Spring 4-29-2015

Negotiating the Neighborhood: The Role of Neighborhood Associations in Urban Planning Processes

Lane K. Holden

lholden1@macalester.edu

Negotiating the Neighborhood:
The Role of Neighborhood Associations in Urban Planning Processes

by
Lane Holden

Honors Thesis
Department of Sociology
Macalester College

Spring 2015

Abstract

To promote collaborative urban planning, the United States Federal Government requires that city and regional governments consult communities affected by planning processes. Neighborhood associations were originally created to engage community members in local social justice issues in order to meet this mandate. Relying on these organizations raises questions about whether they fulfill their potential: what role do community members play in urban planning? Do neighborhood associations feel like they participate effectively in the urban planning process? How do these associations perceive the extent to which the government uses their input? To address these questions, this study examines perceptions of urban planning as held by residents of North Minneapolis. In-depth interviews with residents involved with neighborhood associations reveal that associations face three main difficulties in urban planning processes: neighborhood associations are unable to completely represent their communities, residents involved with associations mistrust government entities, and government entities are disengaged from community needs. These findings demonstrate that neighborhood associations encounter barriers that quiet their collective voice when communicating with urban planners about the wants and needs of their community.

In the 1960s, civic participation in the United States underwent significant changes. Civic participation transitioned from voluntary, membership-based associations to professionally run organizations, resulting in a seemingly diminished grassroots universe (Skocpol 2003). Simultaneously, the federal government under President Lyndon Johnson devised a mandate that would require government entities to engage with community members during urban planning processes. This undertaking aimed to increase citizen participation in local politics in low-income communities as an attempt to fight the War on Poverty. As a result, the number of community organizations, formally called Community Action Programs, increased in cities throughout the United States. This mandate helped legitimize community organizations and increased the number of experienced community organizers around the country (Cazenave 2007). Although the success of these organizations in fighting the War on Poverty is debated, this shift in social reform led to the growth of neighborhood associations during a time of decreasing grassroots presence.

Urban planning and development is necessary to adjust to changing economic and urban trends in cities, as well as to attract capital to certain regions. Over time, urban planning policy has expanded to include city modifications beyond technical aspects like roads and public services. Presently, urban planning also aims to address the social welfare of city dwellers. The growing complexities and interconnectedness of metropolitan areas calls for comprehensive urban planning, involving government entities, businesses, and neighborhood associations (Levy 2006). Existing research on this subject yields three primary possibilities for the function of neighborhood associations in urban planning processes today. The widespread authority the government holds may force neighborhood associations to take a back seat to their decisions. Moreover, the professionalization of civic participation may further inhibit community

involvement. In contrast, if the city government is required to engage with neighborhood associations (and subsequently funds them), we might anticipate a stronger potential for their participation in urban planning. Alternatively, neighborhood associations may be a means of appeasement to the government's community engagement mandate during urban planning processes.

Can community voice exist in this urban planning environment? This study utilizes in-depth interviews with residents involved in neighborhood associations to understand how these associations perceive their role in the larger urban planning process. I aimed to answer the following research questions: Do neighborhood associations feel like they participate effectively in the urban planning process? Do neighborhood associations reach their full potential? How do neighborhood associations perceive the extent to which the city government uses their input in processes of urban planning? These questions address the larger debate surrounding the role of community voice in urban planning by exploring the experiences of community members involved in these processes.

North Minneapolis, Minnesota is central to this study because the area is currently experiencing urban changes. North Minneapolis was created as an area of concentrated poverty through the development of a public housing project in the 1930s (Goetz 2002). Following this development, city officials continued to place low-income housing in the area, perpetuating the state of concentrated poverty. Due to the area's proximity to downtown Minneapolis, the mayor's current campaign to increase the city's population, and amount of space urban planners see as viable for "improving", North Minneapolis has been targeted with possibilities for urban planning.

I will begin this project with introducing existing research on urban planning and civic participation in the United States. I will then describe the methods I employed to complete this study. To conclude, I will discuss the outcomes and significance of my research.

Literature Review

The growing complexity and interconnectedness of cities places an increasing importance on urban planning. As cities began to witness a growth in development, the breadth of urban planning in the United States expanded to address a wider range of city-wide issues beyond traditional physical matters (Bracken 1981). Now placing more focus on the social welfare of cities, urban planning's growing significance in the modern city is evident. Urban planning, however, cannot exist without authorization from the city government. These government entities are required by law to engage and collaborate with communities throughout urban planning processes in order to involve residents in neighborhood wide decision-making. Neighborhood associations emerged to help the government meet these federally mandated initiatives. Are there tensions between involving and not involving neighborhood associations in city-wide decisions? If neighborhood associations are included in these processes, does this change the timeline and potential for adaptation to plans? If they are not involved, however, plans might not meet community needs. The subsequent literature review describes these formalities and poses the question: what role does citizen voice play in these systems of planning?

The Growing Significance of Urban Planning

The extent of urban planning has evolved throughout history. Changing economic and urban trends in a region influence planning policies. By the 1980s, urban planning policies were

growing in complexity. Sociology research identified that over-concern with a city's physical environment and strict goals for efficiency led to neglect of the well-being of large sectors of society. Policies began to widen in scope, addressing further citywide issues. Rather than merely focusing on physical and technical matters–such as roads, public services, and housing quality–spatial growth and urban decay became concerns of urban planning policy. Recently, planning efforts have attempted to address urban unemployment, social justice issues, and environmental affairs (Levy 2006). Additionally, attracting people and capital to cities has become of increasing concern to developers. This objective, however, does not come without stipulations. Cities have been changing in ways that draws in a younger, educated, white cohort of individuals (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2009).

Planning new districts began to require series of small operations spread out over time as opposed to single large operations. Urban policy also began to recognize that planning changes in an existing urban area is less a problem of construction and more a problem of creating community identity and spirit in the midst of economic and social problems (OECD 1983).

As cities began to witness more development, discourse surrounding urban planning also shifted. Urban planning had been seen as a process of professional activity promoting aesthetically pleasing new developments for much of its early existence. Slowly, however, city planning developed a more general concern for serving public interest. As a result, groups and sectors pursuing changes became increasingly concerned with possible outcomes that may affect the interests of others (Bracken 1981).

Today, the need for urban planning is most evident through the increasing interconnectedness and complexity of cities. Each urban development project carries the potential to affect multiple areas of a region: "Decisions about the residential uses of land will

affect housing prices, rents, and vacancies–in short, who can live in the community. Those decisions, in turn, will have effects on the economy of the community and the demands that are placed on the community for educational, social, and other services." (Levy 2006) The complexity of relationships within a city warrants urban planning to be a separate profession and government occupation. If a community were small, it is possible that informal negotiations would be sufficient. Modern cities do not fit this description, however, necessitating an independent sector of urban planning to address city developments. This analysis calls into question the effects of increased complexity in terms of potential for democracy. With cities' growing complexity, the specialization of urban planning increases as well, causing more expert knowledge to become available. This growth may, in turn, contribute to insulation from democracy (Levy 2006).

Political Urban Planning

Urban planners are not capable of enacting change alone. Planners can gain legal power, however, when it is granted by legislative action. Thus, urban planning relies on developing consensus among those in power. City officials have control over affecting change within communities through committing public funds, enacting laws, entering into contracts, and the like.

There are a variety of urban planning approaches that planners use in their professional roles to work successfully in environments experiencing changes. These approaches range from acting as builders of community consensus to entrepreneurs and advocates of the area. Regardless of the approach, all types of urban plans require political action for implementation. Be it providing brokerage between divergent views or advice on successful routes to enact

neighborhood changes, urban planners are in constant conversation with those holding legislative power at the city-level (Levy 2006).

Popular among urban sociologists is the sociospatial perspective on urban development. This approach regards government intervention and interests of politicians as principal features in urban change. The sociospatial perspective views state officials as having personal agendas, causing them to be rather autonomous (Gottdiener and Hutchison 2011). This perspective contributes to the supposition that government entities do not rely on neighborhood associations for input and that these associations are satisfying a government need.

This brings into question what space is available for citizens to participate in urban planning and how they can influence agenda-setting decisions. The subsequent research outlines the positions community organizations have occupied over the previous half-century to give context to how neighborhood associations have come to exist as they do today.

Civic Life and Citizen Voice

Civic life and participation in the United States is not the same today as it once was. During the late-twentieth century, civic participation witnessed a fundamental reorganization; as voluntary membership federations–or associations–experienced a decline, professionally run city and community organizations increased by huge margins, redefining the objectives of civic participation.

Historically, civil society in the United States was comprised of nationally and locally active voluntary membership federations. Individuals with like-minded values created these federations to work collectively toward shared goals; male-led fraternal and veterans' groups and female-led religious and civic associations were two of the most common types of these associations in the 1950s (Skocpol 2003).

Whereas reform once took shape through forces outside of institutions that needed change, attempts to refine social conditions began to emerge from the professional sector by those whose job it was to undertake these efforts. In the 1960s, racial ideals and gender relationships began to transform in the United States. These changes, in turn, delegitimized previously existing groups that functioned in racially and gender segregated manners. As the college-educated population in the United States began to grow, groups that were once formed around common identities lost popularity as individuals began to form political activism groups that were more centrally managed. The increase in technology and available sources of financial support also influenced this transformation from previously existing membership federations to newer, professionally managed organizations. These shifts resulted in moving civic action away from more voluntary and participatory associations that had served as important pipelines between the federal government and citizens.

As membership federations subsided and civic live began to formalize, another style of social reform emerged. The government began to rely on these professionalized organizations to gain input from community members, rather than hearing from voluntary, membership organizations.

In fact, government policies mandated that government entities engage with community members during the process of bringing any changes to a neighborhood. These mandates aimed to counter the loss of grassroots organizations in the civic sphere. President Lyndon B. Johnson created Community Action Programs in 1964 to fight the War on Poverty. The objective of these programs was to get community members involved in local social justice issues and give citizens more agency in organizing social change efforts in their neighborhoods (Cazenave 2007). These changes in social reform led to the creation and maintenance of neighborhood associations: a

place where residents dedicated to working toward social justice in their communities could organize.

Existing research brings forth three potential hypotheses regarding the role neighborhood associations play in urban planning processes today. The government relies on neighborhood associations to fulfill their public engagement requirements during urban planning processes. Therefore, these neighborhood associations bridge the gap between the government and residents by providing information and engagement opportunities (Stovel and Shaw 2012). In this way, it may be anticipated that neighborhood associations are effective in voicing their needs in urban planning processes.

Conversely, the extensive power of the city government is evident in their authority to permit the implementation of certain plans. Additionally, the professionalization of civic life may diminish the possibilities for community involvement. Thus, it is possible that neighborhood associations fall short of successful participation in urban planning.

Furthermore, due to the conditions under which neighborhood associations were created, it is possible that government entities use these associations solely to satisfy their community engagement requirements, not for genuine input. This may serve as a structural barrier—an issue inherent to the urban planning process itself—that isolates community members from participating in city-wide decision making. Such an argument draws from the idea that power may not only limit agenda setting but also set the terms of a city-wide discussion (Lukes 2005).

In an ideal situation, neighborhood associations would interact with the majority of their neighborhood, with a constant flow of residents contributing to the decisions of these organizations. In addition, their influence would be visible, making neighborhood associations an influential presence in their communities. In a model scenario, government entities would begin

engaging with neighborhood associations during the first phase of urban planning processes, in order to gain maximum community input. These government entities would also incorporate residents' sentiments into urban plans to the greatest extent possible.

Substantial research explains the importance of urban planning and shifts in civic participation, but it pays little attention to how neighborhood associations navigate either of these processes. How do neighborhood associations view their participation in the larger system of urban planning?

Research Design

To investigate these hypotheses and answer my research questions, this study inquires into neighborhood associations' involvement in urban planning. Approaching this research, I knew the most compelling community to study would be one that has experience with urban planning processes and, ideally, is currently involved with plans for city-wide changes. Furthermore, for this study to be most successful, the community must have an operating neighborhood association in which the members are knowledgeable of their community (its history, residents, etc.).

North Minneapolis fits these criteria as an ideal place to examine because the area is currently experiencing processes of urban renewal. Moreover, there are multiple neighborhood associations that are dedicated to the well-being of their communities. The intersection of these factors proved to be a compelling empirical case; the changes that North Minneapolis is experiencing currently are relatively new to the area. North Minneapolis was created as an area of concentrated poverty through government construction of low-income housing developments in the 1930s, and the area has experienced further commercial disinvestment over the past few decades (Goetz 2002). Urban planners have recently targeted North Minneapolis for urban

development and renewal. The unique history makes residents involved in neighborhood associations committed to preserving their neighborhood that has, for so long, been ignored by government entities.

North Minneapolis is located to the west of the Mississippi River, northwest of the central business district, and east of Theodore Wirth Park. This area has maintained a low-income status since government housing developments concentrated poverty in the area. Starting in the early 1990s, North Minneapolis began to experience change when the existing housing developments were demolished to build mixed-income housing facilities.

In 1994, residents of North Minneapolis sued the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for racial segregation and concentration of poverty. At the time, the area's population was largely people of color–primarily Hmong, Lao, and African American people– and the rate of poverty was nearly 100%. As a result of the lawsuit, the federal government gave the area $117 million for future development projects. Today, the area remains between 80% and 85% poverty stricken and nearly 80% of the residents are of color (Metropolitan Council 2014).

This study focuses on two neighborhood associations in North Minneapolis. Glendale Neighborhood Association (GNA) and Sheffield Neighborhood Association (SNA) (association names are pseudonyms) are located within less than one mile of each other, but are working with separate neighborhood populations. This geographic proximity was ideal for my research, not only because these neighborhoods are likely to be affected by the same city changes, but also because these associations are located within populations of similar socioeconomic statuses.

GNA is dedicated to creating a community that is equitable and beneficial to the neighborhood's diverse groups of varying economic, racial, and cultural backgrounds. GNA has five operating departments, each focusing on a different area of concern: housing, economic

development, transit development, addressing and undoing racism, and safety issues. GNA has a small number of hired directors and relies heavily on resident volunteers. Similarly, SNA strives to educate and empower its residents by building a self-sustaining and cohesive community that welcomes and values diversity. In contrast to GNA, however, SNA is concerned mainly with the housing redevelopment of the neighborhood. This housing development in North Minneapolis has replaced a previously existing public housing development and now consists of rental, single-family homes, and senior services.

My findings are informed by six in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Five of these interviews were with residents of North Minneapolis who are highly involved in neighborhood associations, while one interview was with an administrator of a public board who specializes in community engagement in the larger Metropolitan area.

I selected interviews as the primary mode of research in order to access personal narratives behind official accounts of urban planning. Recorded information of urban planning tends to focus on formal aspects of cities–changes in civic life, planning policy, and government objectives–leaving the informal aspects, such as opinions of those involved in and affected by urban planning, largely untold. Additionally, interviews, unlike surveys, allowed me to ask follow-up questions to acquire as much information as possible. My primary goal for these interviews was to examine community involvement in urban planning, as perceived by those involved in neighborhood associations in order to situate the current state of neighborhood associations against an ideal scenario of community engagement. To select participants for this research, I contacted Glendale and Sheffield neighborhood associations. Through these associations, I was able to speak with multiple individuals who are involved in the associations and well informed about government policy and urban planning in the area. The unit of analysis

of this study, therefore, is neighborhood associations involved in urban planning Interviews aimed to find similarities between GNA and SNA in order to gauge the general role of neighborhood associations throughout these processes.

The demographics of the residents I interviewed are critical to acknowledge because it is probable that these characteristics influence how they interact with urban development processes. The low-income status of the neighborhood, as well as the minority racial makeup of the region, likely influence the entitlement (or lack thereof) residents feel they have over the trajectory of their neighborhoods. The majority of those involved in Glendale and Sheffield neighborhood associations are women. In both GNA and SNA, the majority of residents are people of color, and almost all residents, regardless of race, are of low socioeconomic status. Of the five community members, three are Black residents and two are white. Three of the five residents are women. Two residents are young adults while three residents are middle-aged or older. The government administrator was a white, middle-aged woman.

I developed a list of questions that I believed would lead me to better understand the function of each neighborhood association. Transcribing these interviews enabled me to uncover similarities and common themes among responses. I asked members of GNA and SNA questions about residents' relationships with their neighborhood association, the relationship their neighborhood association maintains with the government and urban planners, work that residents have done with the association, and opinions about the resulting outcomes of urban planning.

These questions yielded a collection of themes that contribute to the current scholarly discussion of urban planning: challenges of engaging entire communities in public engagement, the variety of players in urban planning, the role community organizations play in the process of this planning, and residents' relationship with the government.

Findings

To examine whether my three hypotheses could account for the gap between the promise and the reality of neighborhood associations, I conducted interviews with residents involved in neighborhood associations to understand their perspective on their role in the larger urban development process. My hypotheses proposed three potential positions in which neighborhood associations may find themselves within urban development processes: First, neighborhood associations may be effective in voicing their needs in urban planning processes due to their position as brokers between communities and the government; second, neighborhood associations may fall short of successful participation due to the extensive power of the city government; third, perhaps neighborhood associations are only used to satisfy government mandates for community engagement, isolating residents from participating in urban planning.

The interviews with residents involved with two neighborhood associations in North Minneapolis, Glendale Neighborhood Association and Sheffield Neighborhood Association, uncovered how these associations traverse urban planning and civic participation. This section will begin with describing the function of neighborhood associations within their communities and how they are not reaching their full potential. I will then outline the players involved in urban planning processes and the miscommunications that occur between those in planning positions and the communities they are working in. I will conclude this section with the ways in which residents involved in neighborhood associations are wary of their relationship with the government, inhibiting successful communication.

The Role of Neighborhood Associations

The two neighborhood associations included in this study provide residents with information about their communities and ways in which to be involved in local politics. In this

way, these associations serve the purpose they were created to fill—to engage residents in city-wide social justice issues. However, full participation from community members is not reached. Although neighborhood associations are partially realizing their intentions, they are also faced with insufficient participation from those living in the community.

Information Hubs. Glendale Neighborhood Association (GNA) and Sheffield Neighborhood Association (SNA) are acknowledged for their commitment to their communities. Nearly all of the residents I interviewed commended GNA for providing community members with information and opportunities for involvement in neighborhood-wide issues. Beyond the functional purpose of the neighborhood association, interviews revealed that GNA fosters a welcoming environment for those involved, both through building relationships in their office and sponsoring community activities.

One of the residents I interviewed reflected on the benefits GNA has on her neighborhood: "Glendale is trying to help the community get from reacting [to an issue] to acting before it happens: intervention." Another resident revealed the ways in which his involvement with GNA has shaped his understanding of decision-making processes and the powerful potential they have:

"With my perspective as a resident—coming in with no real understanding of who all of these players are in my community, making decisions for what's going to happen here—it's been an eye-opening experience. A little shocking, but I have seen that when I've gotten engaged with my neighbors and GNA—you start getting that all together, and then suddenly we get wins."

Residents explained they experienced a lack of both information and connection to local politics, but that they gained this knowledge in participating with neighborhood associations, suggesting that these organizations' accounts have merit. These interviews revealed that GNA is not only committed to inserting itself in the urban planning process, but also that residents

involved with GNA recognize the potential that their neighborhood association has to enact change. Altogether, residents expressed gratitude for their involvement with GNA.

Moreover, GNA focuses on holding urban planners and government entities accountable for their community engagement requirements. One resident explained that during the planning phase, government entities are required to spend a portion of their time on community engagement:

"We really hold them to that and make sure they're engaging the community and having different workshops…we're partnering with them to make sure folks are getting to those meetings and actually giving the input directly to them. And then we make sure that the community is involved in community benefits agreements that we draw up. Those are legal documents saying this is how the community is going to benefit from the project once it's built or once it comes in."

It becomes evident that neighborhood associations serve as a link between residents and government entities during urban planning processes. GNA aims to hold urban planners accountable for communicating with those living in the area. GNA realizes that it is through this communication that their community has an increased chance of having their voice heard in the planning process. Thus, Glendale Neighborhood Association is thought of as a "key information distribution node." It is through GNA that residents can come together, gain awareness of potential changes in the area, and realize their relationship with the key players in these changes.

Sheffield Neighborhood Association is also dedicated to providing services to its residents, although manifested differently than its neighboring association. A resident working for SNA described the neighborhood association's efforts to maintain a sense of community and to give residents the support they need. In reference to a housing development in the neighborhood, this resident stated:

"Two hundred of these apartment units are public housing units and there's a right of return space there. For those that were displaced and wanted to come back to the community, they

could. Another 140 or so units are tax credit—section 42, which is income based… The rest are market rate—with some sections of that being allowed for section 8."

SNA has taken initiative to maintain these 200 apartment units for its residents, securing consistent housing for long-time residents with low incomes. This provides individuals with stability as their neighborhood is in flux from city changes. In this way, SNA advocates on behalf of its residents and communicates these needs to government entities.

Residents involved with Glendale and Sheffield neighborhood associations perceive these associations to be information nodes between local action and the government. These neighborhood associations provide residents with a space to convene and work with shared ambitions for the welfare of their community. Simultaneously, these associations are viewed as establishments that contain the potential to make living conditions better for residents. These associations serve as a location for communication—in both directions—between residents of a community and the government.

Insufficient Participation. The residents I interviewed expressed that they were aware of neighborhood changes due to their involvement with their neighborhood association. In other words, members of neighborhood associations have access to information that is not available to the general public. As a board member of one association explained: "[Knowledge of neighborhood affairs] is not accessible to the general public I don't think; I don't see how it can be. So much of it is so technical." This resident continued, "[the] problem is, if you're not engaged with [the neighborhood association], if you're just living in the neighborhood, there's no real communication pipeline for any of this." This interview portrays not only the details available to neighborhood association participants, but also the informational divide between

these participants and residents living in the same community who are not involved in neighborhood associations.

Many residents are discouraged from participating in neighborhood associations. Reasons for this discouragement vary, however the two most influential factors are a lack of awareness and the feeling of disempowerment. One resident I interviewed conveyed, "People just don't see [the potential for public involvement]… I didn't see it until I got involved with this organization and began to go to trainings and seminars and different things; I was enlightened." This resident spoke of his individual experiences and how they shaped his views of urban planning and the impediments that often follow. If residents encounter neighborhood associations and local politics on an individual level, wide-scale organization between community members becomes difficult. Another resident stated, "it takes a while to unravel that sense of powerlessness," that comes from a disempowering history of living in an area of concentrated poverty. Many community members are discouraged from participating in neighborhood associations and subsequent discussions due to the association's involvement with government entities, for some of these same government entities were responsible for purposefully concentrating poverty in North Minneapolis. Whatever the reasons may be–frustration, lack of enthusiasm, or unawareness–there are barriers to complete community participation.

Residents credit their neighborhood association for opening doors to understanding the politics and processes of urban planning affecting their communities. This suggests that overall awareness of neighborhood developments would increase if more residents were familiar with neighborhood associations. Realizing neighborhood associations operate as information nodes, while simultaneously recalling that not all residents of a community benefit from this information, suggests that neighborhood associations are not reaching their full potential. These

neighborhood associations provide communities with knowledge of urban planning, however they are unable to distribute this information to everyone living in the area. This gap in communication arises from individual disengagement as well as actions of the associations themselves. Furthermore, when government entities consult communities, these associations are unable to completely represent the needs of everyone in the community, which may lead to further sensations of nonparticipation. Individual and organizational characteristics are compounded by structural obstacles that widen the gap between residents and successful political participation, as presented in the subsequent sections.

Miscommunication Between Communities and Urban Planners

During interviews, community members communicated their perceptions about the various players involved in urban planning and their respective roles. Although neighborhood associations are one of these parties involved in urban development, they experience difficulties communicating and interacting with other participants.

Urban Planning Participants. Interviews revealed three main players in the development of urban areas: government entities (agencies and employees of the city or state), businesses, and community groups. These interviews disclosed that the motives of these three participants do not always align. Moreover, neighborhood associations do not feel as though government entities and businesses have residents' best interests in mind when planning city developments.

One interview detailed the perceived motives of city developers: "they've got to make their quick buck. They've got to get a turn around on their investment fairly quickly. Government planners need to make sure that whatever they're doing has some long-term benefit

to ensure the viability of the region." Residents expressed skepticism toward city developers as to whether they are truly interested in community input for their plans.

Also motivating urban planning in North Minneapolis is the mayor's intent to increase the population of the city by 65,000 residents in the next ten years (StarTribune 2013). The effects of this goal are beginning to emerge, with high-density housing appearing in the area. Community members expressed that they do not feel like they are truly a part of these planning processes.

A resident working with SNA detailed the range of contributors to a certain project: the developers of mixed-income housing developments in the area included persons employed by the city of Minneapolis, Minneapolis Public Housing, and a for-profit developer specializing in economic integration of urban areas. An additional developer focused on boosting human capital of the area during the planning and construction processes. This housing development is just one example of a modification a city can experience, revealing how many separate parties may be involved in the changes that take place within city lines.

Businesses also affect the state of a neighborhood. One resident I interviewed relayed that businesses entering the area do so on the sole basis that it would be self-beneficial: "Businesses that want to come, come." Because businesses have authority over their arrival, community members are left without the opportunity to accept or deny this action. In other words, community members cannot decide what businesses surround them.

Residents worry that their concerns about incoming businesses may not be the same concerns as the businesses themselves. While discussing potential businesses coming to the area, one resident said, "We want to be deciders on how many people will be working at that business once it's established and built." Community members expressed that if businesses are not going

to benefit the area, they aren't interested in seeing them in their neighborhoods. Although there are potentially constructive aspects of introducing new businesses to neighborhoods–such as added jobs and excitement–residents feel that businesses are unpredictable. More noteworthy is that the residents these businesses will affect feel as though they don't have control over what happens to the neighborhood upon their arrival.

Every resident I interviewed expressed a desire to have a say in the changes that occur in their neighborhoods. Through their neighborhood associations, residents have developed an understanding of who is involved in urban planning processes and their varying intentions. Concurrently, however, there is a consensus that the influence of these associations is relatively feeble in contrast to the authority of businesses and government entities.

False Perceptions and Misunderstandings. Interviews revealed that miscommunication between urban planners and community members is commonplace. A community organizer involved with Sheffield Neighborhood Association discussed the racial, age, gender, and positional divide between herself and the contractors and consultants she has worked with on certain urban projects. While the majority of the SNA community organizers were women of color in their mid-thirties, the contractors and consultants were white men in their sixties. Moreover, while the community organizers live and work in North Minneapolis, the consultants were from outside neighborhoods. The SNA organizer conveyed that some of the sensibility toward communities gets lost in the technical details of planning projects. By spending so much time focusing on adhering to a project timeline, contractors can get distracted from the community they are working with.

This community organizer also expressed that urban planners do not facilitate successful community engagement; projected timelines for certain projects are too short and inflexible.

Urban planners do not allow communities enough time to express their frustrations with possible consequences of these plans, nor do they consistently focus on the affected neighborhood. Residents believe that planners, who come from lives outside of the neighborhood–both socially and geographically–are not knowledgeable of their community in ways that successfully involve community members. A crucial aspect to consider is the moment in which the community enters into the discussion. If the project's design and financing details have been determined for the developers prior to community engagement, this may strongly reduce the possibilities for input, further separating the developer from community needs.

In the same interview, this SNA organizer stated that the media paints a biased picture of what communities in North Minneapolis are like, affecting planners' perceptions and goals with these areas. She indicated that there is a large difference in quality of life and crime rates among the fourteen various neighborhoods in North Minneapolis, even though these neighborhoods are often considered to be the same general area. These false perceptions affect outsiders' opinions of this area of the city. This common misconception contributes to the separation between urban planners and the communities they work with.

Mistrust of the Government. Interviews explicitly revealed wariness about the relationship between neighborhood associations and the city government. Community members expressed that they are skeptical of the power government officials claim to give community organizations. Residents believe this transfer of power is a tactic to gain support: "Through all my experience I've learned that when it comes to government and political issues, they will give you a false sense of power." This resident continued to describe her displeasure with the government's conduct toward GNA: "[Community members] are sitting there telling our opinion, but when [planners] leave, that's basically all it was." Residents feel that although government entities

consult neighborhood associations, they are not entirely listening to what community members are saying. Referring to the government, one resident stated, "I believe they already have an agenda." These residents recognize the structural barriers that prevent them from effectively participating in urban planning processes. Although some residents believe they may not be in a position to change the underlying structural problems with community engagement processes, they remain involved in neighborhood associations due to their personal motivations and dedication to their communities.

Another individual took issue with government entities and their motives, stating:

"Our political system is so acerbic, so full of vitriol. I think because of the political process being so full of that, anything that smacks of government feels icky—it has that oily sheen of politics…You're going to walk away with a little bit of that oil on you… People, I think, don't feel like there's honesty, truth, value—if [the government] is asking you a question it's because they have to fill a blank. They really don't care what you have to say because their plans are to do whatever they're going to do because of their personal needs—values need to get met—it isn't about the community."

This resident highlights the power that the government holds in urban planning decisions, limiting—if not eliminating—the agency communities have in their neighborhood's development. Having reservations about government actions and intentions serves as an obstacle for neighborhood associations to participate effectively with government entities in urban planning. It is difficult to have productive communication if both neighborhood associations and government entities do not have confidence in one another.

Conclusion

Neighborhood associations came to prominence in an era of urban planning focused on increasing community participation on social justice issues, in an attempt to fight the War on Poverty. Contemporary ideas about cities and planning have changed, placing greater emphasis

on social and economic conditions of urban areas. The findings of this study demonstrate that while neighborhood associations initially may have had affinities with traditional, membership-based voluntary federations, the changes in planning may make neighborhood associations organized on such lines a poor fit for contemporary planning.

Neighborhood associations encounter obstacles that inhibit communication with urban planners about the wants and needs of the community. Neighborhood associations are expected to bridge the gap between community members and government entities, but this role is compromised by three primary challenges. First, neighborhood associations are currently not reaching their full potential. Second, timelines for neighborhood-wide changes are inflexible and not created with specific communities in mind. Third, individuals involved in neighborhood associations mistrust government entities.

Overall, neighborhood associations do not find themselves entirely effective in communicating their needs to urban developers. Although residents value the work of their neighborhood associations and credit these associations for their knowledge of local politics, the overriding power of the government impedes the participation of residents in urban planning processes. Ultimately, neighborhood associations seem to engage with government entities for the purpose of satisfying government mandated community engagement during city-wide changes.

The growing complexity of cities, and consequently of urban planning, becomes evident through this study. This increasing intricacy—along with the authority government entities have in urban development—seems to call for more efficiency in planning, causing citizen voice to fall by the wayside. Neighborhood associations originated both to engage citizens in social justice issues in their communities and to satisfy requirements for the government to engage with

the public. This study reveals that neighborhood associations exist with similar purposes today. However, the functionality of neighborhood associations is insufficient to satisfy community needs with the current state of urban planning.

A limitation of using interviews as the primary mode of research is their lack of breadth. While the interviews yielded a depth of information, time restrictions only permitted this study to include a limited number of interviewees. If time allowed, I would continue with interviews in order to hear as many voices as possible. Additionally, the conclusions drawn from these interviews may not be generalizable to other populations. I am confident the challenges faced by the neighborhood associations in this study are not unique to their neighborhoods, however it is possible that these challenges affect North Minneapolis more significantly than other cities due to the region's unique history. These findings hinge on the specific population of North Minneapolis; Glendale and Sheffield neighborhood associations are located in low-income communities of color. Indisputably, the racial and economic makeup of the area affect both the types of issues the neighborhoods experience and the ways in which residents attempt to make their voices heard.

The findings of this study present an interesting opportunity for future research. This study focuses on how community members involved in neighborhood associations in low-income communities view their role in processes of urban planning. However, my findings may have been different had I interviewed residents of a middle class or primarily white community. In a more affluent region, would debated issues differ from those in a low-income neighborhood? Would residents feel a greater sense of entitlement to speak up about issues affecting their communities, especially if their communities do not have a history of disempowerment? Do government entities approach wealthier communities differently than they

approach North Minneapolis during urban planning processes? Future research might examine or compare community engagement in more affluent, white communities in order to assess the effects that income and race have over the participation and success of neighborhood associations. Under what conditions might neighborhood associations be more influential in city-wide decisions?

Neighborhood associations are grounds through which residents become involved in local politics. This study reveals how neighborhood associations perceive their position in this system, as well as the challenges they face trying to navigate it. It becomes clear that the very people urban planning decisions are going to affect do not hold much authority in the changes that are made. Moving forward, it is important to consider how neighborhood associations face challenges in their role as the link between residents and the government. Moreover, government entities should recognize the disproportionate contributions they are making in order to better utilize neighborhood associations and minimize the obstacles that discourage community voices in the process of urban planning.

References

Bracken, Ian. 1981. *Urban Planning Methods: Research and Policy Analysis*. New York,
    NY: Methuen & Co.

Cazenave, Noel A. 2007. *Impossible Democracy.* Albany, NY: State University of New
    York Press.

Edelman, Charles. 2009. "New Urbanism and Social Equity: A Case Study of Heritage
    Park." *Cities in the 21st Century* 1(1): 2-35.

Goetz, Edward. 2002. "Hollman v. Cisneros: Deconcentrating Poverty in Minneapolis
Report no. 2: Planning for North Side Redevelopment." *Center for Urban and Regional Affairs*
02-03: 3-16.

Gottdiener, Mark and Ray Hutchison. 2011. *The New Urban Sociology.* Fourth
    Edition*.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Lees, Loretta, Tom Slater, and Elvin Wyly. 2009. *Gentrification*. New York, NY:
    Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.

Levy, John M. 2006. *Contemporary Urban Planning.* Upper Saddle River, NJ:
    Pearson Education, Inc.

    Lukes, Steven. 2005. *Power: A Radical View*. Second Edition. New York, NY: Palgrave
    Macmillan.

Metropolitan Council. 2014. *Choice, Place, and Opportunity: an Equity Assessment of
    the Twin Cities Region*. Retrieved March 2015.

Moynihan, Daniel P. 1969. *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding.* New York, NY:
    The Free Press.

Newman, Kathe and Elvin Wyly. 2005. "Gentrification and Resistance in New York
    City." *National Housing Institute* 142: 1-6.

Northway Community Trust. 2007. *North Minneapolis Community Listening Project.*
    Vol. 1. Minneapolis, MN: NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center.

OECD. 1983. *Managing Urban Change*. Vol 2. Paris, France: OECD.

Skocpol, Theda. 2003. *Diminished Democracy*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma
    Press.

StarTribune Editorial. 2013. "Minneapolis Needs Population Growth." *Minneapolis
    StarTribune.*September 7.

Stovel, Katherine and Lynette Shaw. 2012. "Brokerage." *The Annual Review of
    Sociology* 38: 139-58.

Tuhus-Dubrow. 2014. "Pretty Park, Affordable Rent: Making Neighborhoods 'Just Green
    Enough'." Retrieved September, 2014.

Twin Cities Metropolitan Council. 2014. "2012 Affordable Housing Production in the
    Twin Cities Region." Retrieved September, 2014.

Wolch, Jennifer R., Jason Byrne, and Joshua P. Newell. 2014. "Urban Green Space,
    Public Health, and Environmental Justice: The Challenge of Making Cities 'Just
    Green Enough'." *Landscape and Urban Planning* 125: 234-44.