied cities" (*DFC*, p. 5). As is typical of planners' strategies for shrinking cities, however, in *DFC* the focus is on property and only indirectly on the people who live on it (R. A. Beauregard, 2013, p. 240). None of the technical audits that formed the basis of the project studied the people of Detroit, their social and psychological attachments to their neighborhoods, or the hardships they would experience as a result of reducing services to those neighborhoods or even shuttering them entirely. *DFC* was driven entirely by a conception of land in terms of its market value and not at all in terms of the social, cultural, and historical ties that residents have to particular places.

Most Detroiters neither viewed their city through the project's frame of neoliberal austerity nor agreed with its conclusion that their city's top priority is to reconfigure land use. Instead, for years their concerns have been more prosaic: public safety, jobs, and schools—and reasonably so (Gerber et al., 2016; MacDonald, 2012). In various ways, residents who endured DWP's civic engagement exercises tried to explain this to the architects and officials. For example, only 12% of respondents in the clicker surveys agreed that Detroit should "disinvest in declining neighborhoods" (MCR, 2013, p. 49). Another caution flag was raised by the Lower Eastside Action Plan (LEAP), a neighborhood-based planning project the director of which interacted regularly with DWP. *DFC* envisions large swaths of the LEAP area as depopulated "Innovation Productive" or "Innovation Ecological" zones. Yet when LEAP surveyed some 3,000 residents of the area in 2010–2011 and asked them if they would consider moving elsewhere in the city, a majority of them (54%) said they would not (Lower Eastside Action Plan [LEAP], 2012).

Had DWP consultants listened carefully to Detroiters and responded accordingly, they would have crafted a quite different plan. That plan would have offered an achievable strategy to address the human consequences—as well as the physical and fiscal ones—of the corporate, political, and social forces that drove Detroit's decline and continue to stymie its recovery. Altering the city's physical layout is not Detroit's most important priority. Addressing poverty is:

chronic, racialized, concentrated poverty and its consequences. Allan Mallach, who was a consultant to DWP, acknowledged as much in 2018 in his book about Detroit and other distressed cities. "The crisis of sustained multigenerational poverty is at the heart of the growing polarization of these cities between rich and poor, and between white and black," he wrote. "It is the poor or near-poor who are stuck in the poverty trap, are not benefiting from their cities' revival, and need the most help breaking out of the trap" (Mallach, 2018, p. 233).

DFC's chapter on economic growth begins—accurately, in our view—with the statement that "Detroit is not too big; its economy is too small." Neither that chapter nor subsequent ones offer much in the way of practical proposals to address the needs of jobless Detroiters, however. No one presumes it is simple to open up opportunities for all Detroiters to live peaceful, productive lives, whether through jobs, self-employment, or cooperative ventures, such as those that have been created in Cleveland to address that city's declining population and entrenched poverty (Alperowitz & Dubb, 2015; Imbroscio, 2013; Sharkey, 2013, Ch. 7). Doing so is a top priority for Detroit and its people, nonetheless. Equally important is repairing the city's public school system rather than undermining it, as current policy has been doing (Binelli, 2017; Pedroni, 2011; Wright et al., 2020). Even if one preferred to focus on land use, a more apt set of recommendations, ones that reflected Detroiters' creative use of vacant land, would have included community land trusts or other models based on the concept of the commons (Lawson & Miller, 2013), as contrasted with the market-oriented paradigm of *Detroit Future City* (Hackworth, 2014).

Detroit urgently needs a comprehensive strategy for grappling with the causes and consequences of decades of abandonment. Some parts of *DFC* may inform it. On the whole, however, its vision of a future city is, in the words of Peter Eisinger (2015, p. 109), "a chimera, unrelated to the magnitude of the city's fiscal prospects, the employment and housing needs of its poverty population, or the enormity of the long-term costs of transformation."

An unjust plan

Hollander and Németh (2011, p. 356) argued that ensuring procedural justice is crucial in planning for shrinking cities, because many residents of such cities may be "happy for any crumbs city leaders or outside experts might bring to a desperate community." With that in mind, they recommended that such projects undertake a bottom-up planning process that "enables citizens to recognize and challenge power imbalances and structures of domination" (pp. 359–360). The Detroit Works Project failed to do that. A procedurally unjust process yielded a substantively unjust plan. *Detroit Future City* elides basic questions of justice that are embedded in the strategies it proposes. At its core, it is a blueprint for targeting the city's most vulnerable residents, many of whom have endured hardships for decades, for even more service reductions, displacement, and abandonment, while directing investment, improvements, and opportunities toward better-off neighborhoods and residents.

DFC proposes that in neighborhoods earmarked for "gradual depopulation" (p. 553), "core services" should be provided "to the remaining residents in these areas" only for "up to

10 years" (p. 400). What would happen once time had expired is left unspecified. *DFC* alludes to the possibility of a "house swap" program to "ease the burden" for families that opt to relocate (pp. 27, 629). No elaboration of this idea is contained in the voluminous report, however—in contrast to the many pages devoted to detailing fine points of the retention ponds and meadows that would replace the neighborhoods in which those families had lived. As for *DFC*'s environmentally friendly proposals, although they are appealing in some respects, they raise significant social and environmental justice concerns (Akers et al., 2020). The Sierra Club judged "the operating procedures of the DWP to be lacking genuine community direction and protections" and concluded that *DFC* "fundamentally contradicts the principles of environmental justice" (Sierra Club, 2013). Detroit activists voiced the same concerns that S. Campbell (1996, 2013, p. 84) raised: "*What* is to be sustained, and for *whom*?"

In addition to their failure on ethical grounds, unjust strategies are vulnerable in purely practical terms: at a minimum they provoke disdain and noncooperation, but opposition may also take the form of open resistance. In Detroit, a broad array of grassroots organizations opposed the Detroit Works Project's process and the *Detroit Future City* plan (Montgomery, 2015; Newman & Safransky, 2014). On March 21, 2011, members of Detroiters for Dignity and Democracy (2011) were ejected when they attempted to present a letter at a meeting of the Funders Network, which was being held in Detroit. Their letter read in part, "The Detroit Works process, conceived, championed and largely funded by foundations, has been the most divisive planning process in more than four decades. It has created an atmosphere of hostility and anger … . It has substituted managed public relations and empty engagement exercises for authentic citizen participation."

Conclusion

The Detroit Works Project fell short in terms of the integrity of its process and the aptness and equity of its recommendations. Looking back over the seven years since the issuance of its final report, its impact has been minimal (Thomson, 2019, p. 564). Some of the project's shortcomings may be attributable to idiosyncratic factors, such as Mayor Bing's political inexperience or compromises that planning consultants made in the face of time and budget constraints. Other factors were more fundamental and have broader implications. We summarize them here.

First, as state and federal revenue transfers to U.S. cities have declined, local units of government have relied increasingly upon private-public partnerships to finance and staff activities that were formerly governmental responsibilities, including city planning—what J. Bockmeyer (2014, p. 43) called "governance without government." This is particularly likely to be the case for distressed cities (Rhodes & Russo, 2013; Thomson, 2019). Such partnerships can be beneficial, but they inevitably complicate public transparency and accountability—again, particularly in the case of distressed cities and their vulnerable residents. As Miraftab (2004, p. 92) cautioned:

The possibility of a [public-private] partnership benefiting a community's poor depends on … whether the power imbalances amongst participants can be dealt with to secure equitable, horizontal power relations. … [I]t is important to realize who is participating on whose terrain and in whose process. … Philanthropy from the private sector or government benevolence is not a reliable foundation for a partnership.

Compromised transparency and accountability in turn can jeopardize the public legitimacy and support that is crucial to strategic planning to transform an entire city. It would be prudent, therefore, to take special care in such initiatives to ensure that appropriate mechanisms are established to promote transparency and accountability. The relatively enduring successes of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, in Roxbury, Massachusetts (Loh & Shear, 2015; Medoff & Sklar, 1994), and (perhaps to a lesser degree) of the Sandtown-Winchester Neighborhood Transformation Initiative, in Baltimore, Maryland (Rosenblatt & DeLuca, 2017), suggest that collaborative urban strategic planning and implementation initiatives involving philanthropies, government, and local stakeholders are feasible, provided that deeply-rooted, politically sophisticated community organizations are equal partners throughout the process and that they insist upon its transparency, responsiveness, and accountability.

In the case of Detroit Works, there was no comparable community-based partner, and available evidence indicates that a planning process financed and directed by the city government probably would not have been an improvement over the foundation-led one. The implication, then, is not that formal mechanisms of transparency and accountability ensure that local planning and governance transpire with integrity and responsiveness. The implication is that such mechanisms enhance its possibility, but only if residents and other stakeholders are able to make effective use of them. In this regard, we are reminded of Sirianni's (2007, p. 386) conclusion, based on his study of Seattle's neighborhood planning process: "Participatory planning offers no substitute for democratic politics, but rather depends on citizens electing effective city council coalitions as well as supportive mayors."

Second, despite its champions' claims to the contrary, the Detroit Works Project unfolded within a predetermined, institutionally supported paradigm: rightsizing. The idea that a city can become smaller yet provide a better quality of life for its residents is undeniably true. A number of prosperous, livable cities in the U.S. and globally have populations that are substantially smaller than they once had (Hartt, 2019), and as Logan and Molotch (1987) pointed out more than 30 years ago, many fiscally and (comparatively) environmentally sustainable cities have successfully resisted a growth-at-any-cost ideology. The challenge is in applying this idea to distressed cities struggling within a U.S. political environment that has left them largely to fend for themselves (Davidson & Ward, 2018; Peck, 2012). Although a few such cities have made notable progress in reinvigorating themselves—Pittsburgh is perhaps the most prominent, if not entirely unproblematic, one (Teaford, 2015)—none has done it by rightsizing (Gratz, 2010; Hackworth, 2015, 2016; Hartt, 2019; Piiparinen, 2017; Rhodes & Russo, 2013, pp. 320–323; Ryan & Gao, 2019). Moreover, within the current U.S. political context, rightsizing entails a high risk of more deeply entrenching structural inequities rather than mitigating them (Cooper-McCann, 2016).

Why then have rightsizing plans, if not rightsizing successes, proliferated? We propose that, as with most political questions, the answer revolves around interests and power. As legacy cities grapple with a self-reinforcing cycle of declining public services, increasing abandonment, and chronic fiscal distress, a loose alliance of consultants and organizations purports, for a price, to provide a solution: rightsizing and its accompanying program of large-scale demolition (J. Akers, 2015; Akers et al., 2020; Mallach, 2010, 2012; Rosenman & Walker, 2016); and at least some private foundations, enamored of the superficially sound logic of rightsizing, are willing to underwrite the costs of planning it.

Perhaps the most significant power behind rightsizing, however, is not that which is controlled by particular actors, whether they be sponsors, public officials, consultants, civic leaders, or even residents and other stakeholders. Instead, it was, and still is, the power of an ideology of neoliberal austerity that has pervaded thinking and action on urban policy. From the outset, public officials, financial patrons, planners, and even many community leaders involved in the Detroit Works Project operated within an ideological milieu that delimited what was presumed to be desirable, acceptable, or even thinkable—a milieu that privileges market-based solutions to problems that were created in no small part by the operation of markets themselves (Hackworth, 2007; Peck, 2012; Peck & Whiteside, 2016).

Third, the Detroit Works Project was yet another instance of planning that began with an assurance that public involvement would play a central role in it—and then failed to fulfill that promise. The primary functions of the project's elaborate civic engagement element were symbolic and hortatory: to provide the appearance of public involvement and to persuade participants of both the appropriateness and urgency of rightsizing. In Detroit, as in other cities, foundations hired professionals to conduct civic engagement that served largely to reinforce the dominant discourse and insulate it from critical examination (Levine, 2017; Walker et al., 2015). The resulting plan did not reflect the priorities, insights, or needs of most Detroiters. As a consequence, it failed to generate the public support that a transformative strategic framework would need in order to have a realistic chance of succeeding. Moreover, rather than building their capacity and willingness to implement the plan, the experience left many Detroiters with an even deeper sense of cynicism.

If funders, planners, and officials sincerely desire to engage the public, they must accept that public involvement should be more than a mechanism for providing input, let alone for manufacturing support. If for no other reason than to avoid misguided, impractical planning that lacks essential support from the people who must live with its results, public participation in the crafting and implementation of planning for shrinking cities must be authentic and efficacious. In the words of Cornwall and Gaventa (2000), participation should engage citizens as "makers and shapers" of plans and not merely as "users and choosers." Particularly with respect to planning in shrinking cities, ethical and practical considerations oblige leaders to foster good-faith dialogue with residents of the least advantaged neighborhoods to determine what can be done to improve the quality of their lives. That did not happen in Detroit.

As we reflected on what we had learned from our study of the Detroit Works Project, we were reminded of Bent Flyvbjerg's (1998) pioneering work on urban planning, politics, and policy, *Rationality and Power*. In it, Flyvbjerg described in meticulous detail an ambitious planning project that took place in Aalborg, Denmark in the late 1970s. The project aimed to address a growing volume of automotive traffic that threatened to obliterate what remained of the historic town center's charm and integrity. Unfortunately, after more than a decade had passed, most of the award-winning plan remained dormant, and the parts that had been implemented, piecemeal, had created a mess (Flyvbjerg, 1998, pp. 219–221). Flyvbjerg sought to understand how and why the Aalborg Project failed. He concluded that instead of manifesting the power of rational planning, the project reflected the planning rationality of power: it was an exercise in rationalization to advance the sometimes aligned, sometimes contending preferences of powerful local elites. Flyvbjerg accepted that the planners may have genuinely believed that their efforts were "neutral and thorough" (pp. 26–27). Regardless, the undemocratic exercise of power structured the "physical, economic, ecological, and social reality" in which the Aalborg Project was based (p. 36): "Power determines what counts as knowledge [and] what kind of interpretation attains authority … . Power procures the knowledge which supports its purposes and ignores or suppresses that knowledge which does not serve it" (p. 226).

Flyvbjerg offered his study as a reference point against which rationality, power, and democracy elsewhere may be compared (p. 5). He hoped that scholars, public officials, and citizens would be able to ask, "Do we have an instance of Aalborg here?" Based upon our study of the Detroit Works Project, we conclude that in many respects we had an instance of Aalborg there. In Detroit, as in Aalborg, power created its own rationality. It pervaded the public engagement process and the plan, to the detriment of both. The plan reflected not residents' priorities but instead those of its chief sponsor and the hired "consultocracy" (McCann, 2001). Justice was subordinated to the perceived imperative of the market. Transparency and accountability, essential principles of democratic governance, were compromised as a result of the privatization of public responsibilities.

Our reflection does not end there, however. In Aalborg, citizens and officials decided in the early 1990s to plan afresh, this time in a way that in Flyvbjerg's words was "an antithesis to the Aalborg Project" (p. 237). The new plan helped to transform their city into one in which residents today enjoy a quality of life that is literally second to none (Węziak-Białowolska, 2016). Aalborg did not accomplish that feat on its own, to be sure. The political environment of Denmark is far more hospitable than that of the U.S. in providing essential support and investment to urban centers. That said, a genuinely participative, respectful, and just planning process was an essential part of Aalborg's transformation. So, too, can it be an essential part of the revitalization of Detroit and other distressed U.S. cities, even if it is not by itself sufficient.

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Notes

1. The literature on policymaking processes, even at the local level, is massive. Space prevents us from venturing into it here. Our research project is informed most directly by Baumgartner and Jones (1993), Kingdon (1995), and Schattschneider (1960).

2. We reference the second edition of *Detroit Future City*. The first edition was produced in coffee-table book format that is difficult to read in electronic form, which is how most people would access it. The producers of *Detroit Future City* insist it is not a plan but is instead a strategic framework (Guyette, 2013). We acknowledge that it is not an official master plan. Its subtitle, however, is *2012 Detroit Strategic Framework Plan*, and it refers to itself dozens of times as a plan produced by a planning team that engaged in a planning process. *Detroit Future City* is a plan in the common sense of the word.

3. The Kresge and Kellogg Foundations funded the technical team. The Ford Foundation funded the civic engagement work. The Knight Foundation financed Detroit 24/7 (Pitera, 2012).

4. Dan Pitera graciously provided us with an electronic copy of the *Civic Engagement Appendix*.

5. *DFC* indicates that 88,255 people live in high vacancy areas (p. 239). That is a conservative estimate of how many Detroiters would be directly impacted by transforming neighborhoods into Innovation-Ecological or Innovation-Productive zones. According to Clement and Kanai (2015, p. 379), the U.S. Census estimated that 142,014 people lived in those neighborhoods.

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