Spatializing Social Equity through Place-Based Policies
Lessons from the Green Impact Zone of Missouri, in Kansas City, MO

By

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ABSTRACT

The Kansas City Green Impact Zone of Missouri is a regionally administered, place-based initiative that emerged in direct response to the 2009 “federal moment” symbolized by the creation of the White House Office of Urban Affairs and the passing of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and the Livable Communities Act. The initiative aims to coordinate and concentrate new resources in a 150-block area that – once the target of formal disinvestment and segregation – is now home to some of Kansas City’s poorest African American families.

This thesis uses the deep-case study approach to examine how place-based programs can simultaneously promote the three Es of sustainability (equity, the environment, and the economy) and to understand the challenges to organizing and implementing such initiatives.

The thesis first reviews the people vs. place debate in urban policy, and introduces into that debate literature on spatial justice and sustainable development, to claim a role for equity concerns in the current urban policy and planning agendas.

To understand the context in which the Green Impact Zone operates and the source of the problems it hopes to address through place-based investment and programming, the thesis then describes the history of decisions, policies, and programs that created a racialized, inequitable, and unsustainable landscape in Kansas City.

The thesis then describes the process of developing the Green Impact Zone initiative, evaluating the strengths of the model and the challenges it has experienced to date, to draw lessons and make recommendations at two scales. The thesis concludes by suggesting that to effectively promote sustainability in all its three Es (equity, environment, economy), Engagement must be considered as a fourth E.

Thesis Supervisor: Anne Whiston Spirn
Title: Professor of Landscape Architecture and Planning
Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., Letter from a Birmingham Jail, April 16, 1963
I am grateful to the many individuals associated with the Green Impact Zone of Missouri, particularly those who spoke with me about their work, their ideas, and their city. I am especially grateful for the warm hospitality of Mary Nusser and Rick Parker, who so graciously hosted (and fed) me throughout the month of January in Kansas City.

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Preface

I arrived in Kansas City, Missouri in January of 2010 to learn about an initiative that had recently gained national attention – one that was being positioned as a potential model for leveraging stimulus funds to address the complex issues existing within Kansas City’s most distressed communities. The initiative was pioneered by Missouri’s 5th District Representative, Congressman Emanuel Cleaver II, and proposed to use sustainability as a catalyzing force to drive a process of “green” neighborhood transformation through a comprehensive and coordinated set of both social and physical interventions.

Having spent much of my time over the past year and a half at MIT studying regional and local economic development and city design and development, the idea of “greening” held two meanings for me. On the one hand, it implied the participation of physical planners and professionals – including landscape architects, designers, and engineers – who understand the city as a challenge for design, one that could be built and designed more efficiently. On the other hand, it implied the participation of advocates and economic development planners who saw an opportunity to lift low-income communities out of poverty by leveraging what has come to be called the new “green” economy. When I found that the Kansas City initiative was organized in response to perceived opportunities within the Recovery Act and that the initiative had spurred collaboration amongst a wide set of organizations in the city, it seemed that all of the necessary elements for creating a socially and spatially innovative project had come together: physical planners and designers who could implement a set of ‘green’ initiatives that advanced the area’s
When I decided to examine Kansas City’s Green Impact Zone initiative, I knew that it had only been announced in March of 2009, and that, as a result, it would be difficult and unfair to evaluate its overall impact on the community, economy, or environment. My intent, therefore, was less to examine any final outcomes of the initiative, but more to understand the approach to community development and design that it was promoting. What, exactly, was so innovative about this new program that moved Van Jones, the White House’s new Special Advisor for Green Jobs, to promote it on NPR, and Adolfo Carrion, Director of the new White House Office of Urban Affairs, to discuss it in his blog? Furthermore, coming from a background in international development, where I was trained to consider how the process of designing and implementing a given project contributes to its social impact, I wanted to understand the particular process through which this initiative was being organized and implemented. My plan, then, was to take my interest in understanding how to innovatively bridge the social and spatial aspects of urban planning and to learn first-hand from a group of people who were being nationally recognized for doing it in practice.

By the time I arrived at my first interview in Kansas City, spoke with my interviewee, and left her office, I was surprised on many levels. First, I realized that what was spatially innovative about the initiative was not necessarily its focus on energy efficiency and environment (the physical interventions), but rather its focus on an area of the city that was historically the target of formal, racist policies that were meant to physically and socially marginalize the populations therein. The new initiative also recognized that the traditional channels of managing city resources could not account for the outcomes of those injustices, as communities experience them today. Second, it immediately became clear that, although the initiative was widely recognized as a potentially transformative approach to taking on two
pressing urban challenges -- poverty and energy efficiency -- it was experiencing many more challenges than one could perceive through reports and news articles. These two realizations eventually shaped my approach to the case, and, as a result, I formulated the following research question: How can place-based programs simultaneously promote equity, the environment, and the economy? What are the challenges to organizing and implementing such initiatives?

**A Brief Introduction to “The Zone”**

A simple drive through the area bound within the Green Impact Zone is telling. On the one hand, there are obvious signs of distress: foreclosed homes, abandoned schools, curbside dumping, sagging roofs, vacant lots, and overgrown trees, sometimes threatening a home.

On the other hand, there are signs of health: a man shoveling snow outside a church stops to chat with his neighbor, a community garden with a hand-painted sign waiting for winter to thaw, or a recently renovated home. A view of the Green Impact Zone map hints at the area’s historical complexity, too: looking north to south, Troost Avenue tells a story of racial segregation, Paseo Boulevard hints at the legacy of George Kessler and the City Beautiful movement in Kansas City, Bruce R. Watkins Expressway (Highway 71) testifies to a community’s struggles with
displacement and the politics of place, while Prospect Avenue – where it crosses the east-west Brush Creek corridor – is a reminder of a city’s various efforts to control flooding.

This east-west Brush Creek corridor tells another host of Kansas City’s stories. From the Green Impact Zone, it connects west to JC Nichols’s Country Club Plaza and the wealthier inner-ring suburbs on the Kansas side of the Missouri-Kansas state line, and east it connects to the Blue River. In particular, the corridor tells a story of two types of political leaders: one, the notorious “Boss Tom” Pendergast, who used his concrete company in the 1930s to pave the creek, which subsequently contributed to the massive 1977 flood that killed 25 residents; and the other, Emanuel Cleaver II, who as a City Council member in 1987, introduced “the Cleaver Plan,” which included funding for the Brush Creek Flood Control and Beautification Project. Unfortunately, the project stalled before extending to the Blue River, leaving some communities vulnerable to future flooding. Construction resumed after a 1998 flood killed an additional eight
individuals and was completed in 2004. Promoting east-west construction of the Brush Creek project was considered one of Congressman’s Cleaver’s most significant contributions to the city. It also signaled his perennial commitment to mitigating the east-west divide that pervades Kansas City’s social psyche and economic reality.

When Congressman Cleaver announced his idea for the Green Impact Zone in 2009, many locals understood the Zone to be a continuation of his commitment to the Brush Creek Corridor and its symbolic weight as a space that crosses the racial and economic divide of Troost Avenue. But, it was bigger than this; Cleaver was jumping on an opportunity that had yet to present itself during his time as a Congressional leader. The federal government had signaled a move toward establishing and strengthening place-based programs and simultaneously made available new federal funds, through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, that could be used to promote both the economy and the environment.

**Methodology**

Trying to understand the idea of promoting “equity” drew me to the deep-case approach. I wanted to understand the layers of history that created the “place” and the problems that this place-based program was trying to address. This also spurred from my belief that revisiting the root causes of many of the problems associated with “concentrated urban poverty” in a given place can expose the fact that alleviating poverty and promoting equity are often two sides of the same coin. Unfortunately, words like ‘equity’ and ‘justice’ are often marginalized in the urban policy dialogue (Fainstein 2006, 26).

Importantly, my participation in a collaborative thesis project through the Community Innovators Lab (CoLab) at MIT enhanced my “deep case” process since it allowed me to

1 This was first brought to my attention by Dr. Michael Frisch at UMKC
implicitly draw from the experiences, challenges, and questions, facing communities in the five cities that five other Master of City Planning candidates on the project were studying. Through our bi-weekly meetings I was able to continually question how Kansas City and the Green Impact Zone experience compared to the way other communities around the nation were reacting to and grappling with questions of equity and sustainability. Again, I turn to Fainstein’s argument that “when thinking about just cities, we must think simultaneously about means and ends, social movement strategies and goals as well as appropriate public policy” (Fainstein 2006, 26). It was apropos, then, that I could learn from one friend and colleague, Eric Mackres, who was studying framing processing in green social movement building, from another, Ben Brandin, who was looking at the implementation of the Weatherization Assistance Program in three cities, and yet another, Marianna Levy-Sperounis, who was questioning how policy can spur regional collaboration for green jobs development. While I reference their work in only one or two places, their thoughts, research, and influence permeate my chapters.

Data for the Kansas City analysis came from a variety of secondary sources, including books, journal articles, and reports. Primary data for the case analysis came from project and organization websites, local press coverage, publicly available grant applications, publicly available meeting notes, publicly available performance reports, and 25 personal interviews (most were conducted in person during January 2010). A majority of my interviewees were contacts whom I came across through the “snowball sampling” method, whereby each time I spoke to someone I asked them to refer me to other potential informants. As a result my interviewees represent a range of partners and actors whom are either directly involved in the

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2 The Collaborative Thesis Project - advised by Professor Lorlene Hoyt and CoLab staff members, Amy Stitely and Alexa Mills - brought together six Master of City Planning students who convened throughout the year to share research discoveries, craft intellectual connections across studies, trouble-shoot problems, and publicly-disseminate findings. The cities examined were Camden (New Jersey), Kansas City (Missouri), Lawrence (Massachusetts), Oakland (California), The Bronx (New York), and Boston (Massachusetts).
project or are involved more generally in shaping Kansas City’s social and spatial environment. A full list of interviews can be found in the Appendix of this thesis.

**Thesis Organization**

Chapter one lays out the theoretical framework for evaluating the Green Impact Zone, and claims a role for equity in the current urban policy and planning agendas. This includes a discussion on the people vs. place debate in urban policy, interwoven with discussions on spatial justice and sustainable development. Chapter one concludes with the position that place-based programs such as the Green Impact Zone are a potential tool for promoting equity, the economy, and the environment, and that the creation of the Zone gives us an early opportunity to evaluate the implications of the model’s strengths and the challenges it has experienced to date. Chapter two examines the production of the “unjust geography” (Soja 2010) that the Green Impact Zone operates within, whereby decades of conscious decisions, policies, and programs contributed to a racialized and inequitable social and spatial landscape. Chapter three goes into a more detailed description and analysis of the Green Impact Zone initiative and concludes with recommendations for change within the initiative. Chapter four synthesizes the implications of the major challenges for federal policy and ends with concluding thoughts.
Chapter 1: Urban Policy, Equity, and the Environment

There are several key decisions that define the “federal moment” that is so often referred to when describing the current political environment around urban policy and the opportunities it presents to local governments, communities, and professionals that are involved in shaping the built environment. First, on February 17th of 2009, the newly elected President, Barack Obama, signed into the law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act with a dual emphasis on job creation and energy efficiency. Two days later, the President issued an executive order to establish the White House Office of Urban Affairs so that his administration could “take a coordinated and comprehensive approach to developing and implementing an effective strategy concerning urban America” (Orszag et al., 2009). Finally, in August of 2009, members of the Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee introduced a piece of legislation called the Livable Communities Act. This Act established an Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities at the Department of Housing and Urban Development and an independent Interagency Council on Sustainable Communities. The Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities was tasked with establishing a program that would promote comprehensive and sustainability planning, while the Interagency Council was charged with coordinating federal sustainable development polices. Taken together, these actions present a new wave of political will and federal investment to address the intersection of social, economic, and environmental concerns faced by people and places throughout the nation and particularly those in urban communities. They also thrust the idea of sustainability onto the political agenda.

The question of how the administration plans to address these new priorities rests in a memo that was written in April of 2009 by Peter R. Orszag (Office of Management and Budget),
Melody Barnes (Domestic Policy Council), Adolfo Carrion (Office of Urban Affairs), and Lawrence Summers (National Economic Council). The memo, addressed to the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies, carried the title *Developing Effective Place-Based Policies for the FY 2011 Budget* and articulated the position that place-based programs can “leverage investments by focusing resources in targeted places and drawing on the compounding effect of well-coordinated action.”

Using place-based policies to address urban challenges is by no means a new idea. However, new priorities have been introduced into the urban policy agenda, opening the door for place-based policies to be employed in new ways. Where once the urban agenda was defined narrowly to promote economic growth and reactively to insure an adequate supply of affordable housing, it has more recently been challenged to address a confluence of social, economic, and environmental concerns. Hence, the idea of sustainability, with its corresponding three Es, equity (social), economy (economic), and environment (environmental), has come to the forefront.

Considering, however, that the past decades of planning and policy interventions in cities have more often than not produced inequitable and unjust outcomes, the question facing policymakers, local government officials, and practitioners who influence the built environment is an even *deeper* question of *how*. How should the field go about promoting and implementing programs that meet this confluence of priorities, particularly equity and the environment, which traditionally took a back seat to economy? This thesis examines at a recent place-based initiative in Kansas City, Missouri, that proposes an approach and -- although still in its early stages of development -- offers important lessons for policy and planning. The purpose of this chapter is to contextualize these efforts and to frame them in a dialogue about and equity and sustainability.
Urban Policy: The People vs. Place Debate

The question of whether to target assistance and programs to distressed people or to distressed places is one of the oldest debates in urban policy. It was first sparked during the civil rights movement and the brewing urban unrest when housing economist Louis Winnick wrote a seminal piece, titled “Place Prosperity vs. People Prosperity: Welfare Considerations in the Geographic Redistribution of Economic Activity” (Winnick 1966). Winnick laid out what he understood to be the looming tension between two goals of policy: “between the ideal of improving the welfare of deserving people as individuals, regardless of where they live, and the ideal of improving the welfare of groups of deserving people defined by their spatial proximity in ‘places’” (Bolton 1992, 187). These two ideals have corresponding and conflicting implications for government policies; either you promote the direct transfer of payment to individuals, usually through subsidies that assist them in moving out of declining or distressed areas (i.e. Section 8), or you invest in the place – a geographically defined area – through grants to local government, subsidies to business, or by targeting education and worker training in an area (Bolton 1992, 187). Winnick’s essay came down against place policies, arguing that they are “ineffective at redistribution…[and] cannot be effectively targeted. Too much of [the redistribution] goes to the wrong people; the unemployed are often not the main beneficiaries” (Bolton 1992, 187).

Winnick’s position is one that many economists to date have continued to stand by. In a recent article revisiting this debate, Crane and Manville summarize the “case against place” as having three main elements. The first element is around the issue of targeting: “While place-oriented strategies invest resources into distressed places, there is no guarantee that the resources actually reach distressed people” (Crane and Manville 2008, 4). The second element is around
the issue of coverage: “What proportion of the poor or unemployed is helped by the intervention? If assistance is targeted to a neighborhood with concentrated poverty, who is left out?” (4). And the final element is around the issues of mobility: “at its worst, a place-based policy encourages people to stay when they might be better off going” (4).

The case for place goes back to the 60s as well, when President Lyndon B. Johnson created the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorder, which issued the Kerner Commission Report in 1968. The Report “provided careful, detailed findings regarding the status of African Americans in cities in the late 1960s – their income and employment status, their educational opportunities, their access to health care, their relation to the public welfare system and to the criminal justice system, and their access to political power” (Boger and Wegner, x). The report also recommended, without much direct or causal explanation, that this range of problems would be best addressed through a set of place-based programs (Fainstein and Markusen 1996, 143).

Since the Kerner Report, the question of people vs. place has reemerged several times. On the brink of Reagan’s inauguration, the President’s Commission for a National Agenda for the Eighties (PCNAE) delivered a report on Urban America in the Eighties, critiquing the past decade’s place-policies and programs which were criticized for inefficiently and ineffectively using federal funds, thereby coming down against place-based policies in favor of direct assistance to individuals. In the early nineties, with the election of President Clinton, the debate returned with many arguing that people-focused policies, too, had done little to improve the condition of urban poverty. Under Clinton, the place-based Empowerment Zones emerged

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3 In July of 1967 President Johnson issued Executive Order No. 11,365 to create the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorder, which was tasked with investigating “the origins of the recent major civil disorders in our cities, including the basic causes and factors leading to such disorder,” and proposing “methods and techniques for averting or controlling such disorders” (quoted in Boger 1996, 6).
which are continually criticized for their inability to benefit target populations. The George W. Bush years, on the other hand, brought times of complete urban neglect, as demonstrated by Department of Housing and Urban Development Secretary Alphonso Jackson’s infamous line in defense of Section 8 cuts: “being poor is a state of mind, not a condition” (quoted in Drier 2004).

Nonetheless, the case for place is generally built around ‘second-best’ and ‘public-goods’ arguments. In economics, ‘second-best’ refers to the phenomena whereby the most ideal option (i.e. the first-best) is infeasible, making the second-best the most effective. In the place debate, this argument contends that since “poverty is often spatially concentrated and imperfectly documented”, the targeting costs of reaching poor individuals can be reduced through place-based approaches (Crane and Manville 2008, 5). The “public goods” argument contends that place-based programs invest in assets that are geographically fixed, so their returns benefit a larger, non-exclusive public (Fainstein and Markusen 1996).

Gordon Clark and Roger Bolton offer an interesting twist on the public-goods argument by articulating more of the intangible benefits of investing in place. Clark defended place-policies by claiming:

> place and community remain, for many people, important social values that presume the necessity for a specific context in which personal interaction should take place... continual mobility implies personal alienation from the immediate community (Quoted in Bolton 1992, 190)

And Bolton builds his argument around the idea of a ‘sense of place’, which he describes as:

> a sense of community and co-operation that is shaped by a particular geographical setting, including natural and built environment, culture and past history... [and] a complex of intangible characteristics of a place that make it attractive to actual and potential residents and influence their behavior in observable ways” (Bolton 1992, 186-193).

However, most central, for the purpose of this paper, is the observation noted by Fainstein and Markusen who, in their defense of place-based policies, argue that “because racial concentration in inner cities has barely diminished in the last thirty years, the need for policies that take into
account the coincidence of place and poverty has only become more obvious” (Fainstein and Markusen 1996, 146).

It is important to note that Fainstein and Markusen were writing at a time when the “urban challenge” (in so far as policymakers were concerned) was predominantly a mix of social and economic concerns. Hence, their position on the matter was that urban policy moving forward needed to better integrate social and economic development priorities, particularly as it concerned minority communities. Today, environmental concerns have been layered on to the urban policy agenda, begging the question of how these concerns can be promoted at once, again, particularly as it concerns minority communities that are so often spatially defined in cities.

The environmental justice movement that emerged in the eighties was perhaps the first to bring forth the “coincidence of place and poverty,” and race, to widespread attention, while linking it to a question of ‘justice.’ As Soja describes:

Reflecting the ongoing struggle for civil rights, the [environmental justice movement] began as an attack on what was called environmental racism, the tendency for poor and minority populations, especially African Americans, to suffer disproportionately from air and water pollution and the sighting of hazardous or toxic facilities…. the search for environmental justice did as much to raise consciousness about the spatiality of (in)justice as any other development in the last decades of the twentieth century” (Soja 2010, 52).

**Spatial Justice and Equity**

While a complete review of the literature that engages “justice and the city” is beyond the scope of this paper, it should be acknowledged that even before the environmental justice movement, scholars and philosophers have long considered questions of “equity” and “justice” as they relate to the built environment. As Soja describes, Henri Lefebvre’s “Right to the City” “was packed with powerful ideas about the consequential geography of urban life and the need

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4 See Dikec 2001 for a review
for those most negatively affected by the urban condition to take greater control over the social production of urbanized space” (Soja 2010, 6). Similarly, he describes how Harvey’s work on “Social Justice and the City” showed that the effects of the “normal functioning of the labor, housing, and real estate markets, as well as the locational decisions of planners, banks, developers, and retailers” lead consistently to inequitable outcomes that both reinforce and produce distributional inequalities, or in Harvey’s words, territorial injustice (49).

The “consequential geographies of urban life” that Lefebvre references, and the “distributional inequalities” that Harvey discusses, sit at the heart of Soja’s theorizing on spatial justice. But where those works remained mostly theoretical and philosophical, the environmental justice movement and the more recent work of Soja both strive to link these issues more directly into the urban decision-making structure.

Soja considers distributional inequalities to be “the most basic and obvious expression of spatial injustice, at least when emphasizing geographical outcomes rather than the processes that produce them” (47). He goes on to argue that,

Distributional inequalities arise with regard to all basic needs of urban life, ranging from such vital public services as education, mass transit, police and crime prevention, to more privatized provisioning of adequate food, housing, and employment. The end result is an often self-perpetuating interweaving of spatial injustices that, at least after passing a certain level of tolerance, can be seen as a fundamental violation of urban-based civil rights and legal or constitutional guarantees of equality and justice (47).

Another author, Peter Roberts, suggests that such injustices have resulted from the “absence of social awareness in the process of spatial policy-making” (Roberts 2003, 228). Whether these result from a lack of awareness or not, these distributional injustices are the byproduct of a variety of policies and programs that shape the built environment, including (but certainly not limited to) the siting of toxic facilities, the siting of highways, and large-scale redevelopment projects of the past, as experienced during urban renewal. And, because these observations
explicitly acknowledge the unjust distribution of services and resources, and implicitly call for a more just distribution, there are direct policy implications to their claims. In fact, in an earlier work Soja articulated his intent to connect his observations of spatial injustice to the work of policymakers:

I do not mean to substitute spatial justice for the more familiar notion of social justice, but rather to bring out more clearly the potentially powerful yet often obscured spatiality of all aspects of social life and to open up in this spatialized sociality (and historicality) more effective ways to change the world for the better through spatially conscious practices and politics (Soja 2000, 352; quoted in Dikec 2001, 1792).

Yet his intent does not go so far as to suggest how policy can create better outcomes. Fainstein makes a similar critique of past scholars and philosophers who discuss justice and the city, when she said:

They do provide criteria for evaluating policy. The fairly glaring weakness of their arguments as practical tools is their lack of concern for the methods of achieving their ends, their lack of a formula for dealing with entrenched power, and their indifference to the costs and trade-offs that might be incurred by actually seeking to produce social justice (Fainstein 2006, 16).

In an essay about “spatial equality” John O. Calmore goes so far as to suggest that policy has a role in redressing past injustices, rather than simply insuring that they aren’t reinforced. Following from the fact that many of the spatial inequalities faced by African American communities resulted from “past discrimination by state and private actors who often operated in tandem (Calmore 1996, 311), he defined “spatial equity” as “a group-based remedy that focuses on opportunity and circumstances within black communities and demands that both be improved, enriched, and equalized” (Calmore 1996, 315). Later he stresses:

Until dominant society recognizes, acknowledges, and takes responsibility for this situation, denial and neglect will continue to stand in the way of establishing a coherent urban policy that addresses not only matters of housing and community development, but also the larger issues of social, economic, and racial justice (Calmore 1993, 312).
So why have concerns of equity remained relatively removed from the policy dialogue?

Fainstein argues that, in addition to remaining marginal concerns, equity and justice are difficult to achieve in isolation of larger scales. She writes:

To be sure cities cannot be viewed in isolation; they are within networks of governmental institutions and capital flows.... Justice is not achievable at the urban level without support from other levels, but discussion of urban programs requires a concept of justice relevant to what is within city government's power and in terms of the goals of urban movements. Moreover, there are particular policy areas in which municipalities have considerable discretion and thus the power to distribute benefits and cause harm; these include urban redevelopment, racial and ethnic relations, open space planning and service delivery (Fainstein 2006, 4-5).

This point reinforces the importance of multi-scale commitments to these issues and, in a sense calls for an understanding of the systems that reinforce injustice. This inter-scale coordination, or systems approach, is also recognized as crucial for promoting sustainability.5 And, it is the sustainable development agenda that most recently places the question of “equity” into the policy and practice arena.

*Sustainable Development*

In writing about Sustainable Development and Social Justice, Peter Roberts argues that sustainability’s

wider than environment interpretation.... suggests that the reduction of social exclusion and the promotion of greater cohesion and justice are fundamental objectives that are as important to the achievement of sustainable development as responsible economic progress and the effective management of the environment (Roberts 2003, 230).

It is this same definition, however, that moved Scott Campbell, in 1996, to write an article titled “Green Cities, Growing Cities, Just Cities?” in which he argued that the popular

5 The concept of sustainability first emerged in 1987, at the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), from which emerged a document called the Bruntland Report. Its main concern was with what it called “sustainable development”, which it defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.” The report was later adopted at the UN Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. It has been widely acknowledged, that the UN Conference marked a turning point (Roberts 2003, 235) in its challenge of the post-war growth paradigm and its promotion of social and environmental justice concerns into the growth and development agenda.
formulation of sustainability is “vulnerable to the same criticism of vague idealism made thirty years ago against comprehensive planning” (Campbell 1996, 435). Campbell further argued that the tensions between the three priorities within sustainability represent real conflicts of interest that will not be easily resolved. Those conflicts include:

- a property conflict between the ideals of growth and equity;
- a resource conflict between the ideals of environment and growth; and
- a development conflict: between the ideas of equity and environment (Campbell 1996, 437)

Source: Campbell 1996, 437

Tying these concerns together, Campbell asked, “how could those at the bottom of society find greater economic opportunity if environmental protection mandates diminished economic growth?” (437). It is precisely this dilemma that advocates of the “new green economy” have attempted to address: build a new sector of the economy that meets environmental concerns (i.e. green jobs via retrofitting communities, promoting clean technology
industries, etc.) and simultaneously insures that marginalized populations, which are more often than not minority communities, are targeted and trained as the new workforce in that economy.

But who are these targeted populations? They are the same populations whose needs progressive planners and policymakers have continually attempted to meet (i.e. “the urban and rural poor”). What makes this movement different, however, is that it’s tied into a narrative of the sustainable development agenda, where equity has an articulated role. While that role remains marginalized in policy, as one author notes below, it is still there:

Equity is the third and by far the least developed of the Three Es [equity, environment, economy]. To be sure, it has long been the focus of many community activists, labor unions and social justice organizers. However, these constituencies often have relatively little power, and equity concerns frequently take a back seat in planning and political discussions (Wheeler 2004, 60; quoted in Baxamusa 2008, 20).

To be certain, the equity and advocacy planning traditions that emerged in the late 60s and early 70s in response to the overly technical approaches of the time’s top-down planning are a reminder that planners have broached these concerns in the past. And, although those traditions are often discussed as temporary responses to the issues of their time, they hold relevance to the current planning and urban policy moment in important ways: first, in their aspiration to fight for the interest of less powerful segments of society and second, in their inefficacy to truly empower those segments of society through ‘representing’ them. The equity and advocacy planning traditions certainly pushed for more equitable outcomes but did so through non-empowering processes.

Randolph Hester, in his recent book titled Design for Ecological Democracy, argues that there are three formal considerations that determine fairness: accessibility, inclusion, and equal distribution of resources and amenities. Like Soja’s concept of spatial justice, these considerations speak to both the processes and outcomes that determine equity.
If equity does not become a focus for planners and policymakers who wish to promote sustainable development, the idea of “sustainability” will become another model of development that maintains the status-quo (the “growth machine” can easily “go green” through technological innovation). And, while it is easy to recognize what injustice and inequity look like spatially, it is more difficult to imagine what their opposites look like. There is a pressing need for policies and programs that are at once spatially cognizant and able to balance equity concerns with environmental and economic ones.

Leaders in Missouri took a political risk in attempting to address these concerns and apply these ideals through the creation of the Green Impact Zone in Kansas City. While relatively new, their experiences -- both in their strengths and challenges faced to date -- hold important lessons. Before going into a description of the initiative itself, the next chapter reviews past decisions and policies that created the “unjust geography” (Soja 2010) that the Green Impact Zone aims to counter. Digging deep into Kansas City’s history reinforces the idea that alleviating the spatiality of urban poverty and fighting for equity cannot be conceived as separate battles, even if the former is more politically palatable.

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6 It should be noted that the emergence of “sustainability,” which was primarily a challenge to the traditional growth model, is quite distinct from some of the practices today associated with “greening,” which grew primarily out of the landscape architecture tradition, where biological, ecological, and other scientific processes were used to “construct nature” while incorporating necessary infrastructural systems into the urban landscape (Spirn 1995, 91). We might say, then, that “greening” is a tool, or method, used to promote the environmental arm of sustainable development, and therefore a necessary but insufficient piece of sustainability.
Chapter 2: The Production of an Unjust Geography

“The socialized geographies of (in)justice significantly affect our lives, creating lasting structures of unevenly distributed advantage and disadvantage.” – Edward W. Soja, Seeking Spatial Justice, Pg. 20

The title of this chapter draws from Edward Soja’s most recent work, in which he describes how “spatial (in)justice [results] from [both] the external creation of unjust geographies through boundary making and political organization of space... [and] internally from the distributional inequalities created through discriminating decision making by individuals, firms, and institutions” (Soja 2010, 9). The purpose of this chapter is to contextualize this phenomenon in Kansas City, by describing how the creation of physical and cognitive boundaries, and the political organizing of space, combined over decades to produce the uneven, unjust geography that the Green Impact Zone operates within today. I draw heavily from the work of Kevin Gotham and Sherry Lamb Schirmer, who have both written extensively on the policies, programs, and organizations that contributed to the spatial reorganizing and ensuing racial landscape of Kansas City.

Kansas City’s Early Development to the Creation of Deed Restrictions

Kansas City, Missouri has always held a peculiar position in the American landscape. Founded at the confluence of the Kansas and Missouri Rivers and located approximately in the center of the United States, its 19th century history is bound between its western-oriented existence as a once-frontier city, its economic position through ties to the industrial North and East, and its southern heritage as a slave-holding state. Over the course of its development, Kansas City came to be known as a “Northern town with a Southern exposure” and the “Eastern-most Western city.”

Prior to European settlement in 1821, the land within Kansas City belonged to Shawnee Indian tribes. Shortly after Missouri joined the Union as a slave state (1821) and fought in the
Treaty of St. Louis (1825), these tribes were relocated west of Missouri where the land was “still viewed as worthless” (Brown and Dorsett 1978, 4). By the mid-1830s the area grew in importance, as it became a key trading and transportation post and one of the last places that explorers and travelers could buy supplies before heading northwest on the California, Sante Fe, or Oregon trails. The Town of Kansas was incorporated in 1850 and changed its name to The City of Kansas in 1953.

Kansas City’s first streets were graded upon incorporation in 1850, but it did not experience significant growth until the post-civil war era when the Hannibal and St. Lawrence Railway extended across the Missouri River. With the introduction of the rail line over the Hannibal Bridge in 1869, the city boomed, becoming the center of the region’s commercial and industrial activity (Schirmer 2002, 11).

Table I: Total and Black Population 1860-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Pop</th>
<th>% change</th>
<th>Black Population</th>
<th>% Black</th>
<th>% change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>4418</td>
<td></td>
<td>160</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>32260</td>
<td>630.2%</td>
<td>3764</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>2252.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>55785</td>
<td>72.9%</td>
<td>8143</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>116.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>132716</td>
<td>137.9%</td>
<td>13700</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>68.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>163752</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>17567</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>248381</td>
<td>51.7%</td>
<td>23566</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>324410</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>30719</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>399746</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>38574</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>399178</td>
<td>-0.1%</td>
<td>41574</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>456622</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>55682</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>33.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>475539</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>83130</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>49.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>507330</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>112120</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>448159</td>
<td>-11.7%</td>
<td>122699</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>435146</td>
<td>-2.9%</td>
<td>128768</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>441545</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>137879</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>435826</td>
<td>-1.3%</td>
<td>124789</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>-9.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: US Census Bureau (2008 from ACS 3-year estimates)
Accompanying this growth was a significant increase in population, as noted in Table I, and a major real estate boom that increased real estate values significantly between 1880 and 1887 (Brown and Dorsett 1978, 37). Schirmer notes how between these dates,

Speculators rushed to capitalize on [the] amazing growth. Properties sometimes changed hands two or three times in a day as building contractors, carpenters and men with more ambition than construction skills erected houses and apartment blocks... Together they took out more than $10.5 million in building permits in 1886 (Schirmer 2002, 13).

While the boom ended around 1888, speculators and builders, mostly from out of town, continued to buy land and raise cheap structures. When the bust was finally exposed, investors immediately closed on vacant homes, “leaving the city short of capital and scarred by weed-choked, semi-vacant subdivisions” (Schirmer 2002, 14). The significant drop in property values that followed this bust motivated developers to create the city’s first set of official control measures, which came in the form of deed restrictions for the newly created subdivisions of Hyde Park and Kenwood.

When Hyde Park was first envisioned in 1886, its developers had a substantiated fear that the open space around a nearby ravine would attract informal settlements, as it had in other similar neighborhoods. Since the subdivision was created in reaction to the shabby development that marked the end of the real-estate boom, the developers wanted to insure quality and separation from such informal “infringement.” They thus hired a landscape architect, George Kessler, to develop a design solution, and he eventually designed the ravine into the median of a busy throughway. The subdivision was thus protected physically by the ravine and socially by rules within the deed restrictions which regulated the quality of buildings in the subdivisions and thereby the class of its inhabitants (Schirmer 2002, 15).

It is important to note that, throughout this period, Kansas City remained a relatively integrated city. Table II, drawn from Gotham’s 2002 book, shows the black population by ward
in 1880; coupled with the total populations in Table I, these figures illustrate the integration of black populations throughout the city (Gotham 2002,28).

**Table II: Kansas City, Missouri Population by Wards in 1880**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ward Number</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Black Population</th>
<th>% Black of Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9489</td>
<td>1098</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>12259</td>
<td>2537</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>8057</td>
<td>963</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>9106</td>
<td>855</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>8934</td>
<td>1060</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>7528</td>
<td>1401</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>55,373</strong></td>
<td><strong>7914</strong></td>
<td><strong>14.3</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Enumeration of the 1880 US Manuscript Census; Martin 1982, pp 14*

Gotham also used an isolation index to show that between 1880 and 1900 blacks continued to live in neighborhoods that were on average 13% black. He notes:

Interestingly, blacks moving into nineteenth-century Kansas City did not form a unitary, autonomous and racially and culturally defined community within specific geographical boundaries. Thus, local residents did not interpret black culture or behavior as connected to a particular 'place' occupied exclusively by blacks (Gotham 2000, 620).

Despite this assertion, four enclaves of early black settlers did in fact evolve in 19th century Kansas City (Serda 2003, 71). The first enclave developed in Hells Half Acre, which was the site of worker housing for many blacks who were employed to build the Hannibal Bridge. A second enclave developed in Church Hill in the 1880s. Schirmer states that many families chose to live in Church Hill to be near churches that doubled as community centers and that many of the enclave’s black residents worked as servants in nearby homes belonging to the city’s elite and middle-class. A third enclave, called Belvidere Hollow, developed between two ravines located in the North End, which housed many low-wage workers. The fourth enclave

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7 From Gotham 2000b: “An ‘isolation index’ measures the extent to which blacks live within neighborhoods that are mostly black. A value of 100 means complete segregation, indicating that all blacks live in an all-black area. A value of 50 or lower means that blacks are more likely to have whites rather than blacks as neighbors” (619).
developed on the east side of the city after the real estate bust left developers with a surplus of homes that they were willing to sell at modest prices. When these homes became available many African American households located on the east side between Troost and Woodland Avenues, from Twelfth to Twenty-fifth Streets, including part of Vine. Schirmer describes how, “within a decade, a corridor along Vine Street in this eastside black settlement would form the nucleus of the black ghetto in Kansas City” (Schirmer 2002, 39).

Historians acknowledge that these early enclaves did not emerge out of any particular racially discriminating practice or ideology, and both Gotham and Schirmer prove that a significant number of whites coexisted within these neighborhoods (Schirmer 2002, 32; Gotham 2002, 30). However, the real estate bust, the growing anxiety over property values (particularly among white populations), the city’s ensuing beautification projects which destructed integrated
neighborhoods, and the development of differentiated land use (which uprooted many black families from the bottoms), all began to reconfigure African Americans’ residential patterns (Schirmer 2002, 39). As described by Schirmer:

Black residents and newcomers alike found their housing choices narrowed somewhat by these early examples of urban renewal… Whether newcomer or longtime residents, most black Kansas Citians who needed to find new accommodations after 1900 preferred to locate in one of two enclaves, the North End hollows or the east side community of Vine Street.” (41).

Meanwhile, the success of Hyde Park developers in using deed restrictions as a mechanism for controlling use and the beautification projects that introduced the Parks and Boulevard System, caught the attention of a prominent Kansas City, Kansas, suburban developer, J.C. Nichols, who would contribute exponentially to the racialization of the city’s landscape.

**JC Nichols and Race Restrictive Covenants**

By the end of 1910 J.C. Nichols had assembled over 1000 acres of potential building sites in Kansas City, Missouri. His first developments were housing subdivisions, and with the assistance of other financial backers and the landscape designs of Kessler, Nichols later developed what would become the “Country Club District” (given its proximity to the Kansas City Country Club), now the site of today’s “Country Club Plaza” (Worley 1990, 6).

Nichols is recognized nationally for his contributions both to Kansas City’s development and to the real-estate development field more generally, as he was a founder of the Federal Housing Administration, the Urban Land Institute, and the National Association of Homebuilders (Gotham 2000, 625). Urban historian Sam Bass Warner was one of the first to note, however, that while his work in Kansas City was considered a “city planning triumph,” it simultaneously created a “social disaster” (quoted in Worley 1990, 8). What Warner referenced was Nichols’ rigid use of racially restrictive covenants. According to Gotham, “by the 1920s, he
was applying racially restrictive covenants on all classes of white neighborhoods as a necessary
and indispensable tool to exclude blacks”; his property deeds demanded that potential buyers
insure that “none of the lots hereby restricted may be conveyed to, used, owned, nor occupied by
Negroes as owners or tenants’ (quoted in Gotham 2000, 625). As summarized by Schirmer:

What truly distinguished Nichols’s district from similar developments in Kansas City and
elsewhere was the rigor with which he restricted buyers’ use of their property. He included the
typical requirements concerning minimum size and cost of homes, along with strictures against
selling or renting to blacks (Schirmer 2002, 17).

These practices coincided with the emergence of southern blacks in Kansas City during
the Great Migration, which fed directly into an exclusionary ideology being pushed by real-estate
developers. Social workers and public officials further fueled this doctrine through published
reports and analyses that “associated the presence of blacks with declining property values…
deteriorating neighborhoods, poor schools, high crime and other negative characteristics”
(Gotham 2000, 621). Not only were Kansas City blacks being formally restricted from living in
certain residential areas, but there was also a lucrative and conscious effort to create a more
hostile and racist cultural environment. As explained by Gotham,

Early 20th century racial prejudices, negative stereotypes of Black neighborhoods, and subsequent
discriminatory acts were cultivated and disseminated through the organized efforts of housing
reformers and elite real estate interests, community builders, and homeowners associations. Race
in the first half of the twentieth-century city was not just a cultural or ideological construction.
Instead, racial identity and racial difference assumed a material dimension imposed onto the
geography of the city by the emerging real estate industry through the use and enforcement of
racial restrictive covenants and the creation of exclusionary homeowner associations (Gotham
2002, 47)

In 1917, the Supreme Court made racial zoning ordinances unenforceable, signaling
some national attention to relevant issues of race and the organizing of space. But, because
Kansas City’s real estate industry was using restrictive covenants as its discriminatory
mechanism, rather than zoning ordinances, it continued to contribute to the increasingly
racialized landscape (Gotham 2000, 623). Furthermore, the city did not even pass its own
ordinance against racial zoning until 1923. Nationally, as late as 1924, the National Association of Real Estate Board’s code of ethics mandated that “a Realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood… members of any race or nationality… whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in that neighborhood” (quoted in Gotham 2000, 621).

As a result, racial tensions in Kansas City grew dramatically in the 1920s. The growing white anxiety, fueled by the real estate industry, created such contention over the character of some neighborhoods that between 1921 and 1928 there were a series of bombings targeted at black households, predominantly on the east side (Schirmer 2002, 101). It was also around this time that middle-class African Americans began to develop an explicit race consciousness, with a group calling themselves “race men” and “race women” who proposed to shape race awareness amongst the city’s white populations through protest and political independence (148). These groups laid the foundation for the City’s African American activism throughout the next several decades. One of the first leaders to emerge out of this early period was a man name D.A. Holmes, who served as pastor to the Vine Street Baptist Church. Another leader to emerge and align himself with Holmes was a young entrepreneur named T.B. Watkins, whose stepson, Bruce R. Watkins, later became Kansas City’s first African American council representative in 1962.

Kansas City’s use of restrictive covenants was challenged in 1948, when the Supreme Court – in *Shelly v. Kraemer* – finally declared racial covenants unenforceable. Unfortunately, by then, they “were in place in almost every Kansas City Suburb and newly developed residential area” (Gotham 2000, 624).

It is important to note that while these covenants served to keep black residents out of white neighborhoods, like the deed restrictions, they were not formative in the complete spatial reorganizing of black residents in the city as experienced today. They did, however, contribute to
the growing suburbanization of white populations, particularly in the midst of an emerging federally supported housing industry. The racial reorganizing of space would not be forced within Kansas City until the middle of the 20th century, with the introduction of urban renewal, its ensuing public housing activities, and the introduction of urban expressways.

The Implementation of Urban Renewal, Public Housing, and Urban Expressways

In 1949 the United States federal government passed the formative Housing Act of 1949, which provided municipalities with federal funds that could be used for local redevelopment, particularly in areas deemed as “slums” or “blight.” This was preceded by the Housing Act of 1937, which enabled local housing authorities with the legal power of eminent domain and was followed by the Housing Act of 1954, which gave the program its infamous name, “urban renewal”, and broadened its scope (Gotham 2001, 295-297). According to Gotham,

The Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954 represented the culmination of real estate industry lobbying efforts to curtail the production of public housing, create local redevelopment authorities with broad powers of eminent domain, and provide generous public subsides for private redevelopment (297).

To plan and implement urban renewal in Kansas City, “including slum clearance of blighted neighborhoods,” the State of Missouri created the Land Clearance for Redevelopment Authority (LCRA) in 1953. The LCRA was established as its own legal entity and managed by its own board which was “composed of leaders from the private sector” rather than city hall (298). According to Gotham,

The initiative of large-scale slum clearance and public housing building in the early 1950s represented the beginning of a dramatic socio-spatial transformation of the urban core that would continue over the next two and a half decades (298).

While the city received numerous accolades for its transformation of slums into a “New Kansas City,” it displaced thousands of residents – both black and white. To qualify for the federal funding available through the Housing Acts, municipalities were responsible for insuring
an adequate supply of housing for the displaced (Gotham 2001, 302). It was through the implementation of this resettlement process that the city’s racial landscape began to dramatically shift to its current form.

Through the 1960s, the LCRA illegally refused to provide financial assistance for the process of finding replacement housing. When they were forced to take action in the 1960s their relocation specialists “maintained separate lists of available homes ‘for Blacks’ and ‘for Whites,’” which steered displaced residents into different parts of the city. Meanwhile, through 1964, the Housing Authority of Kansas City, Missouri, continued to segregate the recipients of public housing by race: white public-housing units were located North of Independence Avenue, while black public housing units were located south of Independence Avenue, east of Troost Avenue (Gotham 2001, 303-304).

Between 1889 and through the 1960s, therefore, Kansas City experienced first a small set of deed restrictions that discriminated against class in two subdivisions. These eventually snowballed into race-restrictive covenants that discriminated by race. Later, the implementation of urban renewal, public housing, and downtown redevelopment not only destroyed important black cultural landscapes, like 12th and Vine and 18th and Vine, but they also spatially reorganized populations by race. The most influential actions that resulted in this segregated landscape, however, were those of the Kansas City Missouri School District, whose policies intentionally created a cognitive (and real) dividing line along Troost Avenue, which was further exploited by the local real estate and finance industries through blockbusting and redlining (Gotham; Schirmer).

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8 It wasn’t until 1973 that HUD realized how the LCRA “[violated] federal regulations and civil rights statues in its relocation program” (Gotham 2001, 304).
School Segregation and the Emergence of Troost Avenue

The public education system promoted severe inequities as early as the 19th century. Though blacks and whites were relatively integrated residentially during the years of early black migration in the mid-to-late 1800s, the education system remained strictly segregated because of the Jim Crow laws that followed the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court ruling. As noted by an early historian: “Black schools were over-crowded in comparison to white schools and became intolerably so with the rapid increase in the black population in the 1880s. Agitation for improvement was constant” (Brown and Dorsett 1978, 48).

When segregated schools were deemed unconstitutional in the 1955 *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* ruling, the state of Missouri left the responsibility of school desegregation in the hands of local authorities. The Kansas City, Missouri School District (KCMD), subsequently abolished the use of “explicitly racial” attendance zones, but it continued the practice of segregation through the use of *neighborhood attendance zones*. The school district then spent the next two decades making constant north/south shifts to its attendance boundaries, while keeping the east/west boundary along Troost Avenue.

Meanwhile, the local real estate industry used this “cognitive racial boundary” to transform the racial makeup of the bordering neighborhoods by instigating “white flight” through the practice of blockbusting (Gotham 2002, 93). One such advertisement quoted by Gotham read:

Colored in Your Block?  
Want to Sell and Get All Cash?  
For Prompt Appraisal Estimate  
Call Bill Williams, Ch. 1-9063.  
Chas Curry Realtors.

9 Blockbusting was a practice of the real estate and development industries that deceitfully triggered white households to sell their homes at a loss, by implying that the presence of racial minorities in their neighborhood would depress property values.
The following three maps illustrate the growing percentage of black populations east of Troost between 1950 and 1970.

Source: Gotham 2002, pgs. 96-98

Once the neighborhoods on the southeast side of Kansas City went through this racial transition, its communities were further victimized by the “private lending agencies [who] ceased making home mortgage money available to residents living east of Troost Avenue, thereby redlining entire neighborhoods and launching a vicious wave of disinvestment and physical deterioration that continues to this day (Gotham 2002, 138).

In an article about the emergence of a local anti-expressway movement in Kansas City, Gotham notes how the very concentration of African American residents into southeast Kansas City also “had the political effect of establishing a new and powerful voting block that increased African American electoral strength at the local level” (Gotham 1999, 341). This coincided with the emergence of Freedom Inc., which was founded by five African Americans in the city as a way to organize political power in response to local and national issues of segregation and civil
rights. While Freedom Inc. solidified the African American representation in Kansas City politics, their way was paved as early as 1920 with the aforementioned “race men” and “race women.” Bruce R. Watkins, the stepson of T.B. Watkins, was one of Freedom Inc.’s founders. Gotham describes how,

Prior to the 1960s, there were no African Americans serving on the City Council, School Board, or in the Missouri House or Senate. In 1962 seven grassroots leaders founded Freedom, Inc., Kansas City’s first African American political organization, to nominate candidates for office, mobilize voters, and organize communities… By the early 1970s, African American political empowerment in Kansas City had reached a point that African Americans securely held seats on the City Council, the KCMSD board, and the Missouri Senate. Although the majority of elected positions on these government bodies were still dominated by whites, the increasing strength of African American representation provided a platform from which new leaders could challenge the [Missouri State Highway Department (MSHD)] and encourage local opposition and mobilization against the [construction of an 8-10 lane high-speed] expressway (Gotham 1999, 340).

The expressway to which Gotham refers today cuts through southeast Kansas City (down the center of the Green Impact Zone), connecting points south directly to the central business district. The fight against the highway ensued immediately after the Missouri State Highway Department began preparations in the late 60s and was only settled in 1985. While the highway was eventually built and many residents were displaced as a result, the grassroots struggle led to it being redesigned as a four-lane boulevard. It was named “Bruce R. Watkins Drive” (Gotham 1999, 348).

The social implications of the spatial injustices imposed on Kansas City’s African American populations over decades have by no means been lost on the city. A racialized, socio-economic east-west divide still pervades, which is an issue that Emanuel Cleaver II, who first arrived in Kansas City during the mid-70s anti-expressway turmoil, has attempted to address since his early days in politics.
Emanuel Cleaver II

Emanuel Cleaver II arrived in Kansas City in 1974. As a young activist from Texas, he was charged with establishing a new chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an American civil rights organization with close connections to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and one that played a large role in the Civil Rights Movement. During that time Cleaver also earned his Master of Divinity degree from St. Paul School of Theology and started his pastoral career with the St. James United Methodists Church. This church sits east of Troost Avenue, four blocks south of the Green Impact Zone.

Having worked closely with Kansas City residents as both an activist and pastor, Cleaver ran for and was elected for City Council in 1979, representing the city's 5th district. In 1991 – when Kansas City's black population of voting age was 26.5% -- he was elected as Kansas City's first black Mayor. In an analysis on Afrocentric rhetoric, Shauntae Brown-White found that the media coverage of his mayoral campaign painted him as “charismatic and eloquent,” “known for his stirring oratory,” and “a smooth speaker grounded in the rich tradition of the Black church” (Brown-White 2003, 264). He was re-elected in 1995 and left Kansas City office in 1999 with a 71% approval rating. In 2005 he was elected to the United States Congress to represent Missouri's 5th District.

Over the course of his time as a religious and political leader in Kansas City, Cleaver continually worked to mitigate the divisive nature of segregation in the city. In addition to establishing his church east of Troost, he established The Cleaver Family Y on Troost and 70th Street. In 1987, as a Council representative, Cleaver was able to get “The Cleaver Plan” passed through city council, which raised $51 million for cultural and economic development in the city. Included in this plan was a beautification plan for the Brush Creek Corridor, which was adopted
as the Brush Creek Flood Control and Beautification Project. As he is quoted in a Brush Creek Community Partners newsletter, “The Brush Creek project wasn’t just a flood control plan; it was laced with sociology as well. Some of the most affluent parts of the city were connected to low-income parts by water and greenery” (The Brush Creek Bulletin, May/June 2004; Volume 6, Issue 5).

As Mayor, Cleaver commissioned a study to create the city’s first plan since 1947, eventually called FOCUS Kansas City (Forging Our Comprehensive Urban Strategy). The 1947 Master Plan, developed by the City Planning Commission of the time, was the vehicle through which racial segregation continued to be enforced in the city throughout the civil rights era, specifically through its use of the neighborhood unit to influence school districting. FOCUS KCMO was, therefore, not only momentous in content and in process (it engaged residents and professionals throughout the city), but as a symbol of putting the divisive 1947 plan to rest. The planning was lead by Vicki Noteis, then the Director of Planning and Development, and was later, in 1999, awarded the American Planning Association’s “Best Plan” award. One of the first areas the plan focused on was the Troost Avenue corridor. While significant pieces of the plan were implemented, it was mostly shelved with political turnover at city hall.

The Challenge Today

Cleaver's former work in Kansas City could only begin to put a dent into the decades of policies, planning practices, and individual decisions made by high-powered individuals and industries that intentionally discriminated against large sections of Kansas City’s society. The resulting unjust geography sustained beyond the civil rights movement and has persisted through the beginnings of the 21st century, where many African Americans, who today make up 29% of
the city's population, find themselves living in the core of a hyper-segregated, sprawling metropolitan area.

This geography is exacerbated by the fact that Kansas City is now an area of 318 square miles and only 451,572 people, whose six council districts fall within four counties. The traditional equal distribution of city funding to these six districts, while fair in process, is insufficient to counter the unequal landscape that continues to define the city and region. With the announcement of the Recovery Act, Cleaver saw an opportunity to promote equity alongside the “federal moment’s” economic and environmental priorities.
Chapter 3: The Green Impact Zone

"The dynamic of Troost Avenue – it is the issue that has brought the Green Impact Zone to being. The Green Impact Zones starts and stops on Troost Avenue" – David Dowell, El Dorado, Inc.

The last chapter reviewed the policies and practices that led to unjust social and spatial consequences for African American communities in Kansas City and suggested that the current system of urban management is incapable of meeting the problems experienced by communities east of Troost Avenue. Still, when Congressman Cleaver advocated for the use of Recovery Act funds to create the Green Impact Zone and concentrate funding and programs in the same area that was for decades the target of disinvestment, many voices asked: "Why this Neighborhood?" During a recent press-conference, the Congressman addressed this question directly and explained:

The truth of the matter is if we had tried to do this over the entire 5th Congressional District [of Missouri], it would have included Kansas City, Missouri, Sugar Creek, Independence, Raytown, Grandview, Raymore, Peculiar, Lone Jack, Belton and Lee's Summit. And had we tried do something like this, we would have a speck here and a speck there, and afterwards, the taxpayers would question what happened to their money. As a result, we've chosen one of the toughest parts of the city. The Kansas City Star labeled one of the tracts, the murder factory.

The demographic figures below, compiled by the Center for Economic Information at the University of Missouri at Kansas City, illustrate the demographic conditions and poverty levels within the Zone:

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10 The Green Impact Zone is actually composed of 5 neighborhoods, an issue discussed further in this chapter.
11 Press Conference with Transportation Secretary Ray Lahood (February 17th)
Cleaver’s comments reiterate the spatial focus within Kansas City and simultaneously shed light on the motivation behind the strategy of implementing a place-based program. The purpose of this chapter is to understand the process through which the Green Impact Zone was organized, the programmatic features to date, and the strengths and challenges presented by the model. At the end of the chapter, several recommendations for change are suggested.

**Process of Development**

On February 17th of 2009, the recently inaugurated President Obama stood in Denver, Colorado, and signed into law The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA or the Recovery Act). Serving as a direct response to the current economic crisis, the Recovery Act committed $787 billion to stimulate the economy through the creation and maintenance of jobs and through planned investment in long-term economic growth. During his speech in Denver, Obama emphatically told the nation that Recovery Act funds would be “putting Americans to work in doing the work that needs to be done.”
Unlike its New Deal predecessor, the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935, the Recovery Act did not call for the creation of a new federal agency (such as the Work Projects Administration that came out of the 1935 Act). Instead, the 2009 Recovery Act aimed to achieve its primary goals through existing agencies by funding “shovel ready projects.” While the Recovery Act itself offered little by way of innovation, its dual emphasis on job-creation and energy efficiency still motivated many community leaders, local governments, and energy-sector companies alike to begin organizing around the opportunities that were to become available. The Green Impact Zone of Missouri emerged out of this context.

In late March of 2009, one month after the Recovery Act was announced, Congressman Emanuel Cleaver II of Missouri’s 5th District hosted a meeting at the offices of the Mid America Regional Council (MARC). At that meeting, the Congressman presented his idea for attracting and maximizing the impact of the expected stimulus dollars. Familiar with the traditional system through which federal dollars get disbursed, the Congressman feared that stimulus funding would get spread thin, “like peanut butter,” throughout his district, without making a strong impact where it was needed most. Further aware, through his decades of public service in Kansas City, Missouri, of the various social, environmental, and economic problems faced on the east side of Troost Avenue, the Congressman designated a 150-block area as the target of the Green Impact Zone.

When asked how the Zone boundaries were designated, interviewees shared a range of responses. Since Congressman Cleaver described the boundaries at the first meeting, most people believed that he designated the boundaries prior to the first meeting in March, with the advice of close friends and advisors within Kansas City. People’s understanding of the factors that influenced the boundary revolved around five main rationales: first, the boundaries included
the 64130 zip-code, which had recently received negative attention in the Kansas City Starr as the “Missouri Murder Factory”; second, the boundaries included equal parts of the 3rd and 5th council districts, two districts where Congressman Cleaver believed he would find support from council representatives (Melba Curtis and Sharon Sanders Brooks in the 3rd District, and council representatives Cindy Circo and Terry Riley in the 5th District); third, that the boundaries included neighborhoods with some of the area’s strongest neighborhood groups, such as Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council and Brush Creek Community Partners; fourth, that the boundaries wrapped the Brush-Creek Corridor, an area of particular focus during Congressman Cleaver’s time as Mayor and Councilman; and finally, that there were already significant investments and momentum around activities along Troost Avenue, which the Green Impact Zone could build upon, namely the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system and the Troost Bridge project.

It is unlikely that the boundaries were motivated by any one factor over others; however, combined, they point to the fact that Cleaver considered a realm of social, political, economical, and environmental realities (in context with both the area’s history and present circumstances) in making a decision. Given his history in the city, these were realities he was intimately familiar with. In describing her understanding of the process of creating the boundaries, one anonymous interviewee explained:

A lot of stimulus money got spent nationally on things that were shovel ready even if they weren't good. Well, Cleaver knew all that and about how things usually get divided up.... in a way everyone would be happy but nothing would change; so he said what if we could focus money to transform a neighborhood. Not an easy idea politically; but he started floating the idea with political allies here, centered on that zone.... eventually the boundaries were shared and negotiated and it was one thing, then an adjustment to the ski-boot... it was bold to pick a neighborhood in such desperate shape...

The boundaries eventually fell along Troost Avenue to the west, 51st Street on the south, Prospect and Swope Avenues on the east, and 39th street on the north. This area contains part of six neighborhoods: Ivanhoe, Manheim Park, Blue Hills, 49/63, Troostwood (which is technically
within the 49/63 neighborhood), and Town Fork Creek. Of these six neighborhoods, only Manheim Park is completely incorporated within the zone boundaries.

Images: Green Impact Zone with neighborhoods in different colors (left); Green Impact Zone overlaid with full neighborhood boundaries (right). Sources: Mid-America Regional Council (left); author’s creation (right)

Coming up with this zoning strategy and determining its borders was not the only tough decision made by Congressman Cleaver. During a time when city governments around the country were spearheading their respective efforts to attract stimulus funds, Cleaver asked the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) to administer the initiative. Given that this proposition would, in essence, be transferring some of the city’s decision-making power over the competitive stimulus grant-application process to the regional council, it was widely considered a risky move. Regardless, Cleaver was able to garner unanimous support of City Council representatives within weeks of the first meeting in March.

Sources: Green Impact Zone of Missouri, Performance Report (left); author’s creation (right)
When asked why MARC was motivated to accept the challenge, MARC’s executive director, David Warm, articulated five primary reasons: first, he explained, “it was in the capacity of MARC to be helpful in trying to bring people together across disciplines, perspective, levels of government, and across public and private agencies – [and they] have a good deal of capacity of developing strategies that are multi-lateral and consensus oriented”; second, that the process was “driven to a large degree by trying to pull down, streamline, and integrate a number of federal funding streams, as well as local funding streams, and [they] have a lot of capacity in federal grant writing and administration”; third, that being a public agency – but not a government – would allow MARC to operate “more nimbly and flexibly than a lot of governments are [able to]”; fourth, that MARC has some expertise in areas that are in heavy focus in the initiative, “particularly sustainability and transportation”; and fifth, that MARC holds the view that “a region can only do as well as [their] weakest communities, so [as a regional council, they] need to develop more capacity to align regional resources with very localized needs.”

Other individuals interviewed agreed that MARC was an appropriate leader for the initiative. One Green Impact Zone staff member noted how “MARC offers a regional perspective that we do not see.” An individual that works for the city acknowledged that politically it was strategic for MARC to spearhead the initiative because Congressman Cleaver represents the 5th District of the entire State, so having a regional administrator would make the Green Impact Zone more translatable to other areas within the State. Several interviewees believed that the decision to appoint MARC had more, politically, to do with the fact that the then-current city manager was at political odds with much of the city council, and because the
Recovery Act made accountability and transparency a priority, it was too risky to ask the city manager to take on such a challenge at the time.

Between the first meeting in March, and the end of April 2009, MARC convened a series of meetings to which they invited a set of neighborhood associations and community development corporations whose work is focused within the Zone, representatives from city departments and agencies, private sector leaders, and other close advisors. While the project was to be administered from the regional level, Dean Katerndahl, Congressman Cleaver’s staff, and others at the early meetings recognized that, in order for the project to achieve any success, the “neighborhood leadership needed to be at the forefront.” Margaret May, Executive Director of one of the Zone’s most active neighborhood associations, Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council, recalled how:

One of the things that Congressman Cleaver and MARC made clear from the beginning was how important the community leaders were to this initiative – that we were, in effect, the leaders of this initiative... and they have been very serious and sincere about that and making it happen to the maximum extent possible.

MARC initially reached out to, and relied upon, three neighborhood organizations to convene the relevant neighborhood leadership: Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council (a neighborhood association turned community development corporation, lead by Executive Director Margaret May), Brush Creek Community Partners (a community advocacy group), and Blue Hills Community Services (a community development corporation). These three organizations were considered to have the highest administrative capacity to move swiftly and respond to the formation of the Green Impact Zone. As explained by Carol Grimaldi, Executive Director of Brush Creek Community Partners:

I am a paid staff person, Margaret May [of Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council] is a paid staff person; Joanne Bussinger [of Blue Hills Community Services] is a paid staff person... they looked to us... and they asked us to initially convene the neighborhoods and set some direction.
With their combined local knowledge, these organizations assisted MARC in organizing and convening the group of neighborhood-based leaders that eventually turned into the official group of neighborhood partners, which was made up of volunteer-run neighborhood associations, community development corporations, and an advocacy organization:

- Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council
- Historic Mannheim Park Association
- Troostwood Neighborhood Association
- 49/63 Neighborhood Association
- Blue Hills Neighborhood Association
- Town Fork Creek Neighborhood Association
- Blue Hills Community Services
- Neighborhood Housing Services
- Swope Community Builders
- Brush Creek Community Partners
  * Red highlight indicates a volunteer-run organization

Through this outreach process a second group of partners also emerged. These were the organizations and agencies that were conceived to be potential implementing partners, as their work revolved around the programmatic priorities that were being developed:

- Kansas City Power and Light
- Kansas City Area Transportation Authority
- City of Kansas City, Mo
- Metropolitan Energy Center
- University of Missouri, Kansas City
- Full Employment Council
- Kansas City Police Department
- Kansas City Metropolitan Crime Commission
- Missouri Gas Energy

With leadership from these partners, the initiative broke into eight different committees to organize around stimulus grants and to develop a vision, a set of guiding principles, a general strategy for the initiative, and both overall and specific goals (October 16th Performance Report). A look at the initial eight committees shows that they corresponded to both the programmatic interventions that were envisioned to be a part of the initiative, the types of Recovery Act funds that were perceived to be available, and methods through which coordination would take place:
The vision, guiding principles, and strategies were developed by the Neighborhood Leadership Committee, and according to the initiative’s website, were eventually defined as:

**Vision:** The Green Impact Zone Vision is to develop a sustainable community; one that is environmentally, economically, and socially stronger tomorrow than it is today... using a comprehensive green strategy... coordinated programs and innovative delivery mechanisms... and intense resident engagement... to more rapidly push community change, build community capacity, and make the Green Impact Zone a place where people want to live, work, and play.

**Guiding Principles:** The work will be inclusive, with resident participation and representation, community accountability and transparency; The work will be effective, building organizational and community capacity; The work will be efficient, leveraging resources, strategically using resources and fiscally accounting for resources; The work will complement and enhance existing neighborhood goals and activities; The work will cross-pollinate ideas, programs, and people; The work will be evidence-based, using information and data to evaluate the effectiveness of activities; The work will be targeted so that each block sees significant improvements to lives, homes, and community assets.

**Strategies:** The zone, in year one, will engage the community in a conversation about what the elements should be in such a sustainability strategy. This discussion will be based on the collection of a wealth of information about the community aided by such institutions as the University of Missouri at Kansas City and the University of Kansas. However, the most critical element of this process is the engagement of the community in a discussion of the kind of neighborhood residents want and what needs to be done to create and sustain that neighborhood.

It is important to note that during the early process of building this coalition of partners and priority setting, Congress recessed for spring break (between April 3rd and April 20th), giving Congressman Cleaver time to promote and speak more publicly about the Green Impact Zone.

He also led a group of 50 community members, advisors, partners, architects, planners, and local...
representatives on a bus trip to Greensburg, Kansas to learn from the “greening” experience that
the town went through following a 2007 tornado that destructed much of its built and natural
environment. The idea immediately caught both national and local attention, and simultaneously
set up a range of expectations about what the initiative would deliver and in what time frame.

Between May and August 2009, the coalition of partners continued to meet in their
committees to further develop strategies and continue applying for grants. By this time
PolicyLink, a national regional and advocacy organization, joined the process to assist in
designing and planning for Zone activities, particularly as they related to capacity building.
PolicyLink later granted MARC $15,000, which was combined with funding from the City to
create a $39,000 capacity-building fund for the neighborhood associations within the Zone.
$2,500 from this fund went to each of the neighborhood associations, and the remainder was
allocated based on the percentage of the Green Impact Zone area each neighborhood association
covered. As a result, Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council was allotted the greatest number of funds,
as it occupies the greatest percentage of the Green Impact Zone.

Beyond helping MARC organize the Green Impact Zone in the early planning phase,
PolicyLink provides technical assistance and guidance to the initiative, primarily through
research and advising that places the Green Impact Zone within the larger national framework of
communities working to promote and leverage the “new green economy.” As explained by one
of PolicyLink’s Program Associates, Mark Philpart:

It’s pretty much been about framing issues, identifying challenges, identifying opportunities,
identifying best practices. PolicyLink is a national organization, and so we’ve been trying to help
them think about [innovatively using recovery funds] by highlighting best practices and principles
around the country; and letting them know about how others have overcome [their] challenges.

By July, MARC recognized the need for neighborhood-level staff to effectively
implement the anticipated programs and strategies. As Dean Katerndahl explained:
We were going to have all these programmatic things, and the idea was to have a high level of integration, having things work together, like weatherization work together with employment: you'd be doing a lot of weatherization and you'd want people in the zone to get jobs from the weatherization; and then also a high degree of citizen engagement and involvement; and all that takes staff on the ground; and none of these ARRA programs were really geared up to provide that ground level support; it was "here is weatherization money," but there was no money to go knock on doors and all that kind of thing; so we made a strong case, and the congressman's staff was in agreement that we needed to have a ground game; a really strong ground game to make this work."

Since it was clear that funding for a field-staff would be difficult to obtain through the Recovery Act, MARC and the Congressman’s staff began searching for available funds from the city and state. Councilwoman Cindy Circo of Kansas City’s 5th District, who was present on the trip to Greensburg and whose district lies partly within the boundaries, was able to allocate $1.5 million of her district’s public works dollars into general fund dollars, which were then allocated as a one-year “funding and services contract” between MARC and the City for the Green Impact Zone. With that funding secured, MARC hired Anita Maltbia, a former Assistant City Manager, to serve as Director with a start date of August 1st, 2009. Maltbia and MARC proceeded in hiring a staff of six additional individuals: one assistant director, four community ombudsmen, and one office administrator. The staff started their two-week training during the last week of September 2009, about six months after the March meeting, where Congressman Cleaver first shared his Green Impact Zone idea.

The Green Impact Zone staff serves several key functions. The director and assistant director work to grow the partnership by seeking relevant partners that can help implement the vision and goals, while the ombudsmen serve as community liaisons and organizers (each one is designated to a particular group of neighborhoods and works directly with the leadership of the relevant neighborhood partners). The staff is responsible for meeting all of the conditions set forth in the contract that MARC entered with the City for the $1.5 million operating grant. As such, their work involves a range of organizing activities, from door-to-door canvassing to
attending neighborhood association and city council meetings. They are also responsible for producing a progress report every 45 days.

In September of 2009, just before the staff began their training, the White House Office of Urban Affairs’ Director, Adolfo Carrion Jr., visited the Green Impact Zone with Secretary of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Shaun Donovan, and Deputy Secretary of the Department of Transportation, John D. Porcari. This event thrust the Green Impact Zone further into the national spotlight. Since the staff was hired, several larger elements of the initiative have taken shape. In November, the Kansas City Power and Light (KCPL) smart-grid grant from the Department of Energy (DOE) was approved, granting the project $24 million in federal funds, which KCPL then matched. In February, MARC’s $50 million application for the competitive TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) grant was approved by the Department of Transportation (DOT) with $26 million going to the Green Impact Zone for public improvements, and, in April, the Department of Energy (DOE) awarded $20 million in Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant competitive funds for EnergyWorks KC, which plans to implement retrofit ramp-ups in the Green Impact Zone and six other neighborhoods.

On the community engagement side, the first major community-wide event for residents within the Green Impact Zone boundaries was held on December 5, 2009, as a Community Expo. According to the December 9th, 2009 performance report, more than 500 people attended the event, which hosted a number of speakers, entertainment, seven workshops (on weatherization, home ownership, contractor work, etc.), and 54 information booths for residents to gain
information about the types of organizations and services available to them. A survey, designed by the Green Impact Zone Data Committee, was filled out by about 150 of the attendees. A second Community Expo took place on March 27th, 2010. Like the first expo, it consisted of workshops, speeches, and entertainment. Other community-engagement methods that have been employed in the Zone since I completed interviews in mid-February include: the development of a leadership program between MARC’s Government Training Institute and the city’s Neighborhood and Community Services Department, a Sowers of Sustainability program that hosts workshops for Zone residents, the development of community crews (adopted from a successful program developed by Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council), and a Convoys of Hope partnership.

Finally, the Green Impact Zone’s Data Committee, which is lead by the University of Missouri at Kansas City’s Center for Economic Information, coordinated and implemented a major data-collection process throughout the Zone, and the university’s Department of Architecture, Urban Planning, and Design made the Green Impact Zone the focus of a Historic Preservation studio.

**Analysis**

The Green impact Zone is still in its early inception and therefore cannot yet be judged on any substantive or quantifiable outcomes. The purpose of this thesis, however, is to understand the challenges to organizing and implementing a place-based initiative that attempts to promote the three Es (equity, environment, economy) of sustainability. While the previous section outlined the process of development and certain products of that process, this next section

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13 The December 9th Green Impact Zone Performance Report mentions “more than 500 people” but does not differentiate between residents and non-residents of the Zone.
undertakes a more detailed analysis of the model's promise and the challenges it has faced thus far.

**Strengths of the Model**

Perhaps the most obvious strength of the Green Impact Zone is that, given the history of Kansas City, the creation of the Zone and its targeting of communities east of Troost Avenue illustrate a strong commitment to addressing local issues of social equity and spatial justice. Acknowledging the role of the public sector in addressing the many challenges faced by communities in southeast Kansas City and attempting to address those issues through a coordinated set of both social and physical interventions in this area is itself a major feat.

From the federal level down to the very local level, the political environment that led to the creation of the Green Impact Zone is a display of immense political will to take on the "urban challenge." At the federal level, President Obama came into office on a campaign for change, consistently articulating the need to "do things differently" in Washington. Highlighting his commitment to urban America, he introduced the White House Office of Urban Affairs. Later, the legislative branch of government introduced the Livable Communities Act, which established the Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities within the Department of Housing and Urban Development, signaling the intent to integrate sustainability into the urban agenda. Congressman Cleaver saw an opportunity in this "moment," mobilized constituents in his home-city to create the Green Impact Zone, and tapped the regional planning council, MARC, to take the lead. With minimal experience administering such a comprehensive and localized initiative and with no precedent to fall back on, MARC took on the challenge. The City Council members subsequently offered unanimous support for the initiative, passing resolution 090254, which accepted the use of Recovery Act funds to the initiative. When it was clear that the Recovery
Act could not provide the necessary funds for a strong “ground game,” Council Members Circo and Riley stepped up to the plate and mobilized $1.5 million for the initiatives start-up. Furthermore, by inviting the leaders of community-based organizations to the first meeting in March, and by expressing the intent to have them serve as the “drivers” of the Green Impact Zone initiative, MARC and Congressman Cleaver committed themselves to bringing community-based organizations into the initiative as equal partners. As one anonymous partner remarked: “I don’t think there’s been another initiative that has had this level of awareness from the federal, state, regional, local [levels], as well as having those who sit on the grounds at the table with the leadership.”

Another major strength within the Green Impact Zone initiative thus far is its ability to build a wide platform of support and to do so in a short time frame. This was due in part to the Congressman’s reputation and leadership and in part to the top-down/bottom-up nature of the coalition-building process, whereby MARC reached out to organizations and institutions it was familiar with – particularly those with systems capacities – while the three neighborhood partners with the greatest administrative capacity reached out to their more localized networks. As a result, the initiative built a set of partners that includes public agencies, a utility company, university departments, workforce development organizations, and community-based organizations, most of whom participated in the grant applications, priority setting, and goal formulation. As Joanne Bussinger from Blue Hills Community Services articulated:

[One] success of this initiative so far is that it’s brought all kinds of diverse people and organizations to the same table to have the same conversation and I’ve been pretty amazed at how collaborative people have been, and how excited they are to try and engage these communities to make something happen.

It is also through these partnerships that the initiative has seen the most tangible accomplishments to date, including the Smart Grid and TIGER grants and the extensive data-
collection project completed by the Center for Economic Information at the University of Missouri at Kansas City.

The regional-local (i.e. “top-down/bottom-up”) organizing process also reflects a strong organizational structure, whereby MARC administers and coordinates the initiative but aims to empower and build the capacity of neighborhood-based groups and leaders to guide the direction of the initiative. The initiative’s stated intent, as expressed on the website, to “[engage the] community in a discussion of the kind of neighborhood [they] want and what needs to be done to create and sustain that neighborhood” reaffirms this bottom-up spirit. Margaret May reflected on the importance of this aspect: “When you’re actually using the people to carry the message, it’s a lot more effective than the traditional way of delivering that message [whereby a consultant comes into the community].” Bob Housh, Executive Director of the Metropolitan Energy Center, also noted how,

It’s really important for the neighborhood associations to be involved in the planning of this, because – and we talked about the ‘usual suspects’ – unfortunately it’s the organizations that are used to doing things with these communities, but it’s always those organizations doing something on behalf of the communities, rather than with the communities.

Another strength lies within the identified priority areas of the initiative, which include: Housing and Weatherization, Public Safety and Community Services, Employment and Training, Energy and Water Conservation, and Infrastructure. This programming reflects an attention to the intersection of social and spatial issues that affect all aspects of residents’ lives. Furthermore, breaking down the responsibilities of the program areas and developing committees around each area implies that a certain level of role and strategy-setting would take place in those committees. This reflects a developed understanding of the sustainability planning process, which is further strengthened by the existence of a “coordinating committee” that theoretically insures coordination between committees and strategies.
Another major accomplishment is that the initiative motivated the creation of linkages between various service-providers throughout the city and coordination and collaboration between city departments. The actions of key staff members at the City of KCMO, who got together to create a Coordinating Committee for the Green Impact Zone, shows signs that the City is beginning to evaluate its administrative capacity, streamline processes, and eliminate regulatory barriers that are within its control. Kimiko Gilmore in the City Manager’s office noted how:

The city coordination is starting to happen. There is now a monthly meeting of all the city folks from department that have anything to do with the Green Impact Zone, or anything to do with anything that could have to do with the Green Impact Zone; and out of those meetings there have been a lot of ‘aha’ moments about what each department is doing and how they related and can coordinate. And its not that we don’t work together at all, but when you get to the boots on the ground level, you’re just doing your job… but now I think those synergies are being made at those meetings.

Bob Berkebile, Founding Principle of BNIM architects, recognized this opportunity when he explained,

You need the city as a full partner behind this one-thousand percent, because you need public works cooperating with water, cooperating with housing, and all those things that determine the city’s future. They ALL have to own it, and they all need to be working more collaboratively anyway, but they don’t have the venue for acting that out, and this could be that venue. THAT would be a win-win.

These major strengths, characterized as political will and commitment to equity, a strong coalition-building process, a regional-local organizational structure, attention to the intersection of social and spatial concerns, and the creation of linkages across scales and capacities, together serve as the pillars of a place-based program that is well-set up to promote sustainability.

However, given that the Green Impact Zone emerged in response to the Recovery Act, the initiative, as a whole, is left in a perplexing position procedurally. On one hand, the opportunities the Act presented communities, and the hope it inspired therein, moved people and organizations to create new partnerships and networks. Congressman Cleaver and MARC used the moment to
build a strong coalition of partners that may not have otherwise swiftly made commitments to one another and the communities. On the other hand, the rush to organize, apply for funds, and build momentum and attention for the initiative set up a range of implementation challenges.

**Challenges to Implementation: Temporal and Regulatory**

One of the major challenges to implementation arose from the unrealistic expectations that were raised through the early process of organizing and publicly formulating the Green Impact Zone. Congressman Cleaver’s public promotion of the Zone set up expectations about what the initiative would and could do prior to knowing exactly how much funding would be available. Most interviewees noted this dilemma. Bob Housh from the Metropolitan Energy Center explained, “It’s hard to do this kind of planning until you know what your resources are. And we’re still finding out what the resources are.” Similarly, David Dowell of El Dorado Inc. stated, “to me, effective policy making is directly linked with financing of initiatives, which hasn’t been figured out yet... The danger with this is that there’s been so much PR about the Green Impact Zone,...[but] the hype has not translated into projects on the ground that people can feel as the symbol of change.” However, Bob Housh also went on to say that:

> The hype has a purpose too. If you don’t raise the expectations, you’re not going to get the kind of backing that you need to get something like this happening. So it’s just a balance between getting people interested and raising expectations and raising support when you raise expectations. The hype to some extent is a necessary evil, you have to have it to get people on board.

A compounding issue surrounding the “hype” was that it did not match a realistic implementation timeline, particularly given the regulatory environment. The most obvious example of such a promise was the claim that the initiative would weatherize every home in the Green Impact Zone within one year. It is important to note, however, that in making this statement, the Congressman made several key assumptions that actually complied with
conventional wisdom about the Department of Energy’s (DOE) Weatherization Assistance Program. These attributes were recently highlighted in a DOE report that discussed the implementation challenges faced by cities throughout the nation, which included:

- “[The Weatherization Program had] an existing programmatic infrastructure, including processes and procedures which had been in place for many years;
- The techniques for weatherization tasks were well known and comparatively uncomplicated, and the requisite skills were widely available;
- Performance metrics were relatively easy to establish and understand;
- The potential benefits for low income citizens were easily recognized; and,
- The potential beneficial impact on energy conservation was obvious” (US Department of Energy 2010).

Unfortunately, as the Department of Energy recently recognized, these assumptions were complicated by the introduction of new regulatory requirements under the Recovery Act, such as the requirement that “recipients of weatherization funds pay laborers at least prevailing wage, as determined under the Davis-Bacon Act.” Adjusting to this new requirement created an unexpected time lag, and in the case of Kansas City, the Weatherization Program did not get the information they needed to determine prevailing wage until mid summer of 2009.

Within the Green Impact Zone, this time lag was complicated by the fact that because the Weatherization program is a citywide program, the city could not legally target its activities within the Zone. As the city’s Weatherization Director, Bob Jackson, explained, “[there was] a misunderstanding about how [Weatherization] is bound by [its] own regulations that might not match up with the Green Impact Zone agenda.” Deletta Dean, Director of Neighborhood and

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14 The Davis-Bacon Act is a United States federal law that establishes the requirement for paying workers, on public works projects, no less than the local prevailing wages and benefits paid on similar projects.
Community Services, who also initiated the city’s new Coordinating Committee, described this dilemma further when she said:

Kansas City is really large, we have a lot of land to cover [with our services]; so to target resources in 150-blocks is great [in purpose] but we have the other citizens and areas that we have to address with limited resources too.

MARC and the initiative’s Housing and Weatherization Committee later found that not every home in the Green Impact Zone was actually eligible under local rules to receive weatherization funding. This had to do with a city regulation stipulating that if a home was repaired with Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Development within the past 16 years, it no longer qualified to receive weatherization assistance. According to interviewees, many homes in the Green Impact Zone were therefore ineligible for using certain weatherization funds.

Another local regulation slowed down the process of using Neighborhood Stabilization funds. As Cliff Pouppirt from Blue Hills Community Services explained:

The Neighborhood Stabilization program out of ARRA allow[ed] us to purchase homes that have been foreclosed and rehab them for homeownership; the challenge with this program is that our city has required us to pre-sell the home, which makes the program move much slower than other places.

Many interviewees discussed how these regulations were compounded by the fact that Kansas City, like many large cities, operates within functional silos. This is a phenomenon that has implications both for sustainability efforts, which are known to require a systems approach, and for place-based policies, which impose a spatial consideration on departments that operate by function rather than by geography. Carol Grimaldi of Brush Creek Community Partners noted how “working with the city is improving, [but] there is still a lot of silo mentality; it has happened where I’m talking with one department and they’re not getting what they need from
other departments.” In discussing the challenges in coordinating services and programs, Deletta Dean of the City’s Department of Neighborhood and Community Service noted that,

Our biggest challenge is that because we’re such a large city [318 square miles] and city government, we’re all [traditionally] out in our silos doing public service, but then we might forget to tell the next department what that service is; so [now with the Green Impact Zone] its just making sure that the right hand knows what the left hand is doing.

To be certain, this “silo mentality” is an issue that, nationally, affects all scales of governance, from the federal level down to the local and even the neighborhood scales, where community development corporations often fail to coordinate their services even when working for the same target population. This challenge and the regulatory challenges described above are brought to the forefront of policy and practice by place-based initiatives like the Green Impact Zone, whose success depends on the coordination of various public and private services, and the ability of governing bodies to evaluate regulatory barriers and eliminate or minimize them where possible. Unfortunately, addressing most of the regulatory challenges lies outside the initiative organizers’ immediate capacities, even though they point to important considerations for governing bodies at the municipal, state, and federal levels.

There is also a second set of challenges facing the successful implementation of the Green Impact Zone. Some of these challenges were also sparked by the political expediency around the Recovery Act, but they are more specific to the initiative’s community engagement strategies and are therefore within the initiative’s capacity to change.

Challenges to Implementation: Organizing and Engaging

While the Recovery Act presented an immense opportunity, the rush to organize and apply for grants forced the Green Impact Zone initiative to move at a pace that contradicted the intention and rhetoric around community-based control. The drawing of the Zone’s boundaries is the first evidence of this contradiction. While everyone was aware of the rationale for choosing
the general target area of the Zone, very few people understood how or why the specific borders were defined. While Congressman Cleaver consulted with others in the City to determine the boundaries, it is evident that there was little consultation with members of the target communities. This approach to designating the boundaries may have been necessary for political expediency, but it nonetheless raises several concerns. In this particular situation the boundaries entail parts of four neighborhoods and all of one. While these neighborhoods have a shared history and experience from a macro level (as described in the previous chapter) there is little else to suggest that these communities have a shared identity from the neighborhood scale. Prior to drawing the boundaries there was no dialogue within the community about what it means to extract parts of different neighborhoods and treat them as one new place. How do you get different neighborhood-based groups to collaborate as if they are redefined as a single place? Can you create a new sense of community out of a “place” that has been defined by a place-based initiative? The top-down nature of this decision allowed for borders that have little meaning for residents who likely do not experience the space within the zone as one place, and yet, from a political perspective these different places have become “one neighborhood” for the purpose of policy.

In an article on the anti-expressway movement that emerged in the 70s and 80s within the same Kansas City neighborhoods, Kevin Gotham challenged the notion that “there must be an intimate bond of community identity among individuals for them to engage in neighborhood collective action.” He argued instead that political opportunities can create motivations for mobilization (Gotham 1999). He used the case to show that

‘peoples’ identification with place is tied not only to their ability to articulate compelling collective representation of residence, but also to available mobilizing structures that shape the mechanisms by which groups construct their collective identity (Gotham 1999, 349-350).
Promoting a collective “community identity” out of these distinct neighborhoods east of Troost Avenue is certainly possible, especially considering new political opportunities presented within the “federal moment,” but it takes intentional framing on the part of community-based leaders.¹⁵ In the context of the Zone, however, this “moment” was perceived as an opportunity that would only present itself once, which forced a type of rapid decision-making that undercut the necessary organizing process for creating effective collective action between neighborhoods. It was most likely assumed by MARC and other partners that the community organizing and framing could occur in tandem with other planning activities for the Zone; however, this risked the scenario where project planning and implementation might move forward at a faster pace than community organizing and collective action processes. Bob Housh from the Metropolitan Energy Center recalled how Congressman Cleaver has said many times when speaking to people in the community, “this kind of opportunity with these kinds of financial resources is a once in a lifetime opportunity – this is not going to happen again. So jump on it and get it done.”

The rush to apply for funds and to turn the project into something “shovel ready” also presented a challenge for a more inclusive visioning process for the initiative. While the Zone intended to “[engage the community] in a discussion of the kinds of neighborhood residents want and what needs to be done to create and sustain that neighborhood,” the committees that made up the initiative in its early phases were themselves developing the vision and setting the programmatic priorities which inevitably set the agenda for the Zone. Importantly, the initiative’s website reiterates that the guiding principles and priorities were set with strong participation from community-based leaders through the Neighborhood Leadership Committee, yet this proved to be insufficient for insuring wider resident buy-in during the priority-setting. In fact,

¹⁵ See Mackres 2010
several interviewees admitted that they believed residents throughout the Zone were the “last ones” to hear about its creation and development.

Furthermore, there were too many assumptions built into the Neighborhood Leadership Committee model. For a Neighborhood Leadership committee to work effectively and fairly, the capacities of the organizations and individuals within that committee must be equal, and the representatives on the committee must have equal control over programmatic decision-making. However, in the case of the Green Impact Zone, four of the five neighborhood associations that have representatives on the committee are volunteer-run organizations with very low community planning capacities. As Margaret May of Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council noted in conversation,

You can’t depend on people that are working as volunteers to be able to be consistent in doing the kinds of things it takes to really rebuild a neighborhood... the state of readiness is important... I [have tried in the past] to advocate with the city that the other neighborhoods did not have the opportunity through a three-year operating grant [that we received from the Kaufman Foundation]... that [grant] gave us a head start. It would be a mistake – just as it would have been a mistake in 2000 when we first made a strategic plan to expect [much] from us – to expect the other neighborhoods to be able to do what Ivanhoe is doing. But we should provide an opportunity for them to develop the way THEY want to develop.

Carol Grimaldi of Brush Creek Community Partners also noted:

You talk about a neighborhood association like Town-Fork creek that’s just volunteers. Of course they’re lucky to have a great president and leaders, but they’re practically operating out of a shoebox – they have no staff, it’s all volunteer, and they have [other] work, too.

The remaining five non-neighborhood-association partners are all traditional community development corporations with paid staff with the exception of one community-advocacy organization that has one paid staff person. This committee, while called the Neighborhood Leadership Committee, is therefore composed mostly of traditional actors who work for the community rather than those that live within the community. No matter how well intentioned these representatives are, they cannot be assumed to represent the interests and views of the
Zone’s citizens. The four volunteer-representatives of neighborhood associations are insufficient representation, and at worst, the initiative – however unintentionally – risks tokenizing them as the “voice” of their respective communities. The larger issue at hand is that they have little capacity, as volunteers, to effectively organize and plan with their own communities, let alone to challenge the status quo.\textsuperscript{16}

The entire visioning process, therefore, relied on leaders with unequal levels of capacity, implying different levels of voice in the planning process. MARC recognized this as a challenge early on and sought funds for capacity building, but the allocation method used for these funds allotted more money to the organization with the highest pre-existing capacity, which isolated the president of one of the neighborhood associations. This further reinforced the existing neighborhood boundaries within the Zone, inevitably making it all the more difficult to get the neighborhood associations to work collaboratively.

A second concerning assumption built into the Neighborhood Leadership model is that this committee would drive the programmatic priorities. In addition to the aforementioned imperfection of community representation, the priorities represent such a wide range of interventions (that correspond to a wide range of Recovery Act funds), and yet there was no public articulation about which of the priorities are most important for the communities’ most immediate needs (i.e. prioritizing the priorities).

The funds that were subsequently granted were streams of funding that MARC and other larger systems-partners, like the utility company KCP&L, had existing capacity to write grant applications for. Meanwhile the grants that were denied were ones that MARC likely had less capacity to apply for and that the federal government was likely less accustomed to receiving.

\textsuperscript{16} In her seminal essay, \textit{Ladder of Civic Participation}, Sherry Arnstein describes eight types of civic participation, from manipulation (non-participation) to citizen control (community power). In her description, the Neighborhood Leadership committee would fall somewhere between Informing, Consultation, and Placation.
from a regional planning council. As it turned out, funding for some of the more “social” programmatic features (such as the Byrne Justice Assistance grant from the Department of Justice, Pathways out of Poverty from Department of Labor, and the Neighborhood Stabilization Program II from the Department of Housing and Urban Development) were each denied, while funding for some of the more “spatial” interventions (such as the Smart Grid and Retrofit Ramp-up grants from the Department of Energy, and the TIGER grant from the Department of Transportation) were committed. While these grants are undoubtedly going to be used to meet needs within the communities, it presents a more challenging framing scenario for the Green Impact Zone staff and neighborhood association leaders, who have to make the connection, for residents, between these larger infrastructural projects (which will take some time to implement) and the everyday needs of the communities. This is even further compounded by the fact that a larger community visioning process had yet to be developed, giving the impression that the funding for the programs would drive priorities, rather than community vision.

To be sure, MARC hired the Green Impact Zone staff to serve this community organizing capacity. However, while being tasked with organizing the communities, the staff was simultaneously handed a vision, goals, and very specific performance targets to meet from the city contract, giving them little flexibility to organize and reach out to understand communities needs in the ways they might assess to be most effective. This sequencing also implies that the purpose of organizing would be less to create a set of communities-identified goals and performance targets and more to engage residents in meeting pre-defined goals and performance targets.

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17 The Smart Grid grant will enable each home in the Green Impact Zone with a meter to monitor energy use.
The unresolved role of community residents is also evident in the initiative’s reliance on the Community Expos as a major tool for community engagement. The Community Expos are at best a form of individual knowledge building, since they expose community members to many of the opportunities that have been organized through the institutional partnerships of the initiative. At worst, the Expos are another form of tokenism that “inform” citizens of available resources, without empowering them to influence the direction of the initiative. Sherry Arnstein describes this dilemma when she writes:

Informing citizens of their rights and responsibilities, and options can be the most important first step toward legitimate citizen participation. However, too frequently the emphasis is placed on a one-way flow of information – from officials to citizens – with no channel provided for feedback and no power for negotiation. Under these conditions, particularly when information is provided at a late stage in the planning, people have little opportunity to influence the program designed “for their benefit.”

The Community Expos might be a necessary step for informing residents about the Zone, but they should not be the initiative’s most significant (and resource-intensive) method for wider resident engagement. They are not designed to facilitate a deep dialogue about the communities’ visions of sustainability nor are they designed as a venue for deep discussion about shared experiences, fears, hopes for the future, etc. Instead, individual residents are asked to listen to speakers and learn from booth representatives and workshops.

The most significant risk facing the initiative moving forward, then, is that the awarded federal funds will define the initiative’s main features and assume the most attention before there is a chance to stop and re-assess. Why were residents within the five communities so late in accessing the process? And how can the initiative turn into a more community driven one? Effectively engaging citizens is crucial for framing sustainability in the region and crucial for achieving the initiative’s stated goals of transforming the community by involving them in a dialogue about sustainability in their own communities. If they are unable to do so, the Zone
risks becoming another example of well-intentioned institutions and individuals trying to do something for the communities, rather than with those communities. No greater empowerment will take place, thus squandering the present opportunity to truly transform a group of neighborhoods and achieve greater sustainability. Margaret May said it best:

What we have learned here in Ivanhoe is that you can have all the ability to do good things, but if you can’t get people interested, engaged, and willing to take advantage of the opportunity, then all you have is the opportunity.

Rodney Knott, President of the Manheim Neighborhood Association, articulated a similar idea in saying: “To me, the real key to the success or failure of [the Green Impact Zone], is developing that sense of community.”

**Recommendations for Change**

Engaging individuals who have lost trust in and completely disengaged from the public system is a perennial challenge faced by communities and initiatives nationwide. Rodney Knott, President of the Manheim Neighborhood Association, described this challenge:

Unfortunately, in our community, there is a deep-seated sense of apathy. Now there are a number of books and articles about why that is, but the truth remains that it is there. And most of the folks have this wait-and-see attitude. Now that’s not to say that they won’t come on board; but they’re not going to come on board first, prior to seeing anything being done. That’s where they are... so the biggest challenge we face as a neighborhood, with an initiative like this, is, how do we overcome the apathy that has engulfed our community... that is my biggest challenge as a neighborhood leader, its: how do I overcome that sense of apathy.

Another anonymous individual explained:

I think, too, [this challenge arises from the] fact that there have been many things [in the past] that have come up and been promised, but that were never delivered; so [the Green Impact Zone] has to differentiate [itself] from the past programs and initiatives that have come up and haven't bore fruits -- people are so tired of the same thing. So being able to sit with them and talk with them about the difference and the possibility based on the funding that we expect and the things that we have planned to do is important.

These challenges are compounded by the fact that some elements of sustainability, such as the attainment of greater energy efficiency, require a long time horizon to see benefits, while
individuals living in poverty are often forced to take a more short-term view of their needs. One of the greatest accomplishments of the Green Impact Zone to date is its ability to convene a broad base of organizations and institutions (which operate at various scales throughout the neighborhood, city, and region) to think about how their services can meet the needs of some of Kansas City’s most distressed neighborhoods. The goal of a community engagement strategy, then, should be to reverse the traditional paradigm of relationships and develop opportunities for residents to use those institutions and resources in the ways that they perceive will best meet their needs. For the Green Impact Zone to develop those opportunities, it needs to understand how the available resources and services fit into the short and long term goals of residents, as individuals and as communities. This requires that the Green Impact Zone provide venues that actively facilitate the communities’ own dialogue, investigation, and idea generation, thereby enabling them to analyze their own realities. This will require re-visioning and re-strategizing in ways that build upon current priorities, partnerships, and resources.

**Participatory Planning and Design**

There are many methods of community engagement and certainly no “one-size-fits-all” solution. However, the residents that live throughout the Green Impact Zone must be brought into the process of exploring these various options. Participatory planning and design is one method that allows for this type of dialogue, visioning, and idea generating. Importantly, there is a wealth of local knowledge within Kansas City about how to effectively employ participatory visioning, planning, and design; these resources should be tapped and brought into the partnership. Participatory design was employed by BNIM architects with the community in Greensborough, Kansas, and the method has also recently been employed in the Manheim Neighborhood with El Dorado Inc. Perhaps one of the most successful uses of participatory
planning in Kansas City was through the FOCUS KCMO plan, lead by Vicki Noteis. In conversation with Bob Berkebile, he explained how crucial this process is in helping a community develop a vision of their own future:

It gives them a chance to reconsider their future as a community... you take those citizens and you bring them all together and ask they why they live there and what they treasure about the place; then you ask them, what are the barriers; why do their kids move away and not come back; what do they find frustrating; and each time they report back to a plenary; and the third time we ask 'what would you like to see that doesn't exist at all'; and what we learned through that process is that it really establishes a community dialogue at a deep level... From our point of view, its holding that dialogue and creating that collaborative and creative dialogue and the tension of it long enough for them to be educated and to explore one another and to heal themselves; in this particular community healing will be such a huge thing

Bob Housh of the Metropolitan Energy Center described a similar process:

When we've done these projects, one of the very first tasks we go through is to do some visioning with the community; and get the community to talk about things. We ask them first what is it about the community that they don't like and want to get rid of, and what is it about the community that is important to them and that they want to keep, or kinds of things they think needs to be changed. And it's interesting that things that relate to sustainability and the environment almost always come up, and usually come up at the top. They dislike trash in their neighborhoods just as much as they dislike crime.

While participatory visioning, planning and design have not yet been employed in the Green Impact Zone, funding for a “sustainability strategic plan” is appropriated in the $1.5 million from the city, and it remains to be seen if that process will engage residents in a participatory process.

Furthermore, while my interviews brought no mention of integrating the Manheim Park plan that was developed through a participatory planning process just prior to the development of the Green Impact Zone into the initiative, reviewing that plan and understanding where it intersects with the goals of the Green Impact Zone is important, just as tactics and methods adopted from Ivanhoe are now incorporated into the Zone’s strategies.18

18 The recent work of Randolph T. Hester (2006), on Design for Ecological Democracy, offers many ideas for approaching equitable and inclusive design and planning processes.
Strengthening Community-University Partnerships

Other resources that should be capitalized on to the maximum extent possible are those that exist within the area’s local universities. A community-university partnership theoretically employs an exchange of skills and knowledge between local university departments, students, and the local community, and assumes that the community agrees to and participates in the implementation process. The partnership that has developed between the University of Missouri at Kansas City’s Center for Economic Information and the Green Impact Zone is only one of many ways that UMKC’s work can assist the Green Impact Zone’s goals. Similarly, the Department of Architecture, Planning, and Design should continue to be brought into the partnership for their knowledge of neighborhood revitalization processes, participatory planning and design, and historic preservation. Departments within the school of Public Administration (e.g. public health) should be contacted as well.

The current Green Impact Zone experience, however, also has lessons for how and when to engage universities in the knowledge-building process. Without a community vision and shared goals with resident buy-in, data collection and dissemination can be harmful to communities, as raw numbers can speak loudly to a community’s ails and challenges but will say little about the community’s vision for its own future. Entering into community-university partnerships without a clear understanding of the community’s goals risks unintended exploitation of the community, rather than the community’s exploitation of university resources. However, carefully crafted, well-informed partnerships that engage the community in a process of collective inquiry, from question formulation to data collection to action, can be a powerful tool for engagement and knowledge building within the community with mutual benefits for all parties.
Building a Culture of Community Planning and Organizing

The Zone’s current goal to strengthen the capacities of existing neighborhood associations should continue to be built upon so that the “moment” can be used to build a strong grassroots community-planning culture throughout the city. Rather than a one-time capacity building fund, the Green Impact Zone should shift a certain percentage of resources received into a fund that can be turned into seed grants for the volunteer-run neighborhood associations to build and hire full-time, paid staff from their respective communities. These staff members could then be linked into the Zone’s leadership training programs. In addition to strengthening community leadership, building a culture of community planning will require building a strong “demand environment for change” (Traynor and Andors 2005) amongst residents.

A Massachusetts-based CDC, Lawrence Community Works (LCW), has developed a set of strategies and principles, effectively called “network organizing,” which already resonates with some of the strategies employed by the Zone. In network organizing the weakest relationships (i.e. those that do not traditionally exist between residents and institutions) provide the greatest form of strength. As described by William Traynor at LCW:

At the cellular level, place-based community begins with a single relationship of trust and mutual benefit in which one resident or stakeholder shares with another. It is the aggregate of those relationships – along with the loose connections that bind a diversity of them together – that forms not community, but the structural framework for community to exist” (Traynor 2005).

The Green Impact Zone has already succeeded in starting to make some of those connections through the partnership building process; adopting a more intentional network organizing strategy will help the initiative build off of its current efforts.19

19 See Traynor and Andors 2005 (in references) for a description of network organizing principles.
Institutionalizing the Green Impact Zone

The Green Impact Zone will take several years, at the very least, to bear fruit socially. Yet politicians, and funding, have a shorter lifespan, which leaves the initiative politically vulnerable. One of the most important things that the City of Kansas City, Missouri, can do is to recommit itself to this program through a renewed contract in order to give it a chance to develop. The existence of the Green Impact Zone staff is crucial to the initiative’s survival in these early years, particularly if the initiative commits itself to building a culture of community planning in the target neighborhoods. Continuing to work closely with the Green Impact Zone staff will allow for a mutually beneficial relationship where the City can build its own knowledge about how its services can be better integrated and contribute to community empowerment efforts, while the Zone benefits from the wealth of human capital and knowledge about services within city hall. Once the Green Impact Zone develops and enhances its programs and creates strong linkages between programs and services, the network created through the Green Impact Zone can easily be extended beyond the Zone’s borders to benefit citizens throughout the city.
Chapter 4: Lessons and Conclusions

March of 2010 marked one year since Congressman Cleaver first presented his idea for the Green Impact Zone of Missouri. When announced in March of 2009, the Zone was imagined to become a national model for sustainable neighborhood transformation through coordinated and concentrated place-based investment. It intended to do so by using various streams of funding available through the Recovery Act to implement a range of social and spatial interventions from weatherization to community policing, community health, workforce development, and green infrastructure development. While the confluence of challenges facing communities within the Green Impact Zone’s boundaries cannot be addressed in a year’s time, the initiative succeeded in building a broad base of unlikely partnerships and bringing in several substantial federal grants. The most pressing question facing the Zone is how it will balance its social and spatial priorities in implementation, particularly given the nature of funds received.

Considerations for Federal Policy

The Green Impact Zone of Missouri is a place-based initiative insofar as it designated a set of boundaries and targeted resources and services within them. However, it differs from place-based programs of the past in important ways. First, where many place-based programs were narrowly defined around one priority (e.g. economic investment or affordable housing), the Green Impact Zone recognizes the integrated nature of the place’s issues and proposes to address them through integrated social, economic, and environmental programs. Second, while investing resources within the place defined by a set of boundaries, the initiative seeks to also link people in that place to resources, services, and opportunities beyond the Zone’s boundaries. Third, the initiative relies on the creation of linkages and relationships between institutions and
organizations throughout the neighborhood, city, and region. Finally, this multi-scalar approach is facilitated and administered by a regional planning council, rather than a local agency.

These are all strengths of the Green Impact Zone model and point to a potentially powerful approach to addressing the confluence of social, economic, and environmental priorities of urban policy and planning. Important to the Green Impact Zone’s regional approach, however, is the perspective held by the Mid-America Regional Council’s Executive Director, David Warm, who writes: “a region is only as strong as its weakest neighborhoods... to meet regional goals we must pay particular attention to stabilizing and reinvesting in places in need” (Warm 2009). This comment marks an important contrast to the traditional approach and target definition used by many regional and metropolitan planning organizations.

As policymakers consider the role and power of regional and metropolitan planning organizations (MPO) in urban sustainability efforts, they must not forget that many MPOs significantly contributed to the hyper-segregation and environmentally unsustainable sprawl that today define the exact problems that policy hopes to address. This, too, is a result of federal funding that was made available to regional planning councils. Kansas City in Missouri is no exception, and the Mid-America Regional Council was in fact on the defending end of the construction of the Bruce R. Watkins expressway that today cuts directly through the center of the Green Impact Zone. Nevertheless, federal funding is now available for regions to play a new role, and MARC has signaled its own commitment to reframing its work to better serve inner-city populations.

Reframing the role of regions and developing a national vocabulary around regionalism

If the federal government is serious about promoting the regional approach to urban poverty and sustainability challenges, it must insure that regional and metropolitan planning
councils make a dramatic shift in their processes, partnerships, target audiences, and internal capacities. \(^{20}\) This is particularly true given the varying roles that many regional and metropolitan organizations currently play throughout the nation and the historic role that many played in enabling sprawl and segregation in their respective regions. This historic role begs the question of whether the regional planning council programming will simply follow whatever federal funding is available. Developing a national vocabulary around regionalism and the powerful contribution that regional planning organizations can make in promoting all three Es (equity, environment, economy) of sustainability will be an important part of institutionalizing their roles in this effort.

**Encouraging institutional partnerships that help regional and metropolitan organizations build knowledge about inner-city communities**

One concern that arises out of this shift is that many regional planning councils, and other traditional “systems-level” actors including utility companies and transportation authorities, lack deep knowledge about the challenges facing a given inner-city community, let alone the ability to effectively address those issues with their current capacities, programming and staff. Furthermore, such organizations are generally one step further removed from city governments, who are already hard-pressed to access and address the challenges faced by their urban poor and themselves struggle to understand the very local needs of inner-city constituents. These issues become even more complicated in cities that lack a strong grassroots planning and organizing culture.

In the Green Impact Zone partnership, PolicyLink, as a national advocacy organization, and the University of Missouri at Kansas City (UMKC), as a local university, can play key roles to help systems-level organizations build knowledge about engaging in local poverty alleviation

\(^{20}\) MARC hired the Green Impact Zone staff to fill its own capacity gap.
to achieve regional sustainability goals. In PolicyLink, MARC has an advocacy organization with deep knowledge and understanding of the broader intersections of race, space, policy, and equity, which will enable MARC to re-think its approach to regional development, so that it works for the most marginalized segments of its region’s population. In UMKC, the initiative has a strong local institution that has previously worked with communities within the Zone. The Zone can further capitalize on the range of scholarship and expertise (from economic development, to public health, architecture and planning) that exists within UMKC and other local universities. University research can be directly relevant to the issues facing many poor minority communities whose specific problems are often insufficiently documented.

*Improving Coordination and Effectiveness*

Policy must encourage integrated programming which can effectively meet the interrelated nature of problems facing low-income urban communities. This will require minimizing barriers that stand in the way of such integration and evaluating how the federal government can streamline processes and definitions between programs from different agencies whose work overlaps in a given place-based program. That the Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities hopes to coordinate funding and services between the Department of Transportation, Department of Energy, and Department of Housing and Urban Development to promote greater sustainability is a positive start. However, each agency is its own large bureaucracy, so improving coordination and effectiveness will require as much *intra*-agency re-strategizing as it will *inter*-agency re-strategizing.

Finally, it will be important to identify the various jurisdictional implications of a regional approach. This is true particularly given that tension will likely arise between city and regional authorities, and between state and regional authorities, which may be forced to compete
against one another for limited federal funds. A question remains as to whether places would be better served if funding assisted cities to restructure their administrative systems so as to better address the integrated nature of issues faced by citizens (i.e. help cities become more systems capable) or if funding larger entities is more appropriate. Ideally, federal funding expected to go to regional planning councils will spur collaboration, rather than competition, across cities and regions.

Measuring Success

Measuring the success and impact of regionally administered place-based programs that simultaneously promote the three Es (economy, environment, equity) of sustainability will be a complex task. While there are traditional indicators for measuring the success of poverty alleviation and newer indicators that measure sustainable development in purely environmental terms, neither speaks to the process of achieving those indicators, which is often more telling of whether or not an initiative promotes equity. Still, sustainability cannot be understood solely in terms of process (e.g. that all districts get the same funding does not imply an equitable use of public funds), or solely in terms of outcome (e.g. absolute numbers of green jobs created). Measuring the success of such efforts must be done at a systems level, so that the promotion of equity, environment and economy in one place does not result in their obstruction in another place.

Concluding with the Introduction of a Fourth ‘E’

The Green Impact Zone emerged out a particularly urban federal moment that promoted the integration of the economy and the environment. The Zone was imagined by Emanuel Cleaver II, a man whose perennial commitment to equity was nurtured by the civil rights movement that first exposed the racialized landscape of social injustices throughout the nation.
Whether intentional or not, by identifying a regional planning council to manage this new type of place-based initiative, Congressman Cleaver opened the opportunity to not only think of economy and environment from a systems view, but to simultaneously consider the system of institutions and decisions that perpetuate social and spatial inequities.

By creating the Green Impact Zone east of Troost Avenue - a place where people were subject to decades of racist and unjust policies - and by insuring the distribution of resources and services to that place, the initiative begins to address some of the distributional inequities that often define spatial injustice. However, redistribution alone is insufficient. To truly promote equity within sustainability, policymakers, planners, designers, and others who shape the built environment must engage the very people who live with the consequences of inequity. They are integral to the process of devising solutions to address those injustices. A process that promotes equity will have a greater chance at producing fair outcomes. Given the centrality of this concern, Engagement must be considered as the fourth E, the driving E, of sustainability.
Appendix A: References


City of Kansas City, Missouri. FOCUS KCMO Comprehensive Plan (1997)


## Appendix B: Interviews

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
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<tr>
<td>David Warm</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>Mid America Regional Council</td>
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<td>Dean Katerndahl</td>
<td>Director of the Government Innovations Forum</td>
<td>Mid America Regional Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tom Neff</td>
<td>HUD Environmental Review Coordinator</td>
<td>City of Kansas City, Missouri</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kimiko Gilmore</td>
<td>Office of the City Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deletta Dean</td>
<td>Director of Neighborhood and Community Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bob Jackson</td>
<td>Director of Weatherization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Twanna Hall Scott</td>
<td>Assistant Director and Outreach Manager</td>
<td>Green Impact Zone of Missouri</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arletha Manlove</td>
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<td>Coketha Hill</td>
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<td>Pauline Mbogo</td>
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<td>Margaret May</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rodney Knott</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Historic Manheim Park Association</td>
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<td>Paul Tancredi</td>
<td>President of the Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joanne Bussinger</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carol A. Grimaldi</td>
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<td>Brush Creek Community Partners</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bob Berkebile, FAIA</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>B.N.I.M. Architects</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vicki Noteis</td>
<td>Founding Partner</td>
<td>Collins, Noteis and Associates</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stephen Hardy</td>
<td>Director of Planning</td>
<td>B.N.I.M. Architects</td>
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<td>David Dowell, AIA</td>
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<td>El Dorado Inc</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gail Allen</td>
<td>Sr. Manager, Customer Solutions</td>
<td>Kansas City Power and Light</td>
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<td>Bob Housh</td>
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<td>Metropolitan Energy Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marc Philpart</td>
<td>Federal Policy</td>
<td>PolicyLink</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jacob Wagner</td>
<td>Assistant Professor, Architecture, Urban Planning + Design</td>
<td>University of Missouri at Kansas City</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michael Frisch</td>
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