

THE BATTLE OF VICTORY FIELD: A STUDY OF  
SUBURBAN LAND USE, DECISION-MAKING

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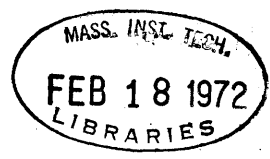
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ABSTRACTTHE BATTLE OF VICTORY FIELD: A STUDY OF  
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Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
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Increasingly, attention has been focussed on the suburbs as a source of land for low- and middle-income housing. Despite widespread recognition that suburbia is a logical relief valve for the crowded and overburdened central cities, developers have been thwarted in efforts to construct low- and middle-income housing in suburban locations by conservative land use measures which have been enacted by even the most "liberal" suburbs.

This paper seeks to explain the failure of a suburban community to enact land use policies in accordance with the public interest. Suburban land use decision-making is analyzed in terms of the structure of a suburban government (i.e., weak mayor, large number of aldermen elected from a ward base, nonpartisan form of election, weak bureaucracy). These structural elements are seen as closely related to three basic philosophical concerns of suburbia: nonpartisanship, neighborhoodism and grassroots democracy. The suburban concern for these ideals of government is strongly reflected in the decentralized and fragmented decision-making process which enables partial interests to triumph over a more generalized community-wide goal such as fulfilling the need for low- and middle-income housing.

We examine a specific land use issue in Newton, Massachusetts; the case study of the land use decision-making process centers on a parcel of land called Victory Field in the village of Nonantum, one of the oldest neighborhoods in Newton. The study of Victory Field offers evidence in support of a view of suburban decision-making as a process designed to encourage maximum neighborhood influence at the expense of implementation of generalized goals.

The case study traces the awarding of a sizable piece of city-owned land to an American Legion Post for the purpose of building a clubhouse despite the efforts of city agencies to reserve the land for

the construction of low- and middle-income housing. It details the importance of neighborhood influence in determining the disposition of the land and indicates the minor role assigned to planning in the decision-making process.

The results of the research study may be of value on three levels:

- (1) as a guide to developers who hope to build low- and middle-income housing in Newton;
- (2) as an indication of the importance of understanding the political structure of suburban governments in order to influence land use decision-making processes;
- (3) as an illustration of the tensions that exist between the need for centralized planning and implementation to cope with the complex problems of modern society and the inherent reluctance of suburbanites to surrender their traditional prerogatives of grassroots democracy and neighborhood control.

Thesis Supervisor: Arthur P. Solomon

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This thesis is dedicated to my husband  
for his unfailing encouragement, support  
and love.

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, supposedly liberal suburban communities have been the scene of conservative land use decisions generally aimed at maintaining the status quo and having the effect of barring construction of low- and middle-income housing within their boundaries. This thesis offers a hypothesis which seeks to explain some of the reasons for this apparent anomaly. After setting forth the hypothesis, we will examine a specific land use issue in Newton, Massachusetts, to see if it provides evidence in support of our case.

The main argument set forth in this paper is that concepts of neighborhoodism, grassroots democracy and nonpartisanship as embodied in suburban political structure result in a decentralized and fragmented decision-making process which facilitates neighborhood or minority control in land use issues. The power that can accrue to a neighborhood or special interest group is partly a function of widespread political apathy among middle- and upper middle-class residents which, in the context of a local government based on neighborhoodism, grassroots democracy and nonpartisanship, creates a partial power vacuum. This vacuum tends to be filled by the more conservative elements in a community. Thus, land use decisions in an affluent, liberal suburb can reflect the views and values of a conservative segment of the community and can result in the defeat of the public interest.

In Chapter One we will define and examine the concepts of neighborhoodism, grassroots democracy and nonpartisanship since it is these concepts which form the philosophical underpinnings for much of modern suburban political life. Chapter Two will analyze Newton's political structure in terms of the three ideals and will see to what extent they are reflected in the decision-making processes of the community. In Chapter Three we provide historical background for the case study of land use decision-making at Victory Field and discuss the social, political and economic characteristics of the neighborhood in which the field lies. Chapter Four presents the groups who were interested in gaining control of Victory Field and traces the decision-making process through the neighborhood, the executive branch and the legislative branch. The results of the decision-making process at Victory Field are weighed in terms of the public interest. The final chapter attempts to evaluate the case study as evidence in support of the original hypothesis. The limitations and value of the study are analyzed. And, finally, note is taken of some impending changes in the political structure of Newton.

#### Methodology

In addition to extensive reading of the literature on modern local government, especially suburban government, the author has approached the research connected with the case study of Newton from the vantage point of participant-observation. As a consultant to the Newton Housing Authority during the early part of 1971 and, as of

November, 1971, a member of the Authority, the author has some specific first-hand knowledge of the decision-making process relating to Victory Field.

The bulk of the research on Victory Field was completed prior to the author's appointment as a member of the Authority, and the interviews, conversations and listening that comprised a basic part of the research were accomplished during a period when the writer was still a relatively anonymous figure at City Hall. Because of the American Legion's connection with many officials in Newton there was some reluctance to discuss the matter of Victory Field but, thanks to the intervention of some key people at City Hall who are friends of the writer, interviews were granted.

The interviews with key actors were supplemented by a review of the newspaper coverage of the events and by a reading of the city documents pertaining to the issue.



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE ROOTS OF SUBURBAN POLITICAL STRUCTURE

The diversity of political activity in American suburbs reflects varying characteristics of size, location, population and resources found in those municipalities which are lumped together under the rubric of "suburbia". There are, however, certain common threads which characterize suburban political thought which may provide a useful framework for examining suburban decision-making. These commonalities are nonpartisanship, grassroots democracy and neighborhoodism; they form the idealized setting for suburban decision-making. Their common acceptance has roots in the earliest colonial settlements and they have shaped some of the most distinctive aspects of twentieth century suburban political life.

It is almost unamerican to question the value of creating governmental forms that provide for the highest degree of individual participation and neighborhood expression in a system free of party politics. These ideals represent the highest expression of the middle-class concept of "good government" and it is natural that they find fervent support in suburbia, the modern nesting place of the middle class.

In large urban centers, citizens bemoan the lack of neighborhood identity, the inability of the average citizen to participate in a meaningful way in the political process, and the power of political parties to determine the course of government. There is a general

feeling that the ills of big city politics derive in large part from the very size of the governing unit and that small units of government are better just because they are smaller.<sup>1</sup> The underlying assumption is that in a smaller unit the citizen will be able to give full expression to the ideals of government embodied in the tenets of grassroots democracy, neighborhoodism and nonpartisanship. A city dweller who moves to suburbia comes armed with the expectation of being part of a more personalized and manageable political unit in which he will have a direct and potent voice in the workings of the system, especially in those areas of government decision-making which have an immediate and direct impact on him. He feels his move to suburbia brings him into close communion with certain hallowed ideals of American political life; the tenacity with which he and his fellow suburbanites cling to these ideals is a basic fact of modern suburban political life.

#### Grassroots Democracy

Grassroots democracy is as American as Mom's apple pie or the World Series. It conjures up pictures of Norman Rockwell's archetypal American men and women striding into a local one-room schoolhouse to poke a handwritten ballot through a slot into a vote box. Through some mysterious alchemy, these millions of "yeas" and "nays" are transformed into something called the "will of the people" and, in due course, this becomes the law of the land.<sup>2</sup>

Grassroots democracy is deeply embedded in the mainstream of American political thought. Roscoe Martin observes that "one who

rejects or ignores a grassroots incantation does so at his own peril, for the public mind does not entertain the alternative of grassroots fallibility."<sup>3</sup> The grassroots philosophy emphasizes the individual's role in governing himself. The body politic is seen as an agglomeration of individual opinions which ultimately select the "right" course of action. Government exists to translate the wishes of the people into appropriate action but the impetus for the action rightfully resides in the people themselves. A responsive government is one which gives the fullest opportunity for the direct implementation of the people's wishes.

The philosophy is based on two premises: (1) that people are interested in participating in local government, and (2) that people are capable of intelligent, informed participation. The second point hinges on the first. It is generally accepted that anybody can participate effectively in exercising his share of governmental power whether it be casting a vote for mayor or passing on a new city charter or participating in a town meeting. But the crucial question is whether most people are interested in assuming the responsibilities of informed participation in local politics. This question will be explored in later sections of this paper. For now, it is important only to identify this as a key element in the effective operation of a governmental system based on grassroots democracy.

In suburbia there is a tantalizing vision of the ideal (i.e., a system in which each citizen participates and has some degree of control over governmental actions which bear on his life). And despite

the fact that the size and complexity of modern municipal government mitigates against effective grassroots decision-making, there is a reluctance to move away from patterns of government which are historically and conceptually pleasing to suburban dwellers. One of the motives which impels people away from the central city towards the suburbs is a desire to recapture the advantages of smaller scale community living where one may experience the joys of direct participation in local government, an experience that is increasingly rare in our larger urban centers. Although many suburban communities are good-sized cities in their own right, their residents cling to forms of government that encourage direct participation and representation of the citizenry although these forms may be unsuited to the demands of a large suburb.

The preference for small-scale government leads to a natural resistance to any drive to combine two or more suburbs into a larger political system which presumably would be more efficient and capable of coordinating such activities as schools, police, fire protection. Citizens see this as a dilution of the individual's capacity to affect government because, as the political unit increases in size, the individual's power tends to diminish and direct participation becomes less meaningful.

The workings of grassroots democracy are vigorously defended and preserved in suburban communities. The insistence on the right of the individual to participate in government is defended even in communities where the great majority of the citizenry choose not to

exercise the right. Perhaps the importance of the philosophy of grassroots democracy lies in the possibility of exerting political influence, not in the actual use of political influence. Whether this is true or not, the importance of the concept as a determinant of suburban political structure should not be underestimated.

### Neighborhoodism

There are almost as many definitions of what constitutes a neighborhood as there are political scientists, sociologists and planners to formulate definitions. Some definitions emphasize one or another characteristics of a neighborhood: its social basis or its physical identity or its political nature. Milton Kotler, in Neighborhood Government: The Local Foundations of Political Life, defines a neighborhood as a "political settlement of small territory and familiar association whose absolute property is its capacity for deliberative democracy."<sup>4</sup> The concept of a neighborhood as a "political settlement" emphasizes an aspect which tends to be undervalued in many analyses of suburban neighborhoods but which will form the focus of the discussion of neighborhoods in this paper.

Many modern neighborhoods have roots in early village and town settlements which were ultimately incorporated into the dominant political unit in the area. For instance, Germantown, a neighborhood in Philadelphia, was, until the middle of the nineteenth century when it was annexed by Philadelphia, an independent political unit.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Roxbury existed as a self-governing entity for 238 years until it was incorporated into the City of Boston.<sup>6</sup>

The historical basis for existing neighborhoods is not a phenomenon restricted to cities of the size of Philadelphia and Boston. Many medium-sized and large suburbs are composed of territory which originally comprised several smaller villages and towns.

A suburban neighborhood need not have an historical origin. A new town, Reston, Virginia, has been purposefully designed to encourage the growth of neighborhood units; there is a sectioning off of the residential areas in the master plan for the town. A neighborhood can grow up as a result of natural boundaries or barriers which delineate an area. Similarly, man-made barriers such as highways can serve as a force for the creation--or the destruction--of neighborhoods. Neighborhoods can develop around a central point of attraction such as a college or a hospital. The Pill Hill neighborhood in Brookline is located in close proximity to some of Boston's major medical institutions, a contributing factor to the concentration of physicians in the neighborhood. And the homogeneity of its residents helps to establish Pill Hill as a specific neighborhood.

Neighborhoods have names: Beacon Hill, Collegetown, Newton Centre, Needham Heights. Neighborhoods also have boundaries, although these are not always easily identifiable. As Kotler notes in discussing neighborhoods,

Administrators and scholars,...have great difficulty in locating its territory. Some turn to techniques used in market research to determine its boundaries; others to sociometric and racial indices; still others to communication theory. Some look for social watersheds, others for indicators of local power.<sup>7</sup>

He concludes that the "most sensible way to locate the neighborhood is to ask people where it is."<sup>8</sup> Sometimes political jurisdictions such as wards and precinct lines help define neighborhoods boundaries.

Modern urbanologists are increasingly concerned with city neighborhoods as targets for economic intervention or as units for organizing citizen participation in local government. Sociologists have long stressed the importance of belonging to a neighborhood as a mechanism for combating the alienation of big city life. Less attention has been paid to the neighborhood in suburbia. People who study suburbs sometimes equate "neighborhood" with "suburb" and, in some cases, a small suburb is, indeed, a neighborhood. However, most suburbs are not small and, therefore, most suburbs are composed of groups of neighborhoods in the manner of large cities.

Suburban neighborhoods are heterogeneous, even those contained within a single community. An affluent bedroom community can have neighborhoods that do not remotely fit the image of the suburb as a whole. It is not unusual to find "pockets of poverty" consisting of welfare recipients or marginally poor people in the midst--or, more generally, on the edges--of affluent communities. Similarly, different ethnic or religious enclaves or neighborhoods can exist in a suburb. A community that is characterized by outsiders as a WASP suburb may include within its boundaries working-class, Catholic neighborhoods.

The point is that we are much more likely to categorize a suburb, to paste a label on it, than a city. Nobody labels Atlanta or Denver as "affluent" or "liberal" or "working-class". We recognize

and accept the heterogeneity that exists within big cities and, as a matter of fact, we stress these differences. When we turn to the suburbs, we tend to gloss over differences within a community.

In actuality, a neighborhood can be a strong point of loyalty and concern in a suburb. The investment of home owners in property creates a feeling of "turf". And the economic stake of a resident in his neighborhood tends to bind together residents of an area into a group with common interests and objectives, at least in regard to the neighborhood. A neighborhood might band together to prevent a highway from coming through or to fight the construction of an industrial or residential development which is viewed as undesirable. It is not uncommon for neighborhood interests to be at odds with community-wide interests--a fact which is accepted dogma in big cities but less widely appreciated in the suburbs because of the tendency of outside investigators to ignore neighborhood differentiations that can exist in a suburban community.

A large suburb is really too big to satisfy people's innate needs for social and political identity and participation. So, suburbanites, like city-dwellers, form themselves into smaller, more manageable units (i.e., neighborhoods).<sup>9</sup> The "clout" of a particular neighborhood can vary in any given political situation and there is, of course, considerable variations among different neighborhoods in any one suburb.

A neighborhood will tend to become most politically aroused in response to any invasion of its "turf" by the larger community. Thus,



a local land use issue is likely to arouse and unite a neighborhood to exert the fullest measure of its political influence. In the absence of such an issue, neighborhood political power is likely to remain dormant except in certain neighborhoods which contain sizable numbers of regular political actors. But, in middle-class suburbs, most citizens are not actively involved in local politics on a regular basis and most neighborhoods are only irregularly involved in local politics except in the most cursory and routinized manner.

But the lack of ongoing, continuous political involvement should not obscure the existence of political power on the neighborhood level in the suburbs and the fact that, given an issue of importance to the neighborhood, this power can be hauled out, dusted off and wielded with some degree of effectiveness.

The structure of many suburban governments gives explicit recognition to neighborhoodism. Ward and precinct lines often conform to neighborhood boundaries. The retention of ward aldermen or representatives in place of or combined with at-large representatives recognizes the importance of neighborhood political divisions within a suburb. Where this formal affirmation of neighborhood lines does not exist, informal, ad hoc neighborhood organizations tend to develop around specific issues or interests--an improvement society, a neighborhood woman's club, a PTA.

Whether neighborhood representation is formally incorporated into the structure of suburban government can be a function of the historical development of the town or city. For instance, if several

villages or small settlements were incorporated into a larger unit, often the smaller units insisted on direct representation in the governing council; the patterns of representation of many modern suburban governments, particularly in the northeastern part of the country, can be traced back to a grouping of colonial settlements which eventually formed the suburb.<sup>10</sup>

The tendency for people to group themselves into neighborhood units for political and social participation is a fact of modern city and suburban life that is closely related to the concern for preserving the tradition of grassroots democracy. John Dewey noted that "democracy must begin at home and its home is the neighborhood community."<sup>11</sup> The two exist together as part of a basic dichotomy which characterizes American society--a thrust forwards toward the big, the mechanized, the centralized, and yet a reluctance to depart from the traditions of individualism and small-scale living, legacies from the past which continue to have an important influence in our modern world.

#### Nonpartisanship

Nonpartisan politics characterize over 60 per cent of cities of over 5,000 population in the United States and seem to have little relationship to the size of the city.<sup>12</sup> Banfield and Wilson define a nonpartisan system as one in which no party affiliation accompanies a candidate's name on the ballot. A nonpartisan electoral system prevails in such strongholds of political party activity as Boston, New York and Chicago--cities in which the influence of one or both major parties is considerable.

Nonpartisanship in suburbia is not merely a formal mechanism used to keep political party influence out of local decision-making nor is it merely an expression of the middle-class reform ethos which sponsored the concept as part of a general program of big city reform at the beginning of the twentieth century. If viewed in that light, suburban nonpartisanship is hardly distinguishable in antecedents or practice from its counterparts in big cities and would merit no further mention in this paper.

In actuality, the suburban brand of nonpartisanship is more aptly called "antipartisanship", implying not just a choosing of one particular mechanism of political life over another (i.e., unaffiliated candidates instead of a party-related slate). Rather, it seems that the suburban rejection of political party government at the local level is an antagonistic response to partisanism and its underlying assumptions. As Robert Wood observes, suburbanites are reluctant to admit that there may be "persistent cleavages in the electorate" of their community. And going one step further, he notes an "ethical disapproval of permanent group collaboration as an appropriate means for settling public disputes."<sup>13</sup>

Harking back to the previous discussions of grassroots democracy and neighborhoodism, one would logically expect suburbanites to display antipathy towards a political mechanism that interferes with or guides the individual in the exercise of his public responsibilities. Such a mechanism runs counter to the trend towards the individual exercise of civic choice and the natural social and political groupings

that suburbanites form for themselves.

Underlying the antagonism to party is confidence and trust in the ability of ordinary citizens to govern themselves without formal organization and direction. Furthermore, there is a strong assumption that this relatively unstructured form of direct democracy is the highest form of political good. Party politics could only intrude an unnecessary and potentially harmful layer between the electorate and government.

Suburban nonpartisanship rejects the notion of local politics as a tug of war among private interests and sees it instead as a "disinterested effort to discover what is best for the community as a whole."<sup>14</sup> In this context, it is as wrong to decide an issue on the basis of party politics as it is to decide it on private-regarding as distinguished from community-regarding grounds.

Although suburbanites are generally committed to direct democracy unencumbered by party involvements, the Democratic and Republican parties have not beat a hasty retreat from suburbia. Aside from efforts on behalf of state and national candidates, the major parties exercise varying degrees of influence in local politics. But much party activity in the suburbs is hidden or unrecognized because of the unwillingness of suburban residents to acknowledge the presence of party influence in local affairs.

In city politics, party organizations are an important mechanism for centralizing authority. Professional politicians can be expected to understand governmental processes, to play an important role

in managing issues and, ultimately, to be accountable for their performances. Suburbia, in rejecting party politics, puts its faith in nonpartisan amateurs to perform the functions that professionals perform in big cities. Elected representatives are, with few exceptions, part-time officeholders whose primary orientation is not political. The civic-minded lawyer or insurance agent, the middle-class businessman or banker replace professional politicians in the governing councils of suburbia. Many mayors serve on a part-time basis, even in cities of substantial population.

The substitution of amateurs for professionals in the political arena gives suburban politics the outward form of morality untainted by the corruption and self-serving motives that characterized big city politics in the early part of the century and that remain, at least in the suburban mind, as a residue in even the most reformed big cities.

More importantly, government by amateurs fits the suburban political ethic in which a system that rejects professional politicians in favor of ordinary citizen representatives is in keeping with the notion that plain folks can and should govern themselves with a minimum of institutional interference.

#### The Forms That Follow

No two suburban governing systems are identical; in addition to other variables, each differs in the degree to which it invokes the three basic tenets which this paper sets forth as the philosophical basis for suburban political activity. But there are a number of

structural characteristics reflecting a preoccupation with grassroots democracy, neighborhoodism and nonpartisanship which characterize many suburban political systems to the extent that they may form a basis for further analysis.

A common characteristic is the existence of a weak executive branch in relation to the legislative arm. The reluctance to vest significant power in a central authority at the cost of diluting individual and neighborhood power insures maximum weight to the opinions of the electorate and their direct representatives. It is a natural result of a philosophy which sees the individual as the ultimate repository of power and supports the axiom that "government is best which governs least." The most extreme example of deification of the electorate is the town meeting form of government which still exists in many parts of New England.

Secondly, there is, in many suburban communities, an absence of institutional mechanisms, such as political parties, to centralize power. The widespread feeling in suburbia is that local issues should be decided strictly on their merits, without the "taint" of party pressures. After all, there is no Republican or Democratic way to install street lights! The result of this attitude is that political parties appear to be weak at the local level; what influence they wield is generally behind the scenes. The lack of parties and professional politicians for handling basic disagreements within a community presupposes either that the workings of the system itself will be able to resolve any differences that arise or that no basic differences exist.

Thirdly, one notes a general lack of power and authority for the professional bureaucracy. The existence of a powerful bureaucracy is at odds with the premise that power rightfully resides in the body politic which has the right and the responsibility for conducting the business of government. The rejection of professional inputs into the process of government leads to a denigration of the concept of centralized planning and results in ad hoc decision-making.

Finally, suburban council systems often feature extreme responsiveness to the citizenry. Many aldermen or councilmen are still elected on a ward basis. The workings of the system provide the closest approximation to direct citizen participation in the conduct of government and is conceptually pleasing to suburbanites. It satisfies the urge for a maximum feasible amount of grassroots democracy, keeping government as close to the people as is practical in modern society. It fulfills an innate desire for small, manageable forms of government, maintaining the illusion (or perhaps the reality) of a citizen's ability to influence the course of government.

The following chapter will focus on a large suburban community, Newton, Massachusetts, and will analyze its political structure and decision-making process to see how closely it fits the model of a government based on neighborhoodism, nonpartisanship and grassroots democracy. We will attempt to show how and why Newton's form of government results in decentralized and fragmented decision-making, encouraging neighborhood control in land use issues.

FOOTNOTES--CHAPTER ONE

<sup>1</sup> Robert C. Wood, Suburbia (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959), p. 158.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 282.

<sup>3</sup> Roscoe Martin, Grassroots Government (University of Alabama, 1957), p. 5, quoted in Robert C. Wood, Suburbia, p. 259.

<sup>4</sup> (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969), p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>9</sup> Digby E. Baltzell, Philadelphia Gentleman (New York: Free Press, 1958), cited in Milton Kotler, Neighborhood Government, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> John Dewey, The Public and Its Problems (New York: 1927), p. 215, quoted in Robert C. Wood, Suburbia, p. 263.

<sup>12</sup> Edward C. Banfield and James O. Wilson, City Politics (New York: Random House, 1963), p. 151.

<sup>13</sup> Wood, Suburbia, p. 155.

<sup>14</sup> Banfield and Wilson, City Politics, p. 154.



CHAPTER TWOGRASSROOTS IN THE GARDEN CITY

Newton, the eighth largest city in Massachusetts, with a population of 91,066, is the largest suburb of Boston. It has the reputation for being an extremely liberal community, a reputation based on the high income of its residents, an innovative and expensive school system, a high percentage of Jewish residents, and a high proportion of college-educated people.<sup>1</sup> Even if one accepts these criteria as valid indices of liberalism as we do, it is still worth examining them to make sure that the underpinnings of liberalism are facts and not myths.

The city's median family income is the fourth highest in Massachusetts; it was \$13,000 in 1968. Over 48,000 people (52.6 per cent of the population) lived in households with incomes exceeding \$12,667. As one might expect, the real estate values in the community reflected the high income level; the average cost of a home in Newton was over \$40,000 in 1968.<sup>2</sup>

The Newton school system is widely acknowledged to be among the model systems in the country; \$1,160 per child was expended by the city on education last year compared to \$913 per child in Boston. Each year, approximately 83 per cent of the 1,500 high school graduates go on to college. The current tax rate, \$121.60 per \$1,000, up almost 100 per cent in the past decade, is largely a function of increased school

spending; the city earmarks 48 per cent of its total budget for school-related spending.<sup>3</sup>

Middle-class Jews have long been considered among the most liberal segments of any population group and Newton has a high percentage of Jewish residents--approximately 35 per cent. The remaining population is about equally divided between Catholics and Protestants.

Almost a quarter of the adult population in the city is college-educated compared to a national figure of 9.6 per cent. Closely related to the pattern of extensive college education is the concentration of professionals in Newton: 21.4 per cent compared with 14.6 per cent in the Boston SMSA.<sup>4</sup>

The statistics lend credence to the acceptance of Newton's liberal orientation. When one adds to the picture of affluence and education Newton's overwhelming support of the liberal Jesuit priest, Father Robert Drinan, in a recent Congressional election and the city's leadership in anti-war activity and "exuberant civil rights advocacy", there is little doubt that the liberal label is an appropriate one.<sup>5</sup>

The general aptness of the affluent-liberal image of Newton is not genuinely arguable. However, it does tend to mask certain demographic facts of Newton life such as:

- An estimated 3,200 families earned less than \$6,000 in 1970.
- There are over 800 substandard dwelling units in Newton.
- In 1970, there were more than 1,000 families on welfare.
- Six per cent of Newton's residents had income under \$3,000 last year.
- Two elementary schools qualify for Title One supplementary funds.<sup>6</sup>

These figures help to establish the variety of income levels that exists in the city and bring into focus certain corollaries attendant upon income variation. For instance, low-income people are not notably liberal in their political outlook. The level of education among low-income persons is lower than among more affluent groups. Ethnic considerations may be of greater importance to lower middle-class and working-class people.

The existence of wide income, occupational and educational differentials within Newton tends to be overlooked in discussing the city's political orientation; observers look at Newton and see 91,000 rich, liberal, white-collar residents.<sup>7</sup> The kind of generalization which stamps Newton as "affluent" and "liberal" emphasizes a homogeneity which could not realistically exist in any city of almost 100,000 people and which has never existed in the entire history of Newton.

#### Newton: A Federation of Villages

Present-day Newton is a fair reflection of colonial Newton in terms of the structure of the city. The town of Newton was founded in 1688 as a joining together of a number of isolated villages and settlements. It was incorporated as a city in 1873. Subsequent growth maintained the early settlements, created others, and ultimately filled in the interstices. Of the twelve or fourteen original villages (there is some disagreement as to the exact number), no one became dominant and assumed a traditional role as the focal point of the city. Rather, each sought to maintain its identity within the wider community.

The original villages of Newton differed one from the other. Some were farming settlements, several were manufacturing centers, others were residential areas. A number of the villages developed around a specific manufacturing enterprise; a saw mill established in 1688 formed the nucleus for Upper Falls, an iron works figured prominently in the growth of Lower Falls. In Nonantum, cloth manufacturing attracted residents and enabled the settlement to prosper. In many cases, the original village names (some with Indian associations from the local tribes) have carried down through the years: Nonantum, Waban, Upper Falls. Some of the original areas have been absorbed into larger units but still delineate neighborhood areas; these include Hunnewell Hill, Farlow Hill, Silver Lake.

It is not uncommon for a Newtonite to respond to the question "Where are you from?" by naming his village affiliation rather than the city. Thus, many residents think of themselves in terms of a particular part of the city--Auburndale, West Newton, Oak Hill--as well as the city as a whole.

Early Newton government was by town meeting, the last of which was held in 1873, approving the change from township to city. The first city charter, modelled after the charters of other Massachusetts towns and cities, provided for seven wards and a bicameral legislative system stressing ward representation. The mayor's term of office was for one year.

The ward system of representation was explicit recognition of the existence of village entities within the city; ward lines were

drawn in a manner that perpetuated village identity. Villages were kept intact within ward boundaries; ward lines did not cross village lines.

A number of Newton's villages retain the demographic characteristics which existed in colonial days. For instance, King's Handbook of Newton (1889) talks of Nonantum's "foreign industrial population" and terms the community a "prosperous manufacturing village".<sup>8</sup> Today, Nonantum is still a working-class and lower middle-class community with a high percentage of foreign-born or first generation residents. Similarly, Waban was known as a quiet area of substantial homes; the village still retains this pleasant residential character.<sup>9</sup>

It seems clear that Newton's structure in 1971 owes much to historical antecedents. The shape and strength of the villages are direct legacies of the original formation of the town and, later, the city. This heritage has had a strong influence on modern Newton's political form.

#### The Governance of Newton

Newton's political system embodies the characteristics of local government which we have associated with ideals of neighborhoodism, grassroots democracy and nonpartisanship. We hope to make an explicit connection between the three philosophical concerns, the structure of the government based on these concerns, and the decision-making process in the city. The discussion will analyze Newton's political system under three headings: (1) the institutions of government; (2) the informal structure; and (3) decision-making.

The governing system in the city is a weak mayor/strong council structure and an analysis of it can best proceed by focussing first on the structure and functions of the executive office and then on the legislative branch.

Newton has had a few strong mayors in its history but they have wielded power in spite of severe limitations imposed on them by the city charter.<sup>10</sup> On paper, the mayor's office is quite weak; as a matter of fact, until the recent charter revision, Newton thought so lightly of the office that it was perfectly permissible and legal for the mayor to serve on a part-time basis!

One significant gauge of power for an executive is the degree of autonomy given him in making appointments. In Newton, the mayor lacks independent appointive powers; several key appointments are completely removed from his jurisdiction. The city clerk, collector, auditor and treasurer are chosen by the Board of Aldermen. Moreover, the Board has the right to confirm or reject the mayor's appointments to numerous commissions and authorities as well as city departments. Most terms of appointment are staggered so a newly-elected mayor may initially have few opportunities to effect personnel changes in city bodies such as the Renewal Authority or the Planning Board.

The mayor has the right to veto actions by the Board of Aldermen, but this is a power that has seldom been invoked. According to the City Clerk, the present incumbent has vetoed measures twice in the past six years.<sup>11</sup> The Board of Aldermen may override the mayor's veto by a two-thirds majority.

The mayor is responsible for presenting a budget to the Board of Aldermen for approval. Approval is not an automatic happening. Increasingly in recent years, the Board has questioned mayoral budgets and requested changes in allocations.

The mayor serves for a two year term, a restricting factor in implementing and following through policy. Most mayors do not serve more than three consecutive terms. As one city official notes, "Six years seems to be about the length of time in which a guy develops so many enemies that he becomes worthless in office."<sup>12</sup>

Newton has a nonpartisan system of election. Mayoral elections in recent years have generally been hotly contested, a factor of the increasing strength of the Democratic party in the city. Despite increasing pressure from the Democrats, Newton has never elected a mayor who was not a member of the Republican party. In the most recent election, Republican Theodore Mann won over a Democratic opponent by less than 1,000 votes. Two years ago, the margin separating the incumbent, Republican Monte Basbas, from challenger Howard Fishman was 250 votes.

The frequent elections and the growing challenge from the Democrats to traditional Republican domination of the executive office lends an air of insecurity to the mayor. He knows he must convince the voters of his worth every two years and that this process of seeking an electoral mandate will take place in the face of strong opposition. Perhaps of equal importance, the aldermen recognize the mayor's vulnerability and are prepared to make political capital of it.

### The Council

The weakness of the mayor's office in Newton is partly a function of the strength of the Board of Aldermen, both in numbers and in power. There are twenty-four aldermen in Newton, a number matched only by Charleston, West Virginia, among cities with comparable population.<sup>13</sup> There is one alderman for 3,000 residents in the city compared to one for 75,000 in Boston, one for 8,500 in Lynn and one for 9,000 in New Bedford. The median number of aldermen for 225 cities with 50,000 to 100,000 population is nine.<sup>14</sup>

Eight aldermen are elected from the eight wards with only the residents of each ward eligible to vote. The remaining sixteen are elected at-large but have strong ward affiliations, both formal and informal. Thus, Ward One was a ward alderman and two at-large aldermen who are elected by the entire city but must reside within the ward. The at-large aldermen are considered by the people within the ward as their representatives.

Although the election process is formally nonpartisan, there are strong party lines within the Board. Presently there are eleven Democrats and thirteen Republicans on the Board and the latest election results gave the Democrats two additional seats so that, in 1972, they will have a majority for the first time in Newton's history.

The aldermen conduct their business through a committee system. There are five general committees: Public Works, Finance, Street Traffic, Franchises and Licenses, Public Buildings. In addition, there are five special committees which have been set up in recent years to handle



areas of growing concern to the city and to expedite the work of the aldermen. These are Land Use, Legislation and Rules, City Planning, Housing, and Education. Each committee is composed of eight members, one from each ward. General committees convene at specified intervals; special committees meet at the will of the chairmen. Each alderman sits on at least two committees; some belong to three.

Following normal procedure, the City Clerk assigns a docket item to the appropriate committee for action. A committee can hold hearings to gather opinions and informations in order to arrive at a decision. There is no timetable on reporting an item out of committee and back to the full board for action. The full board can request that the committee report it out and can, in fact, act on the measure without a report from the committee although this is rarely done. It requires a two-thirds vote of the board to suspend the rules and act without a committee recommendation. This happens only when there is general agreement on a matter and/or a need for quick action. The most recent instance of the Board suspending the rules occurred when the state was considering taking a country club in Newton as a site for a branch of the state college system. The aldermen suspended the rules in order to go on record as unanimously opposing the proposal.

It is not uncommon for an item to languish in committee. The Newton Housing Authority has had a proposal before the Housing Committee for two years; no action has been taken on the request and, at this writing, it seems unlikely that any action will be taken in the immediate future. Similarly, committees have sometimes refused to vote

on mayoral appointments, holding off as long as six months in some cases.

The full Board of Aldermen convenes twice a month at City Hall. A simple majority of those present and voting is needed to pass legislation except in certain stated cases such as overriding the mayor's veto and in the area of land use decision and appropriations. Appropriations require thirteen votes, a majority of the full Board. In land use decisions, permissive uses are granted only on a two-thirds affirmative vote. If twenty per cent of the abutters object, then an affirmative vote by three-quarters of the Board is required.

The balance of power in Newton is heavily weighted in favor of the aldermen and against the executive. Few formal constraints exist to limit the council in its actions. True, the mayor can veto council decisions but, as previously noted, this power is rarely invoked. Probably the strongest constraint on aldermanic action is the threat of rejection at the ballot box. Despite a history of generally returning incumbent aldermen to office, the voters have on more than one occasion expressed displeasure with an incumbent by turning him out on election day.<sup>15</sup>

If one sees government as a gathering up of bits of power from the electorate into a central force which has the authority to make decisions on behalf of the community, then, in Newton, that process seems to come to a halt at the aldermanic level. People will give up their individual bits of power to a direct representative, a resident of their

immediate section of the city with whom they can maintain contact and express their opinions. But they are reluctant to delegate enough power to a central authority such as the mayor to enable the executive branch to dominate or even achieve parity with the aldermen.

One structural characteristic of Newton which mitigates against centralization of power at the executive level is the strong position of the villages. It is important to Newtonites that each village be represented on an equal basis with the others; aldermanic representation best fulfills the goal of neighborhood parity, insuring against the emergence of any one area of the city into a dominant position by means of executive influence or action. The system acts to reserve power in neighborhood representatives instead of placing it in the hands of a community-wide figure.

Newton's formal nonpartisanship reinforces the decentralization of power which characterizes the governing system. In a system where party politics exists as a strong formal force or, as in Chicago, outside the formal mechanisms of government, the mayor or powerful party figures can centralize authority by virtue of controls built into the party structure. But few issues in Newton are resolved along party lines and there are no "strong men" to create a durable Democratic or Republican faction which could supersede the shifting coalitional groupings which form around specific issues.

Thus, there is no effective mechanism--a strong mayor, party allegiance, aldermanic "big boys"--to provide a counterbalance to a

system which places ultimate power in those representatives who are closest to the people: the twenty-four aldermen.

#### Informal Influences

Certain attitudes and values held by Newton's elected representatives, probably reflecting the attitudes and values of a good portion of the electorate, are powerful shapers of policy. And, in analyzing these values, one recognizes the powerful pull of the ideology based on grassroots democracy, neighborhoodism and nonpartisanship and the extent to which these ideals are reflected in the values that underlie Newton's political system just as we saw them reflected in the formal structure itself.

The idea that in a democratic society ultimate responsibility resides in those officials chosen by the electorate and that these representatives should prevail over professional expertise and bureaucratic inputs in most situations is a basic premise of Newton's government. Thus, advice and policy determination by the City Planning Department or the Engineering Department or any one of the other city departments has little weight in council deliberations. The aldermen seem to reject the concept that the specialized knowledge of planners or designers or other professionals can or should be important inputs into the decision-making process. Proposals and recommendations from city agencies or semi-independent bodies such as the Renewal Authority or the Housing Authority lack the legitimacy and authority which would help gain acceptance; the aldermen tend to believe that they know best

and that, like those Norman Rockwell voters, their decisions represent the popular position and, therefore, are "right".

The rejection of professional inputs places a heavy burden on the aldermen. The aldermen in Newton are part-time, unpaid representatives. Being an alderman is not the major focus of their lives as it is for professional politicians in cities where the aldermanic job is a full-time, paid position. The aldermen are committed to two evening meetings a month plus two or three committee meetings which are also held in the evening. These may be supplemented by special hearings, ceremonial duties, etc.

An alderman may serve, for example, on Street Traffic Committee, Land Use Committee and Finance Committee. He is expected to develop some knowledge in these areas in order to be able to arrive at informed and reasoned decisions. In a community which is facing problems of ever-increasing complexity, the burden assumed by an alderman is becoming unreasonably heavy.

Fifteen years ago, Newton's aldermen served in a custodial capacity. Their functions were largely housekeeping duties and the WASP Republicans who sat on the board acted as benovolent stewards for the community. But local governments have increasingly found themselves involved in situations where they are being called upon to determine and implement social policy. The level of expertise and political judgment required for making sound policy decisions in areas such as housing, drug control, urban renewal, law and order, and community development is a quantum jump over that which sufficed for

deciding where street lights should be placed or how much money should be spent on an addition to City Hall.

The increasing burden in terms of time and knowledge on the aldermen because of the greater complexity and number of issues facing the city slows down the workings of government. Each alderman has to know more about more issues and the reluctance to turn over tasks and decisions to the executive branch results in a painfully slow decision-making process which supposedly gives the aldermen an opportunity to gather the pertinent facts to form judgments based on the merits of the situation and/or the wishes of the constituency. The alternative to this lengthy process is uninformed decision-making because no one alderman can be expected to have a high level of knowledge in all the areas in which he is called upon to act. An increasing amount of work is delegated to the aldermanic committees but with multiple committee assignments in unrelated areas, the individual alderman is still required to become something of an expert in a number of fields.

Another widely held value acting to shape the workings of Newton's government is respect for territory. As a general principle, neither the council nor any committee will ordinarily act contrary to the views of the representative from the area most substantially affected by a proposed act.<sup>16</sup> This is especially true in land use decisions. This reciprocal consideration for aldermanic interests contributes to the perpetuation of neighborhood control over neighborhood matters but also acts to constrain the implementation of community-wide objectives if the objectives are seen to intrude upon a neighborhood.

It has frequently been stated by the aldermen that the building of low-income family housing is a desirable objective for the community.<sup>17</sup> In a recent discussion of a possible site in Ward One for such housing, the chairman of the aldermanic Housing Committee was quoted in The Newton Graphic as follows: "I am the alderman from Ward One and I say that there will never be 25 units of housing on that site!"<sup>18</sup> It is reasonably safe to say that the interests that want twenty-five units on that particular site will not be able to muster aldermanic support in the face of the strong objections of the aldermen from the ward.

The willingness of aldermen to acquiesce to the wishes of representatives about what should transpire in a ward is, of course, a self-protective device. By going along with the principle of respect for another ward's views, he knows that he will lessen the risk of being embarrassed in his own constituency by failing to prevail in a matter of neighborhood concern.

Related to the principle which places high value on an alderman's views on matters pertaining to his territory is the direct accountability of the aldermen to his constituency and his easy accessibility to the members of the constituency. Because of the relatively large number of aldermen and the relatively small constituency of each, an individual alderman is extremely vulnerable to public criticism and complaint. Edward Uehlein, the ward alderman from Ward Five, an extremely affluent section of the city, says that he expects and gets numerous phone calls from people in his ward after major snowstorms

asking him to arrange for immediate plowing or complaining about the snow clearance on a particular street. Constituents complain to him about garbage collection, school matters, power failures and other similar concerns.<sup>19</sup> There is little distance between an alderman and his constituents and it is considered perfectly normal for neighbors and others to register either approval or disapproval of his actions.

A recent city-wide issue involved a nonprofit organization's efforts to construct 500 units of low- and middle-income housing on ten sites scattered throughout the city.<sup>20</sup> During the months of public hearings and debates preceding aldermanic action on the issue, most aldermen received numerous telephone calls and visits from people interested in seeing that their representative voted their way.

Since there is no effective system of party rewards or other mechanisms in the Newton political structure to induce an alderman to vote as a representative of a wider community interest rather than on a neighborhood basis, the aldermen are extremely vulnerable to local pressures and where such pressures fail to approach consensus, there is a tendency for an alderman to avoid taking any action rather than going on record in a controversial situation which could alienate a portion of his constituency.

An implicit assumption in Newton is that the aldermen are civic-minded representatives untainted by any personal or political motivation. This belief is a holdover from the days when the Board was composed of upper middle-class Republicans who did, in fact, operate as a sort of gentlemen's civic club or benevolent elite. Meetings



were short, orderly and marked by a high degree of consensus. This is in sharp contrast to council meetings in recent years where heated disagreements on basic policy issues are frequent occurrences. Moreover, a number of aldermen are frankly in office to further their personal and/or political objectives. Board meetings often provide a background for highly political speech-making and actions designed to attract publicity.

The system is geared to the assumption that the aldermen are high-minded trustees of a common good when, in fact, they are delegates representing disparate political stances on a number of key issues. The assumption of an underlying general consensus among the aldermen and among the city's electorate makes conflict appear to be a temporary aberration and not a fundamental characteristic of Newton's political system. There is a reluctance to abandon the vision of Newton as a cohesive, homogeneous, "small town" community in which deep-seated conflict of opposing interests is an anomaly. This vision makes it perfectly feasible for a group of twenty-four citizens to gather together for a few evenings a month to settle the city's business. A more realistic assessment of the complexity and diversity of the political and social groupings within the city might cast doubts on the utility of a system that presupposes a general consensus and makes little provision for handling situations involving conflict. Such an assessment might indicate that Newton's political system is more suited to small-town governance than to that of a big suburb.

### Decision-Making Structure: Decentralized and Fragmented

The problems facing big cities and their outlying suburbs have loomed so large in the past decade that efforts to cope with them threaten to shake the very foundations of modern political life. There is an increasing recognition of the need for central planning and expert professional attention to cope with the familiar litany of metropolitan ills: crime, welfare, housing, drugs, insufficient tax revenues, and so on. There is also a growing awareness of the wastefulness, duplication and inefficiency of myriad layers and levels of government. Efforts to devise more rational approaches to solving the problems of an urban society have focussed increasing attention on the professional bureaucracy and on metropolitan and regional planning as strategies for centralizing and rationalizing the decision-making processes of government.

The suburbs, including Newton, have been extremely resistant to reforms which call for delegating local authority to another level of government such as a regional council. They have been equally reluctant to strengthen the bureaucratic and planning arms of their own governments at the expense of the elected representatives. In Newton, the primacy of the aldermanic council and the horizontal structural division of the city into villages contribute to a decentralized and fragmented decision-making process which runs counter to a generally perceived need by political scientists for more rational and systematized governmental direction at the local level. The value system underlying the formal and informal systems of power is in the tradition

of grassroots democracy, neighborhoodism and nonpartisanship--a tradition which reinforces and supports the decentralization and fragmentation of decision-making in the city.

#### Decentralization of Decision-Making Power

Decision-making power in Newton is diffused among the mayor, the executive department, political parties, the aldermen, the villages and the voters with the balance of power weighted heavily towards the voters. In general, the aldermen are the primary decision-makers. One can view the decision-making process as the result of a series of inputs from the wielders of influence--mayor, bureaucrats, political parties and citizens either in their roles as members of a village group or as individuals at the polls.

In a centralized decision-making situation, the balance of power would weigh in favor of the mayor or a political party or even a cadre of influential "big boys" among the aldermen. Party discipline, material incentives, the promise of personal advancement, a charismatic leader such as Mayor Richard Lee in New Haven--these are some of the mechanisms which could weld the bits and pieces of diffused power into a centralized force. We have shown in previous sections that these mechanisms are either weak or nonexistent in Newton.

In the absence of an effective means to centralize power, the system's formal and informal commitment to grassroots democracy and neighborhoodism is virtually unchecked and the result is a highly decentralized decision-making process marked by extreme responsiveness

and responsibility to the citizenry. The tradition of strong village identity and the existence of a network of voluntary organizations and groupings at the village level reinforces decentralization. As Terry Clark notes:

The degree of structural differentiation in a community...is one of the major variables influencing patterns of decision-making.... In general, greater structural differentiation along horizontal lines will predispose a community towards more decentralized and pluralistic decision-making patterns.<sup>21</sup>

The high degree of aldermanic responsiveness and responsibility to the neighborhoods and the voters tends to suppress innovative or controversial programs in Newton. The normal hue and cry raised by almost any group of human beings at the prospect of a change in the status quo assumes greater importance in the absence of an overriding authority that is capable of withstanding adverse reactions from a portion of the community. In Newton, a relatively small group can organize around a specific issue and exercise influence over its outcome.

Community organizers in urban ghettos tend to feel that the suburban experience has nothing valid to contribute to efforts to restructure inner city communities. However, they may well look to Newton and other suburban communities as working examples of concepts of "citizen participation" and "community control". Decentralized power attracts as fervent a following in the suburbs as it does in the big cities; grassroots democracy and neighborhoodism are the ideological ancestors of "power to the people".

### Fragmented Decisions

A concomitant of the decentralized authority that characterizes Newton's government is fragmentation of the decision-making process. The lack of an overriding authority or set of values which could impose a consistent and rational pattern of action on decision-makers contributes to the fragmented manner in which issues are resolved. Comprehensiveness, coordination and master planning presuppose a formal or informal commitment to a central authority or idea which acts as a directive force towards the achievement of long-term goals for the community.

In some systems, the mayor or the professional bureaucracy sets policy goals which have a high degree of legitimacy and force in the eyes of the council and which act as rational guideposts in legislative decision-making. But, in Newton, the inputs of the mayor and his planning department do not have significant influence with the aldermen. In fact, the Comprehensive Plan for the city has never been formally adopted by the Council and does not function as a framework for aldermanic decisions. Thus, land use decisions are made on an ad hoc, individual basis with little consideration for the overall development of the community.

Because of the reluctance of the aldermen to delegate significant decision-making responsibilities to the bureaucracy, there is a lack of professional guidance which could provide a rationalizing and unifying force. A city department may be called upon to give an opinion at a committee hearing or may be consulted on an informal basis by

one or more aldermen, but the professional opinion of the bureaucrat is not likely to weigh heavily in decision-making. Thus, the recreation department may have a well-developed city plan designating appropriate locations for additional swimming facilities but the aldermen are more likely to decide the location of swimming pools on the basis of neighborhood inputs or their own judgment.

The committee system of the aldermen contributes to the fragmentation of decision-making. A particular issue may be reviewed by several committees before coming to the full board for consideration. In the course of multiple committee hearings and debates, there is ample opportunity for modification and compromise; a proposal is often drastically revised during its journey through committees. This process of extensive review and revision tends to dilute programs because of efforts to satisfy all the aldermen who, in turn, are trying to satisfy all the groups and interests involved.

By breaking down the decision-making function into smaller components, it is relatively easy to block a program at some point along the line. Newton Community Development Foundation, the non-profit organization whose program called for building 500 units of low- and middle-income housing on ten sites scattered throughout the city, was required to hold public hearings on each site before the Land Use Committee as a first step in securing city approval of its plan. The NCDF proposal was presented as a total package, stressing balance and equitable distribution of housing throughout the city. But the program was broken into ten individual proposals for aldermanic

review and this resulted in a multitude of opportunities for registering objections and gathering opposition to one or more sites.

The Housing Authority's current proposal for a four-site package for elderly and low-income housing has to be reviewed by the Housing Finance and Land Use Committees in addition to three separate votes by the full board. Thus, there are six separate points in the decision-making process for opponents to succeed in blocking the program or modifying it to the point where it is unacceptable to the Authority.

The system of fragmented decision-making mitigates against the adoption of comprehensive, ongoing programs. The implementation of a long-term recreation development program in the city requires the aldermen to act over a period of time according to the outlines of a plan developed by the Recreation Department and the Planning Department.<sup>22</sup> Allocations have to be made according to a rational pattern of priorities in order to develop areas throughout the city according to a priority system set forth in the plan. Land acquisitions to create new play areas and to expand existing facilities have to be made. Twenty acres of city-owned land are needed to fulfill the objectives of the plan. Implementation of this plan requires an ongoing commitment by the aldermen over a period of several years to the goals and objectives embodied in the plan. The comprehensive recreation plan has never been accepted by the aldermen and recent decisions on recreation matters are completely unrelated to the recommendations and philosophy set forth in the plan.

### "Liberal" Decisions in a "Liberal" Suburb?

The foregoing analysis of Newton's government leads us to the following three statements about the decision-making process in the city:

1. Decision-makers are responsive to parts of the community at the expense of the total community.
2. They tend to be most responsive to conservative groups that are generally opposed to innovative and controversial programs.
3. The ascendancy of the conservative elements of the community occurs because of widespread citizen apathy and failure to exercise power by the more liberal groups in the city.

We believe that Newton's decision-making structure, characterized by fragmentation and decentralization of decision-making power, functions in response to neighborhood influences at the expense of the wider community. The system mitigates against implementation of generalized community-wide goals even when these goals are recognized to be in the public interest. Lacking mechanisms to gather up power in the pursuance of an overriding goal, the decision-making system is extremely vulnerable to neighborhood interests which are often unwilling to incur immediate social and economic costs as a trade-off against long-term benefits.

The system operates to the advantage of the conservative elements in the community. This may seem fallacious in view of assumptions



made earlier in this chapter. Thus, from the dual propositions:

Newton's citizenry has a liberal orientation,

Newton's government is highly responsive to the citizenry,

one might expect to derive the following conclusion:

Therefore, Newton's governing system should produce liberal decisions.

We believe that the premises are true but experience in Newton tends to prove the conclusion invalid. The fallacy lies with the assumption that all citizens in Newton use their potential influence. We have shown that Newton's political system is based on maximum power residing in the neighborhoods and in the individual. But, on any specific issue, the great majority of the citizens do not exercise their political power. This creates a partial power vacuum which allows those elements in the community who are directly concerned with a particular issue to exercise a disproportionate amount of influence. Thus, the second premise of the syllogism must be modified to state that the system is "highly responsive to citizens who choose to exercise influence." This will invalidate the conclusion that derives liberal outputs from Newton's system.

The decentralized and fragmented decision-making process facilitates the exercise of power by a small minority such as a neighborhood improvement society or an informal association of abutters. A group which gathers its power resources to influence the legislative process is generally trying to block a proposed action. "It is a fact of political behavior that apathy or silence implies consent,

but action is usually motivated by opposition."<sup>23</sup> Robert Dahl observes that "minorities triumph over massive indifference."<sup>24</sup>

Thus, conservatives in the community tend to prevail in the face of failure by the more liberal elements to exercise their role as participants in the governing process. Newton's system, based on a foundation of grassroots democracy, assumes that the mass of responsible and informed citizens will actively participate in government, if only by making their views known in public forum. The assumption is reinforced by the high educational and income levels that characterize many Newtonites; one tends to expect a high level of participation from an affluent, educated population.

A number of reasons have been set forth for the widespread failure of suburban citizens to participate in local government:

1. Many suburbanites have primary business and social ties outside of the suburban community.<sup>25</sup>
2. The political process has little to offer affluent people in the way of material or status incentives.<sup>26</sup>
3. If they are politically involved, it tends to be on the state or national level.<sup>27</sup>

Robert Wood suggests that few citizens are capable of living up to the ideology of grassroots democracy and neighborhood control.<sup>28</sup> We go one step further by postulating that a system which is based on these concepts and the related ideal of nonpartisan governance, faced by the reality of minimal citizen participation, functions in a manner which tends to abrogate the very ideals which underlie the system.

Decisions tend to reflect the wishes of partial interests instead of the values of the general public and neighborhood goals often triumph at the expense of community-wide goals.

FOOTNOTES--CHAPTER TWO

<sup>1</sup>Christa L. Carnegie, "Subsidized Housing: Running the Suburban Gauntlet," (unpublished Master's thesis, M.I.T., 1970), p. 55.

<sup>2</sup>Newton, Massachusetts, Low-Moderate Income Housing Study (Newton Planning Department, 1968), p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>Interview with Herbert Regal, School Committeeman, Newton, Massachusetts, December 5, 1971.

<sup>4</sup>U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, U. S. Census of Population: 1960, Population and Housing Characteristics, Table P-3, p. 128.

<sup>5</sup>"Liberalism in the Suburbs," Newsweek, July 6, 1970, p. 57.

<sup>6</sup>Newton, Massachusetts, Workable Program (Newton Planning Department, 1970), pp. 10a-10b.

<sup>7</sup>An exception is Evelyn Keene, reporter for The Boston Globe, who remarks of Newton in the edition of December 5, 1971, p. 64: "There are pockets in the city that would make John Steinbeck's Okies look affluent...."

<sup>8</sup>M. F. Sweetser, King's Handbook of Newton (Boston: Moses King Corporation, 1889), p. 158.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>10</sup>Several major studies have shown the power of Chicago's mayors despite formal constraints. See Banfield and Wilson, City Politics, and Martin Meyerson and Edward Banfield, Politics, Planning and the Public Interest (Glencoe, New York: The Free Press, 1955).

<sup>11</sup>Interview with Joseph Karlin, City Clerk, Newton, Massachusetts, August 25, 1971.

<sup>12</sup>The official refused to be quoted directly.

<sup>13</sup>Municipal Yearbook (1969) (Washington, D.C.: International City Management Association).

<sup>14</sup>Interview with Michael Curran, Municipal Consultants, Inc., Westwood, Massachusetts, October 27, 1971.

<sup>15</sup>In the November, 1971 election, Alderman Harry Walen failed in a bid for reelection. His opponents capitalized on his failure to attend more than fifty per cent of Board meetings.

FOOTNOTES--CHAPTER TWO (Continued)

<sup>16</sup> George S. Blair, American Local Government (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 280.

<sup>17</sup> A report of the aldermanic subcommittee on low-income housing in November, 1967 noted an immediate need for 200 units of low-income housing. In May, 1969, the Board of Aldermen passed a unanimous resolution stating its support for low- and middle-income housing in Newton.

<sup>18</sup> The Newton Graphic, July 16, 1971, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Edward Uehlein, Alderman, Newton, Massachusetts, November 19, 1971.

<sup>20</sup> For a full discussion of the NCAF issue, see Carnegie, "Subsidized Housing: Running the Suburban Gauntlet." Also, Robert Engler's "Subsidized Housing in the Suburbs: Legislation or Litigation" (unpublished Master's thesis, M.I.T., 1971).

<sup>21</sup> Terry N. Clark, Community Structure and Decision-Making: Comparative Analyses (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1968), p. 92.

<sup>22</sup> Newton, Massachusetts, Comprehensive Recreation/Open Space Plan (Newton Planning Department, 1969).

<sup>23</sup> Raymond and May Associates, Zoning Controversies in the Suburbs: Three Case Studies, Research Report No. 11 to The National Commission on Urban Problems (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1968), p. 77.

<sup>24</sup> Robert A. Dahl, Who Governs? (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 239.

<sup>25</sup> Wood, Suburbia, pp. 92-94.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 168-69.

<sup>27</sup> Banfield and Wilson, City Politics, pp. 57-58.

<sup>28</sup> Wood, Suburbia, p. 197.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE FIELD OF BATTLE

Bakers make bread, weavers make cloth and governments make decisions. Recipes, patterns and political theories are helpful in understanding the processes which lead to the finished products but, ultimately, one must examine the products themselves in order to evaluate the recipes, patterns or theories.

This paper has examined three general theories or ideals of local government: nonpartisanship, neighborhoodism and grassroots democracy. We have related these theories to a suburban political system, drawing conclusions about the form of decision-making which characterizes a system based on these ideals. We now turn to a case study of a set of decisions involving a parcel of land called Victory Field to see if Newton's decision-making system in a specific land use issue supports our original hypothesis. We will seek the answers to three main questions:

- Is the decision-making system in the Victory Field case decentralized and fragmented?
- If it is, does it facilitate control by a neighborhood or special interest group?
- Does neighborhood control result in the defeat of the public interest at Victory Field?

### A Land Use Issue

Several reasons point to the suitability of land use issues as a focus for this type of analysis. There are relatively few areas of decision-making which are still within the exclusive jurisdiction of local governments; land use decisions, despite tentative efforts at interference from the courts, state legislatures and the federal government are still essentially local matters. Thus, our choice of a land use issue as a test of the hypothesis limits the parameters of the study to the local level.

Secondly, land use decisions usually present clear-cut and tangible alternatives to decision-makers. In a specific instance, a decision is likely to be "yes" or "no"; the gray shadings of compromise and halfway measures are likely to be absent in land use decisions.

Another characteristic of land use decisions, particularly those involving low- and middle-income housing, which makes them appropriate for this study, is the importance with which they are viewed by the community. Thus, a land use issue frequently activates a large portion of the community and draws them into the political process.

Finally, land use decisions are often hammered out in a scene of conflict and it is this conflict between opposing interests which is important for our purposes because it provides a test of the decision-making process by offering choices among several goals espoused by different groups.

### Nonantum: A Suburban Village<sup>1</sup>

The piece of land that is the focus of our case study, Victory Field, is located in the village of Nonantum, the oldest section of the City of Newton. From earliest days, the village was known as a manufacturing center and attracted large numbers of foreign-born workers. Located on the banks of the Charles River, the available water power drew many industrial concerns to the area.<sup>2</sup>

Today there is still a strong mix of industrial, commercial and residential elements in Nonantum. The area is a highly built-up section of the city and retains much of the working class and lower middle-class character which marked its early days. The population, which numbers around 7,000 people, has the lowest median family income in the city: \$6,330 compared to \$15,112 for the highest-income census tract.<sup>3</sup> In 1960, 125 families in the Nonantum area had incomes under \$3,000 and another 524 families were between \$3,000 and \$6,000. Nonantum was the only area in Newton in which no family reported an income over \$25,000.<sup>4</sup>

The village has a strong ethnic orientation. There is a large Italian population and a considerable French-Canadian group. The section is overwhelmingly Catholic. There are a number of strong local organizations, often based on ethnic or religious groupings. Among the most important are the Sons of Italy, the Franco-American Society, the Italo-American League, an American Legion Post, the Nonantum Improvement Association, and St. Carmel's Society.



A great many city employees, including many firemen, policemen, sanitation workers and civil service employees, live in Nonantum. In addition, many of the residents have union affiliations. Although unions are prevalent in Nonantum, no one union is important enough to be considered a dominant force in the village's economic and social life.

Nonantum is located within Ward One of Newton. Precincts One and Four of the ward form the approximate boundaries of the village. The village is overwhelmingly Democratic in its political orientation. It is a very conservative section of the city and a very patriotic section. This is an area in which people tend to support the war in Vietnam, display the flag on the fourth of July, and support veteran's organizations.

The ward alderman from Ward One has often been of Italian descent. The present ward alderman is Andrew J. Magni, a funeral director; Magni is now in his fifth term on the Board. The at-large representatives, who are elected on a city-wide basis, are Adelaide Ball and Joseph McDonnell. Miss Ball, who has served since 1954, is a member of an old Newton family noted for its record of public service. Mr. McDonnell, a Boston attorney, is very active in Democratic politics in Newton; he has been an alderman since 1966.

Nonantum has a political "boss", Anthony (Fats) Pellegrini. A reputed Mafia leader, Pellegrini is believed to run the New England communications network for the Mafia. He has been brought into court on charges in connection with the numbers racket and other illegal

activities but has never been convicted. Known as a hustler, Pellegrini is the man to see in Nonantum for jobs and favors which run the gamut from getting a speeding ticket fixed to borrowing money from the local loan-sharks. He is in charge of the annual Nonantum Christmas parade sponsored by the American Legion, Italian-American War Vets, Sons of Italy, St. Mary of Carmen Society and the Nonantum merchants.

A candidate for city-wide office who hopes to do well at the polls in Ward One routinely presents himself to Fats for endorsement. Fats is said to control a hefty proportion of the Italian-American vote in the ward via slate cards that he and his associates hand out on election day. His influence is particularly strong among those Nonantum residents for whom Italian is still the primary language. Pellegrini's cousin, Michael Antonellis, is alderman-at-large from Ward Five.

The Nonantum section is one of the most cohesive and neighborhood-oriented areas in the city. This is due in part to the lower middle-class and working-class make-up of the population. The ethnic homogeneity is also a contributing factor as is the relatively large percentage of residents who work in Newton rather than in downtown Boston. The cohesiveness of the neighborhood and the personal stake of the residents in the area contribute to the political effectiveness for which Nonantum is noted. One high city official who declines to be quoted calls Nonantum a "different city" and maintains that he and other officials choose "not to mess with it."

### Victory Field--Then and Now

Victory Field is a rectangular plot of land measuring 129,940 square feet. It is located in Nonantum, overlooking the Charles River. The plot fronts on California Street, a main thoroughfare, which was laid out in 1816.<sup>6</sup> Owned by the city since 1925, Victory Field has recently been the focus of a series of land use decisions which, in microcosm, reflect many of the major concerns of suburban land use decision-making. Issues of open space, neighborhood control, low- and middle-income housing, and master planning are all embodied in the struggle over Victory Field.

The land called Victory Field was originally the property of the Saxony Knitting Mills and was used to provide housing for mill-workers in the late nineteenth century and the early part of this century. In 1919, the company developed Victory Field as a recreation area and Samuel Hyslop, president of Saxony, dedicated it on July 4, 1920 to the men of Nonantum who lost their lives in World War I. Edward Fahey, a former alderman and retired city assessor, was present at the ceremony and recalls the dedication; there appears to be no written documentation of the event.<sup>7</sup>

The company constructed a clubhouse, a grandstand with seating for 5,000 people and a baseball diamond. In 1925, Saxony Mills went out of business and the City of Newton purchased the site for \$10,000; the Recreation Department operated it as a playfield from that time on. Its use declined over the years partly because of the availability of the nearby Stearns School playground and Allison Park. According to

a 1969 report from the assessor's office regarding the current status of the field: "The subject lot serves no useful purpose."

In 1948, Mayor Lockwood contemplated selling Victory Field to a private developer but changed his mind when Alderman Fahey reminded him that the land had been dedicated to the World War dead of Nonantum. In 1964, the Recreation Commission considered releasing the land but no action was taken.

The field is located in an area of primarily residential use, mainly multi-family dwellings interspersed with a few singly family structures. Although many of the houses in the immediate area need minor repairs and maintenance work, some are in excellent condition and only two were designated as needing extensive work.<sup>8</sup> Across California Street from the field are several commercial establishments: a gasoline station, a linotype service, a pizza shop and a supply distribution office.

The use of Victory Field for other than recreation purposes came under consideration in 1963 when the Community Renewal Program Report indicated that Victory Field would be suitable for moderate density housing. The 1965 General Plan for the city reiterated the desirability of placing moderate density housing on the site. In 1968, the Low and Moderate Income Housing Study, published by the Planning Department, selected Victory Field as one of twelve sites in the city of first order potential for moderate density low- and middle-income housing.<sup>9</sup> On a scale ranging from "good" to "fair" to "poor", Victory Field was rated "good" in the following categories:

configuration of land; topographical characteristics; subsoil; accessibility; convenience to retail shopping, recreation and churches; public transit; availability of utilities. The site was rated "fair" in two categories: convenience to schools and relationship to existing environs.

Thus, by 1968, Victory Field had been marked by three Planning Department reports as a prime site for moderate-density housing; furthermore, one of the reports had noted that the land was particularly suitable for low- and middle-income housing. Against this background of attention from the Planning Department and the growing recognition of the availability of the site for non-recreation purposes, the battle for Victory Field began to take shape.

On September 8, 1969, the Recreation Commission, on the recommendation of the mayor, voted to release all of Victory Field, declaring it surplus land "no longer needed for recreation and playground purposes." In the ensuing months, the battle for Victory Field was fought in the traditional areas of local government--on the neighborhood level, in the aldermanic council and in the executive branch.

FOOTNOTES--CHAPTER THREE

<sup>1</sup>Much of the information about Victory Field and Nonantum was gathered through interviews with residents of the neighborhood, city officials and other Newton citizens.

<sup>2</sup>M. F. Sweetser, King's Handbook of Newton, pp. 157-58.

<sup>3</sup>Newton, Massachusetts, Economic Base Study (Newton Planning Department, 1967), Table 16.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Herbert Gans notes the high degree of neighborhood involvement among working-class Italians in The Urban Villagers (New York: The Free Press, 1962). Also, see Marc Fried's article, "Grieving for A Lost Home," in The Urban Condition, ed. by Leonard J. Duhl (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963).

<sup>6</sup>S. F. Smith, History of Newton, Mass. (Boston: The American Logotype Company, 1880), p. 582.

<sup>7</sup>Interview with Edward Fahey, ex-alderman, Newton, Massachusetts, October 18, 1971.

<sup>8</sup>Newton, Massachusetts, Victory Field (Newton Planning Department, 1969), p. 2.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid. See p. 5 for a summary of Planning Department recommendations concerning Victory Field.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE BATTLE FOR VICTORY FIELD

#### The Combatants

Four groups wanted all or part of Victory Field. Before turning to an analysis of the decision-making processes in the Victory Field land use issue, it will be helpful to the reader to briefly identify each of these four interest groups.

Newton Community Development Foundation. This nonprofit organization sponsored by a group of clergymen in the city was committed to the construction of 500 units of low- and middle-income housing on ten sites scattered throughout Newton. In early 1969, the group was investigating sites in various parts of the city. Victory Field was under consideration as were several other sites in the Nonantum area.

American Legion Post 440. The Legion, now based in small quarters on Adams Street in Nonantum, has approximately 400 members. Most are Nonantum residents, but about one-third live in other parts of the city. The membership is primarily Italian. Many lower-level city employees belong to the Post. In 1969, Post 440 petitioned the Board of Aldermen for the sale of Victory Field for the purpose of building a \$250,000 clubhouse on the site.

Newton Housing Authority. The Newton Housing Authority, a semi-independent agency whose members are appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the Board of Aldermen, operates 228 units of public

housing for the elderly. In March, 1969, the Board widened the Authority's mandate to include housing for low-income families.<sup>1</sup> In November, 1969, the Authority requested approval of the sale of two parcels of city-owned land: Victory Field and property on Crescent Street in West Newton. They planned to construct sixty units of low-income family housing at Victory Field and thirty units on the Crescent Street site.

Private Developers. In recent years, a number of local developers have displayed interest in building housing on the Victory Field site. Four of these developers have been actively engaged in bidding for Victory Field in the past three years: Dominick Sera, an abutter to the field; Edmund Nardone; Luigi Zegarelli; and John Matthews. All are Newton residents and three are of Italian descent. None of the developers is a large-scale operator and each was interested in part of the field rather than the entire parcel.

#### Who Got What, When and How

##### NCDF...and Then There Were Three

In the latter months of 1969, NCDF was actively considering Victory Field as one of ten sites in Newton for its low- and middle-income housing program. The group was aware of the Legion's interest in the property. They entered into off-the-record negotiations with Post 440 and an informal accord was reached in which the Legion agreed to support the nearby Stearns School site in Nonantum as an NCDF site if NCDF would keep hands off Victory Field. The gist of this agreement



was embodied in a joint resolution proposed by Post 440 and NCDF and submitted to the Board of Aldermen. The resolution, No. 144-70, stated in part:

...that the Board of Aldermen recommends the utilization of the Victory Field site in its entirety for a community facility as proposed by American Legion Post 440 and the utilization of the Stearns School site in its entirety for low and middle income housing as proposed by NCDF.

NCDF supported the Legion proposal on Victory Field in exchange for promised support of the Legion and the neighborhood on the Stearns School site.

When public hearings were held on the Legion's request for Victory Field, Marc Slotnick, executive director of NCDF, spoke in support of the Legion. At a subsequent hearing on the proposed Stearns School site, the Legion failed to honor the gentlemen's agreement that had been made with NCDF and led the neighborhood hue and cry against low- and middle-income housing at Stearns School or anywhere in Nonantum.

According to Slotnick, if NCDF had it to do over again, they would "have fought them (the Legion) all the way" for Victory Field.<sup>2</sup> As it turned out, NCDF was the earliest casualty in the battle over Victory Field; their demise could perhaps best be described as the result of a stab in the back.

#### The Legion...No Conscientious Objectors

Post 440 of the American Legion has wanted to construct a new clubhouse on Victory Field for a number of years. Informal discussions with the mayor and some of the aldermen had resulted in an

agreement to let the Legion purchase part of the field from the city for its clubhouse when the Recreation Commission decided to release it.

In December, 1969, the Legion formally offered the city \$9,000 for 74,491 square feet at Victory Field. They planned to build a \$250,000 clubhouse (the cost has since risen to \$600,000) which would include a gym, recreation space, a meeting and social hall and private bars. Private bars are a primary source of income for the Legion; they function as a gathering place for the male membership and are lucrative operations. In addition to the social facilities, the Legion proposed to make a room available to a local Cerebral Palsy group for the use of handicapped children. Roger Marrocco, member of the Post's Land and Building Committee, estimated that 25 per cent of the total building space would be used by the community.<sup>3</sup>

The Legion's request was referred by the Board to the Finance Committee where rapid approval was obtained. Franklin Flaschner, then chairman of the Finance Committee, introduced a resolution stating that the Board "looks with favor on the sale by the City of Newton of approximately 75,000 square feet of land in Victory Field to American Legion Post 440."<sup>4</sup> On February 2, 1970, the full Board approved the sale of the land, amounting to approximately half the entire area of the field.<sup>5</sup> At the public hearing preceding the vote, no one spoke in opposition to the sale; the only recorded opposition was a letter from the Newton Fair Housing Committee, advocating the use of the land for low- and middle-income housing.

The Legion then appeared before the Land Use Committee to obtain a permissive use. The committee approved the plans for the building which had been drawn by a member of the city Engineering Department. The Land Use Committee and the Planning Department originally specified provision for 300 parking spaces; the Legion's initial plan allowed for only ninety. This was partly a result of an increase of 25 per cent in the size of the building over the original estimate. A compromise was effected in which the Legion reduced the size of the building from 100 x 200 feet to 100 x 160 feet. The committee then agreed to a minimum of 115 parking spaces, which the Legion provided. There is an unspoken understanding that the Legion will use adjacent Metropolitan District Commission land for overflow parking.

The Legion proposal was also reviewed by the aldermanic Public Works Committee in order to grant an easement across city-owned land for the installation of utility pipes.

On March 15, 1971, the Board of Aldermen unanimously granted a permissive use to the Legion. According to Joseph Karlin, City Clerk, it was one of the few unanimous votes by the Board on a permissive use in his memory.<sup>6</sup>

#### Dominick Sera...Protecting His Flank

Sera lives in a single-family house on Rustic Street abutting Victory Field. He is a city fireman and a small-scale builder in the Newton area. Sera has been interested in acquiring part of Victory Field ever since it became known that there was a possibility that the city would release the land. His interest in the field centered

on a 19,042 square feet rectangular jut which extends onto Rustic Street right next to his home. He was most anxious to control the use of that lot and, in particular, was against low-income public housing next door to his own home.

Mayor Basbas had assured Sera and other Rustic Street residents that he would not permit low-income housing on Rustic Street. The Mayor supported Sera's application to purchase the lot.<sup>7</sup> Although another builder, Edmund Nardone, offered \$11,500 for the site, the Board of Aldermen accepted Sera's bid of \$9,000 and sold it to him in June, 1971.

Mr. Sera has recently requested a zoning change from Residence D to private residence; the Land Use Committee is presently holding that request. If he gets the zoning change, Mr. Sera is planning to build a four-unit apartment structure on the lot.

#### Newton Housing Authority...Shot Down in Flames

In November, 1969, Milton Manin, then Chairman of the Newton Housing Authority, wrote a letter to Mayor Basbas requesting the sale of Victory Field to the Housing Authority for the purpose of building sixty units of public housing for low-income families. At present, Newton has no public housing for families although there are over 200 units of housing for the elderly. The Authority did not push its plan in the face of the Legion proposal which seemed to have first priority with the mayor and the aldermen. However, immediately after half of Victory Field was sold to the Legion, the Authority submitted another offer for 46,270 square feet, acknowledging the political priority of

Sera's claim to 19,000 square feet. In effect, the Housing Authority was asking for the remainder of the land after the Legion and Sera purchases. Resolution No. 365-70 of March 26, 1970 formally offered 25¢ a square foot for the 46,000 square feet. The Housing Authority proposed to construct twelve two-bedroom and eight three-bedroom units on the field.

On September 10, 1970, the Finance Committee voted 6-1 to recommend the sale to the Authority. The Board then referred the proposal to the Housing Committee for study. Joseph McDonnell, the alderman from Ward One, which includes the Nonantum area, is chairman of the Housing Committee.

The Newton Housing Authority's proposal has been blocked in the Housing Committee since September, 1970; no action has been taken on the offer. A compromise by the committee, offering to sell the Authority 14,000 square feet for the construction of four units of low-income housing has been made. It appears unlikely that the Housing Authority will accept this offer because of factors of economy and because several members consider the site too valuable to be chopped into pieces.

Any discussions of the sale of the land to the Housing Authority have stipulated a price of about 75¢ a square foot; this is three times what the Legion paid for its land and 53 per cent more than Sera paid. The Authority has maintained throughout the negotiations that the city should make the land available to them at the same price as the Legion paid.

At this point in time, several members of the Authority are ready to withdraw their offer for Victory Field and concentrate on developing three other potential sites located in different sections of the city. The feeling among Authority members is that their proposal will never succeed in generating sufficient support among the aldermen and that the strength of the neighborhood opposition as demonstrated at several public hearings is too great to overcome.

The Authority could attempt to take the land by eminent domain but this would undoubtedly result in a protracted Chapter 774 action in order to obtain the necessary zoning. It is doubtful if the Authority will defy the Board and neighborhood opinion to the extent of taking the matter to the state level. It is more likely that they will walk away from Victory Field in defeat.

Nardone, Zegarelli, Matthews...Victory by Default?

These three private developers are bidding for the same 46,270 square feet of Victory Field that the Housing Authority wants. Matthews has offered \$42,000, Zegarelli has bid \$40,000, and Nardone is low man with \$27,800. Matthews and Zegarelli each plan to construct approximately twenty-five units of market rental garden apartments. Nardone wants to build twenty-eight units of MHFA-financed units. Each of the developers has offered to make a number of units, ranging from four to seven, available to the Housing Authority under its leased housing program.

Although Nardone is the low bidder, in recent hearings he appeared to have considerable neighborhood support. John Bibbo, president

of the Nonantum Improvement Association and a leader of the opposition to the Housing Authority proposal, spoke in favor of a private developer, especially Nardone. Mr. Bibbo, who had opposed the Authority's plan on the grounds that construction of multi-family housing on Victory Field would result in overcrowded schools, increased traffic and the loss of needed neighborhood recreational space, saw none of the same deleterious results arising from the construction of private multi-family housing.

At the present writing, it is reasonable to believe that if any housing goes up on the non-Legion part of Victory Field, it will be constructed by one or another of the private developers who is presently bidding on it. Although these men have been relatively withdrawn from the main focus of the battle over the field, one of them is likely to gain control of 46,000 square feet by default or, perhaps, simply to insure that a public housing project is not built there.

#### Who Decided?

In an earlier section, we characterized Newton's decision-making structure as decentralized and fragmented. An analysis of the system's workings in the land use issue at Victory Field indicates that decentralization and fragmentation were important attributes of the decision-making mechanism in the case under consideration.

In the Victory Field issue, rational planning and centralized decision-making efforts failed to prevail. The achievement of a coordinated, rational plan for the development of the site required a commitment by the aldermen and the neighborhood to some central

authority such as the mayor or the planning arm of the executive branch that could provide guidelines for integrated development of the field. At the minimum, coordinated development called for recognition of a guiding principle or set of rules for determining land use at the field. Thus, if the aldermen had accepted the need for low- and middle-income housing in the city as an overriding principle, this would have provided a guideline for the development of Victory Field. Lacking a commitment of this nature, the decision-makers proceeded to dispose of parts of the field without paying heed to community-wide goals and without consideration for the future development of the total parcel.

In like manner, the Legion has developed its half of Victory Field without regard for possible future uses of the remainder of the site. Their parking area extends almost up to the lot line of the unused portion. At this point in time, there is no provision for landscaping to screen the clubhouse and parking area despite a Planning Department stipulation that such landscaping be included in plans for the site. Since Legion functions can last until the early morning hours, there is a distinct probability that future residents of a housing development which might be built on the remaining land would be disturbed by car lights and engine noises. If the site had been laid out with the total use in view, the parking area could have been placed on the river side of the lot where no one would be disturbed by noise or lights at night.

Decision-making power over Victory Field resided at three levels: in the neighborhood, the executive branch and the aldermanic



council. The aldermen were formally empowered to make land use decisions relating to the field. They could have chosen to adhere to Planning Department recommendations which advocated use of the field for low- and middle-income housing. They had the opportunity to decide in favor of a city agency, the Newton Housing Authority, whose proposal for Victory Field was in accord with Planning Department recommendations for the field.

The executive department did not present a united front in relation to the field. The mayor failed to back either the recommendations of the Planning Department or the Housing Authority proposal; instead, he exerted his influence on behalf of the Legion and Mr. Sera, both of whom were strong political supporters. Also, the mayor is a member of American Legion Post 48, known as the City Hall Post because it includes most of the prominent officials of Newton, and was reluctant to hinder Post 440's plans.

In addition to mayoral support, the Legion knew it could count on backing from the various city departments who were concerned with land use and building. The Legion's path was smoothed through the Assessor's Office, Engineering Department, Legal Department, Sewer and Water Department and Building Department. Allan Licarie, Election Commissioner of Newton and chairman of Post 440's Building Committee, performed valuable liaison functions during the Legion's negotiations for approval of plans and permits. As has been noted, Nonantum residents are well-connected at City Hall and if they do not hold influential positions in every city department, they are on good terms with those who do.

Ultimate decision-making power over Victory Field was wielded at the neighborhood level. The decentralization of influence and power which pervades Newton's political structure was clearly evidenced in the Victory Field issue. Victory Field was handled as though it were a piece of land in Nonantum rather than a piece of land in Newton. And this occurred despite the fact that the city had owned the land for forty-five years!

#### Did A Minority Interest Triumph?

Clearly, a minority group had its way with Victory Field. Despite protestations by members of the Legion that the new building will serve as a social headquarters for all of Newton, the clubhouse is widely seen as a neighborhood center. People from the Nonantum community will use its gym (when Legion members are not using it), hold weddings in its banquet hall and imbibe at its bars. Similarly, the designation of a room for the use of Cerebral Palsy children is a neighborhood-oriented action. The parents group which is going to run the program for handicapped children is strongly tied to Nonantum and to the Legion; two of the members of the group are past commanders of Post 440.<sup>8</sup>

The neighborhood was as successful in preventing an unwanted use at Victory Field as it was at securing what it saw as a positive good (i.e., the Legion clubhouse). A Planning Department report had concluded that the field could contain both the clubhouse and approximately thirty units of garden apartments with proper planning and coordination of space. However, it is true beyond any argument that the

people of Nonantum are vigorously opposed to low- and middle-income housing, especially that constructed under the banner of a public agency.

Community spokesmen including John Bibbo, president of the Nonantum Improvement Association; Michael Antonellis; Joseph McDonnell; and other prominent community figures articulated the neighborhood's resistance to low- and middle-income housing. Underlying the standard objections based on overcrowded schools, increased traffic and lack of open space was a strong desire to maintain the status quo in Nonantum. An influx of blacks or welfare families was to be avoided at any cost. The attitude of the Nonantum community towards low- and middle-income housing were typical of those which have surfaced in other working-class and lower middle-class neighborhoods and which have been fully described by other researchers and the newspapers.<sup>9</sup>

One interesting point made by several Newton residents with close Nonantum ties is the fact that few Nonantum residents would avail themselves of subsidized housing even though they were qualified. The community prides itself on taking care of its less affluent members through the efforts of family, church and voluntary organizations. In this connection, the Legion has a strong record of leadership in providing jobs, Christmas packages and funds to needy people in the area. Similarly, Fats Pellegrini, the local boss, has built his following on a base of favors and help to people in need.

The extended family structure which prevailed in the "old country" seems to have carried down to twentieth century Nonantum.

It is almost a mark of shame for a family to put an elderly relative into a public housing unit or into a nursing home.<sup>10</sup> This attitude is in sharp contrast to other areas of the city which would welcome subsidized housing for the elderly. But recognizing no neighborhood need for subsidized housing, Nonantum sees such housing as a vehicle for changing the character of the neighborhood.

Nonantum is well able to press its views in the councils of local government. The community, partly because of its social and economic characteristics, has enormous political clout. Political leaders in the area can promise votes on Election Day and they are one of the few areas in the city that can deliver them in a manner that is reminiscent of political machines in larger cities.

Nonantum has less economic and social status than any other part of the city but the key to its political effectiveness lies in its usage of the available political resources. In contrast to many neighborhoods in Newton and elsewhere where political resources tend to lie fallow, Nonantum utilizes its share of political influence in an ongoing exercise of power. Its channels to City Hall are open on a continuing basis and when the community needs to exert pressure, as in the Victory Field incident, the levers of power, friendship and political debt are there to be pulled.

Some observers have suggested that, given the high degree of aldermanic responsiveness to the neighborhoods, any village in Newton could exercise a similar degree of control over land use decisions within its boundaries and that Nonantum's political power is a myth

constructed of tales of Mafia intrigues superimposed on stories of local vendettas. But Newton's recent history in regard to land use decisions indicates that other neighborhoods are slower to mobilize their resources over a specific land use issue and do not exercise the same degree of sovereignty over neighborhood turf. The opposition generated by NCDF's proposal took the form of a coalition of neighborhood groups, with no one neighborhood exercising a sufficient degree of power to fight one specific site; their success stemmed from concerted opposition of groups representing almost every area of Newton.

A current proposal for construction of a high-rise apartment in Newton Centre, a primarily upper middle-class neighborhood, has not resulted in the activation of area residents. It is conceivable that an ad hoc association of people interested in stopping the construction may be formed but the people who join together for that purpose will lack the history of continuous association, homogeneity of background and entree to the political processes of local government which exist in Nonantum. Although an attempt to block the high-rise construction in Newton Centre may well succeed given the degree of decentralization which exists in the governance of the city, it seems likely that the residents will have a more difficult time than did the Nonantum community.

One factor which aided the community in attaining its objectives was the existence of an informal communications and information network which kept the Legion and Mr. Sera notified of all relevant developments

pertaining to Victory Field. The timing of the Legion proposal on the heels of the release of the field by the Recreation Commission was not an accident; the freeing of the land was timed to coincide with the Legion's readiness to make a firm offer.

The Legion was kept informed by friends at City Hall of possible objections and roadblocks and was able to blunt the objections before they became larger and more public issues. In fact, much of the Legion campaign was waged on an informal basis involving talks with the mayor, the aldermen, local organizations and businessmen. By the time the formal proposal was brought before the aldermen, the "deals" had been made and negotiations proceeded in an atmosphere of consensus. The vote of the aldermen and their separate committees was merely a formal ratification of a series of decisions that had already been made.

The land use issue at Victory Field received almost no publicity in local newspapers. The sales to the Legion and to Sera were noted in the press in a cursory manner. No editorials or letters to the editor, either "pro" or "con", appeared during the period of negotiation. The sales were affected in an atmosphere devoid of controversy and debate. It is probable that the great majority of the citizens of Newton are unaware of what transpired in the Victory Field incident and, going a step further, it is questionable, even if the citizens had been thoroughly informed, whether they would have been stirred to oppose the neighborhood interest. <sup>11</sup>

It seems clear that in the case of Victory Field a minority interest, representing the village of Nonantum and embodied in the proposal of the American Legion and, to a lesser extent, in an abutter's claim, was the deciding force in disposing of one of the few remaining sizable parcels of city-owned land in Newton. In the purest tradition of neighborhoodism and grassroots democracy, unfettered by political party restraints, the people of Nonantum spoke out and were heard.

#### Nonantum v. the Public Interest

It is theoretically possible that a neighborhood interest is synonymous with the public interest. One could conceivably argue that no social benefit is worth the immediate costs which such a benefit might impose on a group or an area, and that the public interest is served only when individual or group interests prevail. But this line of reasoning breaks down when one considers that many programs of social benefit to one group impose costs on other groups.

For example, constructing low- and middle-income housing in an existing middle-class neighborhood as part of a program to disperse ghetto residents into suburban locations, inevitably results in an increased burden in terms of taxes, school needs and services to the community. If one asserted, as some people do, the primacy or the equality of the neighborhood interest, then low- and middle-income housing would never be built in the suburbs; the social benefits of such housing would be considered subordinate to the neighborhood costs.

There are varying conceptions of "the public interest".<sup>12</sup> In its simplest form, an act is said to be in the public interest if "it serves the ends of the whole public rather than those of some sectors of the public."<sup>13</sup> The arguments set forth in this paper rest on an assumption that there is a clearly identifiable public interest relating to the Victory Field issue. Baldly stated, we maintain that it was in the public interest to build low- and/or middle-income housing on Victory Field.

Before stating the case for this definition of the public interest at Victory Field, it is appropriate to expand somewhat on what we mean by "the public interest". It appears to us that some goals override other goals simply by virtue of their virtue. Let us suppose an individual holds two related interests: (1) to live an honest life, and (2) to be rich. Let us further suppose that these interests are mutually exclusive. It seems elementary to grant the primacy of the first goal over the second. Similarly, a society may hold two interests which, for the sake of argument, we will label mutually exclusive: (1) providing decent housing for all its members, and (2) maintaining the status quo in suburbia. In this situation, we believe the first interest overrides the second on the basis of morality alone.

Banfield and Meyerson suggest other criteria besides "morality" as a basis for selecting appropriate societal ends:

The most familiar pattern in our society admits into account ends which are: a) community-regarding rather than self-regarding; b) stable rather than transitory; c) general rather than particular in reference; d) (pertinent) to the role of the citizen rather than to some private role; e) common or statistically frequent rather than idiosyncratic or infrequent....



Measured against any or all of these standards, it is reasonable to identify the building of low- and middle-income housing as in the public interest.

Three levels of public pronouncements buttress our identification of the "public interest" at Victory Field. At the federal level, President Lyndon Johnson, in his charge to the Kaiser Commission in 1967, stated that providing decent housing for every American family was the "most pressing unfulfilled need of our society."<sup>15</sup> The Housing Act of 1968 reaffirmed a national goal originally stated in the Housing Act of 1949 of providing "a decent home and a suitable living environment" for every American. Further, recent policy statements from the Department of Housing and Urban Development have stressed the desirability of locating subsidized housing in the suburbs rather than concentrating it in overcrowded areas of the central city.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has recognized the existence of an "acute shortage of decent, safe and sanitary housing" and calls the condition "inimical to the safety, health morals and welfare" of residents of the Commonwealth.<sup>16</sup> Several recent legislative acts have supported housing construction within the state; these include the anti-snob zoning act (Chapter 774) and the creation of the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency, an agency concerned with providing financing for low- and middle-income housing.

On the local level, every important political spokesman in Newton has announced support for construction of low- and middle-income housing in the city. In November, 1967, a report of the

aldermanic subcommittee on low-income housing recognized a need for upwards of 200 units of low-income family housing in the city. The aldermen, in accepting this report, requested the Planning Department to conduct a comprehensive study of the city's housing needs; their report, Low-Moderate Income Housing Study, was issued in September, 1968, affirming the need for a minimum of 200 units for low-income families plus an equal number of units for middle-income families. The report selected forty-two sites in Newton with varying levels of priority for low- and middle-income housing.<sup>17</sup>

In May of 1969 the aldermen passed a resolution which was also signed by Mayor Basbas which stated in part:

...the city shall not release any of the city-owned property named in the report for other purposes unless the Board of Aldermen decide that the site is not suitable or available for low and moderate income housing, and

That with respect to the private property named in the report, the Board of Aldermen, when it considers a site for any purpose, shall include in its consideration the suitability of or need for the site for low and moderate income housing.<sup>18</sup>

A city-wide housing conference sponsored by a number of civic organizations including the League of Women Voters, Newton Chamber of Commerce, Newton Committee for Fair Housing and the Newton Community Council was held in the Spring of 1969. Over three hundred people attended and a resolution was passed urging the creation of at least 400 units of low- and moderate-income housing.

The Democratic and Republican City Committee issued statements recognizing a city-wide need for subsidized housing and supporting immediate action to satisfy this need.

Despite these generalized endorsements from all segments of the community regarding the need for housing, the Board of Aldermen has never voted to support any specific housing program for low- and middle-income families although at least two major proposals have been set before them for approval since 1969. In one instance, a major plan for 500 units of housing sponsored by NCDF garnered seventeen votes, one short of the needed two-thirds majority.

Whether public utterances reflect inner convictions is, of course, open to debate but the very fact that public leaders at all levels of government have almost unanimously supported this country's urgent need for housing for low- and middle-income people is an indication of the perceived morality of the goal. "Housing", like "motherhood" and "Social Security", is becoming an unquestioned good, defended, at least in the abstract, by one and all.

The question still remains whether it is in the public interest to build subsidized housing at a specific site (i.e., Victory Field). The Planning Department's comprehensive report on housing identified Victory Field as one of the twelve sites in the city with first-order potential for housing development.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, of the twelve sites named in the report, Victory Field was the only city-owned piece of land of any magnitude. Mark Waltch, a Newton resident and a prominent developer with considerable experience in the construction of subsidized housing, called Victory Field "the prime site in the city" for low- and middle-income housing.<sup>20</sup> A report on Victory Field, published in December of 1969, recognized the opportunity for the city to

"exercise a role of leadership in supporting the concept of low-moderate income housing" by its actions at Victory Field.<sup>21</sup>

The weight of evidence indicates that Victory Field was eminently suitable for development as a site for low- and middle-income housing and that the public interest, as expressed by national, state and local leaders would have been served by reserving the site for that purpose. Of the groups interested in the field, three of them--the Newton Housing Authority, NCDF, and, to a lesser extent, the private developers--were prepared to develop the site for low- and/or middle-income housing. Proposals presented by these groups would, in some degree, have been in line with what we view as the public interest at Victory Field.

However, decision-makers in Newton failed to act in a manner consistent with the public interest in the land use issue at Victory Field. A community-wide goal (low- and middle-income housing) was subordinated to a neighborhood or minority goal (an American Legion clubhouse). The power of a special interest group overcame a more generalized interest; a conservative viewpoint prevailed over a liberal cause. The triumph of a minority interest was facilitated by the structure of Newton's political system which, given the existing level of citizen indifference to most public issues, mitigated against a course of action guided by generalized goals and fostered the aims of special interests.

FOOTNOTES--CHAPTER FOUR

<sup>1</sup>Newton, Massachusetts, Resolution No. 435-69 of the Board of Aldermen.

<sup>2</sup>Telephone interview with Marc Slotnick, executive director of Newton Community Development Foundation, Newton, Mass., December 7, 1971.

<sup>3</sup>The Newton Graphic, January 29, 1970, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., December 18, 1969, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>Newton, Massachusetts, Resolution No. 144-70 of the Board of Aldermen.

<sup>6</sup>Interview with Joseph Karlin, City Clerk, Newton, Massachusetts, November 16, 1971.

<sup>7</sup>Interview with city official who declined to be quoted directly.

<sup>8</sup>Telephone interview with Joseph Cortes, director, United Cerebral Palsy of Metropolitan Boston, September 29, 1971.

<sup>9</sup>See Robert Engler's "Subsidized Housing in the Suburbs," p. 95. Also, see The New York Times from September, 1971 to January, 1972 for a description of a lower middle-class neighborhood's reaction to a public housing project in Forest Hills.

<sup>10</sup>Interview with Nonantum resident who declined to be quoted directly.

<sup>11</sup>Raymond and May, Zoning Controversies in the Suburbs, p. 72.

<sup>12</sup>Martin Meyerson and Edward C. Banfield discuss various conceptions of the public interest in Politics, Planning and the Public Interest (Glencoe, New York: The Free Press, 1955), pp. 322-39.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 322.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 326.

<sup>15</sup>Report of the President's Committee on Urban Housing, Edgar F. Kaiser, chairman (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1968), p. 1.

<sup>16</sup>Massachusetts, Acts of 1968, "Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency Statute," Chapter 704, sec. 2.

FOOTNOTES--CHAPTER FOUR (Continued)

17 Newton, Massachusetts, Low-Moderate Income Housing Study, pp. 31-32.

18 Newton, Massachusetts, Resolution No. 802-69 of the Board of Aldermen.

19 Newton, Massachusetts, Low-Moderate Income Housing Study, pp. 31-32.

20 Interview with Mark Waltch, Cambridge, Massachusetts, December 6, 1971.

21 Newton, Massachusetts, Victory Field, p. 5.

CHAPTER FIVEBEYOND VICTORY FIELD

What we have written illustrates the impossibility of achieving full relevance to immediate and practical issues while avoiding judgments which are not rigorously substantiated.... We have made extensive use of participant observation and of interviews with leading actors. We have also relied heavily on documents--minutes, memoranda, speeches, newspaper files and so on--to supplement first-hand accounts. We have not been able to avoid the necessity of making judgments....

Martin Meyerson and Edward Banfield<sup>1</sup>

In developing a conceptual framework for our analysis of land use at Victory Field, we postulated certain ideological influences on suburban political structure (i.e., neighborhoodism, nonpartisanship and grassroots democracy) and turned to an examination of relevant literature and to an analysis of a suburban government to support our contention that these values are strongly reflected in modern suburban governments. We believe that there is much logical support for a view of suburban government as reflecting intense concern for these standards. In particular, the marked decentralization and fragmentation of the decision-making process in Newton appears to be closely related to a desire to maintain a system of government which gives full weight to grassroots democracy and to the neighborhoods and which resists the intrusion of formal party politics at the local level as an unnecessary barrier between the electorate and the government.

We have indicated that a system of government predicated on these ideals works on the assumption that the great mass of citizens

in the body politic will exercise the rights and responsibilities of participation in the processes of local government. And the partial power vacuum which results if a large part of the citizenry fails to exercise these rights and responsibilities enables special interest groups to exercise a disproportionate share of influence in the decision-making process.

Our examination of the events relating to Victory Field showed that a decentralized and fragmented decision-making process designed to give maximum weight to citizen opinion can actually encourage the triumph of special interests over a more generalized public interest in the absence of active support for a community-based view. Moreover, these special or partial interests tend to reflect a conservative philosophy, supporting the status quo against more liberal positions.

The decision-making actions centered around the land use issue at Victory Field are evidence in support of the more generalized hypothesis which is central to this paper. Based on this evidence, it seems fair to state that the hypothesis was valid in the case of Victory Field. The crucial question is whether one can generalize from this specific incident to a wider class of decision-making instances.

#### The Limitations of Victory Field

This researcher, like the eminent social scientists quoted at the beginning of this chapter, readily admits to the combinations of fact and judgment, evidence and supposition, which have been used to establish and test the hypothesis stated at the outset of the paper. Like Meyerson and Banfield, we have attempted to indicate clearly that



which is fact and that which is interpretation. Moreover, we have never presumed that our interpretation is the only possible one to be drawn from the evidence; rather, we prefer to view the results of this research endeavor as an interpretation which appears to be well-grounded in theory and in fact, but one which is open to refutation and to question.

The need to interweave judgment with evidence to defend the initial assumptions can be seen as a fundamental limiting factor on the value of this research as a basis for generalizations about suburban decision-making. Two other factors impose serious limitations on the utility of this study as a basis for widespread generalizations concerning decision-making patterns.

First, we dealt with one specific incident in land use decision-making. One researcher has observed that "the same pattern of decision-making is unlikely to reproduce itself in more than one issue-area."<sup>2</sup> It is questionable if one can generalize from a pattern observed in land use decision-making to other areas of decision-making such as education and taxes. However, our analysis suggests that other land use decisions in Newton would tend to conform to the pattern that was observed at Victory Field.

Even if one restricts one's conclusions to land use decision-making, this study still has not produced evidence which indicates a universal pattern into which most suburban communities can be expected to fit. In fact, the entire thrust of this research indicates that land use decision-making in a suburb can best be understood in terms

of the specific formal and informal political arrangements of the community not in terms of generalized expectations or norms.

A second limitation on the usefulness of this study as a basis for generalization about suburbia is the nature of the community chosen for study. From a demographic point of view, Newton is no ordinary suburb if, indeed, any suburb can be considered "ordinary". And Nonantum is not a typical suburban neighborhood.

#### The Value of Victory Field

We believe this study has utility on three levels. Firstly, its findings should be useful to housers who contemplate building low- and middle-income housing in the City of Newton. Secondly, the study points up the need for understanding and evaluating suburban political structure as a useful tool in efforts to influence land use decision-making. Finally, the study of Victory Field illustrates the problems inherent in trying to reconcile the need for centralization and planning to handle the complex issues of our society with a strong urge for grassroots democracy and neighborhood control.

#### ...to Housers

Proponents of low- and middle-income housing in suburban locations felt that Newton could have set a national example as an affluent suburb ready to assume its share of the responsibility for providing needed housing. The pronouncements of community leaders voicing concern and support for low-income housing buttressed the expectations of success. However, a deeper understanding of the

ideological bases of Newton's political system and the decentralized and fragmented decision-making which characterizes the system would perhaps have indicated to would-be housers that despite its liberal orientation and public support for housing, Newton's system was bound to produce neighborhood-oriented, conservative land use decisions. The results of the land use struggle over Victory Field as well as the more widely publicized rejection of the NCDF proposal were predictable in terms of the city's political structure. Thus, housers interested in immediate acceptance of low- and middle-income housing programs with an eye to establishing a model for other suburbs to follow, should have bypassed Newton.

If, however, a housing group is determined to carry the battle to Newton, it seems clear that its chances for success in influencing land use policy are closely related to its understanding of the city's political structure. Based on knowledge of how and why decisions are made in Newton, a houser might adopt one or both of the following strategies. He could attempt to mobilize extensive liberal support throughout the city to provide a counterbalancing force to inherent neighborhood resistance. There are obvious difficulties in activating people around an issue that many perceive as abstract and of secondary importance. The likelihood is small that a meaningful number of Newton citizens would rally around an effort to build housing units on a little-known site called Victory Field in a remote corner of the city.

A second strategy might focus on winning neighborhood support for the project. NCDF attempted to trade off with the neighborhood in

regard to Victory Field and the nearby Stearns School site but they were unsuccessful in this effort primarily because the neighborhood rightfully recognized NCDF's low level of influence in decision-making. In a neighborhood such as Nonantum, the obvious route to gaining acceptance of a low- and middle-income project would be via the community leadership--Pellegrini, the local aldermen, the Improvement Association and the Legion. In the case of Nonantum, the feelings against subsidized housing are so strong that it is doubtful if enough pressure could be exerted on the neighborhood leadership to generate a meaningful degree of community acceptance. One would probably have to have something worthwhile to trade off with the community.

A houser might well decide to direct his efforts at neighborhoods with less political influence than Nonantum. Our study suggests that despite the desirability of the Victory Field site, the goal of building low- and middle-income housing in Newton might best be achieved by recognizing the political realities of the situation and attempting to construct housing in areas of the city which are less likely to offer organized resistance and which have less political clout.

#### ...as A Tool

Although state and federal governments have made attempts to exert some measure of control over land use and zoning matters, it seems clear that these decision-making functions will continue to remain largely within the control of local jurisdictions for the immediate future.

We believe that the study and comparison of the political structure of local governments could provide a basis for generalized observations regarding land use decision-making. Although no suburban system of government is exactly reproduced in another, there are enough shared structural characteristics and ideological similarities among suburban communities to open up the possibility of comparing and grouping suburbs by structural characteristics. One might postulate that given a similar political structure (i.e., weak mayor, a large number of aldermen elected from a ward base, nonpartisanship) that a suburb will tend to have a fragmented and decentralized decision-making process which will encourage land use decisions based on partial interests rather than community-wide goals. The key variable seems to us to be "political structure", a factor that has been "too frequently neglected as an independent variable in community studies...."<sup>3</sup>

Our study points up the utility of the analysis of local political structure as a path towards better understanding of the failure of suburban governments to implement liberal land use policies. Robert Wood has observed: "It is little wonder that we know most about our national, less about state, and least about local politics. The task of research expands geometrically as we go down the scale."<sup>4</sup> And, indeed, it is a task of heroic proportions to attempt to unravel the myriad threads of local government. But it is an essential task for the serious social scientist who recognizes the need for understanding as a prerequisite for effective action.

In our research we have explored land use decision-making in terms of the political structure of a suburban community; we have tried to indicate the overriding importance of Newton's political structure as a determinant in land use decision-making. In our opinion, demographic characteristics, cultural patterns and political affiliations are relatively less important influences on land use decision-making output. The observer who expects liberal communities to produce liberal land use policy is basing his expectation on false grounds. We believe that an analysis of the political form of a community would provide a good basis for predicting the land use decision-making results in a given community.

#### ...to Urbanologists

A fundamental dilemma of modern society concerns the incompatibility of master planning with the decentralized power and authority which characterize local governments. The complexity and scope of problems such as transportation, housing and education which confront society cry out for a degree of centralization of planning and implementation which is difficult to reconcile with concepts of local control and grassroots democracy.<sup>5</sup> There is an increasing awareness of the problem of how to make attention to neighborhood demands compatible with city, regional and state-wide goals.<sup>6</sup>

The case of Victory Field is one small illustration of the tension that exists between the desire for neighborhood control, on the one hand, and the need to implement community-wide goals on the

other. The case study demonstrates how the lack of effective centralized authority and the resulting extreme decentralization of influence result in the defeat of the public interest.

Social science literature is replete with articles and books emphasizing the dichotomy between planning and politics in our big cities.<sup>7</sup> Less note has been taken of the same dichotomy within many suburban communities. The case for regional planning and metropolitan forms of government has been eloquently presented but this begs the question of how to resolve the conflict between the need for planning and the desire for neighborhood control within a suburban community. The emphasis on metropolitan forms of government as a solution to the failure of the suburbs to act in a manner consistent with broadly-based community objectives implies that no local solution can resolve the conflict between community goals and local implementation. It assumes that suburban communities, left to themselves, will not be able to reconcile the need for actions based on the public interest with the demands of their citizens for maximum influence over decision-making.

#### Some Signs of Change

In Newton, there are indications that what happened at Victory Field may not soon be repeated in other land use issues. The winds of change are blowing over the Garden City and while they are not of hurricane strength, they do seem strong enough to effect some changes in the structure of city government.

The most important elements of change derive from the adoption, by popular vote, of a revised City Charter. On November 2, 1971, Newton voted by a narrow margin (10,746 to 9,524) to accept the recommendations of a nine-member Charter Commission. Probably the most significant provisions of the new charter are those which deal with strengthening the office of the mayor.<sup>8</sup> His term of office has been increased from two to four years and he is now required to serve on a full-time basis. The mayor's power of appointment has been strengthened by requiring a two-thirds negative vote of the Board of Aldermen within a sixty day period to nullify an appointment. Presently, the Board has to vote affirmatively to confirm and there is no time limit on this vote. In addition, the mayor has been given broader powers relating to the reorganization, consolidation and abolition of city departments.

The new charter also clarifies and strengthens the planning functions of the executive branch.<sup>9</sup> The Board of Aldermen will now be required to adopt a Comprehensive Plan for the city which is to serve as a guideline in aldermanic actions relating to land use and development, urban renewal and expenditures for capital improvement. Thus, there will be a formal commitment by the aldermen to an integrated long-range plan for Newton. Whether this will result in more rational land use decision-making remains to be seen.

Predictably, the steps towards centralization and master planning have been balanced by charter provisions which strengthen the role of the neighborhoods and the individual citizen.<sup>10</sup> The mayor



is empowered to appoint an ombudsman, called a Citizen Assistance Officer, who will process citizen complaints, keep a grievance file and assist the public in its dealings with local governmental agencies. The charter also provides for the establishment of neighborhood councils "to encourage citizen involvement in government." These councils, to be established by means of neighborhood petition to the Board of Aldermen, are designed to achieve limited self-government at the local level in matters such as recreation programs, crime prevention and urban renewal.

Initiative and referendum procedures have been made more readily available to citizens and it is anticipated that the lowered requirements for the number of signatures will result in more frequent use of these procedures for bringing issues to a public vote.

During the year-long debate on charter revision, a key objective of many members of the Charter Commission was to effect a reduction in the number of aldermen. At the public hearings on the issue, the incumbent aldermen led opposition to any reduction, claiming it would lower the government's level of responsiveness to the people. There was also strong opposition to lengthening the mayor's term of office for the same reason but proponents of this change were able to muster sufficient support to gain acceptance.

The charter revisions should result in a centralization and legitimation of planning functions in a significantly stronger mayoral office. There is also a slight weakening of aldermanic powers in relation to mayoral appointments and an effort to provide some meaningful

control of land use policy via the guidelines of a Comprehensive Plan. Although the neighborhood councils are not yet operative, there is already much speculation about their possible impact on decision-making in the city.

In addition to the changes in structure incorporated in the new charter, the incoming administration is considering a major realignment of some executive agencies and authorities.<sup>11</sup> The plan being considered would combine urban renewal, housing, planning and code enforcement functions into a Development Agency which would report directly to an executive assistant under the mayor. This super-agency would incorporate functions now spread among the Health Department, Planning Department, Renewal Authority and Housing Authority. Programs relating to land development, renewal and housing would be coordinated and meshed into a coherent program backed with the authority of the mayor.

This last point is extremely important. As presently constituted, the Renewal Authority and the Housing Authority, composed primarily of political appointees lacking professional expertise, function without real legitimacy. They do not have regularized inputs from the Planning Department. And, more importantly, the mayor can, at his pleasure, support their programs, remain neutral or actively oppose them. By bringing these agencies into direct and close relationship with the executive department, their programs become the mayor's programs just as Edward Logue's development programs for the City of Boston in the late 1960's were part and parcel of Mayor John

Collins' administration. It seems apparent that the programs of a centralized development agency would have more weight than the separate proposals of semi-independent agencies and authorities which often lack the support of the mayor and the Planning Department.

Another key element in the proposed reorganization is the increase in importance assigned to the role of planning in land development and housing policy-making. There is a growing recognition at Newton City Hall that "at some stage, and to some degree, decisions must be taken out of the political context and handed over to the planner."<sup>12</sup> To the degree that it leads to a lessening of neighborhood influence on decision-making, the proposed reorganization can be expected to arouse opposition from the aldermen and other citizen groups. And, political realities being what they are, the movement for change may be defused by opposing forces.

However, the need for change in Newton is becoming increasingly apparent; there is a growing recognition that no suburb can continue to enact land use measures which fail to take into account the urgent needs of the wider community. If land use decision-making is to remain under the control of local jurisdictions, the suburbs must demonstrate their ability to pursue land use policies which conform to the general public interest. The structural reforms which will lead towards a more centralized and rational pattern of decision-making will inevitably result in a diminution of citizen influence and neighborhood control of land use matters. And suburbanites will not easily relinquish their voice in land use decision-making; the traditions of

grassroots democracy and neighborhoodism are not easily compromised. But it is clear that if residents of suburban communities are not willing to accede to the enactment of land use measures that are consistent with regional, state and national goals, land use control will eventually be wrested from the hands of local government.

FOOTNOTES--CHAPTER FIVE

<sup>1</sup>Meyerson and Banfield, Political Planning and the Public Interest, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>Nelson W. Polsby, Community Power and Political Theory (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 113.

<sup>3</sup>Clark, Community Structure and Decision-Making, p. 469.

<sup>4</sup>Wood, Suburbia, p. 177.

<sup>5</sup>Banfield and Wilson, City Politics, p. 202.

<sup>6</sup>James Q. Wilson, "Planning and Politics: Citizen Participation in Urban Renewal," in Urban Planning and Social Policy, ed. by Bernard J. Frieden and Robert Morris (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1968), p. 222.

<sup>7</sup>See Urban Planning and Social Policy, edited by Frieden and Morris and Dilemmas of Social Reform by Peter Marris and Martin Rein (New York: The Atherton Press, 1969).

<sup>8</sup>Newton, Massachusetts, Revised City Charter (1971), art. 3, secs. 1, 3, 4.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., art. 7, secs. 2, 4, 5.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., art. 9, art. 10, art. 3, sec. 2(b).

<sup>11</sup>The following information about reorganization of city agencies was obtained through interviews with members of the incoming administration who declined to be quoted directly.

<sup>12</sup>Peter Marris and Martin Rein, "Poverty and the Community Planner's Mandate," in Urban Planning and Social Policy, ed. by Bernard J. Frieden and Robert Morris (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1968), p. 429.

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Joseph Karlin, Newton City Clerk, August 25, 1971; November 16, 1971.

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Jack Penney, Recreation Commissioner, August 20, 1971.

Herbert Regal, Newton School Committeeman, December 5, 1971.

Jason Sacks, Newton alderman, November 19, 1971.

Alan Schiavone, Newton City Engineer; member, American Legion Post  
440, September 27, 1971.

Marc Slotnick, executive director, Newton Community Development  
Foundation, December 7, 1971.

Edward Uehlein, Newton alderman, November 19, 1971.

Mark Waltch, real estate developer, December 6, 1971.