Towards a Practice of Narrative Planning

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ABSTRACT

The author explores the constitutional qualities of place, the role of narratives in framing land-use controversies, and the possibilities of narrative-focused dialogue as a place-making activity. She suggests planners engage communities in democratic land-use decision-making through the use of narrative-oriented deliberation. Three stories about land use controversy are elaborated, illustrating the importance of narrative in land use planning.

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Chapter One
On the Importance of Land

I think the communities, both of ‘em, need it so bad—to have something in their own community that’s theirs, that they can participate in and help maintain, and can turn out on Saturdays and do work, have their kids involved... It’s like, we’re all separate individuals, we have our own makeups, different parts of the country, different parents or maybe ethnicities and genders and so forth, but there’s times when we hold hands in the spirit of moving forward for the common good, and I think some of these kinds of projects are like that.

Arthur Carrol
Area Manager, Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, on the Klickitat Rail Trail

The issue is a perfect example and opportunity to show that it’s time people—the citizens—the taxpayers, stop big business and government from walking all over us... the little guy who doesn’t have much except the right to live in this country and say no to the waste and greed of big businesses and government... I will personally fight this to the death if necessary.

Hank Dane
Longtime area resident and landowner, on the same trail.

After five years of planning to develop the Klickitat (County) Rail Trail, Forest Service employees and area residents remained deeply at odds. Some saw the project as a welcome hand up for rural communities experiencing economic restructuring; others viewed it as intrusive, a waste of tax money, and a violation of private property rights. For a time, the dispute seemed as though it would develop into an old-time range war (Cecil 15 August 1995). The debate over the trail became so heated because it was a material and a symbolic conflict between local residents invested in traditional industries like wheat and cattle ranching, and traditional American-West values about private property, and others who did not hold so tightly to those beliefs. In the debate, not everyone seemed to follow arguments based economic interests; for instance, some people invested in the tourist trade opposed the trail, while others with little to gain nonetheless supported the trail. People’s positions seemed to depend less on narrowly defined private interests and more on their reading of the character of the community, and their role within it. Deciding whether or not to build the trail was an important choice about the community’s essential character. It raised questions about the identity and the future of the region. It is for this reason that the decision became so hotly contested.

Many public policy debates have qualities similar to the Klickitat dispute. For example, the long-running and vociferous American debate over abortion rights is less a disagreement about law or biology than about public sanctioning of a set of values, beliefs, and feelings (Luker
Likewise, disputes about gay marriage, prayer in schools, or even less religiously laden issues like immigration policy, welfare benefits, or corporate tax relief, can also be framed as debates about public values. Who are “we the people,” and to whom are we obligated? Jurgen Habermas, one of many observers to describe these conflicts, called them questions over “the grammar of forms of life” (Habermas 1987 quoted in Chambers). I take this to mean that public controversies are not only about tangible goods, but about whose history, principles, and identity will be acknowledged and valued in the public realm.

Land-use conflicts are especially strong examples of disputes over “the grammar of the forms of life,” because land is bound up with the identity of a physical community, and constitutional to the life experience of the people there. Place locates people in a network of institutions, physical resources, and other people that shapes their fortunes and everyday lives. While connectedness to place varies by age, ethnicity, and gender, personal relationships to place are often powerful, “characterized by intense feelings and commitments appropriate to long-term and multifaceted social and material attachments” (Logan and Molotch 1987).

Region, town, neighborhood, and even building, shape ordinary life events, but the qualities of these places remain mutable and fluid. For this reason also, land use decisions are important. People like the residents of Klickitat care so much about place not only because it is essential to lived experience, but also because it is open to influence. Absolute factors like geography do play a role in defining place, but because place encompasses a network of individuals, institutions, and relationships, places are in some sense made and remade everyday. As Logan and Molotch write in Urban Fortunes:

Places are not simply affected by the institutional maneuvers surrounding them. Places are those machinations. A place is defined as much by its position in a particular organizational web—political, economic, and cultural—as by its physical makeup and topographical configuration. Places are not “discovered” as high school history texts suggest; people construct them as a practical activity. (1987)

Changes to the use of land itself, especially new modes of development or alterations to heritage sites, are often changes in the soul of a place. Likewise, the institutions through which physical changes are mediated make up an important part of the qualities of place. For this reason, the Klickitat dispute is similar to many land-use controversies; it had important implications for the life and identity of the community.
While not every American engages in every policy debate, policies have policy-relevant publics (for instance, “clients and potential clients, legislators, cognate agencies, implementers, and potential voters,” (Yanow 2000)). It is within this relevant public that policy decisions have the effect of mediating values and power relationships. Land-use conflicts such as the trail issue in Klickitat are also strong examples of conflicts over the grammar of life because in land-use, the policy community more or less corresponds to a physical community. In contrast with national or even regional policy debates, land-use questions are discussed not in the national media but in local editorial pages and face-to-face meetings; the participants include neighbors and familiar institutions. The members of the policy community are not all professional policy-makers or movement members that by definition share the same views, but regular people who know each other. So, while many citizens may disengage from national or even state and region-level politics as too distant or abstract, local land use controversies often seem personal and engaging. The participants in land-use debates also usually share some life chances—the same public schools, the same police force, the similar environmental health risks. They are “communities of [shared] fate” (Stinchcombe 1965 quoted in Molotch and Logan 1987). Citizens are more likely to feel like they can impact these communities.

Among all environmental conflicts, land-use conflicts are also particularly engaging because they draw place-based communities—not just activists—into the discourse of environmental ethics and the debate over the weight of environmental claims in comparison to other claims for preserving traditional occupations, promoting economic development, etc.

Taking land-use as “grammar of the forms of life,” Habermas’ conviction that such identity conflicts are increasing is born out in rising concern over land use. The number of land trusts—organizations that exist to protect land (usually from development) has increased dramatically in the last decade (Williams 1997), even as environmental activism in general has declined (Putnam 2001). Land trusts draw out the ways in which land is important to regional character, emphasizing not land preservation for its own sake, but the importance of undeveloped land to the history or identity of a region; land trusts often emphasize the acquisition of “typical” or “representative” natural landscapes, rather than spectacular or unusual ones (Williams 1997). Major environmental organizations have also taken on issues of land use in the last few years;
the Sierra Club recently launched a major campaign to “fight sprawl,” demonstrating the role of land use planning in a larger effort to uphold environmental values.

The conviction that land-use conflicts are important to the identity of a community is also borne by the case studies presented here. In all three examples, participants frequently presented their arguments as stories about the character of the community. At public hearings, many people harkened to a defining moments in the life of the community. For example, in retirement community that was once a fishing village, one woman said, “I remember when the harbor was just a creek with working boats in it.” Similarly, testifiers often asserted their ability to speak for the community by recalling their length of residence. In Klickitat, another woman wrote: “As the owner of 1,400 acres of land along the lower Klickitat River, used exclusively for grazing cattle for the past 60 years...” Residents’ asserted the relevance of tradition and historic identity in land-use disputes—and in cases of conflict, seemed to stake a claim for the importance of their particular experience, history, and identity.

Planners, like community “testifiers” and many environmentalists, increasingly recognize land use as representative of broad community interests. Keith Bartholomew, associate director of the Wallace Stegner Center for Land, Resources, and the Environment, writes in the *American Planning Association Journal* that, “the collective sweep of history appears to show the movement from a focus primarily on [land-use] permit battles to a broader concern with identifying and protecting larger social interests” (1999). Planners also see that land use conflicts increasingly represent conflicts over public values.

In the past decade, planners have returned more and more to spatial (land-use) planning as central to their profession. Although municipal city planners have always had to concern themselves with land-use regulation, a renewed interest in place-making and methods of comprehensive planning are a reaffirmation of the importance of land in shaping a region’s future. (See, for example, Healey 1998 on place-making, Klein 1993 and Gilmore 1997 on comprehensive planning.) Place-making efforts such as those described by Healy (working in the UK), emphasize the importance of spatial planning in the context of a community with a character that includes an economy, demographic patterns, and history. Healy writes that physical planning is most successful, and most engaging to community members, when it integrates issues of community character and land use planning.
One city that has long recognized the role of land and land-use planning in shaping and reflecting the values and identity of a community is Portland, Oregon. Portland’s 1974 Comprehensive Plan begins: “Portland is more than a geographic area—it is a way of life” (Kenney 1992). This city, which explicitly connects geography and form of life, has been extraordinarily successful in shaping its geography, and arguably a form of life—Portland is “City Planning’s Golden Child” (MIT 2000); in 2000 it was named America’s “best big city” by *Money* magazine (“Best Places” 2000).

Portland’s success, the increasing interest of environmentalists and planners, and my own values suggest that acknowledging what’s at stake in land-use conflicts might allow people to begin to address both the presenting issue and the underlying conflicts more successfully. By acknowledging the important issues made tangible in land use conflicts, these disputes might be transformed from divisive community brawls into opportunities to acknowledge and begin to address important questions about the future of a place, and the people that live there. A positive result from a land-use controversy could help to create what Patsey Healey has called “ongoing place-making activities” (1998): continuing dialogue and planning that centers on the qualities of a particular place, and that includes but is not limited to land-use issues. This raises the question: what can communities do to resolve land-use conflicts constructively, even take advantage of the opportunities that such controversies represent?

Here, I present the Klickitat case and two other land-use conflicts in greater detail, examining both the controversies and the larger issues that underlie them. In elaborating these conflicts, I seek to understand how planners can meaningfully engage communities in the resolution of land use controversies, in a way that respects land use as a serious and contested issue that concerns the constitution of the community and at the same time respects difference within the community. In these cases, the question has shifted from, “What is the most logical land-use decision?” to “What is this place we call home?”

### On Planning and Democracy
Where land use decisions involve renegotiating the identity of a community—indeed, where the process by which land use decisions are made itself becomes a quality of that community—the process necessarily centers on stakeholders: community residents, businesses, and institutions. The idea that public planning agencies, especially those that do physical planning, should reflect
the goals and concerns of those stakeholders in some way has always been accepted; in a
democracy, citizens must direct all public-agency planners in some way. The main benefits for
citizen participation have been generally defined as creating legitimacy, utilizing citizen’s
knowledge (local knowledge), and addressing citizens’ needs and preferences in plans. In
addition to the benefits to plans and planners, participation might also have direct benefits to
citizens, such as learning about civic issues or building community ties. Thus, civic capacity is
another quality of place that might be shaped in the land-use planning process. However, which
theory of democracy or which methods of participation that planners should apply—or whether
they should be responsible for acting democratically at all—is hardly a settled question. Ideas
about what constitutes meaningful public involvement in planning change over time, and have
probably always been contested (Day 1997).

Early physical planners depended almost solely upon the expert knowledge of their
profession to make planning decisions. They were “democratic” only in the sense that
bureaucracies in general are democratic—because they enact the intent of elected legislators or
(in the case of many planners) the executive. Beginning in the 1950s, the federal government
and many states mandated direct citizen participation in physical (land-use and project) planning
through public hearings or comment periods. This direct citizen involvement was seen as needed
to create legitimacy for planned projects and address citizens’ needs and preferences more
directly. However, through the 1905s and 1960s, planners still functioned mainly as
professionals with special planning knowledge that allowed them to implement the executive’s
intent in a straightforward way—or as the allies of politicians who crafted projects that succeeded
because they offered something to many different interest groups. In these early efforts at
participation, direct democracy was not intended, and participation efforts often treated the
public as an organism to be studied rather than actually engaged in the planning process (Day
1997).

The urban renewal projects of the 1950s were for the most part examples of bureaucratic-
rationalist planning by “experts”; the massive highway schemes of the 1960s and early 1970s
represent planners working in the political-influence mode. By the 1970s, the public
increasingly recognized the failures of the planning projects produced by planners working in
traditional modes. Critical social theories—feminist, Marxist, democratic, and postmodern—
were applied to planning. As a result of these criticisms, new emphasis was placed on the issue
of public participation in planning, and more mechanisms for public participation were put into place: more hearings, more opportunities to comment on projects in progress, etc. Beginning in the 1960s, social movements also arose that sought to influence the planning process.

As a result of changes that began in the 1960s, opportunities for public input in land use (and other kinds of) planning have increased in number and complexity. However, many of these new practices have been layered on top of old bureaucratic-rationalistic and political-influence modes of planning. The result is a system that is more responsive to citizen concerns, but that still fails in important ways to meet the goals of participation. Large-scale interventions like slum clearance or massive highway construction have declined, but they are only the most obvious examples of the bureaucratic and political planning styles. Although physically less intrusive, many other projects are still planned mainly through political and technical-bureaucratic processes. The rail trail in Klickitat County was to some residents an example of this kind of imposed reconstitution of community identity. Although many communities seem eager to engage, planners still don’t know exactly how to accomplish “participation.”

While large public agencies moved towards establishing formal modes of citizen participation in the later half of this century, municipal governments have always used public meetings and other direct-participation methods, to a greater or lesser extent, to involve citizens in government decision-making. The New England town meeting is the most well known example of this. The commitment to public involvement at the city or town level seems to reflect my earlier statement, that direct participation is more efficient on a smaller scale, and that people expect to exert more influence on the local level, where the polity is smaller and their representatives may be better known to them. However, cities and towns, even small ones, also have bureaucracies to whom models of bureaucratic planning seem to apply. Land-use planning has often fallen into the domain of such bureaucracies.

In the helpful book *Citizen Participation in Planning*, Michael Fagence (1977) suggests that many of the failures of participation efforts stem from a weak understanding of democracy:

The pursuit of citizen participation in planning is too frequently undertaken in considerable ignorance of the political philosophy of democracy. It is apparent from case studies that most planning agencies engage in practices of citizen participation as if they were simply additional planning techniques to be woven into the planning process. Little
thought, if any, is given to the considerable complexities of democracy, its theory and practice, or issues of representation. Many of the traumas generated within participation practices may be traced to naïve conceptions of democracy. Inadequate understanding of theory has contributed to the less than desirable or expected performance of citizen participation.

Likewise, Day (1997) notes that Coppock (1977), Catanese (1984), Fisher (1993), and Grant (1994) have made similar observations.

The popularity in the 1990s of “community visioning” exercises also suggests a weak conception of participatory democracy, even at the municipal level. Although visioning is laudable (and has been widely touted) for its effort to directly address issues of values and hopes for the future, in practice visioning exercises are often shallow. They attempt to identify and answer important questions about the future of a community in a very short time—a few months or even just a weekend—and without acknowledging significant limits on participation in such efforts (Shipley and Newkirk 1998, Helling 1998. Also see Woodmansee 1994 for case examples).

Citizen participation in planning would be more likely to meet the goals of creating legitimacy, utilizing local knowledge, and addressing citizens’ needs and preferences, and more likely to create civic capacity as a quality of place, if participation reflected a deeper understanding of the complexities of democracy.

The most compelling model of democracy to be advanced since interest in public participation in planning grew in the 1970s is the deliberative model suggest by John Rawls and elaborated by Thomas Scanlon, Jurgen Habermas, and others (Chambers 1996). This model emphasizes the dialogic nature of democracy. It presents democracy as a discourse between citizens that affirms the capabilities of individuals to communicate, reason, and reflect. In contrast with liberal models of democracy, deliberation “imagines politics as a contestation over questions of value and not simply questions of preference” (Habermas 1996). This deliberative model has been tied to emerging best practices in planning, often called collaborative or communicative-action modes (Forester 1989, Healey 1998, Innes 2000). Because I suggest that these collaborative models are well worth pursuing with respect to land-use planning, it is worthwhile to unpack democracy and deliberation a bit further.
Deliberative models of democracy represent the planning process as a dialogue that approximates Habermas’ “practical discourse,” a conversation in which equal citizens engage in discussion and argument to eventually reach concurrence on policy choice. Deliberative democracy contrasts with the popular liberal view, which represents democracy as system of voting wherein each individual acts on her private preferences and where the best public choice is represented by the sum of individual preferences. In this liberal democracy, facts are debatable (although they may be rarely debated), but preferences (“values” or “tastes”) are taken as private and indisputable. An important criticism of this liberal view is that because voting requires no interaction, individuals form preferences without any information about other actors’ preferences or intentions. Thus, people’s conceptions of their own interests may be flawed or incomplete. Also, the liberal view does not promise any internal rationality or consistency to government decisions, except in so far as the aggregate of private preferences are rational and consistent (which they likely are not if individuals have poor information). In contrast, deliberative democracy promises to yield decisions that, upon reflection, can be explained in terms of facts and values, and justified as reasonable and acceptable to the polity.

Deliberative democracy is also distinct from the republican view, which is often contrasted with the liberal view. Republicans (with a small r) represent democracy as a shared search for a unitary Common Good. Republican views tend towards communitarianism, depending upon a culturally established background of consensus to reach decisions. In contrast, deliberative democracy upholds the idea that a fair and just procedure for decision-making, one in which people are free to dissent and present conflicting (even self-serving) proposals, and to challenge the way decisions are made, will yield a legitimate and fair result through reasoning, reflection, and respect for difference, rather than the discovery of sameness.

In the deliberative version of democracy, the process by which a decision is made requires reasoning and sharing information. For this reason, it promises to achieve decisions that are more consistent and rational than those achieved under liberalism. It also suggests that decisions will reflect the best knowledge of the entire group rather than the limited knowledge of individuals. At the same time, this practical discourse does not require that everyone ultimately agree on values or the Common Good.

The kind of group problem-solving suggested by this discourse may often lead to creative and effective responses to policy questions. Participants will learn from one another and adjust
their own perceptions of their interests as a result. Evidence from mediation practice, which promotes dialogic procedures for conflict resolution, suggests that this is the case (Susskind et al 1999). If everyone is truly equally free to participate in deliberation, deliberative democracy holds out hope for equitable decisions. Because the practice of respectful deliberation also affirms equity directly, deliberation can help to build real parity among citizens. The use of deliberation to resolve public questions leads to decisions that are reasoned and supported by arguments; therefore, even non-participants in deliberation may have more reason to accept a decision reached deliberatively than one reached, for example, in an election in which they did not vote.

When ordinary citizens participate in deliberation (as opposed to elected representatives, who may also deliberate), public discourse may also have one more important benefit: to build broad and deep citizen participation in public life. Participants in deliberation learn about other citizens’ interests and experiences. They build their own communication and problem-solving skills. By participating in a democratic process, they build their skills as citizens of a democracy and may be more likely to participate in other ways in governance and civil society. In building their collective skills, they also reduce the costs for future deliberation and gain a sense of their own efficacy in shaping a collective future. Thus, one deliberation can lead to more and less costly deliberations in the future. Deliberation is a mechanism through which public controversy might lead to ongoing dialogue about a community’s future.

When the idea of deliberation is applied to public debates over land use, the utility of these outcomes is especially compelling. Through deliberation, people who share a “community of fate” might be able to reflect and reason intersubjectively about that fate. If deliberation builds civil society, understanding, and a sense of efficacy among citizens, then understanding, efficacy of citizen action, and civic capacity become qualities of that place. Because land-use decisions are explicitly about community identity, deliberative-land use planning exercises become dynamic place-making activities: opportunities to shape and enact a new (or confirmed) characterization of the community.

On Narrative and Planning

As one might suspect, theories of deliberative democracy have not quite solved all the problems of democracy or land-use planning in action. While the qualities it promises to imbue are
appealing, the familiar problems of inclusive participation crop up. In political theory, dominant
descriptions of discourse often emphasize the superior rationality that can emerge from
deliberation, an interaction in which the best arguments will prevail. Unfortunately, this
description of discourse often privileges the groups of people who are most adept at making
formal arguments; even deliberative proceedings tend to favor men, white people, and people of
higher economic and education status. An even deeper criticism is that the ideal of democracy as
a contest between disembodied, atomistic individuals (even completely equal individuals) is
utterly impossible to even approximate. Instead, this fiction serves to naturalize a western, male-
centered worldview (which is taken as the closest approximation of “disembodied”), over
worldviews where relationship-regarding and other-regarding concerns are more central to the
concept of interests. Many scholars of democracy, particularly feminist and non-white scholars
have described the problems posed by the fiction of non-contextuality (for instance, Benhabib
mediators have observed a similar bias in traditional interest-based negotiations (Winslade,
Monk, and Cotter 1998). They note that “neutral” mediators who emphasize individual interests,
problem-solving, and material outcomes privilege certain worldviews over others—for instance,
favoring individualism, materialism, and existing power structures over concerns about
communities, relationships, and changes to power structures. Ideal speech situations and
perfectly neutral mediators do not exist; the possibility of carrying out truly “equal” deliberation
is questionable.

Feminist scholars of democracy and some mediators have suggested that a new or
renewed emphasis on narrative as a communicative practice could help to make good on the
possibilities of deliberation. By valuing narrative as a part of discourse, people whose
viewpoints are marginalized in formal dialogue have new opportunities to make their views
apparent and compelling. While formal argumentation obviously privileges people adept at
making formal arguments, storytelling creates opportunities for people who are more adept or
comfortable in a narrative style to present their knowledge in a similarly natural way. Likewise,
while formal arguments privilege people with official kinds of knowledge, storytelling allows
people to present non-formal knowledge in a way that is potentially compelling. While expertise
is always valued in discourse, storytelling allows each person to present themselves as legitimate
experts on their own experience. Narrative also forms the important functions of putting
ideas—abstractions—in an experiential context, and “showing” how a practice or concept is different from different perspectives. Narrative may be particularly useful in deliberative dialogues, where a shared context (“point of view”) should not be assumed.

Narratives are complete stories, and they make sense of things without reference to outside laws or criteria (Kaplan 1986). Because of this internal completeness, narratives make it easier to share information across difference. Narratives can function as a way of examining other people’s, or even our own, way of looking at the worlds. We might also call it “walking in another person’s shoes” or “looking through someone else’s eyes” or (in terms of our own narratives) “frame reflection” (Schon and Rein 1994). When we pay attention to narrative, other people’s actions might seem different to us (hopefully, they would make more sense).

Examining narrative might also lead us to reframe our own experience. This is important to deliberation, which is predicated on the belief that sometimes people come to see things differently.

Narrative has potential to make discourse more inclusive and allow participants to more easily acknowledge differences in experience and point-of-view (issues of identity). This is particularly vital in the context of deliberations over land-use, where the character and identity of a place are explicitly important to the debate, and where community members who may not be comfortable in formal argumentation or public presentation could contribute a great deal to the conversation. Narrative may also help people to be reflective about their own experience, which is also important to deliberation. For these reasons, I suggest that planning around land use issues would benefit tremendously from a new focus on narrative.

Although the term narrative has an everyday meaning, “a story,” it is again useful to explore the concept of narrative a bit more rigorously, since it is so important to the ideas expressed here. What exactly is narrative, and where does it come from?

A narrative is a telling that relates events with a sequence and relationship. Narrative “grasps together” multiple, fragmented experiences and organizes them into a coherent stream connected by goals and motives, successes and failures, actors and victims (Ricoeurs 1983). Narratives are how we make sense of the world (Gergen and Gergen 1986, Murray 1989, Ricoeours cited in Weinbren 1998 and Heine 1994). Life stories constitute our very identities (Mishler 1999). Organizational identities are likewise constructed through stories (Kramer
Narratives, especially stories, also play an important role in public life. Hegemonic narratives organize relationships and power structures within society (Simon 1991); underground or counter-narratives draw attention to the ways in which popular narratives advantage certain interests over others. Policy narratives make sense of current events (Roe 1989).

People don’t pick and choose narratives the way they browse for novels. The process of “choosing stories” is a process of forming beliefs. People form narratives according to their experiences, preferences, and reasoning. Narratives must also accord with authorities in which they have faith, and with social meta-narratives (for instance, a history of the country where they live). People may also manipulate or even invent narratives. But even self-conscious stories are significant. Because narratives gain and change meaning through hearing and retelling, made-up stories still have an affect on listener and storyteller. Narratives are socially shaped and transformed, and once they exist in the public sphere, they take on a life of their own.

Within society, some narratives have developed hegemony. These meta-narratives reflect the views of the dominant groups within society; most cultural narratives and even life stories within the culture conform to these narratives (Simon 1991). For instance, in the United States a Jeffersonian narrative about the virtues of land ownership is hegemonic and underlies many peoples’ beliefs about land. As a result, many people hold private property rights as central to their rights as persons. In cultures where the Jeffersonian story does not have hegemony, land speculation or ownership of large areas of land is often less accepted; in some cases, private ownership of land is not even accepted. Within a society, a minority may disagree with hegemonic narratives, but these narratives are important in shaping peoples’ beliefs. Of course, not all narratives are shaped by hegemonic stories. And not all narratives concern our very identities or essential beliefs. People also narrate minor events in their lives. Layers of narrative make sense of things at many levels.

People do not alter their beliefs easily. Doubt is an uneasy state, and belief is comfortable (to paraphrase Peirce 1992). But some beliefs are more tightly held than others. And the idea that people change their minds—change their preferences or policy prescriptions—is central to deliberation. When new experiences or elements of a narrative come to light, or a story suggests solutions that don’t seem to work when applied, people do seek out new stories to make sense of the same events. For instance, as Americans become more cognizant of the
stories of indigenous Americans, popular narratives of American history have changed. Columbus appears different today than he did one hundred years ago.

**Narrative Analysis**

Narrative is all around us, but not as invisible ether. Scientists, historians, policy analysts, conflict mediators, counselors and psychologists, philosophers, writers and commentators regularly call out and examine causative stories. In the case studies presented here, I examine the narratives of different groups of participants. In doing this, I draw on the field of narrative analysis.

Narrative policy analysts compare different stories about why a social problem occurs and how it could be solved, and then advocate for one solution over another. Narratives organize cause and effect; therefore, narratives are needed within policy to clarify the policy problem and suggest how it could be remedied. All policy prescriptions, even those following from a "tenseless argument for particular principles" require a story to explain how a specific course of action follows from those principles (Kaplan 1986). Policy analysts compare narratives in terms of structure, richness, truth, consistency, congruence, and unity (Roe 1989, Kaplan 1986).

Policy analyst Emery Roe is particularly thoughtful about the way in which analysts examine and compare stories. He suggests that when one “policy story” is under-developed in comparison to a competing story—for instance, a critique of one narrative that does not offer a compelling alternative—the analyst might seek to flesh out the competing story in order to better compare the two (Roe 1989). Sometimes, a better explication of competing narratives will reveal that the two stories recount the same events but begin and end at different points, or include the same possible outcomes, but with different probabilities attached (Roe 1989). A close examination of competing stories may reveal that they can be reconciled. So sometimes, analysts combine elements to reconcile competing stories in a new story.

Advocating for new policy stories is often a difficult task, because stories—beliefs—are often quite entrenched. More often, analysts seek to choose the most sound and compelling existing stories; they advocate the solutions that are suggested by those stories. Thus, policy analysts also promote (re-tell) the stories that usefully connect past events and prescriptions for future action.
The example of policy analysis also shows the ways in which analysis becomes intervention. Examining causative stories, choosing one story over another, and asserting or retelling that story means becoming an advocate for one narrative. The process of policy-making, drawing out causative stories and examining them in the public eye—often in the media—also becomes a process of shaping stories and identities. For instance, Maarten Hajer explicitly examines the role of culture and identity in land-use policies in the Netherlands, and concludes that identity is not pre-given, but “constructed in the narratives, texts, discourses, and related media that we rely upon for analyzing and making public policy” (1999). Analysts in some sense always become interveners.

When policy analysts seek to reconcile conflicting policy stories, they play a role similar to a narrative mediator. Narrative mediators seek to resolve conflict by creating new stories. Thus, mediators explicitly seek to shape new beliefs. Mediators accomplish this by encouraging each participant in a mediation to tell their own story of the relationship, then probing for events that do not fit into disputants’ “conflict-saturated” stories. Thus, they help the participants to build up an alternative narrative that presents their relationship in a new way (Winslade, Monk, and Cotter, 1998, Winslade and Monk 2000). The mediator helps the participants to explore this new story about the relationship, and what it means for their future interactions. Often, the mediator records the new story in a contract or a letter to both parties. Once a new story is developed, mediators find that material issues are much more easily resolved (Winslade, Monk, and Cotter 1998, Winslade and Monk 2000). The experience of both mediators and policy analysts show that careful attention to stories about the world can help make sense of competing or conflicting ideas, bring them into congruence, or suggest a new way of thinking that resolves the conflict.

Like mediators, policy analysts and political observers also increasingly recognize that even tales that are incomplete or don’t seem to fit the facts have significant value (Neisser and Schram 1997). Storytelling is how groups and individuals express their identities, experiences, and their perceived interests. A counter-history or an alternative narrative, even if it doesn’t conform to standards of rational empiricism, explains something about the group that tells it. John Fiske (1993, quoted in Schram and Neisser 1997) uses as an example of counter-narrative the example of “blackstream knowledge” about a deliberate, government-sponsored genocide of young black men. In mainstream thought, this tale is “too easily dismissed” as outlandish. But
tales of widespread, self-induced violence are accepted. Policy analysts seeking to better understand the problems of violence in African American communities might compare the blackstream genocide tale to mainstream stories about self-induced violence. Likewise, in the case studies that follow I examine some narratives that initially seem strange or unlikely.

Planning and Narrative
Perhaps even more than policy analysts or mediators, planners’ work depends on stories. Planning arguments are based upon narratives and are characteristically expressed as stories (what else is a “plan?”); a planner seeks to manage and to tell stories about how the city is, and how it will be in the future (Mandelbaum 1990, Throgmorton 1996). In the past, planners sought to create from these stories a single master narrative—a master plan that would organize and rationalize the city (Beauregard 1996). This corresponds to the non-participatory eras of planning history. As planning practice evolved and the concept of a master narrative was largely rejected planners still sought to sift through different narratives, select the most “rational” and compelling, and project them into the future through retelling in published plans and strategies: rational-bureaucratic planning. Today, planners serve in many ways as the mediators between stories as well as storytellers; they sift through contending narratives that make sense of urban problems, and seek to accommodate multiple views in one arrangement or one built form.

Hegemonic narratives have played an important place in American land-use planning, just as they do in other policy areas. The hegemonic narratives of the frontier and the Jeffersonian ideal of the yeoman farmer, independent, prudent, civic-minded—the ideal citizen of a democracy—shape American land-use policy today. The American view of land as sacred private property, ambivalence towards land speculation, aversion to public ownership and acquisition, and anti-urbanism all follow from the frontier and the yeoman-farmer narratives (Innes 1981). In American housing policy, the effects of these views are particularly obvious; the US government has staunchly advocated private home ownership for over 100 years: through the sacred status of single-family zones in American zoning, through Federal supports and loan guarantees for home loans, through subsidized home loans for veterans, through home mortgage tax deductions, and through provision of the utilities and highways that make suburban homeownership possible (Innes and Barton 1987). This support for private home ownership comes despite the fact that at many points in history, and certainly today, detached single-family
living (and suburban sprawl) is not the best housing option for many people (Innes and Barton 1987). The dominance of private home ownership in American housing policy demonstrates the continuing dominance of the Jeffersonian ideal. Judith Innes and Stephen Barton’s examination of the Jeffersonian narrative’s influence in American housing policy led them to urge planners to confront hegemonic narratives (the authors use the term “myth”) and use them creatively and responsibly, rather than allow policies to be subject to their unexamined influence (1987).

The confrontation and creative use of many policy narratives—not just myths or hegemonic stories—might prove very beneficial to planners. In subsequent chapters, I illustrate stories that are not (yet) myths but that have colonized the attention of the polity because of their straightforward and persuasive forms. One such story is the narrative of tragic development, which posits development as a tragedy in the classical sense, “a final and impressive disaster due to unforeseen or unrealized failure involving people who command respect and sympathy” (Brereton 1968). In the narrative of tragic development, the tragic heroes (“people who command respect and sympathy”) are affluent Americans themselves, who have subdivided and developed the edenic natural landscape, a landscape that is needed to connect people to history and their “simpler” selves. Land development is thus “a final [‘irreversible’] and impressive disaster.” Now, at the eleventh hour, virtuous Americans are seeking to avert the tragedy of development by slowing or stopping “growth.” For some, the effort to stop growth seems to offer a taste of “the distinctive tragic pleasure”—the sense of being “face to face with grander sufferings” (Drakakis and Liebler 1998). Tragedies are almost always seductive, and this story certainly contains elements of truth. But the tragedy of development is not entirely accurate, and planners should again guard against its unexamined influence.

By drawing out social narratives, such as the Jeffersonian myth or the narrative of tragic development, planners can help develop simplistic policy stories. In narrative-focused planning events, these all-purpose stories might be embroidered and elaborated as participants closely consider specific qualities of place. Successful narrative-focused efforts would thus draw out local knowledge, and respond directly to the perceptions of the public. Participatory events that focused on narrative could also accommodate more diverse viewpoints than traditional modes of participation, such as formal argument. If deliberative processes included and encouraged the
use of narrative, the process of thinking about “quality of place,” might also become more reflective. Decisions made in such a forum would be more inclusive and thus more legitimate. Narrative-focused land use planning might help diverse communities develop a sense of membership in spatially defined communities of fate.

**Narrative and Land Use**

Place shapes material well-being and sense of identity; conflicts over place are frequently struggles over the future and identity of a community of shared fate. These serious decisions should engage that community. Democracy, the process by which a community (polity) makes these shared decisions, can be imagined in several ways. Deliberation, which affirms the ability of citizens to reason and reflect, seems most suited for land-use decisions because it has the potential to meaningfully engage difficult questions of identity and life ways. Deliberation works to build civic capacity, which then becomes a quality of that place. However, at the level of individuals, deliberation may fail in important ways if it does not accommodate different styles of discourse. Narrative is one form of communications that is often excluded from accounts of deliberation but that may in fact be vital, in two ways; one, it is a communicative practice that may allow people to use ordinary talk (not formal argument) to engage important issues and make compelling claims. Two, paying attention to narrative helps all participants, including the planner, make sense of the policy and identity issues (and their underlying assumptions) that are at the heart of land use. Planners who pay attention to stories could help communities deliberate, and engage in that deliberation themselves, leading to a practice of planning as on-going place-making activities. I knit these ideas—deliberation, democracy, place, identity—together as “narrative planning.”

Although “narrative planning” as described here is a way of deciding what to do in the world—and thus focused on getting to an “answer,” broadly defined, I also believe that the practice of narrative deliberation is worthwhile when it doesn’t lead to a clear-cut decision. The place-making function of narrative deliberation holds even when the deliberating group does not reach a consensus. Critics of deliberation have argued that the widespread emphasis on consensus as an ultimate goal is oppressive because it posits a universal reality or commonality exists or can be created through dialogue. Postmodernity argues that there is no such absolute reality and therefore no reason to believe that any amount of ideal speech will lead to a
consensus. But because narrative deliberation potentially leads to the elaboration of stories about place, I think it is valuable as a place-making device even if it does not lead to the convergence of stories, or the accommodation of group in the narrative of another. Even in a postmodern world, narrative deliberation has value.

Although imagining deliberation and narrative as central to land-use planning might seem like a revolution for most practicing planners, current practices of public participation are amenable to adaptations that include deliberation and storytelling. Public participation requirements around major projects or changes in zoning already require planners to invest time and resources in public meetings, mailings, newsletters, and the like. The real revolution for planners might not be in the practices of deliberation and attention to narrative, but re-imagining their role as drawing out the narratives of a community rather than authoring texts themselves, and in (sometimes) working to create complexity, instead of simplicity.

In the following cases, I study the policy narratives of three land use conflicts. Land-use conflicts are taken as important and constitutional questions that communities must resolve. The methods commonly used to address land use questions are taken as examples of the existing institutions that might be amenable to narrative planning. Through these case studies, I examine how narratives defined land-use conflicts, and suggest how a more explicit attention to and better development of those narratives might have changed the outcome of the projects. My aim is to understand how narrative theory might be useful to practicing planners who want to use public attention and interest in land use conflicts to lead citizens to uncover important concerns and think constructively about the future of the community. Because my desire in examining these cases is to create a relationship between ideas of deliberation and narrative and planning practice, the dialogues examined are not all successful narrative deliberations, although each case employed practices that might have lent themselves to such a process. Instead, I take the cases as structurally typical controversies, starting points where a deliberation could take place.

In each case, I give some background on the community, suggesting why a land use conflict might have taken on such import to residents. Then I tell a story\(^1\) about what happened,

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\(^1\) Here I use the term “story” interchangeably with “case study”; I see a case study as a teaching story. The “story” I tell is here obviously my own version of events. Because I had the benefit of hindsight, and the opportunity to speak candidly with key participants, and because I had my own reasons for telling these stories, which were
gleaned from newspaper accounts, meeting transcripts, interviews, and planning documents. In this amalgamated retelling, I try to make clear the ways events might have seemed different to different participants. Finally, I try to make sense of each group’s narrative in the context of broader meta-narratives, and then to suggest how things might have gone differently.

In the first case, a dominant narrative about the importance of a place (an apple orchard in Johnny Appleseed’s hometown), and a tragic narrative about land development combined to ensure that an apple orchard would be preserved. The power of the hegemonic and the tragic narratives allowed people did not agree or did not communicate well to nonetheless coordinate their actions. At the same time, the hegemony of the narrative precluded any real discussion about the decision. A closer attention to narrative might have allowed people to examine these narratives more critically. In the second case, a simple and compelling policy narrative in favor of developing a bike trail was toppled by a critique that drew on the narratives of property-rights and devolution. In this case, the two factions within the community barely engaged each other; instead, each promoted their own narrative among outside decision-makers. In this case, a dialogue that valued narrative might have allowed the two sides to engage one another and even reach some agreement. In the third case, two powerful narratives—the tragic development narrative and a story of religious persecution were told to support two different views about whether a large church should be built. Despite the pull of these two narratives, the conflict was resolved with a compromise; a process that valued stories and enabled the community to engage the issues over time and in plain language allowed them to eventually sift out important elements of each narrative and reach an amicable solution.

These cases suggest that drawing out and explicitly identifying important narratives might allow a community to reconcile apparently conflicting narratives, elaborating shared stories so that they leave room for different ways of seeing, rather than scrapping projects or pushing them though in the face of strenuous objections. In some cases, better understanding important narratives might mean that those narratives could be respected even while the physical form of a place continued to change (or the value of the place is recognized and preserved). In contrast, failing to recognize important narratives leaves some identities diminished.

different from the participants’ reasons for telling their stories, my version is different from that of any other participant. I have of course endeavored to represent other views fairly.
The last case study presented here also seems to show that by explicitly examining competing narratives, the planner may observe that people’s stories do indeed change. The act of telling one’s own story is often important to participants, providing evidence that the participants’ identities are respected. The act of publicly telling stories about land use and identity and interacting with the ideas of others also constitutes an opportunity to shape place and identity. As people listen to other narratives, assimilate new knowledge, and place themselves in relationship to the identities of other community members, a new story may evolve that accommodates solutions that were not acceptable previously. Donald Schon and Martin Rein have described interaction over policy objects leading to problem re-framing, or new policy narratives (1994). This also accords with Maarten Hajer’s description of the policy-making process as a process of identity formation, and with Patsey Healey’s call for on-going place-making activities; public deliberation over the importance of a place is in itself a place-making activity. More broadly, the idea that narrative planning process might lead to new policy narratives accords with descriptions of speech as action (Austin 1962 quoted in Midgaard 1980 and Watzlawick 1967).

From my analysis of these three situations, I suggest how collaboration and attention to narrative might change planning, and how planners beginning in situations similar to those described here might begin to structure a public process that explicitly values differing worldviews and encourages communities’ reflection.
Chapter Two

This chapter describes efforts to preserve Sholan Farms, the last apple orchard in Leominster, Massachusetts. In Leominster, the birthplace of Johnny Appleseed, preservation proponents were motivated to “Save Sholan Farms” by a sense of impending tragedy. A family was on the verge of selling the city’s last apple orchard for subdivision and development. Many residents felt that a working apple orchard represented a connection to the city’s heritage, and that its loss would mark Leominster as a victim of the environmental tragedy of over-development taking place across the United States. Determined to preserve their heritage, people spoke out against the proposed sale. The fact that may preservation proponents also benefited directly from conservation of the farm, either though increased prestige, or because they were near neighbors to the new park, was less discussed. Overall, the movement to preserve Sholan Farms was a powerful one.

The tragic drama of development so colonized the attention of Leominster that there were no opponents to preservation of the farm; in the tragic view such opponents would have been, perhaps, remorseless Fates. But even though no opposition was registered, some might have been expected, for several reasons: Leominster has much existing open space, the preservation project was quite expensive, and Leominster public schools are crowded and also require new funds.

The Sholan Farms controversy exemplifies the importance of recognizing and discussing the role of narrative in policy decisions, even when those decisions are not very controversial. The Sholan Farms example is a testament to the power of a good story to inspire—or overwhelm—the decision-making process. Here, I set the stage, present a synopsis of events and examine the dominant narrative, and then suggest how engaging that narrative more directly in a collaborative process might have changed the outcome of events.

Setting

Leominster, Massachusetts, is a city of 38,145 that prides itself on a small-town feel and the existence of small village centers--King’s Corner, Moss Hollow, Silk Hill—that give it charm and a sense of history. Early in its existence, Leominster was an agricultural center. The American folk hero Johnny Appleseed (real name: John Chapman) was born on the outskirts of
Leominster when it was still a small farm town. However, Chapman left Leominster when he was six years old, and was therefore neglected in the annals of the town’s history until recently. In this century, Leominster has based its economy on manufacturing, primarily plastics. In the 1950s, Leominster became famous as the “Pioneer Plastics City,” the birthplace of the pink plastic lawn flamingo. In the early 1990s, a newfound interest in conservation (or perhaps tourism) led to Chapman’s revival as a city hero. Today, the images of Johnny Appleseed and “pioneer plastics” vie to represent Leominster.

Because of Leominster’s longstanding plastics industries, it has a reputation as a blue-collar community. However, non-manufacturing jobs have grown in Leominster in the last two decades, while manufacturing jobs have declined. Since 1985, the total number of jobs in Leominster increased 29%. At the same time, manufacturing declined by over 1,100 jobs, shifting from 45% of all employment to 28%. Although Leominster continues to promote itself to plastics manufacturers and, most recently, biotech companies, trade accounted for much of the job growth. Leominster is increasingly a retail center for the smaller towns that surround it.

In the 1980s, as the number of jobs in Leominster grew, the city also experienced growth in terms of population and land development. When a serious recession hit Massachusetts in the early 1990s, the city suffered and in the aftermath of the boom and bust, as did many Massachusetts cities and towns. In that difficult period, the City of Leominster achieved a political consensus that the town needed to control growth more effectively. The town water supply was of particular concern. At that time, in the early 1990s, the city planner, the mayor, and some city council members undertook a concerted program to preserve open space through outright purchase by the city, and to guide future development more carefully by working more closely with developers.

Leominster’s methods of controlling growth, purchasing large developable tracts of land and working with developers, are relatively unusual today, and certainly were in the early 1990s. The town could afford to acquire open space at that time because the strong sense that growth had gotten out of control made land acquisition a high priority in the municipal budget—even more than other important concerns such as public schools or affordable housing. At the same time, the city’s willingness to work with developers meant that new construction that did occur was in keeping with the city hall’s plans. It also helped to minimize concerns that the city was “anti-development” or “anti-growth.”
By 1999, the mayor, the city planning director, and membership on the city council had changed. The new mayor, Dean Mazzarella, had a charismatic style of leadership and an independent and sometimes critical personality (which was visible not only in the City Hall but also on his weekly cable TV program). Mayor Mazzarella’s style won him many strong supporters in Leominster, but also made political enemies in the police force and on the city council. Disagreements between the mayor, the city council, and the police chief were played out in the city hall and in council meetings, and also in the local newspaper, the *Sentinel and Enterprise*. In March of 1999 alone, three editorials ran decrying political infighting at Leominster City Hall. That March, the paper also covered one major source of disagreement between the Mayor and the Council: the best way to spend the city’s free cash allocation from the state. While some council members suggested it would be prudent to set aside money for a new school, the Mayor preferred to purchase open space or land for a new police station.

**Plot**

In 1999, while the Mayor and City Council sparred over the free cash allowance and other issues, the Possick family, formerly of Leominster but now residing in New Jersey, decided not to renew the agricultural tax exemption on Sholan Farms, a 168-acre property that they had been leasing to an orchardist for many years. Instead, proposed changes in the city’s zoning ordinance led the Possick’s to file a subdivision plan for their property that would lock in the older (and less stringent) subdivision rules.

A small but established neighborhood abutted the Possick’s property. This neighborhood was old by Leominster standards and was home to some of the city’s most longstanding residents. Many of the homes had been passed down within families; only one house had changed hands on the market in the past decade. The neighborhood also retained a rustic atmosphere. The depended on well water and septic tanks, and were not connected to city services. Likewise, the road was a rural one without sidewalks or curbs. The country neighbors were very upset when they learned about the subdivision plan from a friend of one resident who worked in the City Clerk’s Office. They almost immediately decided to try and stop the development.

Fortunately for the Sholan neighbors, they already had an established neighborhood association. The association had for some time taken responsibility for maintaining a one-room
schoolhouse about a mile from Sholan Farms; the association leased the building from the city for a token amount, took responsibility for upkeep, and held their meetings events in the building. Association members also used the schoolhouse for parties and events. These neighbors were already organized knew each other well by virtue of the schoolhouse association and their long residence. When these residents learned of the plan, they organized community meetings in the schoolhouse and formed the Sholan Farms Preservation Committee. The committee discussed ways to prevent development on Sholan Farms and formed sub-committees to publicize the issue, to research the history of the farm, to keep the orchard working, and to preserve the barn as a historic building. Already, the neighbors defined the impending development as a “tragedy,” and for them, it must have seemed so.

Once the Sholan Farms Preservation Committee had taken the initiative to organize around the issue, members of city government got involved. City Councilor Claire Freda, whose ward covers part of the farm, worked with the committee to help them develop alternative plans for the farm. She put them in touch with the State Secretary of Environmental Affairs; with state Senator Robert Antonioni; with the Trustees of Reservations, a Massachusetts land trust; and with residents in Sterling (an adjacent town) who were also working to preserve open space. Trustees of Reservations found the case for preservation was compelling, and worked with the citizen’s committee to develop options to buy the property and preserve it as a working orchard. All the entities that they contacted were already working to preserve land elsewhere, and already knew the story of tragic development.

Leominster Mayor Dean Mazzarella also met with the Sholan Farms Preservation Committee. The committee presented their efforts and he agreed that the issue was an important one. In fact, the mayor may have taken the initiative on Sholan Farms; while the president of the Committee feels sure that he and his neighbors were the first to act on the issue, the mayor recalls that his interest preceded his meeting with the Committee. Their interests may have been simultaneous; the Mayor was undeniably a champion of open space. (For instance, the Mayor had proposed using the city’s free cash allowance for open space acquisition.) At any rate, in the spring of 1999, the mayor began to advocate for the purchase of the property. For the mayor, it soon became a personal cause.
The Sholan Farms issue first appeared in the local paper on March 23, 1999 under the headline, “Saving Apples a Core Issue for Mayor.” The language of “saving” added to the imagery of disaster. The mayor was quoted, saying, “This is a vital piece of the chemistry of Leominster. We will be sure to protect it. We want to make sure people don’t get alarmed” (Leighton 1999). The mayor indicated at this time that he had already contacted the landowners and let them know the city intended to preserve the property. From this time forward, the mayor very much adopted the project as his own. A subsequent newspaper article noted that “Several people have approached the mayor offering to help with his efforts to preserve the farm,” (Leighton April 21, 1999, italics added), and did not mention citizens’ efforts. The mayor, like the Sholan neighbors, was committed to preventing the tragedy of development. But in this version of events, there was only one hero.

A few days after the Sentinel and Enterprise ran the first article about Sholan Farms, the newspaper ran an unsigned editorial urging the purchase of the orchard. It noted many of the same concerns neighbors had first voiced—that development on the farm would change the character of the area and destroy a link to the area’s agricultural past. The editorial also noted that the farm would provide valuable open space and an asset to local tourism, and also that the costs of new development would be high in terms of city services: “Leominster’s public schools are too crowded even now.” The brief editorial ended with this note of caution: “To those who might balk at the thought of paying a hefty price to protect an orchard… these are the words of warning: A new school would cost even more” (“Protect a Vibrant Link…” 1999). In fact, the $4.75 million that the city eventually paid for the land might have made a big dent in the cost of a new school. The development would also have brought the city some revenue in the form of new property taxes. However, no one ever questioned the Sentinel’s pronouncement.

Soon after the Sentinel and Enterprise ran its editorial, the Leominster Historical Commission wrote a letter to the editor supporting the purchase (Piermarini 1999), and shortly after that the paper ran another letter that railed against development and the destruction of natural areas in Leominster in general. The letter seemed typical of the narrative of tragic development:
Development is becoming a crime against nature.

There is a terrible crime happening in Leominster right beyond my backyard and probably yours. This crime some people refer to as progress; I've been told that we can't get in the way of progress. Well, I think we can and should get in the way... This progress is giving us nice buildings, big parking lots, and desolation... When nature is stomped on and pushed out of the way, people are stomped on and pushed out of the way.... The rain forests are being turned into desert... because of progress. If we are not reasonable about progress then that same lifeless situation will happen here in what is left of our city and back yards. (Maxfield 1999)

The letter didn't refer to any project in particular, although the writer did make some reference to trees being cut down at the end of his street. Mostly, the letter just posited the belief that development in general was overwhelming, that things weren't what they used to be, and somebody ought to do something about it. Many Leominster residents seemed to agree.

In April, an engineer engaged by the Possick's officially presented the Sholan Farms subdivision plan to the City Planning Board. The Possick's proposed to divide the entire 172 acre farm into 178 housing lots, seven of which would fall into watershed protection land. The other 165 lots would require no special permits from the city and appeared to be by-right development. The plan took the proposal under consideration and at their next meeting, in May 1999, gave the plan preliminary approval.

The day after the planning board gave the subdivision preliminary approval, the mayor publicly suggested that property owners receive a check-off box on their property tax bills that enabled them to pay a bit extra in support of purchasing Sholan Farms. He also initiated an effort to sell scented candles ("Sholan Farms Baked Apple") to raise money for the farm and opened a bank account to receive money from apple sales and donations. Through the summer, Mayor Mazzarella kept in contact with the Possicks and spoke in favor of purchasing the property.

Meanwhile, the Sholan Farms Preservation Committee continued to work on a parallel track. They did not collaborate with the mayor in his fundraising efforts, nor did the mayor offer to assist them in theirs. Instead, the Committee went after big donors, contacting land preservation groups to see if they would be willing to help fund the project, and working to create a well-developed plan for open space and recreation uses of the farm. In August, City
Councilor Claire Freda helped to publicize an open public meeting for Leominster residents interested working to preserve the farm. President of the Sholan Farms Preservation Committee Dr. Richard Comeau said that this meeting and ones that followed attracted people from across the city, and although Sholan Farms neighbors remained at the heart of the committee, every ward in Leominster was represented in the effort in some capacity. The concerns first articulated by the Sholan neighbors were spread across Leominster.

In September 1999, six months after the Sholan Farms issue first surfaced, Mayor Mazzarella decided to push the farm issue farther by taking his appeal to the national media. The story of tragic development seemed to touch a cord across the country. Newspapers from Hannibal, Missouri, to Corpus Christie, Texas, to Seattle, Washington ran versions of an associated press story about the eminent development of the Leominster orchard (Estrin 1999). A *USA Today* story compared the apple orchard development in Leominster to the runaway development of Amish farms in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, orchards in Traverse City, Michigan (“Home of the Bing Cherry”), and “historic vineyards” in Santa Rosa, California (Bayles 1999). The article quoted the President of the National Trust for Historic Preservation that such developments “destroy the essence of the community.”

While the tragedy of development narrative appealed to adults nationwide, the Johnny Appleseed folktale appealed to children. Letters poured in from elementary schools across the county, sent by kids concerned about the loss of the orchard. Letters the Mayor received from a third-grade class in Topeka, Kansas were typical: “You should not cut down the orchard because that orchard is very famous. Johnny Appleseed wanted to grow apples because people need apples to live,” wrote one student. Another said, “John Chapman was a very nice person, I can tell. I bet he tried hard to make those orchards. I think it would be better if you left the orchard alone” (Dupill 1999). Although John Chapman never visited Sholan Farms, which was a dairy, not an apple orchard, during his lifetime, the distinction was probably lost for third-graders.

In December of 1999, as letters continued to arrive from elementary schools across the country, the City Council legal affairs committee called an organizing meeting attended by the Mayor, the Sholan Farms Preservation Committee, and various municipal, state, and federal agencies that assist in land preservation. Although the details of implementation remained fuzzy, the consensus at this meeting was that the property could somehow be preserved through a
combination of their efforts. Because the details were unclear, there seemed to be no explicit consideration of the costs of preserving the farm, nor any recognition that the costs of development might be offset by some increased revenue to the city. Instead, the focus was on preserving a link to the past, checking unwelcome growth, and preventing the tragedy of development at any cost.

This consensus to save the farm pleased many people, and the Sholan Farms issue slipped out of the newspapers for about nine months as the city continued to seek funds to purchase the property. The citizen’s committee continued their own efforts to plan for the property, and worked to keep interest high through a “Save Sholan Farms” petition drive at the mall, which netted over 5,000 signatures. Then, in September 2000, after more than a year of working separately, the Sholan Farms Preservation Committee publicly announced their desire to coordinate their efforts with the mayor.

Early in October 2000, the Mayor announced that he had made an agreement with the Possick’s to purchase the farm for $4.75 million dollars. Soon afterwards, a front-page article in the Sunday Sentinel and Enterprise said that Mayor Mazzarella had decided that the effort to preserve Sholan Farms would henceforth include the entire community. (“Mayor: Participation in Sholan ‘All-Inclusive’”) (Carrier November 5, 2000). The article noted that although community groups had been interested in helping in the past, “it was the mayor alone who secured the land. He was the sole negotiator for the city.” The mayor revealed that the Possick’s had preferred to work with only one person in negotiating the price of the farm, and that they wanted that negotiator be bound by a gag order until an agreement was reached. The mayor blamed the Possicks for his previous “snubs” of community groups. But now that the mayor had succeeded in his mission, he was able to welcome the support of the community.

In order to facilitate increased participation in the city’s efforts, Mayor Mazzarella invited community members to join a newly formed Sholan Farms Post-Use Committee. As the newspaper noted, everyone named to the committee had already been involved with the neighborhood’s existing Sholan Farms Preservation Committee, except the mayor himself.

Although the first article about the Sholan Farms acquisition announced the triumph of the city and the inclusiveness of future planning efforts, a subsequent article (second in a three-part series
on the farm) the paper described the Sholan plan as “dogged by politics.” The article noted that while the city had managed to acquire the farm, several major disagreements remained: first, some city councilors were upset that the mayor had not worked with the citizen’s committee to secure funding from the state and from land trusts earlier in the process; they said that the mayor’s proposal to pay for the farm mainly from the city budget was wrong-headed when preservation monies were available specifically for this purpose. City councilors also criticized the mayor paying too much for the land, saying that an ongoing, citywide water assessment would likely have revealed that the lot could not have been developed at the proposed density because the city could not supply sufficient drinking water. If the water study revealed that the property could not be densely developed, its value would have decreased. They also argued that the national publicity initiated by the mayor had driven up the price of the farm. Some councilors also chided the mayor for agreeing, at the Possick’s request, not to test soil on the property for contaminants. Although there was no indication that any pre-1970s pesticides, such as lead, arsenic, or DDT, remained on the property, the problem had occurred at other old orchards. Evidence of such contamination would also have reduced the value of the property for development. The triumph was not quite as grand as the mayor might have hoped.

Later in November 2000, as Leominster moved forward with efforts to purchase the property, the mayor and the city council clashed again, this time over the mayor’s request for authorization to sell up to 42 acres of land to finance the purchase, and over language in the formal finance request that appeared to authorize the mayor to make spending decisions about the farm without the council’s permission. The mayor later revised his request and the council approved it. Privately, some grumbled that the project was becoming more expensive than they had bargained for. These would-be skeptics pointed out that the city has already preserved over 1,000 acres of land. And at least one councilor believed that Leominster could have preserved more sensitive watershed lands at a lower cost per acre if they had bought a less charismatic location (Freda 2001). Still, councilors kept their concerns to themselves and went ahead with the project, which was mostly complete anyway. The city was managing to push on with preservation efforts even though they did not agree on many of the details.

In a private interview, City Councilor Claire Freda, who assisted the Sholan Farms Preservation Committee from early on, and who was vocal in her criticisms of the mayor after the Sholan Farms deal was announced, acknowledged that she has long-standing differences with
the mayor over his stand-alone leadership style (Freda 2001). But she also said the criticisms were legitimate, and that many of the problems were the result of the mayor’s inability to share responsibility with others. The mayor, for his part, said privately that critics were Monday-morning quarterbacks and that in “Any kind of thing that gets [a] high publicity profile there are going to be people who… jump into the fray for different reasons. … It may look so good that some people have to show politically that it’s not as good as you think it is” (Mazzarella 2001).

Despite the differences that became public after the agreement was made, the city followed through with the purchase of the farm. In February 2001, the Post-Use Committee released their final report on future uses of the farm. This report cited protection of the city’s water supply and control of residential growth as the “primary” reasons to acquire the property. The Appleseed connection turned out to be an important but still secondary consideration, along with preservation of the city’s agricultural heritage, habitat protection, and open space. The committees plans for the property included conservation on the forested portions of the property, public access to the property and to the adjoining trial, diversified agricultural operations, including Christmas trees and Halloween pumpkins, and retail sales (a farm stand and Johnny Appleseed store) (Sholan Farm Post-Purchase Use Committee 2001). And the schools might benefit slightly after all; there was some talk of moving their animal husbandry program to the site.

Dr. Richard Comeau, president of the original Sholan Farms Preservation Committee and of the Mayor’s Post-Purchase Use Committee, indicated that as the Post-Purchase Use committee was dissolved, the Preservation Committee would again be active as a “watchdog” to see that the property is protected and developed in accord with the announced plans. He said that the committee has a list of over 100 Leominster citizens interested in volunteering on the farm, and that the Committee also hopes to coordinate volunteer efforts to keep up the orchard—for instance, mowing and brushing out under the trees. Although most Leominster residents were not directly involved in organizing to preserve the farm, they remain interested in the effort, especially as it becomes more tangible.
Further Analysis

In Leominster, everyone seemed to be “on the same side.” The Mayor and the citizen’s committee did not coordinate their efforts until late in the process. The city council and the mayor did not agree on all the financial details of the Sholan Farms purchase plan. However, they were all able preserve the orchard despite their differences and despite some lack of communication, because they all agreed on an important main story. That narrative, a common one in political discourse, was the story of tragic development.

The narrative of tragic development has widespread appeal, as exemplified by the national media attention accorded to the Sholan Farms issue. In both the widely circulated AP article and another article that appeared in USA TODAY, the authors mourned the impending loss of “the last apple orchard,” calling it a loss of the area’s history and heritage. The writers could hardly resist evoking flags, motherhood, and apple pie, and both compared the subdivision of Sholan Farms to land development taking place across the country. Both articles, as well as one that appeared in the Boston Globe and numerous articles in the Enterprise and Telegraph, expressed the feeling that land development was erasing what was good about small-town America, and replacing it with places where there’s no there there. The appeal of the story is why it spread so quickly.

The city recognized the attraction of the tragic narrative; Mayor Mazzarella captured it well in his comments on why the Sholan Farms issue received so much attention:

Everybody remembers some field or place they used to play or apple orchard that’s now houses or industrial [or] whatever. And everybody looks back and says why didn’t somebody do something about saving it....

Nobody can identify with anything, but they can identify with the fact [that] everything seems to be growing too fast. Here’s a community [Leominster] that seems to be saying, “Time out for a minute, we’ve got to keep things under control, we can’t lose our last orchard, it’s a special piece of land, and we’re willing to step up to the plate and do what’s necessary.” People liked that, you know, that was the David and Goliath thing, us standing in front of the Tianamen square with the tanks in front of us, you know--us standing there making a move... That’s what everybody’s looking for, everybody’s looking for a piece of-how do people end up in North Conway or Martha’s Vineyard? Everybody’s looking for a piece of New England in the East, tranquility, peacefulness, all those things. .... So it did a lot for our community in terms of creating that sense of place. We’re somewhere.
The main elements of the narrative of tragic development are a sense of a lost connection to place, caused by too much or too-fast development—development that doesn’t respect nature or people who already live in a location. This narrative blames an unnamed “they,” developers, for the problem. Tied to this description of the problem is the idea that development should be slowed down or stopped, and that to do so would be heroic. The narrative of tragic development is often angry, but it also expresses helplessness, because the foes are so unspecific; the narrative of tragic development could refer to almost any developer anywhere. As urbanist James H. Kunstler wrote, “The word development itself has become a dirty word” (1994). No one wanted to be in favor of it. In Leominster, the Sholan Farms case was taken as one example of the progress of this narrative. The letter to the editor about runaway progress exemplified this view.

The narrative of tragic development, like most policy narratives, has a strong basis in truth. In general, there is a lot of development that is not particularly sensitive to its location, and in the US land development often exceeds population growth. Likewise, Leominster did reach a political consensus in the early 1990s that growth rates in that city in particular had exceeded acceptable limits on the rate and quality of development. For residents there, the narrative of tragic development summarized specific concerns and tied them to broader, national concerns. The tragic narrative stood in for a longer and more specific definition of the problem.

In general, tragic narratives may often have an important role in policy discourse, especially planning. Tragic narratives create a sense of crisis or urgency that can be a constructive spur to action. Tragedies are also emotionally appealing, because the structure of tragedy itself allows listeners to experience the passion of great events without the fear that they will personally bear the brunt of a disaster. Angst, danger, and uncertainty make good media coverage for the same reason that tragedy appeals to individuals—and the retelling of a tragic story through the media may yet again heighten the sense of tragedy. Certainly, it seems that in this case that what may have been a self-conscious promotion of the Johnny Appleseed story was amplified and given new meaning by the genuine concern of schoolchildren. But at the same time that a tragic frame heightens emotions, it tends to simplify complicated events into undemanding categories of good and evil, right and wrong. The characteristics of simplicity, urgency, and emotional appeal make tragedy an important policy narrative. These same characteristics may mean that once a series of events have been labeled a tragedy, other
interpretations are hard to explore, even if the tragic label doesn’t entirely fit. Tragic narratives tend to become hegemonic.

In Leominster, the narrative of tragic development was highly appealing. However, the story’s simplicity also obscured the specific issues of the case: it became overpowering. For instance, the imperative to prevent development (and the heroism of doing so) foreclosed a consideration of the opportunity costs of the purchase. Although some of the money used to purchase Sholan Farms could not have been put to another use by the city (for instance, money donated by land trusts), the free cash that the city put towards purchase could have significantly benefited schools or affordable housing in the community. The Sholan Farms purchase probably drove up the cost of housing and did not help already crowded schools. And important watershed land could have been purchased elsewhere for less money. Although there was much discussion about the costs of new development to the city in terms of new schools and infrastructure needs generated by the development, there was no recognition that new development would also have expanded the city’s tax base. It seems that these issues were not discussed because of the wide appeal and overriding imperative of the narrative of tragic development.

There may also be something a bit troubling about the city’s national media appearance. Johnny Appleseed only lived in Leominster until he was 6, and the city is not “100% sure” where. He certainly never had anything to do with Sholan Farms, which was a dairy at that time. As for the farm being the only working orchards within the city limits: this is true, but there are certainly working farms and orchards nearby, in unincorporated areas.

The appeal of the narrative of tragic development seems to have prevented a critical examination of this case. These considerations don’t mean that Sholan Farms didn’t deserve protection, but a more thoughtful discussion about the reasons to preserve Sholan Farms versus the opportunity costs of investing $5 million in this project instead of other projects, and the possible effects this project would have on housing costs, would have been worthwhile.

A Deliberation Alternative
The Sholan Farms issue strongly appealed to many people in the community and could have involved them in a more meaningful way. By taking on more responsibility for facilitating the process, rather than leaving it to the citizen’s committee, the city could have leveraged the
Sholan Farms controversy into a place-making activity: a chance for residents to publicly deliberate about the future of their community. The narrative of tragic development could have been examined more critically, and even if the same result were achieved, residents might have left the process with a sense that “our values were affirmed” rather than “tragedy was barely averted.”

The well-attended public meetings sponsored by the Committee to Preserve Sholan Farms (the citizen’s committee) and the committee’s efforts to make people aware of the Sholan Farms issue were admirable. The group made a robust effort to engage people in the issue. But the citizen’s committee was an interest group, and necessarily excluded individuals who opposed preserving the orchard, or who thought other projects were more important. Many committee members had very personal interests in the project. As the president of the citizen’s committee stated, “I live in the orchard, so… I have a vested interest in what goes on there” (Comeau 2001). If the Mayor or the City Council had taken a stronger role in facilitating the process, they could have sponsored public meetings instead of leaving it up to the citizen’s committee, and thus made room for dissenting opinions. Since the Mayor did eventually create a committee anyway, and since the Mayor and the City Council both invested a lot of effort in the Sholan Farms case, this might have been worthwhile.

The only point of having meetings sponsored by the city would not have been to elicit dissenting opinions; it would also have created an opportunity to explore the narrative of tragic development more fully and examine what parts of that story truly applied to this particular case. But instead of being overpowered by the narrative, the residents might have freely chosen to accept it, or accept part and reject part. By creating opportunities for residents to talk about why they were interested in Sholan Farms—because they like the sense of living in a small town, because they valued the sense of history it created, or because they feared increased congestion if the population continued to grow—other positive aspects of life in Leominster could also have been identified and acknowledged. At the same time, negative aspects of development might have been brought into the open to be addressed more directly (for instance, there are many ways to control traffic besides preventing new housing). In this way, the planning activities could have functioned more positively as place-making activities. Instead of leaving people with no choices (or a choice between two outcomes, one of them bad) the whole process might have led
people to feel that they were engaged not in averting a disaster but in reflecting on the character and priorities of their community.

The Sholan Farms controversy could also have been an avenue for cooperation between sparring political entities. If the public meetings over Sholan Farms generated good will and a discussion of what people like about Leominster, then it might have been a chance for the Mayor and the City Council to publicly agree on something easy, and thus work towards mending their relationship a little bit.
Chapter Three

Klickitat County experienced significant economic and demographic change in the 1990s, as traditional industries like logging declined and property values rose. During that time, a recreational trail proposed by the Forest Service became the magnet for broader concerns about change in the region. Accepting a project to turn an abandoned rail line into a paved bicycle trail became symbolic of accepting profound changes to the local economy and traditional ways of life.

Many local residents supported the project, but an important minority opposed it on both practical and ideological grounds. A simple policy story made the case for the rail-trail; rural Klickitat communities lack paved roads, and a new recreational trail would enable local residents, particularly children and retired people, to walk and bike in safety. The trail might also draw mountain-bike enthusiasts or wheelchair users eager for scenic paved trails, and this would in turn generate income for local businesses. But in the main the trail would be a local endeavor, with area residents volunteering to maintain it. While proponents emphasized the trail as a primarily local amenity, area landowners opposed the project as intrusive, a violation of their property rights (it passed a narrow right-of-way through private property), and a waste of tax dollars. The well-developed meta-narratives of property rights and devolution became rallying points for trail opponents, and for opponents of regional change in general. These meta-narratives garnered political support from county officials and a state senator.

Although the views of opponents and proponents were not necessarily irreconcilable, the two camps failed to engage one another. Instead, they worked through a formal planning process that stifled dialogue. Frustrated with this process, both sides also lobbied their political representatives to take a stand in their favor. Larger political forces eventually superceded the planning agency’s authority, and their meticulously prepared plan was shelved. Community participants on both sides were left with the sense that planning in Klickitat was a waste of time.

The Klickitat case illustrates the power of a well-developed policy narrative, like property-rights or devolution, to overwhelm other narratives that may be equally compelling but that are less well developed. Here, I again give the planning history, trying to suggest how the same events may have read differently to different actors. Then, I briefly examine the narratives on each side of the controversy explicitly. From this examination, I suggest how deliberation
and a greater use of narrative practices might have transformed the conflict into an opportunity for the community to build civil society and community capacity. This in turn suggests a new structure for the dialogue between the bureaucratic agency (in this case the Forest Service) and the community.

Setting

The wind blows almost continuously in the Columbia River Gorge, which presents the only sea-level passage through the Northwest’s Cascade Range. The Gorge is a river canyon 80 miles long and 4,000 feet deep; the Columbia River, second only to the Mississippi among American rivers, squeezes between banks a half-mile apart in its narrowest sections. Long-beard hawkweed (Hieracium longiberbe), smooth desert parsley (Lomatium laevigatum), the obscure buttercup (Ranunculus reconditus), and fourteen other plants grow nowhere except the Gorge. The Gorge also presents a refuge for the peregrine falcon, the wolverine, the bald eagle, and the spotted owl. Many of the 50,000 people who live in the Gorge, clustered into 13 small towns and strung out along the narrow roads that wind up into the western mountains and the Columbia Plateau, also consider the place a refuge.

In 1986, the unique geology and ecology of the Gorge led to its designation as a National Scenic Area—the only one in the United States. The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act (CRGNSA Act) was passed by Congress to “protect and enhance” the beauty of the Gorge. The Act requires that any alterations to the Gorge’s landscape—construction, logging, mining—comply with a comprehensive management plan. The Gorge Commission, a ten-member body established by the Act, writes the plan, which supersedes local authority except within designated urban areas. (Urban areas can plan their own land use, but they are not allowed to expand.) The Act also provided $38.2 million dollars for economic development activities, such as a natural history museum, a conference center, and a guest lodge.

The CRGNSA Act was hotly contested in the region before it was passed. While some residents were glad to see federal land-use protection and federal development money come into the area, others saw the restrictions created by the Act as a usurpation of local control. Small, unincorporated communities not designated “urban” feared the Act would leave them moribund. Many believed the Act tolled a death knoll for logging in the Gorge, and posed a threat to ranching and other traditional occupations. Residents also feared that the Act would stifle
industrial and commercial growth, turning the Gorge into an expensive park for tourists from Portland, Seattle, and beyond.

The Forest Service manages the federal lands in the Gorge, directly controlling some 62,000 acres, or 20% of the 292,500 acres affected by the Act. The Forest Service also serves as the right arm of the Gorge Commission in enforcing the management plan, and thus has indirect control over the 230,000 acres of private and state-owned land. The Forest Service also administers management plans for two nationally designated Wild and Scenic Rivers that flow into the Columbia at the Gorge: Klickitat and White Salmon. Because the Forest Service has a full-time planning and management staff, and is visible in the communities along the Gorge, both proponents and opponents of the Scenic Area Act view the Forest Service as the major agent of the Act. For the Forest Service, the Scenic Area Act has created a mandate and responsibilities very different from its historic mission.

Klickitat is a rural county on the eastern edge of the National Scenic Area. Much of it falls outside the Scenic Area boundary. The county population was estimated at 18,130 in 1995, with a population growth rate of 1.8% per year, significantly lower than the statewide average of 4.4% annually (CACI "County" 1995). Agriculture and wood products form the traditional basis of the county economy. The role of wood products is decreasing, however, and transportation and trade are growing. Most people in the area commute to blue-collar jobs in the larger towns of The Dalles and Hood River, or hang on to local jobs in timber and agriculture. A Champion International Mill, the largest employer in the Town of Klickitat, closed in 1994. The county income average reflects a working-class nature. In 1995, the median household income in Klickitat was $25,319--30% lower than the statewide average of $36,183. Unemployment in Klickitat County is also consistently about twice the statewide rate. (Arnold 1995)

Recognizing the challenges that Klickitat faces as resource-based economies continue to decline, the Klickitat County Planning Department conducted a community development survey in 1995. In the survey, they asked residents to rate the problems the county faced, and identify items that should be high government priorities. Most residents rated unemployment and low income as the county’s most serious problems, and gave job creation a high priority. A majority also rated the development of recreation or tourist facilities as a moderate or high priority. The same survey noted a tension between the desire for growth and economic development and a
desire to maintain traditional patterns. Statements like "too many people moving in" or "close-mindedness and a minority who feel they have special rights because they were born here" reveal this tension. Recurring concerns also included "too many welfare families moving in" and increased drug use.

Plot
From 1903 until the early 1990s, a 45-mile railroad corridor linked the county seat of Goldendale and the small community of Lyle. The railroad was used primarily for freight transport, shipping grain, cattle, and lumber from rural areas on to other destinations. The railroad passed mostly though private ranches and farms.

In December of 1992, Burlington Northern, the owner of the railroad right-of-way (ROW), filed a petition with the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC, now the Surface Transportation Board) to abandon several lines in the state of Washington, including the rail line between Lyle and Goldendale. The company complied with legal notification requirements, and advertised their intent to abandon the line in local papers.

When Burlington Northern decided to abandon the ROW, the Forest Service, the City of Goldendale and the non-profit Rails to Trails Conservancy (RTC) all expressed interest in preserving the corridor. Goldendale was concerned about loss of rail service and was interested in acquiring the ROW and developing it as a scenic excursion railway, and continuing its use for freight traffic. The Forest Service and the RTC both agreed that Goldendale should have the first opportunity to use the rails. But when the excursion railway proved financially infeasible, the RTC, the Forest Service, and the State Parks formed a partnership to convert the rail line into a public trail.

The Forest Service wanted to develop the rail line as a trail, but as a federal agency it could not own the rail line outright. Washington State Parks could own the rail line, but was not interested in developing it because the state’s efforts were focused on a cross-state trail. The Rails to Trail Conservancy, a national non-profit that advocates for the conversion of disused rail lines into trails, and often plays a transitional role in helping public agencies to acquire rail trails, was eager to facilitate even a dead-end trail along the beautiful Klickitat River. The RTC suggested a compromise: if Washington State Parks would acquire the line, the Forest Service
would manage it, and RTC would make a donation to State Parks to help them develop their own rail trails. Washington State Parks provisionally accepted the proposal, as did the Forest Service.

The deal suggested by the RTC had to be approved by the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission (the Commission that leads the Parks Commission). The motion to accept transfer of title was first raised at the December 1993, meeting of the Parks Commission in Vancouver, Washington (a two-hour drive from Goldendale).

The Forest Service didn’t notify anyone about the Commission meeting because they were holding off contacting the public until their involvement was official. State Parks was not intending to develop the land, and therefore it had not conducted any public scoping either. State Parks did develop a public contact list for this meeting, but it is not clear whether they contacted adjacent property owners. Property owners should have been included on a list of "interested parties," but the landowners who attended said they heard about it "through the grapevine" and don’t remember receiving any official mailing. (In fact, one property owner refused to "reveal her source" when interviewed about the proposal by a local newspaper.) Instead, news of the trail spread by word-of-mouth, and property owners who didn’t like what they heard immediately organized as an "informal group." They sent representatives to the Commission meeting to oppose rail-banking. This group of trail opponents included many people who had heard about the trail only from their neighbors.

Parks Commission meetings are starchy events. The Commission follows a set agenda, and hears comments from parties both for and against each item. People often read their testimony. After each item, the Commission takes a binding vote. Only four commissioners were present at the December 1993, meeting (Cecil 11 January 1994), and they were not prepared for the controversy and emotional speeches prompted by the rail-trail question. They decided to table the measure pending further public discussion, and revisit it at their January meeting in Spokane. In the interim, the State Parks Commission was directed to facilitate more public involvement.

On December 13, 1993, a few days after the State Parks and Recreation Commissioner's meeting in Vancouver, property owners opposing the trail organized a public meeting in Centerville. This was the first opportunity for public discussion, and it was dominated by trail opponents. An RTC representative, a State Parks representative, and two
representatives from the Forest Service attended the meeting. No potential trail proponents attended. Generally, the public agents told landowners that the ROW was or would be in public ownership and that it would be up to the Forest Service to determine the type and intensity of trail use. Presumably, the Forest Service expressed a desire to work with property owners in planning the trail. Presumably, they also felt quite uncomfortable. (Because this was not an "official" public meeting, no minutes are available.)

The first officially sponsored (as opposed to privately sponsored) Public Information Meeting was convened on January 11, 1994. The State Parks department was the meeting sponsor, but representatives of the Forest Service and the RTC also attended. The purpose of the meeting was to inform the public, answer questions, and learn of concerns that would need to be addressed as the project was carried out (Fankhauser 1993). For landowners, this was a chance to voice reservations they'd harbored for months, while for potential proponents, this was the first they'd heard of the proposal.

Forest Service area manager Art Carroll, who attended the meeting, remembers, “The place was packed.” (Carroll 2000) Forty-two people signed the attendance sheet in this room; others may not have signed in. Most of the people who spoke were opposed to the trail. Many were property owners, and furious. Carroll said, "80-90% of the input was diametrically opposed to the project. And there were only 3 or 4 people who even made any noise at all that they thought it was a reasonable project or they openly favored the project.... Numerous spokespeople for the audience questioned the legality of it.”

Carroll was somewhat taken aback by the vehemence of opposition, but he recalled that, “State Parks wasn’t alarmed about that... They’d heard all these arguments before... In fact, they as much as said they didn’t hear anything new that they hadn’t heard in opposition to... other proposals.” State Parks and the RTC, which worked together frequently, were not moved by landowners’ impassioned arguments. Nationally, the RTC is vilified by property-rights groups for their determination in pushing trail projects forward. The RTC takes the position that, while impacts of Rail Trails should be anticipated and prevented as much as possible, most landowner concerns prove groundless once the trail is in use. Accordingly, they often discount landowners’ concerns. Washington State Parks takes a similar position. The Forest Service was in the position of mediating between these agencies and the trail opponents.
Some trail supporters also attended this initial meeting, but they did not speak because they found the environment intimidating. For instance, members of the Goldendale Peace and Environmental Group attended, but were "discouraged from voicing approval for the project with so many landowners attacking anyone in favor of the public trail" (Vowell "Landowners" 1994). The Forest Service employees also saw evidence that some residents supported the trail: Carroll said, "I had 2 or 3 or 4 people tell me after the meeting, just mixing and milling around, looking at maps and stuff, that they were really in favor of the project and thought it was a really good recreational opportunity for the people of Klickitat county as well as the people who would come from Vancouver and Portland, but they weren't going to stand up and say that in that meeting in such an intimidating audience. They didn't want to voice their opinions and just get shouted down and stuff, by people they gotta live with all the time."

Because in both public meetings most people had spoken against the trail, trail opponents may have left the confident that they held a strong majority. On the other hand, FS employees believed that a groundswell of support existed, that they should go ahead anyway, and that the Commission would accept title to the trail anyway.

At the second State Parks and Recreation Commission Commissioner's meeting in Spokane, all seven members were in attendance. Proponents and opponents made a long trip to the meeting to make their opinions known—Vancouver, where the first meeting was held, is 87 miles from Klickitat; Spokane is 287 miles. Art Carroll and another Forest Service employee attended and spoke in favor of the project on behalf of the Forest Service. Bill Jolly, a State parks employee, also attended. He said the tone of the meeting was "coarse," characterized by "very aggressive language... implicit threats." Opponents "testified and testified strong" (Jolly 1999). Despite the strong opposition, the Commission voted 6-1 to accept title to the rail corridor, with the understanding that the Forest Service would be "solely responsible for operating and maintaining this corridor as a rail-trail" (Fankhauser 1994). The RTC also donated $50,000 to the State Parks at this time to help them pay for their own rail-trail projects.

The Forest Service saw the State Park's taking title to the rail corridor as the go-ahead for them to initiate their own planning process. After the meeting, Art Carroll approached two property owners who had opposed the trail: "I tried to approach [her] after the meting and I was in the
spirit of, well that decision's made, but let's try and work together, and she wouldn't talk with me. She just walked away from me. One of the other property owners, he chewed my butt out right in the lobby of the hotel there, four-letter words and everything else." The Forest Service saw the process as just beginning, but trail opponents felt they had already suffered a defeat.

The actual transfer of title for the ROW did not occur until April of 1994. As soon as the title was transferred, a group of eight landowners filed suit against the RTC and Washington State Parks alleging that the trail was a government taking of private lands.

Washington State Parks had expected that the Forest Service would take over management responsibilities immediately. In the January-April interim, following the Commission's approval, the Forest Service legal council had determined that the Forest Service's jurisdiction was still tenuous. Only a few miles of the trail lay within the National Scenic Area Boundary, and only about 11 were inside the Wild and Scenic River Corridor. Nearly twenty miles were outside both these jurisdictions. The Forest Service decided that the only way to justify maintaining the site was to designate it a National Recreation Trail. Contrary to expectations of Scenic Area staff (including the Area Manager himself) this designation could not be made within the NSA. It had to be made by the Regional Forester, who is responsible for National Forests across the Pacific Northwest. The designation could only be made after an Environmental Assessment had been performed and a management plan recommended.

In April 1994, the Forest Service planning staff for the Scenic Area finally got the go-ahead to begin their own planning and public involvement process on the trail under this new context. In June the FS initiated analysis under the NEPA process. The first step was distribution of a newsletter to the interested public in late July. This letter described the location and distance of the trail. It also described the legal status of the trail as the FS understood it, and how the FS had come to manage it. The newsletter invited citizens to submit comments on the proposal by August 25, 1994 (Carroll “Klickitat” undated), to facilitate incorporation in the second newsletter, in fall, 1994. It did not mention any further public meetings. The letter also stated that a project manager would call each landowner in the next few days. When Forest Service planner Virginia Kelly made the calls, many people refused to speak with her, some hung up, and a few swore at her.
The next public-involvement event hosted by the Forest Service was not made until January 1995. It was between these two meetings that the lumber mill in Klickitat closed, costing the community about 100 jobs and its main commercial tax base (JB1998). The planning process was delayed during this time because of the strength of public reaction against the trail. There was also some feeling on the part of both the Forest Service and certainly the landowners that the initial newsletter was premature, because the landowners' suit was still in litigation. The landowners’ suit was dismissed in September 1994. Although landowners appealed, this initial legal decision lent some authority to the planning process.

During the long quiet period after the first public newsletter, the Forest Service received the first letter indicating interest in the trail project by federal legislators. Washington State Congressman Jay Inslee sent a letter to Art Carroll dated October 17, 1994. Trail opponents had been contacting their congressional representatives, county commissioners, state representatives, and the governor, all of whom eventually weighted in on the rails-to-trails debate. Congressman Inslee was the first federal-level official to do so; he urged the Forest Service to communicate better with the community, especially trail opponents: “I believe firmly that a meeting between the property owners along the proposed trail wand you and your staff would be beneficial.... I would consider an open forum to be an (sic) vital gesture to the community... I urge you in the strongest possible terms to arrange this forum in the coming month” (Inslee 1994). Art Carroll responded to Inslee on November 2, 1994: "We concur with this request and will proceed to coordinate and arrange the public forum on this matter”; however, another public forum did not take place until January 25, 1995.

The minutes sent out after the January meeting noted that a planned earlier meeting with landowners was cancelled because the Forest Service legal council was concerned that the meeting would violate the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) requirements. This act generally prevents a public agency from initiating closed meetings with one party in an unresolved dispute. Several landowners had expressed frustration that the USFS did not "keep its word" to meet with them. Local landowners trying to make sense of the Forest Service’s late and mistimed meetings saw a pattern of deliberate disrespect. But the FS planning team also felt frustrated that they could not hold the meetings as planned.
The January Open House Meeting was advertised in all the local papers, and property owners and anyone else who had expressed interest in the trails issues were notified by mail. The meeting attracted more than 120 people. The format was question-and-answer. First the entire group asked questions, then the meeting broke up into interest groups and the trail was discussed further within each group. People were invited to submit their questions on note cards as well as orally, so that the Forest Service could respond to every question, even if the asker was too shy or the meeting too short to respond to them all that night. Trail opponents generally dominated the meeting, and the six "main topics" of the meeting correlated directly with the major objections to the trail: law enforcement, access/use, private property/takings, cultural, cattle, and funding.

A spate of publicity about the Rail-to-Trail conversion followed the first Open House. The FS may not have been successful in stimulating dialogue, but residents were clearly interested in exploring the proposal. The Dalles Daily Chronicle ran a front-page article on Rails to Trails with the headline, " Debate Continues Over Klickitat River Proposal." (Cecil 22 January 1995) An editorial in the Hood River Daily News endorsed the Klickitat Trail (February 7, 1995). The headline read, " Klickitat Trail has Merit," and the short piece noted,

Local landowners aren't wild about the idea. They're concerned the trail would bring all manner of unsavory types, from trespassers to drug dealers, through their backyards.

Those concerns don't hold much water. Recreational trail users tend to be yuppity types out to enjoy nature--not skulk through someone's woodshed. And trail users would bring a new source of retail income to the communities of Lyle and Klickitat.

The Klickitat Canyon trail project is a gorge-wide issue that deserves gorge-wide support. ("Klickitat" 1995)

A February commentary in the Bingen-White Salmon Enterprise read, "Klickitat Trail Could be an Asset," and noted that while "almost everyone had a reasonable complaint... with proper management... the trail could be a very positive addition to our county." (Jaques 1995). An editorial cartoon in the Gorge Weekly suggested frustration with the controversy "Must every new idea come to this?" it asked, then showed a trail, "Rails to Trails," becoming a trial, "Riles to Trials." The community seemed attentive to landowners concerns but still supportive of a trail
that accommodated their needs. At the same time, participants were beginning to feel that Klickitat County was a place with a lot of internal conflicts.

Landowners’ persistence in contacting government officials paid off that spring when Washington State Congressman Doc Hastings weighted in on the trail project; in a strongly worded letter to Art Carroll he wrote: “I want to express my concern about the handling of the Klickitat County 'Rails to Trails' Project in my Congressional District. The transformation of this area from an abandoned rail corridor to a public trail makes no sense and has been poorly handled form the start.” (Hastings letter to Art Carroll 1995) Ten days later, Hastings issued a press release headlined "Hastings Speaks Out for Property Owners of Klickitat County." (Riggs 1995). Later that spring, in May, Hastings contacted Art Carroll's supervisor, Regional Forester John Lowe, and asked him to put the project on hold while residents pursued their court case. He was quoted in the Goldendale Sentinel as saying, "I am... hopeful that we've finally reached a management level in the Forest Service that understand the importance of protecting private property rights" ("Rails-to-Trail Conservancy Project is put on hold" 1995). Hastings was the second US Congressman to interest himself in the trail; he clearly sided with the trail opponents.

A draft of the January Open House meeting minutes was sent out to all the meeting attendees in February, and in May a final draft was sent out along with responses to all the questions submitted at the meeting. Forest Service legal council extensively vetted the Forest Service’s responses to the questions. This is probably why the final responses took so long to produce, and also the reason they have a rather cold legal tone: for instance, the complaint, "This trail passes through my private property" was met with, "The right-of-way was transferred from Burlington Northern to the State of Washington pursuant to the terms of U.S.C. 1247(d)." Other concerns were deferred: "Need a water source for cattle," and "Increased sports fishery will impact fish runs in Klickitat" were met with the comment, "This is a planning issue. It will be addressed in the management plan." To trail opponents these were dissatisfying, deliberate non-answers. But the Forest Service was eager to develop more substantial responses but felt hamstrung, both by their legal council and by what they perceived as landowners’ hostility.
That spring, the trail controversy heated up with the weather. When salvage of the ties was completed, people began driving four-wheelers on the rail line. The *Enterprise* ran an editorial against the practice (JB 1995) and landowners especially complained about the problem. The Forest Service was still unable to expend money modifying the trail, since their management agreement was pending approval of the management plan and National Trail designation. Instead, the RTC agreed to install gates and bollards, a project that was completed in August. Ironically, the signs' installation was delayed because landowners objected to placing gates or signs on their private property, even within the ROW. Several landowners sent letters to the local contractor who installed the gates, letters he characterized as "a little bit threatening" ("Klickitat Trail Meetings Attempt to..." 1995). The installation was finished on time, but the signs and locks were vandalized soon after.

Partly in response to this negative publicity about the trail, residents of Klickitat and Lyle took up petitions to show support for the idea. The petition in Lyle got 49 signatures, the one in Klickitat, 107. The original petitions were sent to Rep. Doc Hastings. Now both sides were lobbying their representatives.

In August 1995, while the Forest Service worked to create the draft management plans, the RTC also tried to move the project forward. The RTC, which had also given money to install the signs and bollards, sponsored a public trail walk, meant to encourage enthusiasm for the trail and help the public "understand the trail potential." The event attracted about 20 people who hiked 3.5 miles between the towns of Klickitat and Wahkiacus ("Trail Trial" 1995 (photo caption)). Midway through the walk, the participants were stopped and questioned by the county sheriff, who asked them for written permission to be on the trail, and then advised them to complete their walk on the road, not the ROW. Later that week, the sheriff also ticketed a fourteen-year-old for knocking over a "No Trespassing" sign as he hopped over a homemade fence across the trail (Cecil 15 August 1995). The Klickitat Sheriff's Office received a letter from the State Attorney General a few a days later, instructing her not to issue any warnings or tickets for trespassing on the ROW. Trail opponents were pleased with the sheriff's actions, which let support to their position that the ROW was not legally for public use. RTC and the State Parks Commission, which owned the ROW, were frustrated.

That August the RTC also sponsored two meetings and contracted with a private out-of-state facilitator to run them. The first meeting was for trail proponents; it was meant to solidify
support for the project and encourage local action in support of the trail. About 25 people attended; most were trail supporters, but a few were trail opponents who heard about the meeting and showed up to voice their opposition. Charles Montague, a lawyer and founder of RTC, attended the meeting to support the trail. He accused trail opponents of pulling a "snow job" and "hammering" Forest Service employees (ibid.), and ended up in a heated debate. Although the shouting match was probably uncomfortable for some, this was one of the few meetings where proponents and opponents engaged each other in the same (loud) tones. This was also one of the few public events in which trail supporters predominated. At the end of the meeting, facilitator Marge Peterson urged residents not to let the trail "die," and the group set some action steps and planned to meet again.

Trail opponents received written invitations to attend the RCT meeting held the next night, and about 75 people showed up, mostly to oppose the trail. They voiced their well-rehearsed concerns: property rights, wasted tax money, trespassing, vandalism. Some expressed a lack of confidence in the mediator from out of town; "If you don't know cattle, we can't deal with you. You're wasting our time," said one resident (Burkhardt 1995). The meeting attendees may also have sensed that the "neutral" mediator was not quite neutral. Overall, this meeting did not seem productive. Afterwards, Peterson told the Dalles Daily Chronicle, "These people are not interested in solutions" (Cecil 11 August 1995).

During the summer, another petition supporting the trail circulated in the county, gathering 194 signatures. Two more letters to the editor supporting the trail appeared in local papers. The trail opponents met again in late August in a privately sponsored "public meeting" where they reiterated their opposition to the trail. It seemed that support for the trail was growing in the area over the summer, although trail opponents continued to maintain that the trail did not have much public support.

Controversy about the trail died down after the August meetings, although the trail supporters group met occasionally and presumably the opponents continued to meet to discuss the progress of their court case. The next major event occurred in January 1996, when the Forest Service released its draft alternatives for the trail. A public open house followed. Meetings were dropped because the Forest Service felt they were too dramatic and therefore not productive. During the open house, proponents and opponents were invited to stop by and make comments,
but no formal presentations were given. Forty-five people stopped by to look at the alternatives and write comments. Thirty-one more people wrote the Forest Service with comments, mostly from outside the area. In the end, 75% of the written comments received supported the trail (Kelly "Public Involvement Summary" undated). Since the meetings were dropped, trail proponents and opponents did not interact with each other at all.

Early the following spring, a flood on the Klickitat River revived the controversy about the rail trail. Some property owners blamed the train trestles for constricting the river's flow and exacerbating flooding; others blamed the Forest Service for removing the tracks and ties that helped to stabilize the rail bed. Thus, the Forest Service was faulted for both dismantling the trail and not dismantling it enough. (Complainants about the missing rails missed the point that the rails belonged to Burlington Northern and would have been salvaged regardless.) The trail’s contribution to the damage was probably minimal at best. However, property owners seemed eager to blame the Forest Service for the disaster. This served two possible purposes: to make sense of an otherwise inexplicable disaster by assigning blame, and to impugn the agency’s integrity and competence. A letter to the editor that appeared soon after the flood was typical:

I have a residence along the Klickitat River.... The railroad bed and tracks located just upstream help protect our home from flood waters. As part of the Rails to Trails project the tracks were removed, the track served to support and strengthen the railroad bed, preventing it from washing out and damaging our homes located below.... The flood came as we knew it eventually would... and the homes were damaged... Who is going to pay the price for Forest Service neglect? Are they going to repair the damage caused by their inexcusable irresponsibility? Who is going to repair the railroad bed where it protected our homes? Are they going to use this as a hammer to force people to support the trail? Or are they going to use this as an excuse to walk away from the trail and leave us with their mess. (Peterson 15 February 1996)

The letter’s last question doesn’t leave the Forest Service with an honorable option to follow. Like complaints that they removed both too much and not enough of the railroad, the Forest Service presented as either forcing the trial on people or walking away and leave a mess. The letter expresses entrenched distrust.

While the above letter to the editor stretched the reader’s credulity a bit, another letter that appeared two months later was less coherent and even more angry:
Rails-to-Trails? There is no trail or rail; it is in the Klickitat River. I am addressing this letter to the taxpayer and Dawn Stover [who write a previous letter in support of the trail]. You say it is good for recreation, my recreation would be something better than looking a 2,000 pound bull in the face, maybe, who knows, this bull might be mad. I have seen a mad bull, not a pretty sight. Ms Stover, you need to get a life, because you cannot mix people with livestock, the will won and the rattlesnakes will win. The U.S. Forest Service has no right to say what we can and can’t do with our own land. Ms. Stover, you must rent not pay property taxes, and federal taxes that pay for things like this: they’re too high now. You are the joke of this whole thing. Go to a barn yard to see what a cow or a bull can do to people. (Pate 18 April 1996)

Both these letters, though extreme, were still reasonable enough to make the pages of the local newspaper. Another letter mailed to the Forest Service and distributed at a public meeting was a little more far-fetched, but in other ways also more revealing. It read, in part:


LANDOWNERS AND FARMERS ALONG WITH OTHER PRODUCERS AND BUSINESSES, ONCE THE BACK BONE OF THIS NATION, ARE BEING ACCUSED OF DESTRUCTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT, POLLUTION, GREED, AND ALL SORTS OF DEGRADING BEHAVIOR BY THE SO CALLED SAVIORS OF THE EARTH TO PROMOTE THEIR MESSAGES OF CLASS ENVY AND TO GAIN CONTROL OF A ONCE FREE COUNTRY FOR CONTROL OF A PRIVILEGE FEW ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS IN CONJUGATION WITH THE UNITED NATIONS.

THE BIODIVERSITY TREATY DEIVED BY THE U.N., THAT WAS SIGNED BY PRES. CLINTON BUT NOT RATIFIED BY CONGRESS IS AT THIS TIME STILL BEING IMPLEMENTED, WITH OUT THE FULL KNOWLEDGE OF THE CITIZENS… RAILS TO TRAILS IS PART OF THE BIO-CORRIDORS TO EVENTUALLY CONNECT UP WITH THE BIO-PARKS. THESE AREAS WILL BE MADE INTO RESTRICTED ZONES WITH NO HUMAN ACCESS, IF THESE ENVIRONMENTAL TREATIES ARE IN CONTROL. THIS MUST BE STOPPED.

MOST REASONABLE PEOPLE DESIRE CLEAN AIR AND WATER, AND DO NOT MAKE A HABIT OF POLLUTING THE PLANTET THEY HAVE TO LIVE ON, THEY WILLINGLY PARTICIPATE IN RECYCLING, THEY DO NOT PLOT TO DESTROY THE WILDLIFE. THEY KNOW THAT
REGULATED HUNTING OF ANIMALS CAN MAKE FOR STRONGER HERDS. THAT HARVESTING OF TIMBER (WHICH IS A RENEWABLE RESOURCE) MAKES FOR HEALTHIER FOREST. THAT CONSERVATION IS A WISE PRACTICE UNLESS PUSHED TO EXTREMES AS THE PRESENT DAY ENVIRONMENTAL EXTREMIST ARE DOING WITH OUT THE SLIGHTEST CONCERN FOR THE REST OF THE HUMAN NEEDS OF MAN.

WE CANNOT AGREE TO THE RAILS TO TRAILS PLAN YOU ARE TRYING TO IMPLEMENT AS THERE IS A VIOLATION OF PROPERTY RIGHTS AS WE SEE IT. (Bostick and Bostick 1996)

In this letter, the authors present themselves as hard-working citizens who understand ecology, care about their environment, and willingly participate in reasonable environmental efforts, like recycling. They have been unfairly accused of “degrading behavior” by radical environmentalists and Rail-to-Trail advocates, whom they lump into one group, along with President Clinton, the Departments of the Interior and of Agriculture, and the United Nations. While the Bostick’s conspiracy theory regarding collusion between these entities is far-fetched, their sense that they are all part of a cultural mainstream the Bostick’s themselves have somehow been excluded from is probably on the mark. Ranchers and farmers are no longer the arbiters of culture or the “backbone of the nation.” The Bostick’s saw the trail as one more way in which they’d left behind, left out, and probably tricked. Many rural Klickitat landowners would probably agree.

In March 1996, soon after the floodwaters receded, trail opponents experienced another “disaster,” as the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals reached a decision on their case. The court ruled that they that they did not have jurisdiction and that a takings claim would have to be filed in U.S. Court of Federal Claims, for payment by the federal government, not the state. The ruling frustrated opponents who had hoped the Ninth Circuit would be able to stop or slow down the trail by requiring the state to pay property owners before a plan could go forward. The ruling was covered in the local newspapers.

Later in the same month, the FS sent a letter to interested parties thanking them for participation in the open house and advising them that the draft alternatives were being revised because of the flood. In the letter, the FS said that the lawsuit opposing the trail had been dismissed, and released a tally of comments received after the January open house; this was
reported in local newspapers as a survey that showed the trail had a 75% approval rating (Cecil 4 April 1996). A letter to the editor favorable to the trail appeared, and was rebutted by another reader.

After the court ruled on the trail opponents’ case, the Forest Service put the project "on the back burner" while they worked to survey and repair structural damage caused by the floods (Kelly "Project History" undated). RTC apparently tired of the organizing effort after their August efforts did not bear fruit. The opponents did not file another court case. Community proponents continued to meet informally, but the RTC and Forest Service did not work with them or with other groups during this process. Enthusiasm community groups had built up over the issue began to dissipate as months passed and nothing happened. The Forest Service did not write to update interested parties.

Nearly a year later, in May 1997, the Forest Service finally released an Environmental Assessment for the Rail Trail. This was the planning document that was needed for the trail to receive designation as a National Recreational Trail and move forward into development--or be denied and put to rest. When the document was released, the Forest Service sponsored three more open houses and solicited comments on the draft proposals. Proponents and opponents turned out to comment once more. RTC made one more effort to muster support for the trail; in May they sent an appeal to all 376 regional members asking them to make written comments in favor of the trail. They specifically instructed them to "commend the Forest Service for its excellent public involvement process and the thorough Environmental Assessment" (Emmett-Mattox 1997). A few did exactly that. Opponents of the trail also wrote to the Forest Service, but after five years of protesting, they seemed less certain that their comments would carry the day. County Commissioner Joan Frey seemed to speak for many opponents when she said, "I don't feel this whole process is legitimate," (Cecil 19 May 1997). At the Open Houses, the Forest Service did not sponsor any opportunities for discussion; comments were directed only to the Forest Service. The USFS received 144 responses, about 50% of which came from Klickitat county residents. 84% supported the trial, 10% opposed it, and 6% raised specific concerns but did not support or oppose the project.

Once the public comment period expired, the Forest Service worked to compile the public comments, respond to each query, and then re-publish the environmental assessment and.
comment as the final product. This should have been forwarded to the regional administrator with a recommendation from Art Carroll, the area manager, for the regional forester to decide. It took the planners at the USFS a full year to prepare the final Environmental Impact Statement. Six months were spent researching and responding to people's questions; the Office of General Council again carefully vetted responses. Six more months were spent responding to queries of the regional forester. In July 1998, the EA was finally submitted to the forester, but without a recommended plan of action; he requested that there be no recommendation. The state governor wrote the regional forester urging him to designate the Klickitat Rail Trail a National Recreation Trail. The county commissioners and Doc Hastings remained strongly opposed. The regional forester took everything under advisement, but since then there has been no action on the part of the Forest Service.

Further Analysis

The efforts of the RTC, Washington State Parks, and especially the Forest Service to create the Klickitat Rail Trail were a disaster in planning terms; the project was dragged out over four years, barely completed, and immediately shelved.

As I have attempted to suggest above, the narratives of trail opponents and proponents conflicted throughout the course of events, and in the project's aftermath, both sides saw endless controversy as the only possible outcome. But other contentious rail-trail projects have been resolved to the satisfaction of most parties. The outcome in Klickitat seemed inevitable because choices about the process were naturalized, and opportunities for improved dialogue became invisible; in fact, things could have gone differently. Here, I briefly discuss the dominant narratives on each side, and then consider how residents might have been able to acknowledge and discuss the conflict in their community, and even possibly been somewhat reconciled, through deliberation and the use of narrative practices.

Trail Proponents' Narrative

The people who supported the trail mostly lived in small communities along the rail line. They accepted that the rail to trail conversion was legal because it had been accomplished in other places, and because the Forest Service and other authorities said that it was. Local trail supporters presented their case in a story that was compelling for its simplicity: the communities
along the trail have only a few paved roads (the main one being the state highway) and no sidewalks. For exercise and recreation, children bike and elderly people walk along the highway. The trail could absorb this recreational traffic and allow people who live in the small communities to enjoy the Gorge’s famous scenery in safety. Because Burlington Northern had left a graded rail bed, the trail was practically ready-made. In the future, local users would maintain it. This policy story was straightforward, but was not well developed in that it was not widely known and it did not directly draw on broader narratives in political discourse (although it certainly might have). For this reason, this first narrative did not influence decision-making in the end.

A second policy in support of the trail story described tourists from outside the area that would come to ride their bikes along the trail. The trail, it was said, would bring business to local stores and restaurants, and help the local economy. The RTC and trail enthusiasts who wrote to letters of comment supporting the trail supported this narrative. This narrative also fit with the Forest Service and the County’s development plans for the area. However, it was not the main focus of debate within the community. Although trail enthusiasts from outside the area did send comments, only the RTC took part in the dialogue about the trail; others did not attend public meetings or write letters to the editor.

The position of the RTC in this case was similar to the position of the neighborhood Committee in Leominster: it was trying to both facilitate widespread community involvement and advocate for one position. On the one hand, the RTC is an advocacy organization whose primary role was to represent trail users—particularly non-local users—in the face of opposition. On the other hand, the RTC sought to move the trail project forward by engaging the entire community. This role was particularly important because the Forest Service was ineffective in facilitating public dialogue. However, the facilitator role and the advocacy role inevitably conflicted. When they were unable to carry out their conflicting tasks, they disappeared from the community.

While the RTC was frustrated with this dynamic, so were landowners. They sensed that the RTC was not in any sense neutral, and this added to their sense that the deck was somehow stacked against them.

Ironically, local residents never really joined with the RTC. Perhaps they did not really believe that many people would make the long drive to use the Klickitat trail, or maybe they
were just more enthusiastic about using the trail themselves. For them, the story about outside users mostly served as evidence that the trail fit into existing plans for the area. Both the Forest Service and local supporters preferred the first story, about how the trail would benefit local residents.

**Trail Opponents’ Critique**

Trail opponents generally lived on bigger spreads farther out in the country. They were more likely to suffer inconvenience from the trail, if trail users littered, set fires, or bothered their livestock. These potential problems were one reason to oppose the trail. Their other, probably more important, concerns were that the trail violated their property rights and that it was a waste of money. The trail opponents’ concerns did not combine to form a complete story in the way that the trail supporters did; instead, their narrative was a critique of the trail project. This critique drew on two important and well-developed meta-narratives in American political discourse: property-rights and devolution. These two narratives eventually triumphed over the proponents’ narratives because they were better known, and thus were more developed and had political allies. There are several reasons that these narratives might have appealed to landowners.

**Property Rights**

Most trail opponents’ direst criticism was that the proposed trail violated their property rights. Landowners strongly resented being forced to allow pedestrians and bicyclers to pass through their land. They did not accept the legal reasoning that the railroad could sell or transfer its right-of-way to others. The property owners believed that they should receive additional compensation for the intrusion. Some thought that no compensation would be enough.

Property owners that opposed the trail on takings grounds aligned themselves with the national property rights movement. This movement is powerful, especially in western states. It holds that government regulation of land, particularly environmental regulation, is an infringement of landowners’ rights that diminishes civil liberties and imposes far-left values on the public. Although some academics and mainstream Western conservative politicians support the property-rights movement, many citizen property-rights supporters also believe in outright
government conspiracies to disempower conservative and rural people; the Bostick's letter was one example of this reasoning.

Although some elements of the property-right movement may seem extreme or unlikely, it is an important policy narrative in that it makes sense to many people. Several trends underlie the popularity of this narrative: the sense of identity many people derive from land ownership, the desire to assert the importance of landownership (especially rural land ownership) in the face of social forces that increasingly exclude working-class rural people from the mainstream, the Jeffersonian ideal that associates private land ownership with conservatism and traditional values, and the mythology of the American West which also associates land ownership with (masculine) identity and traditional values.

Many trail opponents seemed to feel that their status as landowners—ranchers, farmers, or just country folks—was an important part of their identity. Thus, a threat to their land rights was a threat to their identity. This is foreshadowed in the letters to the editor and in the fierceness with which many of the landowners defended their property rights. This identification with the land is also suggested by the literature on the culture of the American west. For instance, in Who Owns the West? (1996), Oregonian and former rancher William Kettridge describes growing up on a rural Oregon ranch with an overwhelming sense that land made a man. Likewise, Montana rancher and writer Daniel Kemmis argues in Community and the Politics of Place (1990) that place, land ownership, and profession (particularly traditional professions like ranching and farming) are how people define their lives. This strong sense of identification with land and a correspondingly fierce opposition to public access through private land also echoes American myths about the West and the Jeffersonian ideal, both of which uphold the rural, independent homesteader, rancher or farmer as the backbone of the nation.

The (correct) sense that small-scale agriculturalists are now excluded from the mainstream, probably also led the landowners to more loudly and strongly assert their rights. Kittredge, who writes about land and identity in the rural West, identifies “Working-class white folks whose people have been in the country for at least a few generations” as those most likely to “feel, quite justifiably, cut off from the sources of power in their culture” (1996). Underlying many extreme property-rights pronouncements is a sense that the government and environmental organizations have no sense of what life is like in rural, resource-based communities, and no concern for working-class people. Property-rights dogma expresses a sense of being
disenfranchised and marginalized in mainstream America. It seeks to restore the respect and influence rural landowners were once accorded, at least in American myth.

**Waste of Tax Money**

Trail opponents were also incensed about how much the trail was costing taxpayers. Trail opponents frequently mentioned the waste of money the trail represented, and listed other pressing priorities that they felt the government should consider before building another trail: education, road improvements, emergency services. At least one resident used the Freedom of Information Act to obtain information about the budget for the Klickitat trail and other recreational facilities in the region, the cost of preparing a Environmental Assessment, etc. She then distributed these figures at public meetings as evidence of the government’s wasteful ways.

The “waste of tax money argument” was an interesting one, because it was not a problem particular to the rail-trail issue. However, this argument was in keeping with the trail opponents’ general feelings about government “intrusions: and conspiracies. Likewise, it served to align trail opponents with another critical policy narrative, the tale of devolution.

Devolution is an effort to devolve power from the federal government to the states, and from states to community and individuals. It focuses on the wastefulness of Big Government and posits local government and private ownership as the alternative. Political analyst Joseph Kling identifies the devolution narrative and describes it as “a *story* about how ordinary Americans have lost control over the conditions of their lives, and how the dismantling of… federal regulations” will “restore control” (1997, italics in original). The devolution story combines the desire to “decentralize administrative functions” with the desire to “constrict public purposes” (Kling 1997). The devolution argument is often combined with arguments to move property ownership from federal agencies to communities or individuals. Trail opponents supported both these arguments.

The devolution narrative may have appealed to Klickitat landowners for many of the same reasons that the property-rights argument did: it explains how rural, working-class whites have been disempowered and promises to restore their franchise. Kling identifies working-class whites as the group as most likely to subscribe to devolutionary views; in his view, they recognize that federal redistributions tend to place them nearer to the lower economic classes,
and therefore not make them better off. In comparison to other Klickitat County residents (who are also mostly white and working-class), landowners’ particular sense that they had been cheated by the Scenic Area Act and the Klickitat Wild and Scenic River designation, which restricted development on their property, may have fanned this feeling. Their unhappy early experience with the Rail Trail may have also amplified it.

An extreme form of the devolutionary story, like the extreme forms of the property-rights movement, holds that the US government is already engaged in conspiracies to take power away from citizens. Like Fiske’s “blackstream knowledge” (1993), these theories do reveal something about those who tell them; trail opponents strongly feared that the government was untrustworthy.

Logistical Problems
Finally, trail opponents critiqued the trail proposal by presenting numerous logistical problems; the trail would lead to cattle-human conflicts, with harm to individuals of both species; fences along the trail would cut cattle from their water source; a lack of fences across the trail would allow cattle to wander off. Walkers and bikers would also vandalize private property, trespass, set wildfires, litter, spread noxious weeds, interfere with Native American dip-net fishers, damage the riparian ecosystem, and finally, be inaccessible to fire, police, and emergency medical services when they were inevitably gored, snake bitten, or drowned in the river.

These were problem narratives that were much more easily accepted by the Forest Service and by trail proponents. These concerns are the kind most easily addressed by “rational planning.” Therefore, these problems were emphasized by both sides in many planning documents and written comments. However, this was not the main critique in the opponents’ view. Several incongruities show that the practical difficulties were relatively unimportant.

First, complaints about litter, vandalism, animal harassment, and the like, were almost always couched in terms of “outsiders” who would not know how to behave along the trail. But according to the trail proponents’ main narrative, most trail users would be local residents, in many cases people known to the landowners. This is another example of how the proponents’ and opponents’ narratives failed to interact. Trail opponents never acknowledged the incongruity between their concerns about “outsiders” and their own neighbors’ desire to use the trail; in fact, one landowner said that although he was opposed to the rail trail, he did not mind
local hunters using the rail bed. It did not seem to occur to him that this would strike many landowners as quite permissive.

Second, it seemed clear from some landowners’ actions that they were more interested in opposing the trail from property-rights and devolutionary frameworks than in discussing or addressing its logistical problems. For instance, the RTC created a special contract that specifically forbid salvage workers from leaving the ROW. This contract was written because landowners were concerned about rail-and-tie salvagers trespassing on their private property. However, this provision meant that workers could not salvage debris that was not on the ROW. Landowners subsequently complained that the salvage operation was shoddy because debris outside the ROW was not collected. One local resident, in an anonymous letter to the FS, even “tipped off” the FS that a landowner had dragged ties out of the ROW and then videotaped them lying in a ditch to prove that the salvage operation was incomplete.

In another case, landowners complained that four-wheel enthusiasts were using the rail bed illegally. The RTC subsequently erected gates, bollards, and signs instructing people to keep off the ROW. Local landowners almost immediately removed these same signs and gates because they were angry that the RTC had erected them on private (the landowners’) property.

Finally, landowners declined numerous offers to meet with the FS to address logistical concerns. They preferred to talk about property rights and tax money. When the FS did arrange a private meeting with a subset of landowners, in which they expected to talk about design concerns, the landowners quickly returned the topic to their main priorities—property rights and the waste of tax money. This hesitance to address logistical issues betrays uneasiness that these issues might be resolvable, and that their resolution might allow the trail project moving forward despite other important objections.

The trail opponents’ criticisms did not poke holes in the simple and compelling story presented by trail proponents. Instead, the landowners’ broad critique raised a number of new and difficult issues, issues that won them many political supporters who were ideological proponents of the meta-narratives of property rights and devolution. Over time, the trail opponents’ critique prevailed over the trail proponents’ straightforward story, although neither side truly engaged the narratives of the other. Deliberation focused on narrative could have overcome some of these problems.
Narrative and the Potential for Collaboration

Regardless of whether the trail should have been built or not, the project was not decided in a democratic way. It was not decided legally, with regards to rights (a court case seemed to indicate the project should go forward), it was not decided by a popular vote (there was never a vote), it was not decided by a reasoned appeal to facts (the opponents never engaged one another in this way), it was not decided by an appeal to emotions or needs (the opponents never engaged each other this way either), and it was not decided by the Forest Service as an agent of the public interest. The decision-making process was a failure in the worst possible way: it took a lot of time and effort, it was undemocratic and extremely agonizing, and no one felt happy with the decision at the end. In fact, the process seemed to sharpen divisions in the community—thus illustrating how planning activities can function as (dark) place-making events.

The most obvious barrier to resolution in this process was a lack of interaction between proponents and opponents. The communities never really engaged the differences between their stories, and never came to see any reasonableness in their opponents. Landowners said the project would allow strangers on their land—but might not have minded their own neighbors using it. Their neighbors wanted to use the trail but were characterized as strangers by the property owners. Similarly, opponents said the project would be expensive, but proponents were interested in volunteering their own labor to minimize costs. (This community-based solution is exactly the kind of effort that is praised by many political proponents of devolution.) Without engaging difference and acknowledging reasonableness in other parties, there was no possibility that the two camps could deliberate or imagine a way to coexist. If residents were able to communicate with each other, perhaps they could have accommodated each other’s points of view. However, proponents and opponents rarely addressed each other directly—both talked to the Forest Service instead, and depended on the Forest Service to mediate their concerns.

The Forest Service encouraged this pattern of interaction in part because meetings were loud and emotional, and trail proponents reported feeling shouted down or intimidated by opponents. Instead of canceling the meetings, however, the Forest Service could have used small-group discussion, more clear expectations for speakers, taking turns speaking pro and con, or some other method to allow both sides to be heard. If the Forest Service had even just kept on
with the loud meetings, people might have shouted themselves out and begun to talk. By whatever method, freedom to speak for all participants should have been preserved; open discourse is the first step towards deliberation. A restructuring of the format of dialogue between the parties could have helped a lot in this matter, because a lack of interaction between arguments was a barrier to resolution.

The public meetings and other participation opportunities would also have benefited from a widened focus. Although the Forest Service was interested in strict rational-planning issues like trail width and the number of parking spaces, participants wanted to get at the broader narratives the heart of the conflict. By excluding issues that some participants felt were important, the Forest Service prevented some residents from telling their “whole story,” and again foreclosed the possibility of deliberation. It is vital in deliberation that all topics be open to discussion, not artificially foreclosed by one member (Habermas 1996). The FS feared the topic would stray too far from the trail, but in fact time constraints (not to mention the coughs and uncomfortable shifting of friends and supporters) would probably have prevented participants from ranging too far afield. Also, once the opportunity to speak was open, people might have felt they were being heard and thus had less compulsion to shout; by acknowledging landowners’ concerns and allowing them to be discussed—even if they could not be resolved immediately—the Forest Service would have assured landowners that they were not being ignored.

If the Forest Service had created forum where community members could openly discuss the broader issues implicated in the trail decision, even mostly among themselves, and if the Forest Service had modeled respect and openness in their own communication, then they might have made their own role in the community less fraught, and thus moved the project forward. Later, the FS could have worked to create solutions to the logistical problems of a trail (fencing, cattle guards, watering troughs, seasonal closures).

Although this different approach might have been uncomfortable, it would not have required more resources than those devoted to the unsuccessful process, nor would it have been incompatible with established public-participation procedures, which in this case were relatively open.

Actual collaborative practices could have taken the form of facilitated meetings in which everyone was allowed to speak and encouraged to tell their complete story about the trail. At first, trail supporters might have described walking along the highway, and wanting to have safer
places to walk. Landowners might say they had been ripped off by the Gorge Act and pounded by natural and economic disasters, and that the trail was just one more bad thing. As they spoke, they might begin to develop a sense of being a community of fate. Their interests might not have seemed too far apart. This might have meant more and longer meetings, but it would not have required more resources than those already devoted to this lengthy process.

I can imagine a deliberative dialogue that dispelled ill will and built a modicum of trust. In Klickitat, project opponents were angry with the Forest Service, but a conversation with other community members might have dissipated that anger. For instance, one resolution might have been to construct one section of the trail, one that passed through a more urbanized area. In the urbanized area, adjacent landowners were less likely to oppose the trail, passersby were most likely to be local residents, and the logistical problems were minimal (no cattle to contend with, no river nearby). If in a few years the trail was well-maintained and most of the users were local, or if outside users did not prove troublesome, the entire trail idea would not seem so foreign and the path could be extended. In this case, landowners who had positive experiences with the trail might also become advocates for the extension of the trail. This compromise solution could satisfy the narratives of both sides; urban residents would have a safer place to walk and exercise, and rural residents would see that the trail benefited the community and was not an intrusion for outsiders. Or, residents opposed to the trail might revise their story to emphasize the another aspect of the Jeffersonian ideal—the side that holds that citizens have an interest and a responsibility to weight not only their own personal desires but the good of their community (Innes 1981, Innes 2000, Kemmis 1990, Kettridge 1996). That’s just one idea.

Perhaps the most central problem in the Klickitat process was that the Forest Service planners tried to put themselves at the center of a conflict when in fact they were only one participant in an existing conflict within the community. By making themselves the center of it all, the Forest Service became an outlet for concerns and frustrations it could not hope to resolve. Community members might have been able to work out some of these problems themselves, but the Forest Service did not facilitate communication within the community, instead it encouraged everyone to come to the FS for satisfaction.

Figure one: Dominant model of interaction in planning process: monolithic “public,” government as central.
The model of participation shown in figure one is one also identified by Innes (2000), and similar to ideas expressed by Healy (1998) and Kemmis (1990). In her description, Innes states that such a model is not interactive because there is no sustained conversation; the government solicits opinions, and then acts on them. In return, the government supplies information; nowhere does a back-and-forth take place. Thus, this model does not allow for deliberation. This model also does not allow for the transformation of narratives; because stories are shaped and transformed socially, through interaction, a scheme that limits interaction between community members also limits the possibility that the community will elaborate or develop a new story that accommodates apparent differences. In Klickitat, participants’ infrequent interaction and their inability to tell stories even when they did encounter one another meant that the conflicting narratives were not elaborated. In many respects the stories on both sides remained quite simplistic. The inability to develop narratives hindered efforts to reach some agreement. This inability to develop stories follows from the model, which shows the public as monolithic and unable to problem-solve without government.

A better model might be to facilitate interaction between members of the public. In this way, important but imprecise issues, such as community identity, that were identified in the planning process could have been recognized and addressed through dialogue. The sharp edges of angry, fearful stories might have softened if those stories circulated openly in the community. Narratives on both sides might be have been elaborated to accommodate other views or ways of life, even if only on their periphery. And even if Klickitat remained a community in conflict and never agreed about the trail, the practice of narrative deliberation could have benefited them. Discussion might have led people feel like a community of shared fate. The FS could have played an important role in encouraging this discussion, without needing to solve those resolve the issues themselves (see figure two, also adapted from Innes, 2000).

1 In promoting this model for public participation, it is necessary to assert that planners and public agencies ("Gov't") still play playing an important role in facilitating the networks, carrying out some of its plans, and in ensuring that those plans conform to state and federal rules and laws. This view is in contrast with some proponents of community management, particularly westerners such as Kemmis (1990), who argues for a mode of interaction
similar to the one shown in figure two, but holds that groups like the RTC and the Forest Service have almost no role in the dialogue. A.M. Schlesinger (1992, quoted in Weber 1999) points out that local planning networks which exclude "outsiders" may lead to balkanization, and a sense that the community has no obligations to a wider state or national community. I see the role of the Forest Service and the participation of groups like the RTC as important in preventing this separatism.
In the small community of Orleans, Massachusetts, a controversy about a large new church building attracted the attention of local residents already concerned about the cultural and environmental impacts of increased development. Members of the Community of Jesus, who proposed to build the church, charged that the controversy also became a way for people to act on existing prejudices against their religious community. In Orleans, the narrative of tragic development again appeared and was pitted against a tale of religious persecution. But despite the pull of these two powerful narratives and despite the initial anger on both sides, people in Orleans managed to resolve the conflict through a compromise. The strong development of both narratives facilitated a process in which the sides disagreed but neither was overpowered. The process in Orleans took place in several venues, each of which created opportunities to talk and tell stories about the character of the community, and eventually patch together their two narratives.

Setting

Orleans is a small Massachusetts town at the elbow of Cape Cod, 21 square miles in area, 14 of them land. It was founded in 1797 and is governed by a board of selectmen, with all major decisions voted on in an open town meeting. It has a year-round population of about 5,800, while a charter fishing fleet and small-scale commercial development attracts more visitors in the summer months. Although religion was obviously a difference in Orleans, most residents are demographically similar, predominantly college-educated upper-income retired people who have lived on the Cape more than 5 years (75%). The 1990 census also reported that every single resident of Orleans was white. Orleans’ economic base depends primarily on tourism; the state department of revenue characterizes the community as “resort-retirement-artistic.”

The Community of Jesus Church has been located in Orleans since 1971. It is a non-denominational Protestant Church that observes many religious rituals reminiscent of traditional Catholic practices of the Middle Ages; the Community is home to male and female monastic orders that observe hourly prayers, it has a large choir, and it is a center for the study and recording of Gregorian chants. The somewhat unusual scope of the protestant Church’s activities have led Orleans residents describe it variously as “a prayer group, a cult, a Christian
community, a sect, an abbey, and a church” (Milton August 4, 1991). However, over 300 of Orleans' residents are members of the church, including 60 to 70 members of its monastic orders. These members also play important roles within the community, owning local businesses and serving on local government councils.

In 1981 and 1985 there were spates of accusations by disenchanted Community members, publicized in the Cape Cod Times, that the organization was a cult that sought to control its members through psychological and even physical abuse. However, the Community was never officially accused of any illegal activity. Unlike many religious groups outside the mainstream, the Community has a reputation for attracting wealthy and upper-middle-class members who wield significant political clout in the larger community.

Plot

In 1990, the Community of Jesus decided to tear down their existing meetinghouse and replace it with a much larger, gothic-style church in keeping with their neo-traditional practices, and which would have the acoustic properties to allow recording Gregorian chants in the church. They commissioned an architect to design the building, which was to occupy the same site as the old meetinghouse: a ten-acre lot facing Rock Harbor and adjacent to the Town Dock, and a brackish wetland. The proposed new church was to stand 65 feet at the roofline, with a 104-foot tower. This would have made it by far the tallest building in town, and one of the tallest structures on Cape Cod.

In the spring of 1991, the Community of Jesus began to apply for necessary building permits. These applications were met with resistance in the town of Orleans. The town Conservation Commission declined to grant the Community an Order of Conditions to build the new church adjacent to wetlands. Likewise, the Zoning Board of Appeals declined to grant them a special permit to exceed the 30-foot height limit for buildings in the town of Orleans, or to allow a variance from the ordinary required setback from a coastal bank. Both Commissions expressed concern that the proposed project was too large and would have too great an impact on the small town of Orleans.

Also in the spring of 1991, the town of Eastham, which is adjacent to Orleans and which also faces Rock Harbor, petitioned the regional planning authority, the Cape Cod Commission, to review the Community of Jesus Church as a Development of Regional Impact. Residents of the
town of Eastham were concerned that the large gothic-style building would not only impact the
town of Orleans, but would be visible from their town, changing the appearance of the entire
harbor. For some, there may also have been an unspoken discomfort at an expansion of the
Church facilities that might allow the Community to expand their religious outreach or attract
more religious pilgrims to the community. The Plan Evaluation Board of the Town of Orleans
later joined the Eastham Board of Selectman in requesting that the Cape Cod Commission
review the Community’s Church project.

The Cape Cod Commission is a special planning and regulatory agency created by the
Massachusetts State Legislature in 1989 in response to fears that runaway commercial and resort
development was destroying the delicate environment of the Cape and crowding out long-time,
traditional residents, such as fishermen. The Cape Cod Commission is charged with protecting
the environment and history of the Cape through comprehensive planning and development
regulations. The Commission has the authority to review large developments, termed
“Developments of Regional Impact” or DRIs, for compliance with their regional plan. The
Commission can curtail development that does not accord with that plan.

The full Commission voted to accept review of the project as a DRI in late May 1991. In
their decision to review the project, the Commission cited concerns about the project’s impact on
natural and cultural resources (the historic harbor and the wetland issue), its size, its impact on
existing capital facilities, its traffic impacts, and its location near a waterway, public lands, and a
municipal boundary. The full Commission then designated a subcommittee to investigate the
project and report back to the full Committee with a recommendation on whether the project
should be approved or denied.

The Commission subcommittee held six public meetings. The first was a regularly
scheduled public meeting to hear testimony from the public. It was scheduled for June 27, 1991.
In the weeks leading up to the meeting, public resistance to the church proposal developed.
Mitchell and Brenda Eskie, residents of the neighboring town of Chatham, formerly of Orleans,
organized Citizens Against Rock Harbor Environmental Destruction (CARED) to oppose the
new church. The couple proposed a boycott of Church events (the Church regularly held fee-for-
admission concerts) and of the businesses of church owners. They also initiated a leafleting and
advertising campaign in downtown Orleans. Their efforts netted them a dozen anonymous
supporters (Milton 19 June 1991); they told the Cape Cod Times that many other downtown
business owners were supportive of their efforts, but didn’t want to get involved because “the economy is bad and the Community does so much business with us” (Milton 20 June 1991). The Eskies also circulated a petition against the Church that garnered 690 signatures by the first public meeting (Public Hearing Minutes 27 June 1991). The Eskie’s campaign against the church building drew on the narrative of environmental tragedy (as the “Against Environmental Destruction” name suggests). Some thought it also appealed to people who harbored religious intolerance for the Community or who disliked the Church’s influence on the larger community.

In the week preceding the first public meeting, the Cape Cod Times ran an editorial opposing the boycott of Community members’ businesses, calling the plan bigoted (20 June 1991). The paper urged that the dispute should be resolved in existing legal forums and not “pit one private citizen against another.” In response, two letters to the editor appeared. One objected to characterization of Church opposition as bigoted, saying that it was only fair that the same development rules be applied to the church as to other developers. The founders of CARED also wrote in defending the boycott as “very American,” and saying that although they “[did] not even know one Community member,” boycotts were an effective way for people to express their views.

The entire boycott brouhaha the week before the first public meeting—five prominent mentions in the Cape Cod Times, the area’s only daily paper—probably helped that first meeting draw a crowd; over 300 people attended, and 200 of them signed up to speak. Church supporters outnumbered those who opposed the project. Many church members who were also residents of Orleans attended to speak in favor of the Community’s proposal. The Community of Jesus had the floor first to present their project. Chris Kanaga, the Church’s lawyer, a Community member, and an Orleans resident, introduced the project by explaining that in his view the benefit-versus-detriment test commonly applied by the Cape Cod Commission could not be used to evaluate the spiritual “benefits” created by a church. He then introduced the benefits of the project, including worship, religious education, support for a monastic way of life, Gregorian chanting and musical scholarship, a telephone crisis line, religious television programming, counseling, and volunteer charity work. This presentation was followed by presentations by Community consultants on the physical impacts of the project. This included detailed discussions of drainage, wetland protection, traffic, parking, zoning, wastewater treatment, and acoustic requirements for the space. The subcommittee interjected questions about everything
from the effects of sea level rise to the Constitutional implications of Church regulation to the acoustic requirements of Gregorian chanting. When the subcommittee had finished asking questions, they gave public officials in the audience the chance to ask questions first. The Town of Orleans Board of Health, Conservation Commission, and Planner all expressed reservations about the project. The subcommittee then invited members of the public to make comments. At this point, many church members took the opportunity to speak in favor of the church and the benefits it offered to the community. Many also called the opposition to the church prejudice against a religious minority and claimed, as one supporter explained, “All we want... is the same thing the pilgrims wanted.” (Milton 28 June 1991).

The second meeting was scheduled for August 7, for the applicant to answer questions from the subcommittee. This meeting drew about 600 people (Milton 8 August 1991). CARED organized a march for about 95 people who walked from downtown Rock Harbor to the hearing carrying banners and signs in opposition to the project. Their slogans read: “SAVE ROCK HARBOR” “No eyesore by the seashore” and “God hears even whispers—HEAL Mother Earth!” Perhaps mindful of the Cape Cod Times criticisms—even if they weren’t true, they made the group look bad—CARED used the protest and the meeting to strengthen their claims of environmental tragedy.

At the hearing, the applicant again had the opportunity to make a presentation and answer questions from the subcommittee, and again the issues ran the gamut from sewerage to parking to the separation of Church and State. Representatives of the Community continued to emphasize their protected status as a religious organization; Community lawyer Chris Kanaga stated “no other church in the country has been so persecuted,” (Public Hearing Minutes 7 August, 1991). The public also took the opportunity to offer testimony; 60 people signed up to speak. Despite the very visible march (which made the front page of the Cape Cod Times), supporters once again outnumbered opposition. All the public officials that spoke again voiced concerns about the environmental and visual impacts of the project.

The first two meetings were so packed that the Committee scheduled a third public meeting to give people who had not yet had a chance to speak the opportunity to do so. At this meeting, held August 29, 1991, the applicants and the subcommittee submitted written reports on the progress of the project but did not give presentations. Instead, the meeting was turned over to the public. Forty-four people spoke, and thirty-eight supported the project. Their praise
covered the beauty of the church, the good works of the Community, the need for more seating at church services, the possible economic benefits to the surrounding community, and the belief that environmental impacts had been adequately addressed by the Church’s consultants. A CARED founder, one of the few people to speak in opposition, said he was distressed at the dissention that had come to surround the project and suggested a compromise between the church and the town. The people who were initially the most vociferous opponents seemed to be moving towards the middle, even as town authorities remained opposed to the project.

In August, soon after the third public meeting, the Orleans Planning Board announced plans to create new height limits for the town of Orleans. They recognized that their 30-foot limit, written with commercial and residential structures in mind but applied to all buildings, would likely be held invalid as applied to Church buildings, since other public buildings in town (including the new elementary school) had been exempted from the limit. The Planning Board proposed a new limit of 45 feet for churches and institutional buildings. The proposal was a direct response to the Community’s church proposal. Said Planning Board chairman Richard Philbrick, “It’s a reasonable reaction. We’re not hiding it or ashamed of it…. Towns do react.” This proposal brought the debate over the church into the town’s business as well as the Commission’s.

At the request of the Community, the subcommittee held a fourth meeting on September 5, 1991, so that they could present additional information about the project. The subcommittee characterized it as “an opportunity to have a free and open dialogue” (Public Hearing Minutes September 5, 1991). Although tension was evident at this meeting, it was an opportunity for the community and the board to hash out differences. The Community summarized the subcommittee’s concerns and the ways they felt they’d addressed them. The subcommittee summarized what the community had done and what they felt was still unresolved. A few days later, the Community announced plans to move the church five feet farther from the wetlands, preserve 2300 square feet of oceanfront wetland as public open space, reduce the size of their recoding studio, produce a watershed plan for the entire area of town, and donate $5,000 for a bike path to mitigate traffic impacts. Church Attorney Kanaga said, “We though mitigation was the way to go since it was clear it was going to be difficult for us to agree.” The Church too was moving closer to the center.
The subcommittee met again in public session again a week later to discuss the Community’s revised proposal; although the subcommittee still had concerns, primarily about the visual impact of the project, they decided to postpone their decision until another public meeting could be held. At this meeting, held at the end of September, the Church summarized its proposal and how it felt it addressed the concerns of the subcommittee. Perhaps sensing an impending rejection, they again added to their proposal, offering to build a private septic treatment plant and pay fully for a Route 6 bicycle overpass. After the Community’s presentation, the subcommittee presented their remaining concerns. About ten members of the public spoke, almost evenly divided over the project.

Also in September, as the subcommittee prepared to reach a decision over the Community of Jesus proposal, the town prepared for the annual town meeting (held in early October). On the agenda were groundwater protection bylaws, nitrogen-loading regulations, a clarification of the definition of wetlands, and an initiative to write a local comprehensive plan. The proposal to limit church and institutional buildings to 45 feet of height was pulled from the town meeting agenda at the last minute, after newspaper notices announcing the public meetings over the proposal were accidentally published with the wrong date, making it impossible to hold the required meetings in time. Although the height limit which dealt directly with the church proposal was pulled, all the proposals that were voted on addressed growth, particularly its impacts on water supplies. The Cape Cod Times ran a full-page Sunday spread about the Orleans proposals, describing them as “a string of eye-glazing bylaws and regulations…. Translated, they mean changes in Orleans and other Cape towns that face similar decisions,” (Milton 22 September 1991).

Orleans’ annual Town Meeting was held October 8, 1991. Supporters of the Community of Jesus attended in force, and helped to defeat the groundwater protection measure, and to take away the Conservation Commission’s jurisdiction over all development within 100 feet of wetlands; groundwater and wetlands issues had been major stumbling blocks to the Community Church proposal. Local property owners concerned about over-regulation of private lands joined Community members in opposing the regulations.

Some Orleans residents outside the Community of Jesus were surprised and upset by the Community’s political muster. One planning board member accused the Community of packing the meeting and warned voters to act “if you have a concern about who’s running the town
meeting.” Another town Selectman said the “ground-water protection bylaw lost because of a concerted effort by a small group of people.” Two other selectmen described the defeat as a “carefully orchestrated effort.” There was a strong feeling of surprise and even ill will towards Church members by Selectmen and Planning Board members, who had worked to draft the proposals that were defeated. However, at least one water-protection advocate (not a public official) disagreed, saying “Even though you might call it a bloc, that's their privilege… to me [the result] was the failure of people who feel strongly about protecting our water supplies but who didn’t come to the meeting” (Milton October 9, 1991).

Community of Jesus members, for their part, resented being singled out by their votes; they criticized the Planning Board member who accused them of “running the meeting.” One Church member said, “It’s a little bit like being Black”; another suggested that the town hand out Star-of-David armbands to Community members so they could be more easily identified (ibid.) Later, one Community member said, “People of the lower Cape seized the opportunity to vent their long-held resentment of the Community church members” (MacMillan 1991).

After the Community meeting, debate continued in Orleans. Three more letters to the editor appeared in the Cape Cod Times, two from people who said they were not members of the Community of Jesus, and they thought the town meeting was perfectly fair. One writer specifically praised the fair moderator, and the other decried the dearth of scientific information presented in favor of groundwater protection. The Cape Cod Times also ran an editorial chiding community members who didn’t attend the town meeting: “If they care at all about what will happen in Rock Harbor… they’ll show up the next time” (Cape Cod Times 10 October 1991). In the end, the events at town meeting sparked a civic discussion about the responsibility of all town members to participate in governance, and the equal rights of Community members to participate in and influence decisions about Orleans.

In October, after the Orleans town meeting and the September public meetings held by the Cape Cod Commission subcommittee, the subcommittee met twice to discuss the proposal. At the second they voted unanimously to recommend denial of the project. They presented this recommendation to the full Cape Cod Commission on November 7, 1991, and the Commission also voted to deny the development.
Later in November, the town held a special town meeting to consider the proposal to limit church buildings to 45 feet in height. (“Special” town meetings are not uncommon in Orleans, which generally holds one regular and one or two more special town meetings annually.) Non-community Church members turned out in force at this meeting, and the proposal passed.

The two weeks into November, the Community asked the Commission to table their decision regarding the development and extend the decision date to March 5, 1992, so that they could propose a new chapel design. The Commission agreed to this request. The Community presented a new design at a public meeting on January 22, 1992. The new proposal showed the church just 55 feet tall, with an 89-foot tower. (The last proposal was 65 feet with a 104-foot tower.) Again, fewer people attended the meeting and speakers were about evenly divided for and against the proposal. The subcommittee met again on February 12, and February 20 and again voted to deny the project. The new proposal, although marginally smaller in size, did not assuage their concerns about scale and visual impact. The full Commission supported the decision to deny approval on March 5, 1992.

The Community subsequently sued the Commission, seeking to reverse this decision. Predictably, the legal case proved expensive and time consuming. On April 16, 1993, the Cape Cod Commission and Community of Jesus, Inc. enter into an Agreement for Judgement to settle the litigation. But instead of pursuing the modified proposal that appeared in the Agreement for Judgement, the Church opted to redesign the entire facility. On February 2, 1996 the Community of Jesus submitted a Modified Agreement for Judgement, with a new site plan and building elevations. On March 20, 1996 the Cape Cod Commission held a public hearing on the proposed modified plans.

The new plans met with widespread approval; only one negative letter of comment was received (from a next-door-neighbor of the church). Many community members who had turned out to protest the old proposal actually came to the public meeting to support the new design. One former critic said, “I’m sure the community of Orleans will thank the Community of Jesus for this effort” (Milton 21 March 1996). Although the new design met with widespread approval, the building was still 55 feet tall and the new tower, while slightly short at 75 feet, was still taller than the height specified in the town’s new ordinance. The Community managed to respond to the substance of the Orleans’ residents concerns without compromising what was important to them in the design.
In the face of community-wide support, the Cape Cod Commission voted to approve the Modified Agreement for Judgement, and on May 1, 1996 the Court also ordered (approved) it. The Community of Jesus broke ground on the church November 1, 1997.

**Further Analysis**

The Orleans planning process was the most successful of the three examined here in terms of supporting a deliberative, narrative-oriented dialogue. The two narratives that seemed to be in conflict—a story of religious persecution and a story of tragic development—were both well developed to start with, and thus neither overwhelmed the other. The process through which these narratives were elaborated and eventually patched together was a process that upheld community character as an explicit concern. Participants therefore acknowledged stories about the community as relevant to the proceedings. Because both the Town of Orleans and the Cape Cod Commission held meetings on different aspects of the project, no one agency dominated the process, and there were a variety of different fora in which to discuss the issue. The Cape Cod Commission, for its part, accommodated everyone’s desire to speak and also created a good deal of back-and-forth with the Community of Jesus. As a result, two potentially overwhelming narratives were patched together, perhaps differently by each side, but into narratives that each could live with. The ability of both sides to find a middle ground in the final proposal shows that each had came to appreciate the concerns of the other.

**Community Members**

The members of the Community of Jesus held that the Church was an important expression of their religious beliefs. The size and design were important to provide the right acoustic setting for their liturgical music and to express their identification with very old Christian practices. To limit their proposal on environmental grounds was perhaps acceptable, but to limit it on aesthetic grounds was insupportable; the size and style of the Church was a constitutionally protected religious expression, and not allowing a large church violated community members right to free expression of religion. The community’s lawyer, Chris Kanaga, also an Orleans resident and a member of the Community of Jesus, consistently brought up the issue of religious persecution at public meetings. Other community members also stated in meetings and in letters to the editor that they felt unfairly singled out.
Community members portrayed project opponents as intending to limit the Community’s religious freedoms and as perhaps harboring grudges against specific Community members or against the Community as a whole because of its non-contemporary-traditional practices. They portrayed themselves as victims of religious persecution: it was “kind of like being black,” having to wear a Star of David, or being a “pilgrim.”

**Project Opponents**

Project opponents presented a critique of the project that was a variation on the narrative of tragic development. They criticized both the environmental and the aesthetic impacts of the project as harmful to the character of the towns of Orleans and Eastham. Their criticisms in public meetings emphasized the “character” of the area—one resident put it eloquently:

> I grew up in the house that abuts the Community’s property facing the harbor; and I must say that growing up we took for granted the magical confluence of light, topography, tidal rhythms, and the strong architectural style that characterizes the Cape. Having lived and traveled both here and abroad extensively, however, I’ve come to realize that the Cape is not only charming, but is a rarity unique in this world... Rock Harbor is an archetypal expression of that character, one reason it has been so photographed, painted, visited, et cetera... My main concern is the effect this enormous non-contextual building would have on this regional landmark. The harbor would be literally and figuratively consumed by such a complex.

> I remember the Harbor when it was just a creek with working boats in it. As it is now, the capacity for boats and cars alike is being strained to the limits. There are also very serious environmental concerns... the buffer zone between buildings and wetlands...and... high nitrate levels. (Public Hearing 27 June 1991)

Many other opponents also emphasized their longtime ties to the area and their concerns that the Church would distance the community from its past. Like the people of Leominster, they may have tied the tragedy in Orleans to a larger problem. They blamed the Community of Jesus for perpetuating this tragedy in the town.

**Success of Narrative in this Dialogue**

The dialogue involved two narratives that were both well known and well developed in American political thought: the narrative of tragic development and the narrative of religious persecution. The strong development of both narratives facilitated a discourse in which neither
side was overpowered. Practically, this discourse as also made possible by a process that took place in several venues: public Cape Cod Commission subcommittee meetings, town meetings, and the wider civic arena (interest-group meetings, letters to the editor). The town meeting and the subcommittee meetings were, by participants’ accounts, well facilitated. Various viewpoints were allowed equal and ample opportunities to speak and be heard. Storytelling was valued as a communicative practice, and the sharp edges of both narratives seemed to be softened by their frequent circulation in many fora. By the end of the process, both sides were voluntarily suggesting “compromise” and an end to “bad feelings.” Residents may have had some advantage with respect to communications; Orleans was the most homogenous of the three towns examined here. For whatever reasons, people felt that public meetings afforded them a fair chance to say their piece in their own words and be heard.

As the excerpted comments show, stories about the town and what was worth preserving, and about what it was like to belong to the Community were both welcomed as relevant to the dialogue which explicitly held “community character” as a value. There was also an emphasis on giving everyone a chance to speak, and the subcommittee scheduled additional meetings for the express purpose of giving everyone who wanted to talk a chance to do so. Thus, fairness was also stressed as a characteristic of Orleans. There was a lot of back-and-forth between participants, particularly the Community and the subcommittee: they took turns summarizing their concerns and how they felt they were responding to the concerns of others—giving each side a chance to hear their own concerns repeated by their opponents and to correct wrong perceptions. Likewise, the civic culture of the community allowed for back-and-forth between residents in the civic arena and particularly at town meeting.

In Orleans, the participants avoided what might have been an explosive and divisive battle of religious rights and tragic development, and instead seemed to honestly appreciate the arguments of the other, as was reflected by the church’s ability to make a proposal that appealed to the town, and the town’s willingness to accept the proposal even though it did not meet all they criteria (i.e. height) that they thought it would need to meet to please them. The activities that occurred at the demonstration, town meetings, and subcommittee meetings seem to have served a place-making function. People on both sides of the issue came to see their community as a tolerant place that could accommodate the needs of both groups.
In the church controversies’ place-making dialogue, the Cape Cod Commission subcommittee played an important role--but it was not at the center of every conversation. Town members had two fora (town meetings and more general civic arenas such as newspapers and interest group meetings) where they were able to discuss things among themselves.

The successful compromise between members of the Community of Jesus, the planning subcommittee, and residents of the town of Orleans makes a strong case for deliberation and attention to place in planning activities. Although the case did take a long time to resolve, it did not require the planners to take procedurally extraordinary (or extraordinarily expensive) measures.
Chapter Five

The network of locations, institutions, and people that make up a place is constitutional to the identity and well being of that place’s residents. Changes in a place—such as land-use changes, are often real adjustments and renegotiations of the community identity. Planners who seek to shape place must engage communities in these decisions. However, the theories of democracy that support participation efforts are often insufficient. Also, even quite knowledgeable planners may feel hamstrung by regulations that seem to limit public participation to strict deadlines, narrow agendas, and stylized public hearings.

Although starchy hearings are still the norm, some practicing planners and planning theorists have called for planners to embrace the still-evolving concept of deliberative democracy as a more useful way to understand democratic planning. Deliberation acknowledges and utilizes individuals’ ability to reason and reflect. In its ideal form, deliberation involves an open and equal dialogue between community members who work to understand the issues and agree on a collective course of action. Successful deliberation should lead to legitimacy among citizens, use of local knowledge, and direct address of citizens’ needs and preferences. At least in theory, participation also has direct benefits to citizen-participants in learning about civic issues and building community ties. Thus, civic capacity is also a quality of place that can be influenced by deliberation.

Although the alleged benefits of deliberation are appealing, the ideal of deliberation as a rationalistic process in which the best arguments prevail by force of reason has led other to criticize deliberative practice as narrow and exclusive, privileging citizens who are accustomed to making formal arguments and being treated with respect. Even more deeply, critics charge that accounts of deliberation as contest between disembodied equals ignore reality (no one is disembodied or non-contextualized) and naturalize worldviews shaped by (male) gender and (Western) culture, because these conditions are taken as the approximations of “disembodied equals. To incorporate more inclusive norms of speaking and listening, some theorists have suggested that the use of communicative norms such as personal narrative and storytelling should be incorporated into the practice of deliberation. The more widespread use of narrative forms of communication might allow traditionally marginalized groups to more easily put forward their (world)views in the deliberative process, by permitting them to a choice of
communicative practices, a chance to present their experiences in a potentially compelling way, and an opportunity demonstrate legitimate expertise in their own lived experience. Narrative could play an important role in some more inclusive version of democratic deliberation.

Narrative already has an important and established role in many social sciences, including policy analysis, and particularly planning. More generally, narratives are how people establish identity and understand the world. Personal identity is constructed out of life stories. Cultural narratives, particularly hegemonic social narratives, structure relationships in society. Policy narratives make sense of current events. Planners are charged with mediating between different narratives of place and promoting chosen narratives in projects and published plans.

In this thesis, I examined three land-use controversies in terms of competing narratives. Narrative analysis helped to make sense of the outcomes in terms of dominant and undeveloped narratives and the participants' relative ability to engage those narratives. For instance, in Leominster, a hegemonic policy narrative of tragic development pushed the planning process inexorably in one direction, despite the parties' inability to get along. Attention to the narratives at work also suggested how explicitly recognizing and drawing out narratives in the planning process, especially narratives of identity, might lead to different planning outcomes. For instance, disparate planning outcomes in Klickitat and in Orleans seem to be the result of process that engaged the community more or less directly in issues of community identity, and that led to one narrative being more or less well-developed than others. Overall, narrative analysis was a useful framework for understanding events. The considerations suggested by a narrative analysis are discussed in more detail below.

It also follows from my analysis of the role of narrative in planning conflicts that public participation through narrative-focused deliberation would significantly benefit planning outcomes. Deliberation that embraced narrative styles of communication and gave overt attention to policy narratives could help check the unexamined influence of dominant cultural narratives in the planning process. Embracing narrative would also increase the likelihood that the process was truly inclusive of diverse worldviews and experiences. The use of deliberation in land-use planning might also lead to many of the positive outcomes attributed to deliberative processes in general; it would build legitimacy, incorporate local knowledge, and address local needs. These benefits seem to have been demonstrated in the most deliberative of the three cases examined here, Orleans. Deliberative planning would also have the general benefit of promoting
civil society. Here, the Klickitat case seems to have diminished civil society (and even civility in general), while the Leominster had the potential to build civil society but failed to do so effectively. Finally, the practice of deliberative physical planning could a place-making event, in which the public sharing of narratives related to place would create rich and diverse stories about a place and its community of fate. This most important benefit holds even where communities ultimately do not reach a consensus about “their” story or even about what action to take.

The three cases suggest that the Jeffersonian ideal and the myth of the frontier are narratives that still play an important if unexamined role in American debates over land use. The cases also suggest that another narrative, the story of tragic development, is gaining dominance. The narrative of tragic development is attractive because, like a classical tragedy, it provides clear moral distinctions and in a certain way invites us to enjoy pathos. Hegemonic narratives like tragedy of the frontier myth are often convenient frames, with the capacity to simplify complex problems and spur people to action (often through moral outrage). But dominant narratives also frequently obscure important distinctions, and block out alternative ways of framing conflicts.

Important cultural narratives influenced all of the cases presented here. In two cases, hegemonic narratives dominated in the planning process. In the Sholan Farms controversy, the narrative of tragic development colonized the attention of the polis. The overriding imperative presented by this narrative enabled actors with otherwise dysfunctional relationships to coordinate their actions and preserve Sholan Farms. However, the imperative nature of the narrative also precluded meaningful debate on whether saving Sholan Farms was indeed the best course of action. In another case, the Klickitat Rail Trail, the powerful narrative of property rights defeated a simple and compelling policy-story about the benefits of a trail. Although the trail and property-rights narratives were not necessarily incompatible, the participants never really engaged each other. Instead, larger political forces made the decision and, not surprisingly, upheld the hegemonic narrative. A process that allowed participants to engage the narratives more fully might have called out the influence of the dominant narratives more explicitly and employed them constructively, without allowing their unexamined influence to control the planning process. The more careful examination of narrative might also have led to the more full development of the narrative supporting the trail, which could have drawn on and cultivated norms of cooperation and obligation to broad community interests. The Orleans case,
in which the narrative of tragic development and a narrative of religious persecution were
accommodated in a compromise, despite both narratives’ potentially controlling influence. This
outcome demonstrated how well developed narratives facilitate discourse, and how a planning
process that engages important narratives can lead to solutions even in important decisions about
identity and the future of a place. Although dominant narratives are powerful, they need not
overwhelm the planning process.

The Sholan Farms case also demonstrated how narrative analysis might be useful even
when no overt conflict is present. In Leominster, a dominating narrative precluded a clear
examination of the costs and benefits of preserving the orchard. In this case, a deliberative
planning process might have allowed participants to examine the narrative of tragic development
more critically and to develop its alternatives. The advantage of examining these controversies
in would not have necessarily led to a different conclusion, but it would have introduced that
possibility. It might also have allowed the planning process to function as a more constructive
place-making activity; the many people who became involved in the Sholan Farms controversy
might have come away with a clarified—and probably quite positive—sense of community,
rather than a sense that the Sholan Farms issue was a brush with disaster. Narrative analysis can
help to call out the influence of dominant narratives, and challenge planners and communities to
elaborate upon or even discard such simplistic frameworks.

The cases also suggest that in successful deliberations, participants directly interact with the
narratives of other participants. Because narratives are socially constructed, this exchange of
stories almost inevitably leads to the elaboration and modification of the narratives. Although
change does not necessarily bring communities closer to agreement, in many cases it may lead
different groups to find more room in their worldview for the experiences of other groups. This
is particularly likely when different groups begin with narratives that are fairly well developed
(for instance, a story rather than a critique).

The most detailed analysis presented here, that of the Klickitat Rail Trail controversy,
illustrated how an inability to engage the narratives of the other might make a question very
difficult to resolve. In Klickitat, this failure to engage was in large part the result of the planning
agency’s well-intentioned efforts to “fix” everyone’s problems and mediate between all the
different interests. Because the planning agency was naturally unable to solve everyone’s
problems, the case became deadlocked. In contrast, the more successfully resolved controversy in Orleans was negotiated in several different fora. No single agency was at the center of all discourse. Instead, community members were able to engage each others’ narratives directly in multiple venues. This process also explicitly upheld “community character” as an important consideration, and as a result stories were valued as “evidence.” The process was more able to accommodate concerns about community character exactly because a single planning agency was not responsible for resolving every problem raised in the planning process.

The experiences of Klickitat and Orleans also illustrate the ways in which public deliberation over place is itself a place-making activity. As people listen to the narratives of other community members and place themselves in relationship to the identities of other community members and their stories change, the place—the web of cultural and relationships that define place—are also transformed. In Orleans, community residents opposed to the church set an absolute height limit on buildings; to go beyond that limit would, they felt, signify the triumph of a tragic development. However, they later praised a new church design that exceeded this height. A part of their narrative had changed to accommodate their neighbors in the Community of Jesus, and a new chapter about Orleans was added: Orleans is a tolerant place. In Klickitat, public participation around planning seems to also have cemented a (negative) sense of place; Klickitat County became more and more a place of endless conflict: “every new idea comes to this.” A planning process that acknowledged that planning narratives and the process of planning also shape a sense of place could be much more successful in constructive place-making, even where consensus was not the ultimate result.

**Where to begin?**

Public deliberation requires more investment than other processes meant merely to collect and aggregate opinions. A process that elicits and values narrative will also require more time and greater risk-taking on the part of the planner. However, these efforts may not be more expensive than prolonged disputes, reversals of plans, and litigation. They might also provide a lot more to the community in terms of greater legitimacy, more responsive planning outcomes, stronger civic values, and a sense of place and community. The process of deliberation can be an important place-making activity.
Although many authors claim to have observed inclusive deliberations (for example, Patsy Healey and Judith Innes), actual accounts of the practice of narrative-focused deliberation are as rare as tape recordings of “ideal speech.” Communities might begin narrative-focused deliberation by hiring a narrative mediator (if they could find one) and committing henceforth to a narrative-based deliberative planning process. But where the political will is lacking for such investments, planners must begin by working to make existing practices more collaborative. For instance, public meetings might include small-group sessions in which people are invited to talk about why an issue concerns them, or how they would ideally see it resolved (this method was suggested in Sandercock and Forsyth 1992 and described by Healey 1998). More time might be allowed for public events (as was done in Orleans) so that everyone has a chance to speak. Planners may attempt to move the conversation closer to ideal (equal) narratives by doing away with gavels and raised speaker’s platforms, and instead encouraging simple norms of respectful listening and interaction. Planners might ask each speaker to begin by repeating and paraphrasing one key point of the previous speaker, and they might limit each speaker to two or three comments until everyone has spoken that number of times. Iris Marion Young has even suggested that deliberation should include norms of caretaking such as sharing food (1996).

The planner may also begin in their own work by paying closer attention to the narratives that underlie different positions in planning debates. Where one narrative seems undeveloped, the planner might ask questions to flesh out that story. Where there is no opposing narrative, the planner might begin to imagine one. And where the stories being told by one side don’t seem to make sense or fit the facts that the planner perceives, she might pay close attention to that story and try to understand why it does make sense and seem important to those who tell it.

Planners may also focus on narrative by paying close attention to the stories they tell in meetings and in written documents. Are planner’s stories compelling or uninteresting? Do they draw on the popular narratives of the place where the planner works? What voice and tone are adopted in the planner’s stories? Who is the actor—the planner or the community? By using compelling and active stories, the planner may find that more people are drawn to the work of the planner; poorly articulated stories may diminish planners’ impacts. For example, Alison Tett and Jeanne Wolfe (1990) examined a selection of city plans from major Canadian cities and found that in published communication, planners were not very compelling. The planners’ voice was usually passive and non-transactive, distancing the authors from the text to give it
“weighty authority and sanitized legitimacy.” At the same time, planning documents described change as agent-less: for example, “business centers will continue to grow and the suburban shopping centers will proliferate” (Toronto 1963 quoted in Tett and Wolfe). This description undermines a key concept of planning, that the future can be affected. Instead, descriptions of agent-less change suggest that things just happen. The planner’s stories seemed to undermine themselves. In somewhat similar research, anthropologist Caroline Tauxe (1996, 1993) provided an in-depth account of the ways in which planners may use language to marginalize rural residents in public planning meetings. In her research, Tauxe observed that in public, planners’ rational-bureaucratic style of speaking was privileged while local ways of talking and telling stories were marginalized. Not surprisingly, planners also imposed a development plan strongly against the wishes of rural residents. Local narratives were not respected. In both Tauxe’s and Tett and Wolfe’s investigations, planners presented future narratives that were not “good stories”—they either did not fit with current stories of how things are and should be, or they did not present a compelling narrative. By becoming aware of how their verbal and written stories read, planners can create plans that are more compelling, and that mesh with existing narratives. Planners might find that their own plans (stories) make a deeper impression in the minds of the public if planners themselves are more aware of stories.

Efforts to fit deliberation into existing practices fit with Innes’ (2000) call to adapt current institutions. This move would also conform with my sense (grounded in the history of planning) that the shift to collaborative planning is not likely to occur by “converting” public agencies, any more than previous reform efforts at reform have converted technical-bureaucratic planning agencies. Instead, change seems likely to incrementally and from the bottom-up, by trying narrative-based ventures and seeing them work. And of course, narrative planning can be promoted by perpetuating stories among planners about the successes of narrative deliberation.
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