LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Planning is inherently political; this is something that Hunter students know well. The Introduction to Planning course has many students reading entire books on problem solving and policy analysis, as we aspire to not simply write plans from afar but to affect change, using our skills as planners to advocate within the imperfect and at times broken realm of politics.

However, politics is not simply a tool to accomplish goals of planning. Planning itself is a powerful political tool, one that can be used to accomplish and demonstrate political goals. A zoning change, a parking limit, or a design for a park are not technical planning decisions but are pronouncements of priorities, of political goals, and of particular visions of space and community. Our responsibility as future planners is to probe this technical side of planning, determining its larger context.

This issue of Urban Review had the privilege to feature two accomplished and active planners: Commissioner Mitchell Silver of the NYC Parks Department and Dr. Lester King, Sustainability Planner in Houston, TX. Both Silver and King emphasize the need for proper community engagement and dialogue.

It is time to ask, however, if this focus on process, on stakeholder engagement and communication suffices. Equitable planning processes may be inherently positive improvements, but our cities, our people, need equitable results as well. Who determines what is an equitable result? And how can planners lead these results forward?

These are questions we must wrestle with, as we aspire to be on the front lines of advocacy planning and engagement. The articles in this issue can help begin and inform this conversation. Beatriz Gil demands that we begin to formulate affordable housing as a right for all citizens, while Vincent DeCesare examines the history of a famous NYCHA development. Brad Zambrello brings us to Seoul, South Korea, where a park’s design manipulates human behavior on site. James Hull discusses how planning for a global event like the Olympics disregards local needs. Vicky Garvey offers a land use analysis of Ridgewood, Queens, with careful consideration of spatial justice. Finally, Monica Lee and Ranjana Venkatesh critically examine the systemic conservatism of social policy in the United States.

“The end result of wisdom must be good deeds.”[1] The research and analysis in this issue is only the beginning; our end result is to affect change, building on the equitable standards set out by those before us. We look forward to hearing your opinions and reactions to this issue, and ultimately seeing the incredible actions of the planners and policy makers of our fellow students at Hunter.

Atara Lindenbaum and Aly Hassell
Editors-in-Chief

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[1] Babylonian Talmud
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Lily Baum Pollans is Assistant Professor of Urban Policy and Planning at Hunter College. As an urban planner and scholar, her interests lie in sustainability, infrastructure, and environmental justice. As a practicing planner, she has worked in both municipal and institutional settings on public transportation, public space design, and brownfield redevelopment.

Interview by Aly M. Hassell
Aly M. Hassell: Tell me a little bit about your background. What were you doing before you got to Hunter?

Lily Baum Pollans: Before I started at Hunter last fall, I was at MIT finishing a PhD in urban studies and then doing a Postdoc funded by the MIT Environmental Solutions Initiative. AMH: Very cool! Can you tell me more about your area of study?

LBP: I study urban sustainability and environmental justice. I am interested both in the environment within cities, and the many ways that urban activities impact the environment at regional and global scales. Because these impacts are distributed unequally, environmental justice and the social geography of environmental degradation are also central to my work. In my recent research, I have focused on municipal waste management. Trash turns out to be an excellent way to access these issues because cities control it, but it remains connected to the global economy and global resource flows. Garbage is also a set of physical flows that can be traced across social and economic geographies, revealing a lot about power and inequality. The big question guiding my work is: how cities can manage waste in ways that start to shift the global socio-environmental relations of consumption.

AMH: You mentioned finishing your PhD relative recently. Were you working in the private sector prior to that?

LBP: Prior to starting my PhD, I worked in a few different sectors. First I worked in the public sector as a planner in a small city outside of Boston. I worked on environmental justice and transit-oriented development projects. As part of that job I helped to run a tiny little transit system that consisted of about eight buses on four routes—that was a real education! I enjoyed the public sector, and I learned a lot about planning, but I ended up taking a job in campus planning at Harvard University so that I could shift from car commuting to bike commuting. While at Harvard, I worked on sustainability and urban design initiatives.

AMH: What initially attracted you to Urban Studies?

LBP: I started college with the intention to study art. But as soon as I got to New York City, I fell in love with the city. One day during my freshman year of college, I stepped off a curb into the street and realized that someone had decided to build that street, and that curb. I had always taken the urban landscape for granted, and for the first time I awakened to the fact that every single trash can, smoke stack, and brick was the product of ideas, policies and decisions. If everything was a decision, then everything could also be different (this was before I encountered the study of Capitalism!). This realization “denaturalized” the city, but it also helped me to understand that “nature” and “city” are not actually separate worlds. Cities exist in and of “nature.” I switched my major to Urban Studies with a concentration in Environmental Science and I’ve been obsessed ever since.

AMH: I actually had a very similar experience—before deciding to pursue planning. Capitalism does tend to throw a wrench in the machine, doesn’t it? What led you to pursue an advanced degree?

LBP: I enrolled in planning master’s program because it was clear to me after working for a few years that a master’s in planning would help me to productively contribute to solving the problems in the world that I thought were the most urgent. But after several years in planning practice, I found that I was frustrated by the pace and politics of daily decision-making. Critical issues were at stake, but I didn’t have time or resources to fully consider the ramifications of my work. While I was a Harvard, a professor from my master’s program offered me an opportunity to teach, and I jumped at it because I thought it would provide time for reflection. I taught planning and sustainability for a couple of semesters on an academically rigorous urban studies program that was part of IHP/World Learning’s study abroad. During the course of a semester we traveled through one US city and three international cities and learned from local experts. For me, teaching and research turned out to be a more satisfying way to engage with the issues that I care about, so I started a PhD.

AMH: That’s great. Well, we’re very excited to have you! Why Hunter? What are you excited about working on while you’re here?

LBP: A few things really drew me to Hunter. First, Hunter’s program has social justice in its DNA; this is evident in the history of the program, as well as the interests of current faculty and students. I am also inspired by how many students work while pursuing their graduate degrees. It means that nothing we talk about in class is purely theoretical—we are all living the city every day and this allows a deeper level of discourse and reflection in the classroom. And of course, although we have lived our life in bucolic Cambridge, my whole family is very excited about New York City.

AMH: What courses are you teaching at Hunter?

LBP: Next Fall, I will teach graduate and undergraduate sections of Structure of the Urban Region, as well as a graduate course on Urban Sustainability. Next Spring, I will probably be teaching environmental justice. And someday, I hope to teach a garbage seminar!

“IT was clear to me after working for a few years that a master’s in planning would help me to productively contribute to solving the problems in the world that I thought were the most urgent.”

AMH: Exciting! Ok, now a couple fun ones. What are you currently reading / what do you recommend reading ASAP?

LBP: While I’ve been on maternity leave, I’ve indulged in a lot of great fiction that I normally don’t have time to read. There were two novels that I especially loved. One was Transit by Rachel Cusk. The other was A Gentleman in Moscow by Amor Towles. They are completely different from each other—one is narrated by a divorced mother in London, the other follows a prince of the Russian imperial family abroad during the Bolshevik revolution. But themes of space, family, and ideas of home are explored in interesting ways in both. I’ve also been reading Capitalism and the Web of Life (when I’ve had enough sleep for something more heavy duty!). Its central argument is that capitalism is fundamentally a way of organizing nature. It will probably sneak its way into some of my syllabi in the coming years.

AMH: Do you have any advice for current students?

LBP: I always try to remind students that graduate school is a remarkable privilege, even if you are working full time and juggling a whole host of responsibilities. When else will you have access to the resources of an entire university, just so that you can learn about things that you find fascinating? So, while you are doing it, make time to study something completely out of your comfort zone. Take at least one class that has nothing to do with your specialization—something that you don’t know anything about, but that might just unsettle all of your assumptions about the urban world.
In 2014, Mayor Bill De Blasio selected Mitchell J. Silver to head the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. Since his appointment, Commissioner Silver has taken a planner’s perspective to the Parks Department, launching two flagship programs—Parks Without Borders and the Community Parks Initiative—that aim to affect change within the bigger picture of economic inequality and the livability of urban spaces in New York City. A graduate of Hunter’s Masters of Urban Planning program, it is unsurprising that equity and advocacy are at the heart of Commissioner Silver’s work.

Although previous Parks commissioners including Veronica White (Harvard-trained lawyer and Executive Director of Mayor Bloomberg’s Center for Economic Opportunity), Adrian Benepe (lifelong Parks employee with a wide breadth of experience in the Agency), and Henry J. Stern (former Councilman with a history of administrative positions in the city) had engaged in “planning” work during their tenures, Silver is the first formally trained planner to hold the Commissioner position. Silver’s planning background quickly became apparent as he hit the ground running at the start of his tenure with two flagship programs.

The Community Parks Initiative was rolled out amidst growing concern over inequality in New York City. Disparities in access to affordable housing, transportation, and other services were becoming more pronounced, and there was a climate of frustration around the failure of the previous administration to address the needs of underserved communities. With regard to open space in particular, the emerging prevalence of conservancy groups had fostered among many residents the sense of a two-tiered park system, with a handful of prominent parks being lavished with money from wealthy park neighbors and the rest of the city’s smaller parks falling into disrepair. This disparity has a disproportionate effect, as young people in low-income neighborhoods tend to rely more on local public spaces and use them more frequently than those in more affluent areas.

CPI addressed this head on: using an inventory of Parks properties and an analysis of past investments, Silver and his team generated a list of parks that were located in densely-populated areas with higher than average concentrations of poverty. Going a bit further, CPI identified properties that had received less than $250,000 in the past 20 years and prioritized those sites for immediate capital investment with an accelerated design/build timeline.

Rather than talking vaguely about an “equity agenda”, Silver moved quickly to publicly acknowledge a problem, used data to quantify the problem, and directed funding to address that problem as fast as possible. When I asked the Commissioner about the perception of planners as professionals, he said: “I always tell planners, if you want to be valued, show your value. Don’t just focus on reports, focus on outcomes. People make the connection to something done, not a piece of paper”.

The Community Parks Initiative allowed Silver to start focusing on outcomes and providing tangible benefits to his constituents. CPI signaled to the public that their neighborhoods were important and deserving of investment, and also helped convince local elected officials that the Parks Department was capable of providing deliverables in a timely fashion.

In New York, Mitchell acknowledges that planning professionals have largely become sorted into specialty or agency specific silos, often focusing on one area of interest, rather than taking a more holistic view of planning problems. However, he cautions against the myopic view of any one planning specialization: “To me, planners are like doctors of cities—you need to understand the whole anatomy of the city to know the role of parks, and transportation, and residential areas.”

As Parks Commissioner, Silver has maintained the working philosophy of planning as an interdisciplinary profession. The Parks Without Borders (PWB) initiative exemplifies that outlook. Many of the city’s public spaces have become physical representations of the siloed nature of it’s agencies: with tall fences, abrupt edges and other mobility barriers creating a disjointed...
pedestrian experience. Silver is fond of saying that when the average New Yorker is walking around their city, they don’t realize that as they take a step out of the park and onto the sidewalk that they’re crossing between Parks’ jurisdiction and into DOT’s jurisdiction, and frankly, they don’t care. PWB is an effort to change the design approaches that create these isolated spaces and broken connections. By blurring the edges of parks, lowering fences and making entrances more obvious and welcoming, Silver believes we can create a more cohesive and seamless public realm. Streets, sidewalks, parks and plazas are where public life happens, and working with communities and other city agencies to erase the barriers between these spaces will make NYC more beautiful, vibrant, safe, and accessible for all residents. As David Harvey suggest, “the public realm, when it feels safe, inviting and interesting, draws us to engage in social and active recreation on an everyday basis with little additional effort”.

Silver and I spoke about the disconnect that tends to emerge between planning officials and the public, and how this disconnect often stems from issues of trust. Building trust is key to Silver: “It takes time to build trust, there’s no short-cuts around it... You have to do your best to have an outreach strategy that touches as many people as possible in as many ways as possible”. Parks Without Borders and the Community Parks Initiative both included strong public outreach components in an effort to make Parks’ work more transparent and more community-driven.

Parks Without Borders’ eight showcase projects were chosen based on input solicited through online surveys and at public meetings, and although this methodology here is imperfect and raises valid questions of accessibility, more than 6,000 nominations were received during a three month comment period. While Parks planners ultimately had to choose sites based on the right physical characteristics and context for the design approach to be truly effective, the PWB initiative looked seriously to the community for direction in the planning process. This major investment took into account both community support and the opinions of experts, balancing the needs and desires expressed by the public with professional know-how.

CPI projects all begin with a ‘Scope Meeting’, where project designers and the public sit down together to discuss the community’s vision for their park. Months later, as design teams are presenting the plans they’ve developed based on these meetings to the Commissioner, he will ask questions about the issues raised at the Scope meeting and make decisions about site elements and programming based on the feedback given by the community. While details may change based on technical and spatial considerations, the programmatic elements of the site are determined by the community.

Silver does recognize that the community outreach process is far from perfect, with public meetings often amplifying certain voices at the expense of others. Particular groups can sometimes dominate scoping meeting, leaving other groups without proper opportunities to express their views. Too often we plan for just “the people in the room”, he says, and that “35 people out of a community of 15,000 who were well-informed or connected enough to know about the meeting and show up” should not be allowed to dictate the future of the community as a whole. The Commissioner is always cautious about acting based on technical and spatial considerations, the programmatic elements of the site are determined by the community.

I spoke to the commissioner about was how the nature of planning work often puts the planner in the position of the ‘outsider’. He described how he overcame the initial distrust of the residents of Raleigh when he served has the city’s Planning Director; many were afraid of how a professional planner from New York might change the city they knew and loved. His approach was simple; he didn’t make a single recommendation for six months. Instead, he did his research - he talked to the public, to community leaders, business owners, and elected officials. When he finally spoke on his vision for Raleigh, people were pleasantly surprised to see that his ideas reflected their concerns and hopes for their city. “It’s just like dating someone--there is no way you’re going to know someone on the first date. Coming into a city, you’re developing a relationship, just like any [other]. I have to spend time with you and I have to get to know you, so [in Raleigh] I knew when I was imposing an outside culture on the community and when I was not. Building that trust involves earning it, spending that time to get to know a place, so when you do make a recommendation it’s authentic and it’s right and it fits”. This is perhaps Silver’s greatest strength as a planner; his charismatic personality makes him a natural communicator. He eschews industry jargon for colloquial and honest conversation, and can take a career’s worth of knowledge and expertise and synthesize it into a relatable anecdote, humorous analogy, or when he’s lucky, a well-timed joke.

Commissioner Silver’s work with the Parks Department shows that situating one’s work within the wider context of the city and region, prioritizing tangible results, and fostering community inclusivity are effective strategies for improving the public realm--and are hallmarks of good planning. Silver has taken a planner’s approach to his role as Parks Commissioner, developing and implementing innovative policies that are deeply impactful and that provide immediate benefits to his constituency. The job has put him in unique position to connect with that constituency, the people of New York: “People come up to me, they know a place, so when you do make a recommendation it’s authentic and it’s right and it fits”. This is perhaps Silver’s greatest strength as a planner; his charismatic personality makes him a natural communicator. He eschews industry jargon for colloquial and honest conversation, and can take a career’s worth of knowledge and expertise and synthesize it into a relatable anecdote, humorous analogy, or when he’s lucky, a well-timed joke.
Protecting the Spectacle:
Mega-Development, Spectacle & the Olympic Movement
James Hull

The fundamental principles outlined in the Olympic Charter, to use sports in service of a “harmonious development of humankind” and to promote a society of peace that preserves human dignity, guide the modern Olympic Movement; the global nature of the Olympic games, the thousands of talented athletes who compete and the billions of international spectators it draws, demonstrates the aspirations of these principles. The lofty goals of the Olympic Movement are underpinned by a long history that contains both old traditions and powerful symbols, which in turn engender the Olympics as a sacred or religious festival of sorts. However, as the games developed over time, they also became an opportunity for huge commercial profits and garnered the attention of lucrative media networks, corporate sponsors, and security experts, as well as local, national, and international organizing committees. These economic interests are woven into the aspirations of host cities and nation-states to deliver a safe and secure event.

Host cities are also responsible for the spectacle of the games. The production of spectacle is a highly involved and publicized process that demands a manipulation or reconfiguration of space. Furthermore, the games can be at once both diversionary and pacifying, a stage for ruling elites to perform rituals of “commonality, community, and solidarity in the face of perceived or actual fears and threats.”

The spectacle of the mega-event is the perfect arena for terrorist organizations to exert pressure and instill fear in the status quo. This threat legitimizes the carte blanche to law enforcement agencies at every level to ensure the safety of the event. Often, these security measures inflate budgets that have lasting economic and spatial impacts on host communities. Massive private investments, national reputations, and corporate advertisers are all tied up in the smooth and safe delivery of the games and the creation of a unifying international narrative, both which run counter to the material reality of communities directly affected by the event.

Scholars Jon Coaffee and Lorraine Johnston identify four themes of mega-project construction that are helpful in understanding the socio-spatial impacts of the Olympics on host communities. The first is the assertion that monumental projects are priceless, that cost overruns are irrelevant due to a mega-projects ability to amaze and affect a global audience. This assertion disregards the increasingly stretched coiffers of municipalities, the real risk of government debts, and the potential deleterious effect on local communities. The second theme is the common inability to properly estimate cost in every quantifiable way -- from a project's effect on the environment, to budget overruns, and to the displacement of residents. Third, that the alleged community benefit of, among other things, regional growth, employment, increased green space are exaggerated at the expense of public monies. And fourth, urban megaprojects have been increasingly linked with pro-growth boosterism, in which government leaders align with the interests of private capital to engage in place promotion and economic development. These elements are key in understanding the amplifying effect an Olympic-sized redevelopment can have on the pre-existing populations in a given city. Small cadres of business and government elites fail to adequately address wider public concerns, prioritizing the pro-growth doctrine important to keeping individual cities competitive for capital investment on the global scale. Voices and stakeholders of sites specified for Olympic development see their voices stifled, contradicting the stated ideals of the Olympic Movement that aspires to encourage equitable human development practices.

Organizing committees are aware that actors involved in local, national, and international causes are keen to use the exposure the Olympics provides as a stage to promote their cause. The threat of conflict interrupting the ritualistic spectacle of the games would threaten the humanistic tenets of the Olympic Movement. This was especially clear after the Munich Massacre of members of the Israeli Olympic Team in 1972, which prompted subsequent organizing committees to create increasingly secure spaces and militarized contingency plans with lasting effects. The contradiction between the Olympic values of equality, human development, and peace and the hegemonic forces at work before, during, and after the games are inherent to the Olympic process. The prestige, attention, and spectacle of the Olympic Games privileges the financial and institutional interests of both private and public.
Angeles Olympics as a success story of capitalism
and to promote their image, marketed the Los Angeles Olympics without substantial government funding. The Olympic Organizing Committee (LAOOC), anticipated Olympics-related budget deficits. That the taxpayers would not be responsible for debt to the taxpayers, only Los Angeles (Tehran the 1976 Montreal Games left $1.6 billion in debt for their staging of the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games. In 1979, Los Angeles voters passed an amendment to the city charter stating that the taxpayers would not be responsible for anticipated Olympics-related budget deficits. As a result, the president of the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee (LAOOC), Peter Ueberroth, was tasked with operating the games without substantial government funding.

LOS ANGELES, 1984

The 1984 Olympic Games, formally opened by President Ronald Reagan on July 28th, were the first Olympic Games in the era of neoliberal capitalism, hallmarked by a retraction of government funding and refusal of underlying structural conditions in favor of free market-driven solutions to development financing. After the 1976 Montreal Games left $1.6 billion in debt to the taxpayers, only Los Angeles (Tehran immediately withdrew their bid due to political instability in the late 70’s) launched a bid for the 1984 Summer Games. The Soviet Union reportedly incurred more than $6 billion in debt for their staging of the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games. In 1979, Los Angeles voters passed an amendment to the city charter stating that the taxpayers would not be responsible for anticipated Olympics-related budget deficits. As a result, the president of the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee (LAOOC), Peter Ueberroth, was tasked with operating the games without substantial government funding.

“The prestige, attention, and spectacle of The Olympic Games privileges the financial and institutional interests of both private and public elites but fails to consider existing communities.”

Ueberroth overcame this dilemma by relying solely on the existing landscape and corporate sponsors. His plan to limit the number of sponsors to 30 raised individual bid values by increasing their exclusivity and demand. McDonald’s, for example, paid $4 million to refurbish an Olympic swimming pool and an additional $5 million for exclusive concessionary rights. Over 30 companies agreed, and provided funds, merchandise, and assortment of services in exchange for the right to use the Olympics logo in their company marketing. The biggest contribution came from ABC, who shelled out $225 million for sole broadcast rights.

The diminished role of government in planning the Games closed off opportunities for the public to scrutinize the operational processes required for the mega-event. Private investors, hoping to recoup their massive injection of funds and to promote their image, marketed the Los Angeles Olympics as a success story of capitalism and the entrepreneurial spirit of America. They did not need to seriously consider the long-term concerns of the local population to accomplish this due to their status as a private coalition of funders. Instead their focus was ensuring the safety of their investment.

On January 29th, 1982, President Reagan provided assurance to Ueberroth that the US government would give “whatever assistance was needed by local government” to guarantee the security of the games. Over 16,000 officers across various municipalities in Los Angeles were trained, in addition to the 13,000 private security officers deployed to police the games. In total, 170 public and private policing agencies across local, state, and national jurisdictions along the West Coast coordinated their strategy and expertise from July to August 1984. The same year, the LAPD implemented the Emergency Command Control Communications Systems, revolutionizing police communications. Los Angeles was one of the cities worst hit by the crack epidemic of the 1980s. During this time, gang-related crime skyrocketed, disproportionately affecting low-income communities of color. Unemployment rates in inner city communities neared 40%, worsening the unrest in South Central Los Angeles. This threatened the positive image of Los Angeles the LAOOC hoped to project to hundreds of thousands of tourists and billions of television viewers. Though the LAOOC received no financial support from the taxpayers of Los Angeles, the LAPD received over $20 million in funding from the Department of Defense to bolster the police force and to ensure that crime was kept to a minimum during the games. Instead of investing in job creation or addiction services, the LAOOC employed its quasi-governmental status toward an effort to push out or incarcerate marginalized populations who lived in the area where the Olympics would hold its opening and closing ceremonies, by far the most recognizable site of Games. The policing strategies employed by the LAPD were lauded as crucial to the financial success of the 1984 Olympic Games. After the games ended, the oppressive strength of these strategies, newly bolstered by the $20 million injection of federal funds, continued to impact minority communities in Los Angeles. In February 1985, the LAPD used a military grade tank-like vehicle received from the Olympics to destroy a wall of an alleged crack house. Inside, they found children eating ice cream. The militarized LAPD evolved with the launch of Operation Hammer in 1987, an anti-gang effort that resulted in the arrests of over 20,000 mostly African American youths. A Los Angeles Times report from 1991 uncovered that the district attorney’s office declined to prosecute at least 278 police officers who were accused of police brutality. This tension between police brutality and communities throughout the 70’s and 80’s erupted with the beating of Rodney King in 1991 and the 1992 Los Angeles Riots that followed the verdict.

Even in the years after the games concluded, surplus Olympic funds were used to militarize space in deprived communities. The South Central Organizing Committee and East Los Angeles’ United Neighborhoods Organization, two vocal anti-gang civic organizations, jointly received a large donation to enhance targeting crime-fighting strategy with the creation of “combat zone teams from several law enforcement agencies to crack down on gangs...in high crime neighborhoods.”

It is unhelpful to view unique community groups as sharing universal goals, especially as fractures formed in communities along various lines in the wake of the crack epidemic and the War on Drugs. Perhaps these funds would have been better allocated to job training centers, to addiction clinics, or other social service coalitions that provide security for citizens.

This case study of the 1984 Olympics, shows the afterlife of the militarization of police on local communities in Los Angeles. The LAOOC could have taken a different tack with their management of the games. But, limited by their budgetary mandate, the consortium of corporate interests running the show elicited a militarized and anti-social justice response to sanitize the surrounding area for commercial consumption. They chose a route leading towards a more aggressive policing of already hurting communities instead of targeting root sources of social problems. But the federal funding, professional knowledge, and military weaponry commissioned at the behest of the LAOOC’s financial interest in protecting the Olympics exacerbated community and police relations in Los Angeles. This is contrary to the stated goals of the Olympic Charter. It is one example of how the aspirations of the Olympic Movement are incompatible with interests of private capital. It is an example of spectacle-centric mega-development adversely impacting local communities. The well-marketed budgetary surplus of over $215 million from the 1984 Games propelled a reinvigorated and reimagined neoliberalized financing model for Olympic mega-events to follow.
The Current of Expression

Evolving Public Space & Discourse Along the Banks of the Cheonggyecheon

Brad Zambrello

The history of the Cheonggyecheon, a linear park in central Seoul, reveals the critical relationship between public space, the public sphere, and social transformation through the lens of contemporary South Korea. Public space, in its most reductive sense, is a physical place that is available to the general public and can be used for expressive purposes, political or otherwise.\(^3\) Public space also provides a physical forum for the exercise of free speech rights,\(^4\) affording individuals an opportunity to contribute to the ongoing body of political and social discourse occurring within broader society, which Jürgen Habermas has termed the “public sphere.”\(^5\)

The Cheonggyecheon (literally the “clear water stream”)\(^6\) is a six mile long park in Seoul that follows the former course of a natural stream of the same name. This natural stream was filled in and paved over during the late 1950s. Running down the center of the modern park is a re-creation of the historic stream, the water for which is pumped in from the nearby Han River, Seoul’s chief waterway.\(^8\) Pedestrian walkways and terraced seating options line both sides of the restored Cheonggyecheon, and the entire site is replete with native plants, stone bridges, secondary water features, and art installations intended to confer peace onto visitors amidst the bustle of urban Seoul.\(^3\) The vast majority of the modern park is situated roughly fifteen feet below street level, though the 2,500-square-meter Cheonggye Plaza, at the park’s western terminus, is sited at-grade and linked to the rest of the park by staircases and pedestrian ramps.\(^10\)

Cheonggye Plaza frequently hosts protests targeting both the national and municipal governments. Cheonggye Plaza, identifiable by a distinctive red and blue sculpture resembling a giant conch shell, sits immediately east of Gwanghwamun Square and Sejong Road, the primary power axis in Seoul that links the Blue House (the South Korean presidential residence) to the Gyeongbokgung (a historic palace and the site of South Korean constitution signing in 1948) and Seoul City Hall.\(^11\) Both the plaza’s proximity to this power axis and its relatively open design make it a popular public place for protests.

Aside from Cheonggye Plaza, however, the vast majority of the public space within the Cheonggyecheon park is highly programmed, manifesting what Anthony Maniscalco calls “customized place” that “cannot accommodate new or heterogeneous use frameworks” such as political speech.\(^12\) As with Federal Foley Plaza in New York City — where, Kristine Miller notes, “the dominance of the physical objects within the [space]... severely limits what can happen”\(^13\) — the Cheonggyecheon’s physical design precludes all but a handful of authorized leisure uses (namely: strolling, sitting, lunching, and photography). The park’s central water feature divides the space into roughly thirds — the northern bank, the water itself, and the southern bank — which prevents both large political assembly and most physical activities within the space.\(^14\) The Cheonggyecheon’s linear design also subtly promotes movement within the park, discouraging visitors from lingering or participating in social activities outside of prescribed seating areas and gathering points.\(^15\) The park’s physical location, at fifteen feet below street level, further saps the space of its civic capacity. Should a political group overcome the park design’s physical constraints - this groups would still be invisible to potential audiences found at street level.\(^16\) Though the Cheonggyecheon's design does not engender spontaneous activity nor accommodate insurgent public uses, the park does routinely host festivals and official events planned by the Seoul municipal government, establishing its use as an “institutional public space.”\(^17\) Many of the official events held at the Cheonggyecheon are overt expressions of Korean identity. Such events include the annual lantern festival at the Buddha’s birthday, the celebrations of Chuseok (Korean Thanksgiving), and the Lunar New Year.\(^18\) Other events held at the Cheonggyecheon are explicit expressions of the Korean state, such as decorations promoting the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympic Games (and local advertising partner, SK Telecom)\(^19\) or the inclusion of Korean reunification messaging in Christmas displays.\(^20\)

The Seoul government’s top-down approach to the festivals and decorations permitted at the Cheonggyecheon is reminiscent of Mayor Giuliani’s approach to the steps of New York City Hall, wherein special events were limited to what the mayor identified as of “extraordinary public interest,” ignoring smaller community interests.\(^21\) This type of programing implicitly questions the legitimacy of communities not represented in the space by narrowing the list of people suitable to form the proper public.\(^22\) (Marginalized publics of note in Korea include the domestic LGBTQ community, ethnic Koreans from northeastern China, southeast Asian migrant workers, and various expatriates from Western countries.\(^23\)

The Historic Cheonggyecheon

The Cheonggyecheon was not always the programmed, institutionally-controlled space that it is today. The stream’s natural shores were historically loose and unstructured throughout...
the various Korean royal dynasties, the
Japanese occupation, and the years immediately
following the Korean War. Photographs from
the early twentieth century reveal large open
spaces on the Cheonggyecheon’s banks, with
children swimming in the stream or playing
nearby and women washing laundry on its
shores. Following the Korean War, as the
country urbanized and Seoul’s population grew
dramatically, new residents of the capital began
erecting makeshift shacks alongside the stream. The Cheonggyecheon’s banks thus became a place
of spontaneous community, where ambitious
new Seoulites could first hang their hats in the
capital and try to take hold of the country’s rising
economy. The early South Korean government’s
initial tolerance of these settlements near the
Cheonggyecheon reflected a broad conception
of the public that the space should serve and
of public space itself – one “marked by free
interactions, user determination, and the absence
of coercion by powerful institutions,” to return
to27—in that anyone was free to set down their
belongings and make a life on its shores.

The government’s attitude toward the
Cheonggyecheon changed dramatically in the
1950s. The stream’s poor conditions and its
pollution with human and industrial waste
greatly concerned political leaders. These hygienic
considerations, however, were used as a pretext
for expulsion.28 The stream was filled and covered
with a simple roadway in 1958,29 and in the 1970s
the dictator Park Chung-hee built an elevated
expressway on the site meant to symbolize the
emergent industrial Korean state.30 Over the course of these two renovations, “the
occupants of [the nearby] shanties, who used the
stream for washing and doing laundry for hire,
[were] forcibly displaced.”31 The government
successfully pried what had been a public space,
available to all, from the broader public and
transferred it to Korea’s nascent motoring public
(in the service of the government’s public image,
both at home and abroad). For the following 45
years, what was once the Cheonggyecheon ceased
to be an authentic public space.

By the turn of the twenty-first century,
however, Seoul’s residents had grown tired of
the Cheonggye Expressway built atop the buried
stream, as it brought noise, air pollution, and
vehicular congestion to the city’s center.

Korea continued to urbanize over the latter half of the
twentieth century, and the increasingly wealthy
Korean populace demanded a higher quality of life
and healthier living conditions in Seoul than the
previous generation.32 In 2002, Lee Myung-bak
ran for Seoul Mayor on a platform that promised
the removal of the Cheonggye Expressway and a package of new urban amenities – the redevelopment Cheonggyechon being chief among them – that would improve residents' quality of life and increase the city's appeal as a touristic and business hub. Lee was elected mayor later that year, powered by his promise to redevelop the stream, a plan that 79% of Seoul residents supported at the time. The Cheonggye Expressway's demolition began in mid-2003, and by late 2005 the $900-million Cheonggyecheon restoration project was complete. The project's success and its widespread public approval later contributed to Lee winning the South Korean presidency in 2007.

The history redevelopments of the Cheonggyechon site, detailed above, reflects both waxing and waning public participation in the placemaking process. The Cheonggyechon began as an intensely grassroots space, where citizens formed what Hou calls an "insurgent public space" – "[one] created or initiated by citizens and communities … outside or at the border of the regulatory and legal domain." Yet the stream was later buried and built-over with the removal of the Cheonggye Expressway during his earlier tenure as Seoul mayor. In response to the protests, the president said, "My heart ached when I saw even young students come out to stage candlelight vigils at Cheonggye Plaza, which I worked with all my heart, mind and soul to restore." As the protests intensified, activists eventually moved to the plaza at Gwanghwamun Square and the surrounding lanes on Sejong Road, along the primary power axis in Seoul, and approached the presidential residence. In the face of this growing unrest, the police barricaded off these core public spaces with police buses and shipping containers, prompting many protesters to return to Cheonggye Plaza and the streets flanking its north and south sides. Though the protests did not ultimately result in changes to the controversial trade agreement, the public outpouring against the Lee administration's policies did undermine its legitimacy and prevented the president from pursuing "several [other] neoliberal projects, such as the Grand Canal construction and privatization of some public companies." The largest and most-successful protests in Cheonggye Plaza's history occurred in the fall of 2016, when the Choi Soon-shil scandal first broke. Ms. Choi, a personal contact of then-President Park Geun-hye – a conservative who had been elected on the right-wing bona fides of her father, the former dictator Park Chung-hee – had used her influence on the president to extort roughly $70 million from high-profile Korean companies including Samsung, Hyundai, and Lotte. Choi had also unduly influenced the president's policies, political appointments, speech contents, and even personal wardrobe, all without a formal position in the administration. The president's confidante had also bribed the dressage judges at 2014 Asian Games, held in Korea, winning her daughter a gold medal at the event that was later improperly leveraged into admission to the prestigious Ehwa Womans University.

When the TV network JTBC broke this news, Korean society erupted – protesters mobbed Gwanghwamun Square and the Cheonggye Plaza for weeks, once again holding candlelight vigils and this time demanding the president's resignation. At the height of the protests, 1.5 million people congregated peacefully in central Seoul, with hundreds of thousands of others rallying at public sites in smaller Korean cities. Weekend protesting continued for months, underscoring the broad public's displeasure with the president, though some of these rallies were met with counter-protests from hardline conservatives. By the end of 2016, the president's approval rating had sunk to an anemic 4%, and by March 2017 she had officially been removed from office on corruption charges. Shortly after being impeached, the president was jailed on those charges; she has been on trial since May, and is facing life in prison for her misdeeds.

The protests in Seoul during the winter of 2016-2017 demonstrated the power of political activity in Korea and resulted in the sternest rebuke of a sitting government possible – the removal of its head of state. The site of these protests, Gwanghwamun Square and Cheonggye Plaza, maximized their exposure and impact, underscoring the importance of centralized public spaces to civic activity and their inseparability from the larger public sphere. Though the institutional Cheonggyechon represents the common conception of a public space – a designated leisure zone that public is invited to access, free of charge – it is the insurgent use of the stream and its plaza that make this park an authentic public space. Since its redevelopment in the early twenty-first century, the Cheonggyechon has hosted two major national protests (and countless smaller protests), both of which have reshaped Korean politics. By providing the Korean public a forum to voice its opposition to the national government's policies, in spite of the site's constrictive design, the Cheonggyechon has thus expanded the discursive public sphere in contemporary South Korea.
Learning to Reckon with Structural Injustice:

Historical reflections on Social Policy and special education in America

Adapted from
“The History of US Social Policy and Implications for the Current System” by Ranjana Venkatesh
“Overrepresentation in Special Education” by Monica Lee

“The subject of justice is the basic structure of society...[it is] the way in which major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation.” John Rawls

Despite over a century of legislative victories in the interest of justice, the United States and its social, political, and economic institutions remain inured to a vast and impenetrable narrative of white supremacy. To break this cycle, Americans must confront their heritage, reckon and grapple with it, and engage in a radical re-imagining of their future. Parsing out the avenues to this future depends more on reckoning with this shared legacy than assigning blame, more on solutions than problems, and promoting sustaining interventions to correct the course of history.

Educational reform offers society a pragmatic juncture of arbitration. Radical pedagogy, or “Culturally Responsible Teaching” (CRT) engages with and celebrates the diverse realities of all students. This practice fulfills what political theorist Iris Marion Young would call “political responsibility,” a “plausible way of conceiving responsibility that connects individual agency to structural processes.”

Current social policy in the United States stems from the legacies of racial exclusion, federalism, and paternalistic attitudes of who is “deserving” of social support. By examining the trajectory of social policy from the 1930s until today, it is evident that because social policy explicitly determines who and where support is distributed, it implicitly utilizes the values and convictions of white supremacy.

A marked shift in the national attitude concerning the poor followed in the years after the Great Depression. New Deal policy essentially “marked a turning point by recognizing a national interest in the economic well-being and security of individuals and families.” The national re-imagining of the role of government in society was catalyzed by an expanded federal involvement, written into New Deal policy. However, “the pervasive curse of localism” would serve as a grim reminder of conflicting ideologies, white supremacy, and contested political authority for decades to come.

New Deal policies were severely limited in their geographical application. States and local municipalities had influence over the execution of federal policy due to historical decentralization of authority and the fragmentation of decision making, which were by the 1930s firmly ensconced as central tenets of a federalist approach to government structure. Decisions on how to distribute payments were made by (the virtually all white) state and local officials, which led to wide interstate discrepancies in patterns of relief...
payments. In 1935, the Social Security Act was passed, which limited assistance to “categories” of the population deemed the “deserving poor.” States were not required to adhere to the categorical assistance plans, and by 1939, ten states had not done so. By 1940, nearly two-thirds of eligible dependent children were not covered.\(^5\)

This local jurisdictional authority was also a tool with which to enact a racist agenda. Southern Democrats, with little opposition from the Roosevelt administration, were successful in ensuring that wide swaths of the black population were deliberately excluded from New Deal social policy. Politicians omitted farm workers and domestic servants from the Social Security Act, effectively excluding a great majority of the African Americans employed in these sectors. In total, 65 percent of African Americans fell outside the reach of the new program nationally; in the South, this ratio soared to 80 percent.\(^5\) Social Security was turned into “a form of policy apartheid,” and formed part of the “patchwork” nature of social programs.\(^7\)

Under the Johnson Administration, the use of federal funds to alleviate poverty, especially for poor African Americans, generated strong opposition from many local and state government officials. Federal funding was tied to desegregation requirements as stated under the Civil Rights Act. Political leaders and private citizens alike resisted implementation, thereby fulfilling trends of state-by-state variation in social support.

Buttressing the prevailing climate of racism were two fundamental ideologies that continue today: the conviction that economic growth was the solution to poverty ("the rising tide that lifts all boats"); and the importance of “personal responsibility” and its twinned moralistic attitude of “deservingness.” These principles reflected the optimistic zeitgeist that economic growth was the surefire solution to social ills.

These ideas, held up by conservatives, continue to shape discussions surrounding social welfare policy. Conservative columnist Henry Hazlitt wrote in the 1960s, "the only solution to poverty is free enterprise and continued economic growth—those things which made America great." Such sentiments are very much still echoed today.

This paternalism permeating social policy still lingers. Poverty was and continues to be framed as a natural outcome of “low intelligence or low ambition,” or other personal failings, rather than a shared social reality.\(^7\) Political conservatives continue to call for a shrinking of the welfare state, something they believe contributes to continued or compounded poverty, family breakup, and poor work ethic.\(^10\) The ethos of responsibility is laid solely at the feet of the individual: making better personal choices is touted as a cure. Polemics such as these willfully reject the bearing
of structural social conditions on opportunity, and place a premium on simply working more, despite evidence that “rising inequality of income helps to account for the persistence of so much poverty in otherwise affluent America.”

Localism and racist attitudes have helped perpetuate this social policy patchwork and account for the enduring lack of comprehensive coverage. Modern social insurance programs and means-tested programs still limit who is eligible for coverage and where. Shifts in coverage and institutionalized notions of who makes up the “deserving poor,” exclude large populations from receiving benefits. The large demographic most underserved by the current system includes non-elderly, non-disabled families with no continuously-employed members. Poverty rates among this group are over 67 percent after transfers, and are the highest of any other demographic.

Geographic variation is an obvious and continuous weakness of the current system with clear historical roots. States determine the benefit level and eligibility requirements for a number of benefits programs like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, Medicaid, the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), Worker’s Compensation, and Unemployment Insurance. State authority allows many poorer states, mostly in the South, to cut spending on social support, and clearly exemplifies “the enduring power of federalism in American life.”

Another glaring weakness of the current system is the uneven nature of when coverage is provided. Continuing the tradition of paternalism, both federal and state governments determine the length of time that a recipient can receive social support. For example, Unemployment Insurance benefits are only typically paid for six months, and TANF benefits can only be used for up to a lifetime total of five years (though states can set even shorter time limits). These time restrictions are arbitrarily set and embody the notion that welfare should not weaken work ethic and encourage dependence on the government. Time limits coupled with the desire to protect states’ rights, excludes millions of poor Americans from receiving social support, and makes it irrefutable that current social policy is far from adequate or comprehensive.

To strengthen the modern system, deeply entrenched racist attitudes need to be radically confronted and dismantled, and a more universal and humanistic approach to social support needs to be adopted. An assessment of the nature of social policy over the last near-century traces racist and paternalistic legacies to the early days of social support programs that remain in place today. The War on Poverty is by no means won, the struggle against inequality continues, and privation is a fundamental feature of American society.

Special education in public schools is an example of an institution plagued by a history of white supremacy and divisive policy implementation. Its roots in American institutions following mandated integration in public schooling. One can see this trend begin to take shape immediately following the ruling of Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954). Following the integration of schools, intelligence testing often resulted in students of color being tracked into highly restrictive placements. This resulted in a “de facto” segregation within schools. This separation resulted in many African American
children being educated in a less effective setting than their European-American peers.

To this day, studies show that black students, relative to their white counterparts, are far more likely to spend time outside of the general education population and more time within a restrictive special education setting. Consequently, black students make fewer academic gains and are far less likely to ultimately exit the special education system. A symptom of this is a large achievement gap between students of color and their Caucasian peers. Due to this chronic trend, fewer black students ultimately graduate from high school or enter post-secondary education, and fewer men and women of color can enter the workforce or attain class mobility. This trend of cultural and racial discrimination in the special education evaluation and placement process has been identified to courts, federal and state agencies, and local school districts as problematic, widespread, and severe.

A study conducted by the Department of Education, entitled Early Childhood

“Parents of non-white students are often thought of to be less participatory than the parents of white students.”

Longitudinal Study Kindergarten Cohort (1998), found that when data is controlled for socioeconomic status, number of books in the home, gender, and birth weight, black and white children enter kindergarten at the same achievement level, and black children frequently score higher on some evaluations in reading. This study was conducted with a national probability sample of around 22,000 children in 800 public schools and 200 private schools. The children were assessed upon entry to kindergarten in fall of 1998, spring of kindergarten, and fall and spring of first grade. Although these children showed similar academic abilities upon entry into kindergarten, it is how the gap dramatically expands by the time the children enter spring of first grade that is extremely troubling. Figure 1 (p.15 )represents both the raw data (prior to placed controls) as well as the adjusted data for both achievement in mathematics and reading.

The study concludes that if black students continue to fall behind their white counterparts at a similar rate as shown from kindergarten to first (0.16 standard deviations in math and 0.19 standard deviations in reading), by the time they reach 9th grade they will be one full standard deviation behind their white peers.

Over the years there have been many different policy implementations to attempt to amend the issue of overrepresentation of black students receiving SpEd services. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) as well as No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) both put emphasis on accountability through mandated monitoring of academic outcomes for the most at risk populations of students. IDEIA also requires that students are serviced with the least restrictive programs possible. These kinds of programs are all classified as “tiered interventions.”

Culturally responsive teaching strategies attempt to fight cultural bias and create classrooms that validate non-dominant cultures are successful when utilized appropriately. There is evidence that tiered intervention frameworks such as Response to Intervention (RtI) and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) can assist in eliminating this overrepresentation. Parent advocacy groups targeted at expanding the general knowledge of the Individual Education Process (IEP) and increasing opportunities for trust and participation between parents of color and school systems can be powerful instruments for change.

CRT ideology and policies oriented towards increasing parent advocacy are methods that work to eliminate the disproportionality in special education. CRT is targeted at eliminating institutional bias while empowering parents to ensure they have decision-making capacity when it comes to educational choices being made for their child.

A popular implementation of tiered intervention is Response to Intervention services (RtI), as well as its most recent iteration multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). Both of these models are multi-tiered instructional delivery systems that utilize research-based interventions that increase in intensity depending on the students’ instructional response. MTSS is the most recent iteration of RtI framework. Its goal, similar to that of RtI, is to increase levels of support and intensity of intervention based on a student’s needs. The student’s individual needs are measured utilizing standardized assessment and audited by built in progress monitoring. It also places an emphasis on decreasing the popular “zero tolerance” policy within schools. This type of system leads to automatic removal from classrooms, which results in time spent outside of a learning environment, and also directly contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline. Similar to RtI the program, MTSS utilizes systematic, data-based decision making about services needed for students based on specific outcomes. Unlike the RtI framework, MTSS promotes overall emotional wellness using a universal screening for behavioral and emotional barriers to learning. This creates a more holistic and sustainable approach: academic struggles often have ties to behavioral and emotional barriers, which tend to be ignored or mistreated. RtI and MTSS increase early identification and intervention so schools can begin servicing students informally before significant weaknesses begin to surface. According to the U.S Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection (2012), black students are referred more often and punished more severely for the same behaviors exhibited by their white peers. A huge contributor to behaviors is feeling academically frustrated. The RtI program enables teachers to identify students who may not be mastering foundational skills early on and gives them the support that they need in order to catch up. This early identification and intervention limits the number of students who feel like they are behind their classmates, thereby encouraging marginalized students to stay in school.

Another contributor to frustration is feeling different or unacknowledged in the classroom. Biases of curriculum and educators create an environment that causes experiences of frustration. In 2003 a study was conducted that followed the referral processes in schools that served primarily African American students. The researchers found that when teachers met to discuss concerns, they portrayed students as “problems” and attributed their academic weaknesses to personal characteristics such as low intellect, socioeconomic background, and dysfunction within the home. Subsequently, very few discussions revolved around what could be done within the classroom to help the students in question. This lack of focus on pedagogical practices led to fewer students of color being eligible for pre-referral early intervention, and more students of color being tested for special education eligibility.

Utilizing culturally responsive teaching methodology can help combat this bias. The Center for Culturally Responsive Teaching (CCRTL) attempts to push an approach to teaching that validates and affirms different cultures for the purposes of moving beyond race and moving below the superficial focus on culture. The program is comprised of three broad strands of development: professional development, community development, and school development. Through these three strands, the program aims to inform stakeholders concretely and practically while reforming institutional policies and practices (and consequently, administrative and instructor mindsets).
Rezoning Ridgewood:

A Land Use Survey

Victoria Garvey

In 1994, the New York Times published an article that proclaimed Ridgewood, Queens as a “blue collar haven” within New York City. At a time when the city was experiencing a swift uptick in employment, young professionals settled within this sleepy Queens neighborhood and were charmed by the neighborhood’s idyllic and historic districts where porches were cleaned and well-kept. The article also acknowledges that the “invisible, jagged line separating [Ridgewood] from Bushwick, Brooklyn, has long been an object of both anxiety and opportunity.” The relationship between these two neighborhoods has been one of tacit acceptance and tolerance that roiled throughout New York City history: is Ridgewood in Queens? Or Brooklyn? On the northern, less dense side of Ridgewood, many families own brick rowhouses and pass them down to younger generations. On the south side, the neighborhood looks much more like its Brooklyn counterpart, Bushwick, and has been the site of growing anticipation for much of the mid-2000s as some of the area’s industry has shifted out of the neighborhood. Ridgewood, like its adjacent neighborhood, Glendale, is situated on the southeast border of Queens County, directly above Bushwick and between Maspeth and Middle Village. Ridgewood is well serviced by public transportation; two MTA subway lines reach Ridgewood in two different areas of the
Ridgewood's industrial area more affordable for residents on the border of these two neighborhoods. This study will demonstrate the current demographics, zoning, and land use of the neighborhood and discuss the immediate future of the area in question in which residents will see their physical landscape change dramatically.

Employment

There is a good variety of industry reflected in the Ridgewood workforce population. In civilians over age 16, approximately 27% work in service occupations, 23% work in “management, business, science and arts occupations,” and 22% work in sales and office occupations. Other frequently-worked industries in Ridgewood are education (19.4%), construction (12.9%), waste services (11.2%), retail (9.3%), and production & manufacturing (6.5%). It is interesting to note that even with its devoted manufacturing zoning, the smallest percentage of the neighborhood workforce deals in the industry. This may or may not have consequences on the population in the event of the new rezoning, which will be discussed later in this article.

Current Zoning

As shown in Figure 2, land use in the 4-block radius of census tract 559 is industrial, with some residential and commercial properties mixed in. Within the four different blocks of the census tract, Block 3556 emerged as the focal point because it showcased the different types of land well.

Block 3556, like the entire primary study area, is zoned as M1-4D. The zoning designation “M1” regulates the use of multi-story lofts that include light industrial uses. In this area, most warehouses and lots fit this description – most industrial lots belong to window makers, automobile shops, storage units, and wholesale services. None of these industrial types of buildings exceed two stories, so sunlight is abundant and shines down on most of the street. The 4 in M1-4D means the maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR) cannot exceed 2.0 and that parking is not required for these types of facilities. For the most part, Block 3556 meets these criteria – not one building surveyed went over the maximum FAR, and minimal parking lots are used. Examples of building typologies can be seen in Figure 3.

The residential housing peppered throughout the industrial atmosphere also complies under M1-4D zoning, which also allows office space and housing to be built next door or nearby (but it does not allow these light industrial buildings to be converted into housing). M1-4 zoning also has height restrictions on buildings of 60 ft. from the street. For example, the mix of these two zones on Decatur Street show a varied landscape of buildings, where a home can be situated next to a walled off lot or padlocked garage. The aesthetic impact of these zoning regulations are quieter streets that are sparsely occupied in the evening or late nights after industries have closed for the day.

Ridgewood Rezoning Proposal from the Land Use and Zoning Committee of CB5

Efforts to rezone Ridgewood were a focal point of neighborhood politics at the time of this survey. Paul Kerzner, the vice president of the Ridgewood Property Owners and Civic Association (RPOCA) and committee member of Queens Community Board 5 (CB), became a spokesperson to keep development away from the historical landmark district of northern Ridgewood, and placing it in the southern, manufacturing area. The last rezoning was seventeen years ago, primarily motivated by neighborhood constituents in response to landlords turning one bedrooms into 2 or 3+ bedrooms in their buildings. Under the previous zoning resolution, this practice was legal (though frowned upon). Now, Kerzner claims that this new rezoning would address the
issue of landlords adding new floors that maximize 15 to 20% more space in new and existing residential buildings. He says, “we needed to do [the first rezoning] under the cover of darkness to avoid speculation.” Now, with this new zoning potentially on the docket, there is more at stake for the industrial area of Ridgewood.

The primary goal of CB5 is to downzone all of Ridgewood and keep it low-density. This is against the grain of the “pro-growth” modus operandi the City has taken in the last twenty years, so the community board realized they needed to propose a plan that would promote development in other areas of the neighborhood. Their proposal, when unveiled on November 8, 2017 at a community board meeting, was met with a lackluster (but not wholly negative) response from the people in the audience. This is the first “bottom-up” plan Ridgewood has created, in which CB5 created the rezoning proposal from scratch, based on other cities like Denver, CO and Portland, OR.\(^\text{11}\)

Kerzner acknowledges that the current M1-4D zoning (light manufacturing with mixed uses allowed) was a part of the 2000 rezoning, and he echoes the fear that many people in the area share: gentrification. He explains that there is a possibility that landlords and owners of these manufacturing spaces may be using their buildings illegally to lease as residential spaces. This new proposed 2018 rezoning would provide an M-X overlay to the entire primary area (and other surrounding blocks): the overlay would help mandate manufacturing use in the area, much like the current industry. The change would come in an FAR bonus: if a developer decides to keep the first two stories as true industrial use, then he or she can develop two or three more stories on top for condominiums. The key here is ownership – with equity partnerships, Kerzner believes this would be successful in combating gentrification, which manifests in higher rents and displacement of residents. His proposal also includes 50% affordable housing for residents already living in Ridgewood. He calls it “capitalism in its newest form,” as the new development would not require any government subsidies.

Kerzner hopes to see 1,000 new units built. When asked if community land trusts (CLTs) could be a part of the solution to this new rezoning, he was less than optimistic. He explains that Queens in general does not have a good track record of developing or executing CLTs.

With this new development, Kerzner also commented on the influx of residents that may overburden the already-strapped transportation system in the area. Presently, the Halsey St. L subway station is the only walkable stop for many residents, and there are only a few bus lines (and fewer that go into the CBD of Manhattan). Kerzner explained that 70-80 years ago, the LIRR used to have passenger service stop in Ridgewood on its Bay Ridge line. The possibility of its renewed service has been in the Regional Planning Association’s back pocket for many years, he says, and feels any significant residential activity may be the fire that lights the spark.

“This is not pie in the sky – this could all be very real,” Kerzner said, when asked about all of this in a five to ten-year scope. In a more recent conversation, Kerzner also explained the possibility of opening up an express track on the M train line to alleviate congestion in the subway. At the Seneca Ave. station, there are two extra tracks covered by the current station that could be re-exposed and used to hold extra subway cars for the rush-hour commute.\(^\text{15}\) While these ideas could work in the future, there is a lot of guesswork involved if these retired transit modes will be utilized at all.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The proposed Ridgewood rezoning is in a holding pattern – the rezoning subcommittee of CB5 held a closed meeting on April 5, 2018 to answer questions from the District 30 Councilmember Robert Holden. In a past community board meeting on November 8, 2017, there were some dissenting opinions regarding condominiums as the favored housing stock. Community board chair Vincent Arcuri felt there was no way to mandate this housing unit over rentals or other types of homes.\(^\text{13}\) Other concerns with the plan that were voiced included: lack of control over condominium boards; who could elect to rent out all the spaces in the building; change of character in the area that could lead to gentrification (though the MX overlay zoning does prohibit big box stores, hotels, storage units, and big entertainment buildings like movie theaters); and congestion added to an already overburdened transportation system (if the LIRR tracks cannot be used as an alternative).

When confronted with these issues recently, Kerzner responded honestly and said, “I worry about everything. I know we can’t resolve everything at once, but we’re in good shape right now.” He believes that by fulfilling the city’s mandatory inclusionary housing (MIH) directive by making 50% of new housing in the rezoning available to Ridgewood residents, this will encourage longtime residents to stay and build equity in a significant way. As mentioned previously, many historically-landmarked row houses in Ridgewood are passed down to family members, and those that are not passed down are often sold at market rate.\(^\text{14}\) It is clear Kerzner cares about Ridgewood, and does not want to see gentrification sweep through any part of the neighborhood, but intentions cannot be the bedrock of any plan – as the proposal reaches the Department of City Planning, he hopes the plan will stay in tact and will not be altered in any way.

Currently, there are no parameters in this plan to enforce industrial business to stay in a building once condominiums are already built. Because the plan had not been public at the time of the initial land use survey, it was difficult to gauge public opinion. A popular website called Ridgewood Social, which frequently posts local news about the neighborhood as well as issues that would affect tenants and renters in the area, commented that there was no organizing activity against this rezoning in Ridgewood currently and generally, many of these groups would likely exist in the neighborhood next door in Maspeth.\(^\text{15}\) This signaled a need to promote this plan publicly and get more industrial business owners involved and aware. This work will continue beyond the scope of this report.

When looking at the area in its historical and economic context, it is important to note that this rezoning was created by a predominantly white, middle-aged group of people who have lived in Ridgewood or the surrounding area for
most of their lives. With the majority of citizens represented as Latino in the U.S. Census, residents living in or around census tract 559 need to be made aware of this new rezoning, and given the option to buy property if they can afford it under the MIH directive (though the affordability of “affordable” housing does need to be questioned in the context of New York City, it cannot be fleshed out here in its entirety). It would be a disservice to the neighborhood to allow any type of rezoning that would raise rents and push existing residents out of their homes or exacerbate displacement of any these communities. This area of Ridgewood is unique in its building typologies and its inhabitants. Many people of all ages and ethnicities live or interact in this space, either recreationally or through work, and its character underscores the working- to middle-class economy present in the area. While more development is not always negative, any new development done within these industrial and manufacturing buildings needs to be done slowly and with extra attention to vulnerable people, specifically the families that live in this district and the workers that are employed at these manufacturing sites.
Queensbridge Houses, a 46.5-acre site of public housing in the Long Island City neighborhood of western Queens, stands out for both its affordability and for its social services and park space it has made available to its tenants. Frederick L. Ackerman and William F. R. Ballard, both architects in the Technical Division of the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), developed the original site plan of the Queensbridge Houses in 1936. Ackerman was a renowned housing reformer who was responsible for the design of the First Houses in the Lower East Side, and Ballard went on to become chairman of the New York City Planning Commission from 1963 to 1966. While their original plans for the project did not completely come to fruition, the project still stands out as an example of decent, affordable housing built and managed by the municipal government.

Ackerman and Ballard were dedicated to designing high-quality housing for lower-income tenants that also provided greener living environments and community-based recreational spaces at affordable rent prices. The original plan arranged the project buildings in an orthogonal pattern to create numerous courtyards. To compute the amount of daylight available to each unit of housing, they used research by consultants Herbert S. Swan and George W. Tuttle. The daylight available to rooms within the complex would decrease at a rate related to the increases in density and land coverage. Due to the space in between buildings, daylight would be more accessible for project tenants than tenement dwellers. The original plan for the complex even included a community pool and eight tennis courts near the two large playfields abutting the river.1

Ackerman believed that government leadership on this project could resolve the shortcomings of capitalist housing markets by providing decent, low-cost housing for the working class. As Ackerman repeatedly mentioned in the site and unit plan, planners who set out to design quality housing for low-income households were constrained by the market’s profit motive. Despite improvements in productive capacity and design techniques, the private housing market, Ackerman lamented, continually delivered a substandard quality of housing for the working class, characterized by high levels of congestion and inordinate rates of decay and obsolescence.2 In the late nineteenth century, for instance, reform-minded philanthropists constructed “model tenements,” but these failed to become generalized because of the higher profitability of standard tenements.3 Ackerman and Ballard’s ambitious design of Queensbridge reflected their faith in the government to correct this market flaw.

Ironically, the United States Housing Authority’s (USHA) strict spending limits simply replaced the private market’s limitations in this instance, and ultimately constrained the design quality of the Queensbridge Houses.

The housing projects built by the Public Works Administration (PWA) between 1933 and 1937 were expensive compared to USHA’s projects. For example, Queensbridge’s cost per room was half that of the PWA-funded Harlem River Houses. After USHA funds became available, the project restarted and NYCHA named Ballard the chief architect of the project, and Henry S. Churchill the associate architect. They replaced the bar buildings with Y-shaped structures, which were combined in chains of two, three, or more buildings around the perimeter of the superblocks. The Y-plan, they argued, improved daylight illumination and privacy by adding more building façade. Even though taller buildings would have reduced average room cost, the buildings did not rise above six stories, likely because city regulations required a second fire exit staircase for taller buildings. Other cost-cutting measures included eliminating closet doors and basements, and having elevators stop at every other floor.4 Currently, the elevators stop at every floor, except the sixth.

Today, the Queensbridge Houses do not include all the amenities envisioned in the original 1937 plan, such as the large community pool and the eight tennis courts. Yet, the NYCHA complex still impressively offers numerous amenities - often through partnerships with other city agencies and charity organizations. East of the housing project is Queensbridge Park, which, although under the jurisdiction of NYCHA, is maintained by the Parks Department and the community group Friends of Queensbridge Park. The park includes a number of facilities, such as baseball and soccer fields; basketball, volleyball, and handball courts; a playground with swings and a jungle gym; and picnic
and sitting areas. On weekends, hundreds of project tenants patronize the park. Additionally, on the project grounds, there is a community center run by the Jacob Riis Settlement House, a community garden stewarded by residents, a nursery school administered by the non-profit Police Athletic League, and a charity healthcare facility operated by Floating Hospital. On 41st Avenue, at the center of the complex, there are a few private businesses catering to the community, such as a Fine Fare supermarket, Dollar Store, Dominican restaurant, and beauty salon. Despite the proximity to the Queensbridge-21st Street F-train station and Queens bus stops, there is a large parking lot for NYCHA residents who depend on their cars. For the almost 15 percent of the project population that is disabled, cars may be an important transportation option.

NYCHA envisioned that the Queensbridge Houses would be home to working families, and not a site of concentrated poverty. However, in response to federal pressure, NYCHA eventually lifted the cap on families receiving welfare from 20 to 30 percent at USHA projects and Queensbridge did become a development with a high concentration of impoverished families of color. While in its early years, Queensbridge was predominantly white, due to factors external to the project, the demographics at Queensbridge changed. While in 1941 over 3,000 households living in the project were white compared with only 52 African-American households, by 1969, 63 percent of tenants were African American and 16 percent were Puerto Rican - two groups that tended to have lower incomes than the earlier white families, in large part due to racial discrimination in the labor market and to the deindustrialization of the local economy. White families found opportunities to move out of public housing in response to their improved economic situation and the expansion of options in the private market. At the same time, Black families were limited by private-sector discrimination and increased their demand for public housing. That same year, only 19 percent of families were on relief, but by 1978, 25 percent received assistance. Likewise, in 2010, 50 percent of tenants were African-American, 37 percent Latino, and 9 percent Asian, and 37 percent of families lived below the poverty line.

“[Queensbridge Houses] stands out as an example of decent, affordable housing built and managed by the municipal government.”
Reframing the Affordable Housing Crisis

Beatriz A. Gil

In 2013, Mayor de Blasio came into office with the promise of affordable housing for all. However, the housing affordability crisis will not be addressed by simply increasing the number of affordable units. Fulfilling the promise of affordable housing requires an entire reframing of development in terms of equity so that the city’s residents can benefit from the revitalization of our neighborhoods and entail a redefinition of housing as a human right; in order to rightfully address the housing crisis in New York City, affordable housing must be understood as a right of all citizens.

A Crisis in Affordable Housing During his State of the City Address in 2017, Mayor de Blasio committed to build or preserve 200,000 affordable homes in 10 years. He reiterated his commitment in the 2018 State of the City Address where he outlined his plan to achieve this ambitious goal by setting aside underused, small, and irregular lots for affordable construction, helping non-profits buy rent-stabilized apartments in gentrifying neighborhoods, protecting Mitchell-Lama buildings, and offering financing to first-time home buyers. He touted that his administration will reach their original goal two years ahead of schedule and then surpass it, to build or preserve 300,000 homes by 2026.

Does a focus on a specific number of units truly address the affordability crisis? Despite the city’s plethora of affordable housing, there are still many New Yorkers without steady shelter. Based on the most recent 2014 U.S. Census Bureau New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey, there were 75,458 vacant units across the 5 boroughs, with the highest number in Manhattan (24,254), followed by Brooklyn (20,896), Bronx (14,871), Queens (12,070), and Staten Island (3,368). The total number of units includes units in rent stabilized buildings (21,822), Mitchell Lama buildings (2,861), public housing (2,861), other government assisted/regulated buildings (617) and all other vacant units for rent (47,518).

According to the de Blasio administration, the Mayor built or preserved 21,963 housing units in 2016 for poor and working-class New Yorkers – this is the most since 1989. Housing affordability is not a matter of supply, but more closely concerns the current incomes of current city residents that do not keep up with inflation.

The Policy Environment Much like Michael Bloomberg, de Blasio is counting on new, market-rate construction to alleviate the housing crisis rather than pushing the city to directly subsidize new construction. The current policy environment to create affordable housing is driven by Housing New York, Mayor de Blasio’s 10-year housing plan to create and preserve 200,000 affordable units targeting low and moderate income New Yorkers – this is the most since 1989. Housing affordability is not a matter of supply, but more closely concerns the current incomes of current city residents that do not keep up with inflation. Given that Mayor de Blasio made affordable housing a core message of his mayoral campaign, many New Yorkers expected that housing affordability would be at the heart of his administration’s agenda. A major strength in the Housing New York plan is the emphasis on preserving the affordability and quality of existing housing stock. It is critical to keep New Yorkers in their homes and improve the quality of many buildings, particularly those that create dangerous and unsanitary living conditions.

Housing New York has created a 5-level income band with a percentage of area median income (AMI) and annual income (for a family of three) as part of their efforts to define affordability. This is a significant first step towards preserving the City’s economic diversity, but the income bands may need to be revisited if the local residents fall below the limits. An emphasis on serving the housing needs of the homeless, seniors and people with special needs is also favorable to addressing affordability as members of these communities live in precarious housing arrangements.
One ongoing threat to affordable housing is the high costs involved in building new housing in NYC. The city is also losing some of its sources of funding; in 2017, the federal government slashed the budget for the New York City Public Housing Authority (NYCHA), which depends on $2 billion of its $3.2 billion operating budget from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Given this threat, the city ought to explore other financing models for housing preservation and new construction. This may create an opportunity to work with community development institutions that have experience with lending, acquisition and rehabilitation of smaller buildings. However, attracting prospective developers and community development organizations to create a patchwork of financing streams adds another layer of complexity to implementation and long-term sustainability.

The Politics of Affordability

In 2018, the Legislature revived the 421-a tax abatement, but re-branded the abatements as the “Affordable New York Housing Program.” The tax abatement program initially expired in June 2015 but the bill died in the Legislature when leaders and labor unions could not agree on wages for the construction of these projects. Critics of the bill argued that the plan was not intended to create affordable housing but was simply a generous subsidy for developers. Initially, the abatement program was created in the midst of a fiscal crisis in the 1970s to encourage development in underutilized and vacant lots. Developers have come to rely on the tax exemption under the guise of creating “affordable” housing. According to the Department of Housing Preservation and Development, the State will be increasing the subsidy in the form of a tax break for developers for every unit of affordable housing.

Because the new 421-a bill will be in effect until 2022, housing advocates need a strategy to hold developers accountable to actually creating affordable housing for every unit of affordable housing.

Organizing groups have asked advocates to find out which jobs go on the city’s projects. Housing advocates have also challenged city officials to make the city’s work within each of these projects more public.

In order to rightfully address the housing crisis in New York City, affordable housing must be understood as a right of all citizens.
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Worried about Gentrification? Want to be part of a Community Land Trust?

**Community Land Trusts (CLTs)** are non-profit organizations that treat land as a public good.

CLTs can promote environmental sustainability and justice by:
- Cleaning up toxic sites and fixing properties in poor shape.
- Requiring the use of environmentally sound materials and fair distribution of waste and resources.

CLTs can preserve and develop good community spaces like parks, gardens, and public centers.

CLTs can support jobs and economic justice by:
- Making affordable space available to small businesses and non-profits.
- Requiring businesses and development projects on the CLT to hire locally and pay a living wage.

CLTs can work with non-profit, cooperative housing models to:
- Keep rents low and to create and maintain homes not shelters.

Community Land Trusts (CLTs) support development without displacement by:
- Working closely with community members and prioritizing community needs when making decisions.
benefit from market rate housing to subsidize affordable housing. This private construction however, has done very little to fill the void of affordability. Conceiving of a housing model that will fit everyone's needs is challenging. Still, the current political climate may allow policymakers to consider a hybrid model that can address housing needs on a localized level. The policy alternatives below work within the constraints of current law but also consider a cooperative model that gives communities more say on how housing is developed and managed in their neighborhoods. Promoting neighborhood development with an emphasis on equity is timely given that the crisis in affordable housing has reached a tipping point.

Policy Alternative 1: Let Current Trends Continue Through the Reinstatement of 421-a

Under the first policy scenario, housing advocates would step back and let current trends continue, consisting of the rebranded 421-a tax abatement law, which expires in 2022. This policy works by offering developers of market rate rentals (300+ units in certain neighborhoods) a 35-year property tax exemption with the condition that they set aside 25% to 30% of the units for low- and moderate-income tenants. The previous 421-a policy provided a shorter exemption period. The advantages of this law will give developers confidence to move forward on major construction, but this does not necessarily translate into more affordable units. The law will mainly benefit the developers because they receive a tax break in exchange of including "affordable housing" in new construction. The policy also favors the construction unions because it adds a wage requirement for construction in Manhattan and certain parts of the outer boroughs. This tax abatement will usher in more permit requests from developers, especially those that waited for the law to be reinstated. Although there is a carve-out for affordable housing, it is unlikely that it will alleviate the housing crisis and will come to a significant cost to taxpayers over the long-term. According to analysis by the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development, 79 cents of every 421-a dollar is spent on luxury developments, and only 11 cents is spent to support affordability. The Independent Budget Office estimated the tax abatement would cost the City $8.4 billion in foregone property taxes over the next 10 years. Four of these funds could be directed towards neighborhood-based housing development.

Policy Alternative 2: Develop Additional Regulations to Guide Implementation of 421-a

A second alternative would be to work within the constraints of the recently passed 421-a law, but work with the City and developers to implement it in a way that ensures affordability. This could mean pushing developers and the City to agree on an AMI that truly reflects what people earn in NYC, rather than following the AMI established by HUD. The current AMI calculation includes parts of Long Island which skews the data and assumes New Yorkers make more than they take home in net pay; hence, a more accurate way to calculate the AMI is to only include income data from the five boroughs. The advantage of working with the current law is that advocates can use this as an opportunity to revisit AMI. Housing advocates need to ensure the conversation around affordability is based on real incomes. According to the New York City Community Land Initiative, CLTs and MHAs enable lower-income people to access housing and improve their financial situations, but the programs are sometimes criticized for not allowing property owners to profit from their investment. CLTs and MHAs are up against the same challenges as developers in that they still need the resources to acquire and develop properties, but developers have access to more capital. CLTs have a housing model that can involve financial support from different sources, such as rental of commercial space and higher income tenants. Another challenge of the CLT/MHA model is that it can be difficult to operationalize because it requires that the community take on technical roles and responsibilities related to running a building. Nevertheless, this model can be leveraged in addition to other housing models because the need for affordable housing is so acute.

Policy Alternative 3: Replicate the Community Land Trust Model

The third scenario offers a community-based model that could respond to the housing market at a neighborhood level. A Community Land Trust (CLT) owns and manages land, while a Mutual Housing Association (MHA), owns and manages housing. MHAs can own several buildings and help residents manage their housing with the help of other outside experts. The advantage of a CLT is that it creates a vehicle for the community to take ownership of the land and it treats land as a community resource or public good rather than as a source of profit. Members of the CLT board are responsible for maintaining housing affordable in the long-term. The New York City Community Land Initiative leads efforts to support different groups in the creation of a CLT or MHA. Currently, there are several CLTs and MHAs in New York City, including Cooper Square CLT/MHA, Lower East Side People’s Mutual Housing Association, Mutual Housing Association of New York (MHANY), CATCH (Community-Assisted Tenant-Controlled Housing), and the East Harlem-El Barrio Community Land Trust. The de Blasio administration has been criticized for not being more open to the CLT model and instead relying on developers to provide affordable housing in large-scale development projects through time-limited affordability agreements. This creates the potential for city-owned land to be privatized, which could have otherwise been used for affordable housing. But with the Mayor’s recent housing plan, the administration is now considering CLTs. In early 2017, the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) issued a Request for Expressions of Interest for organizations to develop at Community Land Trust, although this does not obligate the City to provide funding.

Towards Long-term Affordability

Residents in neighborhoods across New York City are under intense displacement pressure because of increasing rents and redevelopment. Maintaining New York as a diverse and vibrant place will require the City to create a stronger incentive structure for affordable housing so that current residents can benefit from development projects. Furthermore, the crisis in affordable housing is also contributing to a rise in homelessness; all while luxury housing projects are springing up across the city. Displacement should not be considered an inevitable side-effect of neighborhood and economic development. If equality becomes a key part of policy conversations among City officials, real estate developers and neighborhood development advocates can help shift the City’s housing policy towards creating long-term affordability.
In recent years, the United States has suffered natural disaster after natural disaster. The increased frequency of strong hurricanes that have made landfall on US soil due to climate change has exposed some of the many existing gaps in disaster planning and recovery. These forces of nature uproot infrastructure and make it clear that development without reverence for the natural world can be catastrophic. As students and planners, how do we move forward?
Houston, the 4th largest city in the US, is popularly known in the planning community as the city with no official zoning codes. This policy or lack thereof is reflected in the sprawling city’s infrastructure, a patchwork of business districts, suburban residences and heavy industry, connected by long stretches of pavement lined with wet and dry swales. It is bordered on its east side by Bernet Bay, and Downtown Houston is accentuated by the meandering Buffalo Bayou. It is this combination of market driven land use decisions and geographic context that left Houston so prone to Harvey’s devastating effects when it reached the metropolitan area on August 26th, 2017. By the time it reached Houston, Harvey was a Category 4 storm with winds reaching up to 130 MPH and a storm surge that crested over 6 feet. More than 30 inches of rain poured over the city and several tornadoes were reported.

In a world in which disasters like Harvey are becoming frustratingly common, it is crucial that planners collaborate across disciplines and agencies to identify weaknesses in resiliency policy and disaster preparedness. Urban planners at Rice University who experienced the effects of Harvey first hand. He specializes in sustainable development and the development of context sensitive solutions for urban development. He has had experience with sustainability social engagement through developing consensus-building techniques for public participation and community involvement support for the identification and delineation of planning objectives, and facilitation of stakeholder meetings for federal, state, and municipal projects. We spoke about how individuals could get involved with relief efforts in Houston and how the history of city planning in Houston has affected the policy responses of the state and federal governments.

Dr. King advises that the first step any individual should take to become more disaster ready, is to perform a thorough inspection of personal disaster preparedness. They should also refresh their knowledge of emergency and evacuation protocols. Evaluating their communities access to disaster relief information is also key to becoming better prepared. The next steps are for community members to reach out to their local planning boards to develop strategies for both disaster preparedness as well as relief strategy, however, due to the history of planning in Houston, as King states, “people do not care about city planning because they do not know what it is”. Houston’s government speaks the language of engineering and construction to solve most of their issues, and due to this, planners must work alongside communities to begin the process of planning for future natural disasters. Although tragic, Harvey has provided an opportunity for planners to make themselves more visible to communities and explain what their role is in community governance.

Student planners can play a key role in improving urban resilience and sustainability, especially in the wake of disasters, by playing the intermediary between professional planners and communities. Although this information sharing is restricted by both a lack of access to populations in need and the warranted timidity of professional planners to take part in top-down planning as we have learned so many painful lessons from that process.

As Dr. King discussed, the goal for these conversations should not be to tell communities what to do and how to react to a natural disaster, instead they should provide the language and information necessary to enable community members to participate in the urban development legal process. These conversations should primarily be hosted in town hall meetings and community board meetings. To reach the broadest audience, it should also be discussed on social media such as community-focused Facebook groups, message boards, and other popular platforms in the particular community.

In Kings words, we need to “stop thinking about pouring concrete and think more about building bonds between communities and governance”. Although King recognizes that efforts in this participatory practice of community are already taking place to some extent, he cites that they do not occur in a very efficient manner in Houston as the communities in which these practices are implemented do not reflect the areas that require the most aid post disaster.

As King explains, community-based implantation strategies can be pushed to the side very quickly, especially when a community lacks access to information and education regarding planning. Departments fear participatory practices will be ineffective due to a history of a lack of involvement as well, and this often leads to an over generalized understanding of the planning process. Although this is well intended, planning policy that does not deeply engage and integrate community practices prove inert in the face of real situations.

Considering all of the factors that go into community planning for disasters in a place like Houston, how are we supposed to effectively create and implement community-based planning strategies? King cites planners ability to unite stakeholders as the strongest skill we have readily available to us in the wake of natural disaster. Planners must be prepared to take their craft outside of traditional contexts as board meetings and written proposals have not been sufficient. To rebuild Houston, we must rebuild trust.
Can Move New York Move in NYC?

Queens as a Case Study

Atara Lindenbaum

Move New York, (Move NY) is a policy solution to an urgent issue in New York City, one that affects almost all city users and residents. Despite frequent toll increases and transit fare hikes, New York City's transportation infrastructure is in dire need of mass improvements — delays, overcrowding, and traffic are features of all modes of transit. Still, as a congestion pricing plan designed to raise revenue and lessen traffic, Move NY has yet to gain political traction.

A case study of the opposition to Move NY in the borough of Queens elucidates the contentious nature of the plan. Through a careful analysis of the demographics and opinions inside this borough, it is possible to better understand specific political obstacles. Here, using a mixed methods approach, an analysis shows that in order to move this transportation policy forward, it is imperative to nurture and create a targeted campaign, with a mixture of storytelling and rational numbers.

Move NY centers itself on one main principle: drivers should be tolled more for driving on highly congested roads, and charged less for roads that are used less often. In this vein, Move NY proposes that all private cars entering the Central Business District (CBD) pay a flat fare when they enter and leave. Cashless tolls would be installed at 60th street and charge all private cars a fee when they enter and exit the CBD. However, Move NY also proposes that the tolls on outer and less congested bridges, like the Whitestone, Throgs Neck, and the Triborough (now called the Robert F. Kennedy Bridge), be reduced by a significant percentage, but reintroduces tolls on the more congested bridges such as Brooklyn, Queensboro, and Williamsburg Bridges. Additionally, Move NY adds a surcharge to for-hire-vehicles (FHV) that travel in the CBD. At the end of 2017, this plan had the support of politicians in 4 out of 5 boroughs in New York City. However, Queens politicians refused to support Move NY despite its widespread support in other boroughs.

Support and Opposition for Move NY in Queens

Queens politicians were extremely resistant to any sort of congestion pricing even though a majority of Queens residents expressed support for the Move NY plan. In a poll administered by Transportation Alternatives in late 2016, 55% percent of Queens residents chose a more equitable tolling system as a preferred means for raising revenue for transit and transportation infrastructure. Still, a steady and pervasive opposition and ambivalence existed within Queens towards Move NY.

The recent poll indicates that the opposition is likely not about Move NY’s actual proposal. Rather, opposition centers around a distaste to the plan’s perceived underlying motivations, as well as a reluctance due to a general lack of understanding and education of what the plan is and will do. The Transportation Alternatives poll did not use the plan’s title (i.e. Move NY, and avoided any term like congestion or cordon pricing. While there is no proof of correlation between residents’ support and the lack of the Move NY title, qualitative interviews with Queens leaders and residents suggest that it is likely that naming the policy Move NY would have skewed the results towards less support.

The experience in reaching out to Queens leaders and politicians supports this theory. Calls made to Community Boards in Queens were initially friendly and congenial. When the request was to talk to someone about transportation needs, instructions were to reach out to the community leaders over email. However, once emails were sent that mentioned Move NY, responses became curt and opinionated. For example, after hearing that the correspondence was in connection to Move NY, one district manager responded with the following sentence: “Our Board is vehemently opposed to any proposal that would put a tax burden on middle class families from Queens who travel to Manhattan.” Further attempts to explain Move NY as a benefit, not a burden, to Queens residents proved futile, eliciting no response from the district manager.

Queens residents have a long history of resisting citywide policies, particularly when Queens residents feel they are bearing the brunt of the policy implications. Lobbyists who are against raising revenue from tolls have given voice to this sentiment amongst Queens residents since a prior plan from former Mayor Michael Bloomberg was introduced and failed in 2007. While facts and costs-savings go far in illustrating the
benefits and need for Move NY, in the current political culture in Queens, public support lags behind. alteration the deeply embedded culture of opposition to transportation policy a concerted effort to change the perceptions about Move NY is necessary for its success in the borough.

Case Study of Queens:

Culture of Opposition In Queens

Interviews conducted with Queens residents and politicians revealed a deep culture of opposition to Move NY. A distrust of the MTA, a need to protect the middle class, and a need to protect the single family suburban lifestyle of many Queens neighborhoods were frequently mentioned. To Queens residents, Move NY was emblematic of a slew of other city policies that aimed to use their borough for citywide revenue or housing, without consideration for its current residents. The diverse demographics of Queens contributes to its culture of political opposition. Queens is one of the top five most diverse counties in the United States. The ethnic communities in Queens can be quite segregated from one another, each creating its own unique social group and community infrastructure. While each group may have strong community leadership, often, these distinct and particularistic ethnic groups distrust the politicians working on their behalf. Divisive political issues risk united opposition from various ethnic groups.

Queens is also quite diverse politically; some communities vote Republican while others lean Democrat. Toll pricing often enjoys the support of both the right and the left. However, the reverse is also true; both the right and the left will take issue with aspects of the policy. For example, liberals see tolling as an issue of equity to those who have no choice but to drive to get to work. Conservatives are suspicious of the government, and do not want any more money leaving the pockets of the (so called) “middle class” to the government of New York City.

Suspicion Over Revenue and Benefits

Politicians were suspicious — Move NY’s only guarantee is a toll hike, while the promises of transit benefits from tolled revenue remain theoretical. In fact, some politicians who contacted the MTA and DOT had their suspicions confirmed. The MTA and DOT were allegedly unwilling to verify that revenue streams from Queens would in fact be used to fund specific projects within the Queens borough.

Politicians also question why the MTA should collect more funds from city residents. City residents already contribute to the MTA through taxes, ticket fares, and other existing tolls; while the state only provides 4% of the MTA budget. The MTA is a state agency and provides an integral economic service to the state. With this in mind, many residents and city politicians insist that the MTA should find funding from the state government before reaching deeper into the pockets of city residents. Furthermore, current revenues from MTA tolls disproportionately go to commuter rail projects. The burden of toll payments falls on city residents, most of the revenue from tolls goes to subsidize commuter rails. The graphic below, from the city Comptroller’s office, illustrates this discrepancy.

Protection of Suburban Lifestyle

Move NY is often interpreted as part of a larger scheme to take away the bucolic suburban lifestyle present in many Queens neighborhoods. Recent proposals from the Mayor’s office to change zoning laws to accommodate affordable housing have put these neighborhoods further on the defensive. Move NY, while not a policy from the Mayor’s office, is often suspected as being a part of “another” scheme by the city to push out lower density neighborhoods and upzone them. To many, a suburban lifestyle is the convenience of a personally owned vehicle, even with access to transit. These drivers do not want to feel that they are paying for every ride they take in their cars.

Protection of the Middle Class

Queens has long been the home of middle class families and individuals who are either priced out of Manhattan or Brooklyn, or prefer the suburban setting of Queens. While Brooklyn and Manhattan house some of the wealthiest residents in the city, Queens prides itself as being open to all income levels. The congestion within the city business district, to many residents in Queens, is a problem that disproportionately affects only the upper classes of Manhattan. Re-introducing a toll on the Queensboro Bridge, therefore, is considered a tax on the middle class lifestyle of Queens residents that will only solve an issue of congestion for the wealthy city residents.

Lack of information to Queens

While many elements of the Move NY Plan will benefit Queens residents, a culture of opposition in Queens has created an environment where residents have a negative reaction to many of Move NY’s promises and benefits. For exam-
ple, when Queens residents hear that traffic will go down and result in significant time savings in their commutes to Manhattan, many hold a suspicion that Manhattanites simply want Queens residents out of Manhattan, and using the tolls is a way to ensure that Queens residents stay out of Manhattan. Promises that money will fund transit projects is interpreted as money going directly to politicians who will use the money for their own benefits.

Queens is home to a plethora of industrial business owners, many of whom use the Queensboro bridge to conduct business in Manhattan. The currently toll-free bridge results in a lowering of costs to their consumers, which gives businesses a competitive edge in the market. An additional toll scares them, and they are not sure what they stand to gain. These business owners only see a toll hike, and do not understand how less traffic will result in increased revenue for their businesses.

Other residents raised doubts that drivers would change their habits and thus take the Queensboro bridge infrequently due to a new toll. Opponents claim that toll pricing is inelastic, meaning that behavior does not necessarily change due to a price increase. This argument is compounded by the fact that for many drivers crossing over the bridge, there is no alternate route via public transportation.

Who Will Pay?

Many Queens residents were unaware of the various mechanisms within the Move NY plan that will raise revenue. To them, a toll over the Queensboro Bridge is a direct toll only on Queens residents. Residents seem to be unaware that there are drivers using this bridge coming from other boroughs or from New York State. While the concept of “bridge shopping” may seem obvious to policy makers, it is not familiar to many Queens residents and politicians.

Data

Many Queens residents work in the Central Business District (CBD) in Manhattan. However, only around 49,000 of those who work in the CBD actually drive into work — around 210,000 use public transportation.

Residents of Queens who work in the Bronx, Upper Manhattan, Suffolk County, Westchester, Hudson County, Bergen County, and Staten Island would all see significant cost savings on their work trips due to the toll decreases on the outer bridges. These are workers who all depend on their cars to get to work as there are no direct public transit options originating from Queens and ending in these other outer boroughs and counties. Perhaps Queens politicians are listening to the political elite when they defend their citizens’ rights to travel to Manhattan’s CBD without tolls instead of their constituents. The residents interviewed for this paper who work outside of the CBD are largely in low earning professions (i.e. teachers, storekeepers and caretakers). While many were apprehensive about a toll on the Queensboro bridge, they were also receptive to the proposal for lower tolls on the outer bridges, as it could bring them significant cost savings. On the other hand, interviewees who work in Manhattan or Queens were against tolls on the Queensboro, citing an unfair burden on Queens residents who often travel to Manhattan on the weekends to go to the theater.

Spatial Analysis

Queens suffers from a lack of subway lines and access. A glance at a subway map (above) reveals that many people living in Queens have a ten-minute plus walk to the nearest subway line. Further analysis of city data shows that Queens does indeed rank last in subway access across the five boroughs. Queens has 81 subway stations, while Brooklyn has 170 and Manhattan has 148. The Bronx has only 70 stations, but has 900,00 fewer residents than Queens, which is home to 2.3 million people. Queens is larger [in land mass] than the Bronx as well.10

Queens is not a true transit desert, as there are extensive bus lines throughout the borough. The Select Bus Service is expanding in the borough ast well, and the Mayor’s plan for a BQX trolley along the waterfront is gaining traction. However, Queens residents are aware of the new extension of the subway line along Second Avenue in Manhattan, as well as the Mayor’s exploration of the Utica Avenue Line in Brooklyn. Queens residents often feel forgotten and overlooked in spite of its significant population growth.

Recommendations

Define a problem that MOVE NY is trying to solve

Currently, many Queens residents see Move NY as creating more problems than it solves. Unlike Bloomberg’s plan in 2007, Move NY does not define the central problem as increased congestion, but instead presents the toll swap as a means to provide better transportation infrastructure for the city. This problem is neither convincing for Queens residents, nor do they think that the burden to fund the MTA should fall on city residents.

Without a convincing problem, Queens residents often presume that other motivations are behind the plan, such as the goal to greatly reduce car ownership in the city, or “toll trips out of existence.”11 Conversations about Move NY eas-
ily devolve into explanations as to why Queens residents need their cars. This is indicative of the fact that to Queens residents, Move NY appears to aim for an alteration of the car culture in the borough. A more clearly defined problem, one that is clearly felt by Queens residents and solved by Move NY, would avoid ancillary conversations about funding the MTA and the need for personal vehicles in certain areas of the city.

A New Sense of Urgency

Transportation policy is often personal — everyone travels in some capacity, and feels connected to their chosen mode of transportation. Changes to transportation policy are therefore perceived as personal as well. Politicians are wary of transportation policy issues, as a position on transportation policy will likely polarize many voters.

One proven way to affect public opinion is to draw attention to a state of emergency in regards to the current transportation system. The Haas Ordinance in 1937 limited the number of medallions on the streets of New York City. However, the ordinance passed after outbreaks of violence erupted on the streets of New York, as cab drivers cut rates and fought over passengers. Aside from the violence, stores along Madison Avenue complained that congestion was bad for business; empty busses and cabs were roaming the streets of Manhattan. There was fear that congestion was also bad for development in the city. At the time, politicians understood that limiting the number of taxis on the streets would alleviate the traffic in the city, and allow those who drove taxis to have a functional work environment.

NYC faces congestion problems that will lead to an emergency if no action is taken. Queens politicians may understand this, but feel that the benefits of supporting a policy like Move NY do not outweigh the potential political costs — that of alienating their voter base. Move NY advocates must help politicians understand how the risk of congestion is felt collectively, and specifically stress the direct impacts on Queens residents.

Recent transit news highlights the need for a plan like Move NY. This past year, Bruce Schaller, principal of Schaller Consulting, published a report about the failure of the city to plan for the congestion. Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) add to the city’s streets. Vehicle Miles Travelled (VMT) is rising, and subway transit service and ridership is dipping. Schaller proved that TNCs were adding significant congestion to the streets of NYC, and that the new technology of TNCs, which makes passengers’ lives easier, was causing a significant burden on the city’s traffic and roads. Last year TNCs caused a net increase of 600 million vehicle miles traveled in NYC. The ease of app-based hailing services is taking passengers away from public transit as well.

In his report, Schaller strongly recommends road pricing as a means of reducing congestion and raising needed funds for public transit. The Move NY plan, per Schaller, is well suited to contain the rise of TNCs in NYC because it adds a surcharge to for-hire-vehicles (FHV). Using GPS technology, Move NY charges FHV by the mile and the minute in Manhattan south of 69th Street. Added costs would both discourage TNC use and raise funds for transportation projects within NYC.

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The current Move NY slogan claims that it is “fairer.” This slogan presumes that the current state of tolls over the Queensboro Bridge gives them the better end of a deal, while others lost out. A replacement to this term needs to avoid any terminology that may put Queens residents on the defensive.

Conclusion

Move NY should engage Queens residents with customized messages that are tailored to specific communities within Queens. When talking to the CBD drivers who value their time highly, time savings should be the emphasis. Liberal groups will likely support a plan that emphasizes the environmental benefits and improved transit, while Conservative groups ought to understand that this is an alternative to a tax on all citizens to raise funds for transportation. Queens residents stand to benefit from the lowered tolls throughout the city. Effort needs to be made to highlight the cost savings, using targeted campaigns, technology, and personal conversations with community leaders.

Thus far, Move NY presents itself as a rational policy solution to an obvious problem of congestion NYC. In the current political climate, empirical studies and evidence are often considered biased and subjective. A thorough understanding of the culture and demographics of Queens residents is essential in building a narrative that can help shape perceptions of public policy.
The financial success of the 1984 Olympics proved that if organized "correctly" (by private capital rather than municipal bodies), hosting mega-events could be a boon for both corporate sponsors and the private sector. Though the LAOOC did not significantly change existing urban fabric or work to improve local conditions through infrastructure or employment initiatives, the surplus of $872 million in 1984, $1.1 billion, and $1.7 billion, respectively. 

Renewed interest in hosting the Olympics post-1984 has largely been a result of the intra-urban competition for private capital. Mega-events and the accompanying economic Morrill that have the opportunity to engage in marketing for their cities, leveraging the self promotion as a method of urban regeneration. This pro-growth strategy, spearheaded by local elites and corporate sponsors, fails to address the needs of the most marginalized groups at-risk in host cities. The "sanitation" of Los Angeles and Atlanta came about the world's focus would be on these events, millions of dollars in private investment at stake; between 1995 and 1996, over 9,000 homeless people were arrested for loitering in Atlanta. Thus 400% increase from previous years. Laws were legislature to prevent the removal of litter from trash cans, clearly targeting the city's homeless population. At the same time, Atlanta's public housing stock was decimated, and its residents displaced. 

These recent developments complicates the relationship between the idealism of Olympism as a movement and the mega-events themselves. Organizers have failed in maintaining the perceived importance of the event, no matter how much pressure from its foundations it has become. The Olympics, in addition to showcasing the skills of the world's premier athletes, also provides an opportunity for pro-growth municipal forces to engage in the privatization of public life. 

PUBLIC HOUSING

The Olympics continue to grow in importance as a transnational cultural sporting event despite fierce criticisms from all crevices of the political spectrum at every level of representation. In line with Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony, our contemporary Olympics is a stage for corporate interests and elites to deploy the Olympic ideology towards legitimizing their roles in society. Private actors collaborate with state agents to provide safe areas for consumption, for capital surplus, and for accumulation. For Los Angeles, the success of the Olympic movement is a result of the privatization of public space. This has resulted in the privitization and gentrification of the LAPD. Root causes of strife, such as unemployment and drug addiction, or any other social ills plaguing inner-city LA, were ignored in favor of aggressive public housing policies.

SOCIAL POLICY

An example of teaching with CRT is education on American Western expansion. While some may choose to teach the lesson through the eyes of the Anglo or white pioneers and politicians who supported westward expansion, CCRTL incorporates multiple paradigms in curriculum implementation by providing the perspective of indigenous people. CCRTL engages classrooms with a curriculum that is structured to foster a community that can explore differences of opinion and background, safe social interactions, and mutual support among classmates. Engaging students of dominant cultures could have a profound importance in closing the achievement gap and lessening the amount of minority students that end up being tracked into SpEd settings. 

QUEENSBRIDGE

The Queensbridge Houses experienced higher crime rates in the 1980s and 1990s, and developed a reputation for gang- and drug-related activities. Such changes were poetically reflected upon by the local rapper Nas in the early lyrics of rapper Nas, who grew up in the complex during the height of the city's crack epidemic. In his song "One Love," he updated his incarcerated friend on recent neighborhood happenings, singing Little things on the dice, hanging out with young thugs that all carry guns, at night time there is more trife [violence] than ever. I But, as Katherine Bristol has similarly argued, "The chronic free-ride myth," the higher crime rates and resultant social chaos of these years cannot be blamed solely on the design of public housing projects, such as Queensbridge. Instead, there is a shared responsibility for the social-historical context: the continued deindustrialization of New York's economy, which had negative impacts on working-class communities of color, in tandem with the growth of the illicit crack cocaine economy in the 1980s, not just in public neighborhoods, but in workplaces and homes. 

The demolition of public housing sites across the nation over the past two decades has dovetailed with efforts by cities to improve their tax base through gentrification. Thus, there are a number of factors countervailing against this outcome for Queensbridge, at least in the short-term. First, NYCHA is one of the few public housing authorities that retains a degree of control over its properties, giving NYCHA the ability to maintain its public housing in pristine condition. Second, unlike in the 1970s, New York is no longer struggling to attract private investment. Gentrification has spread throughout the city, and therefore, affordable housing is a politically sensitive issue for local politicians. Lastly, activism among project tenants and the relatively decentralized nature of New York City politics also play an essential role in the superior conditions of public housing in New York, compared to cities like Chicago where much of the public housing was mismanaged and eventually demolished through HOPE VI. These factors can help explain why Queensbridge recently received $87 million for facade and roof restoration.

Nevertheless, Queensbridge, along with the rest of NYCHA's portfolio, is still endangered because of continued federal disinvestment. Local authorities, such as NYCHA, receive funds every year from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to cover the gap between rent revenues and operational costs. HUD's formula to determine this amount, but Congress ultimately decides on the percentage of the formula to allocate to local authorities. Beginning in 2003, funding dropped to 95 percent of the formula, then 90 percent in 2005, and subsequently to 78 percent in 2007.6 In response to underfunding, NYCHA has hired developers through HUD's Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) program to convert 1,700 unit public housing projects into Section 8 housing, which will be managed by both NYCHA and a private real estate company. Ackerman's ambition to develop an alternative model for housing the working class has been realized. Queensbridge Houses is a remarkable example of how government can build and continue to successfully manage affordable housing for the working class, and at the same time collaborate with local non-profits and community-based organizations to offer social services to residents. The project's unique social climate in the 1980s and 1990s was not due to any inherent design flaw of the project, but was simply indicative of the restructuring of New York's larger political economy. The project's success is even more impressive in the face of the federal government's continued disinvestment in public housing. However, in order to maintain and even expand upon it.
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