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**Metropolitan fragmentation vs. new regionalism and the evolving nature of metropolitan governance: an analysis of growth politics and policy in the capital region of upstate New York**

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METROPOLITAN FRAGMENTATION VS. NEW REGIONALISM AND THE EVOLVING NATURE OF METROPOLITAN GOVERNANCE: AN ANALYSIS OF GROWTH POLITICS AND POLICY IN THE CAPITAL REGION OF UPSTATE NEW YORK

by

Paul T. Knudson

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Department of Sociology
2011
METROPOLITAN FRAGMENTATION VS. NEW REGIONALISM AND THE
EVOLVING NATURE OF METROPOLITAN GOVERNANCE: AN ANALYSIS OF
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ABSTRACT

Development in the urban and metropolitan context continues to be a vibrant area of scholarship and debate in the social sciences. This study continues and augments this research by examining two overarching issues: first, how development at the local level is impacted by fragmented political structures and inter-municipal relations, and second, the extent to which local, non-profit organizations and state agencies whose policies involve land-use planning and environmental conservation, are addressing issues of uneven- and parochial-centered development as a by-product of political fragmentation.

This study relies on the case-study method and uses the Albany-Schenectady-Troy metropolitan area in upstate New York as the analytical context. Data come from in-depth, qualitative interview- and archival sources. Structured and semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with local elected leaders, local planning officials, heads of government agencies, and leaders within the economic development- and non-profit sectors. The archival data comprise an array of primary sources including newspaper articles, minutes from government and organizational meetings, and organizational and governmental pamphlets and websites.

Political fragmentation and inter-municipal/regional relations align to form what I call a “regional opportunity structure” that has important consequences on the resource levels of communities, a community’s ability to capitalize on or exploit existing resources, and its capability of successfully implementing coherent and comprehensive development plans. Therefore, local growth coalitions must be studied in ways that take into account stratified regional contexts maintained, in part, by political fragmentation. A community’s growth coalition, therefore, cannot be examined in isolation from growth
coalitions in neighboring communities, jurisdictions, as well as the context in which the community lies within the hierarchical region.

Local organizations and state agencies have an impact on facilitating inter-municipal and regional land-use and development outcomes. The study finds that state agencies are best suited to foster regional planning and development cooperation. In comparison to non-profit organizations, public agencies carry the weight of the state as well as strategic cross-agency communication important for achieving policy implementation. Although non-profit organizations play a role, questions remain surrounding the extent to which such groups represent “shadow” or privatized government and the effect this may have on the wider public interest.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Urban growth and development have long been areas of contentious debate in American communities and public life. Urban development has especially been controversial when it is accompanied by the loss of farmland, forests, and natural habitat at rates in which the public takes notice. In situations such as these, one often hears the term ‘urban sprawl,’ a loaded concept that is often defined ambiguously and used in an indiscriminate manner. In other situations development on the fringe of metropolitan areas weakens older, inner city communities by moving residents, businesses, and wealth further away from the central cities. This process is often intensified when rapid development occurs in areas of substantial political fragmentation at the local level.

Although the factors that determine land use outcomes are multifaceted, in this study I seek to explain first how decision-making as it applies to land development is affected by the regional context in which a community lies. I argue that because localities are embedded within larger regions, growth and development processes must be contextualized within regions, particularly the hierarchical relationships within regions. Second, although these hierarchical relationships emerge from various factors including global economic forces and national politics, this project focuses on how regional hierarchies emerge from fragmented metropolitan political structures in which numerous governments or authorities have jurisdiction over finances and land use within what in both geographic and economic terms, would be a single, unitary region.

I argue that regional context and political fragmentation essentially interact to form what I term a “regional opportunity structure” (ROS), that impacts inter-municipal relations, community resource levels, and the ability of communities to utilize or exploit
their existing resources. These subsequently affect development outcomes. Therefore, within the framework of the ROS, this research explores how growth politics play out for governments and institutions in various places within the Capital Region of upstate New York.

I also examine the role of the ROS and political integration or cohesion among community elites as it applies to economic development at the local level. I argue that political integration is an important factor in extracting important resources from higher-level institutions and government. Finally, I examine activities and reforms of actors that seek to address the numerous problems exacerbated by political fragmentation and regional stratification by encouraging inter-municipal and regional approaches to land use and development. I examine these issues and questions with a case study of the Capital Region of Upstate New York, the region encompassing the Albany-Schenectady-Troy-Saratoga Springs metropolitan area. As I will elaborate on further in subsequent sections, the Capital Region represents both a theoretical and empirically appropriate case for inquiry.

Suburbanization, Development Patterns, and Central City Decline

Urban development and land use patterns are metropolitan-wide issues that affect newly developing out-lying areas as well as central cities and older, inner-ring suburbs. Over the last several decades, as the population in the United States has grown, it has also decentralized greatly. By 1970, for the first time, more people lived in suburbs than in either urban or rural areas. By 2000, 50 percent of the population resided in suburbs with central cities and rural areas comprising 30.3 percent and 19.7 percent of the population, respectively (Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom, 2005). Not all residents, however,
were equally likely to move to the suburbs. Indeed, central cities lost a disproportionate number of middle income residents to the suburbs so that by 1990, one-half of the nation’s poor residents resided in central cities even though these places only held one-third of the population (Benfield, Raimi, and Chen, 1999). Therefore, it came as little surprise that by 2000, researchers, using a sample of 85 American metropolitan areas, documented that central city per-capita income was only 83 percent that of suburban per-capita income. In 1960, the former had been 105 percent of suburban per-capita income (City Distress, Metropolitan Disparities and Economic Growth, cited by Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom, 2005).

With the loss of middle class residents, city governments found it very difficult to maintain public infrastructure. Transit systems, public schools, libraries, streets, sidewalks, sewers, and police and fire departments all faced revenue-challenges due to the erosion of middle class residents. Deteriorating service levels successively usher in a cycle of disinvestment in that new middle income residents, witnessing both higher taxes and inferior services relative to the suburbs, increasingly avoid the central city. With weakening property values, poor residents find cities as the only affordable places to live and the downward economic cycle continues.

As poor residents replace those of the middle class, public infrastructure not only suffers, private businesses are also challenged. With lower purchasing power, poor residents are not able to support the kind of retail stores and services that the middle class customer base once patronized. Regional and national chain stores left the central city downtowns in droves for new suburban shopping centers during the 1970s and 1980s, and in some central city neighborhoods, even independent “mom and pop” stores did not
survive. Perhaps most notable in many poor, central city neighborhoods are the dearth of full service banks and full service grocery stores. Banks have been largely replaced by currency exchanges and payday loan businesses—typically charging usury levels of interest to their customers—while fast-food outlets and convenience stores have multiplied in neighborhoods without full service grocery stores.

These changes have resulted in a noticeable decline in the quality of life in countless central city neighborhoods. While these neighborhoods provide low income households with housing, they do little to serve their residents in most other respects including access to quality education and employment opportunities. Low income neighborhoods are also more likely to face neglect by the political system so that infrastructure is allowed to decay and crime not addressed at levels that in wealthier neighborhoods would not be tolerated by residents. Moreover, pollution-emitting facilities such as waste incinerators, power plants, and bus terminals are disproportionately placed in high poverty areas because local residents lack the political clout necessary to redirect or disperse these facilities to other neighborhoods (Benfield, Raimi, and Chen, 1999).

In more recent years, however, urban disinvestment has not been confined to central cities. Disinvestment is increasingly visible in older inner-ring suburbs, particularly post-war suburbs that have neither the desirable housing stock of the early twentieth century ‘streetcar’ suburbs, nor the new office parks and shopping centers of the newly developed exurbs. Myron Orfield (1997, 2002), an academic as well as a former lawmaker in the Twin Cities of Minnesota, has made the issue of inner-ring disinvestment particularly visible. Orfield has documented both the economic and racial
challenges facing older suburbs. Whereas older suburbs are facing many of the fiscal
strains that have challenged central cities for years, they have also begun to experience
racial resegregation as blacks and other ethnic minorities have increasingly left their
former, inner city neighborhoods for inner-ring suburbs. Though not as rapid as the
‘white flight’ experienced in central city neighborhoods during the 1960s and 1970s,
white residents continue to leave many inner-ring suburbs upon the arrival of ethnic
minorities (Massey and Denton, 1993, 70-74).

Despite the profound population losses in many central cities during the last fifty
years, the exodus of residents to suburban areas has, of course, not been the only
challenge to inner cities. The loss of business establishments and manufacturing firms has
also had wide implications. Manufacturing, in particular, began relocating to suburban
regions following World War 2. With the emergence of interstate trucking made possible
by the Eisenhower Administration’s investment in inter-city superhighways, firms
increasingly found their old, multi-storied plants in urban industrial districts near rivers
and railroads to be functionally obsolete. The federal government also encouraged the
suburbanization of manufacturing by locating war-industry and defense-related firms in
the newly developing edges of metropolitan areas. Other companies were attracted to
suburban locations by lower taxes and laxer regulations—made possible by the declining
ability of cities to annex outlying areas into their jurisdictions. Finally, firms also found
the suburbs to be closer to potential customers, especially those with financial means
(Lewis, 1996).

With the increasing importance of the service sector to the American economy in
1970s and 1980s, along with Federal urban renewal programs that redeveloped
neighborhoods adjacent to central business districts, many central city downtowns experienced an upsurge in office construction. At the same time, however, office construction in suburban areas grew at a considerably faster rate than in the central cities. Although many of the offices that located to suburban business parks were corporate “back offices”—facilities that tend to employ lower- to medium-skilled office workers—suburban areas have also taken advantage of the rapidly growing finance, insurance, and real estate (FIRE) sector. Suburban areas have also attracted a substantial number of the headquarters of major corporations. For example, by 1979, over 50 percent of the Fortune 500 companies in Boston and Detroit had located in the suburbs. With a figure of 22 percent, even Manhattan was not immune to the trend. Overall, by 1984, a majority of office space—57 percent—was located outside central cities. This compares to only 25 percent in 1970 (Lewis, 1996).

The proliferation of office parks led to the coinage of the term “Edge Cities” by author Joel Garreau (1988). Garreau notes that the edge city of Schaumburg, Illinois, an outer suburb of Chicago, has more square footage of office space than downtown Milwaukee. Other significant edge cities include Tyson’s Corner, Virginia, the Denver Tech Center, and the Bloomington-Edina corridor in the western Minneapolis suburbs. Garreau claims that edge cities represent a technologically superior form of urban development that enables workers to easily commute from their suburban homes to their suburban jobs. Edge cities tend to contain other services such as stores, restaurants, and doctor’s offices so that people no longer have to be inconvenienced by the commute to congested central city downtowns. Suburbs then are essentially self-contained worlds of their own, independent of the central city and self-sustaining. Garreau’s analyses, to little
surprise, have come under fire from numerous academics, urban planners, and officials since the debut of his book (Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom, 2005).

Whether one is a critic or a proponent of the current forms of suburban development, no one can doubt the effects that suburban development has had on central cities, rural areas, and the country as a whole. Specifically to this study, suburban development has had a tremendous effect on the urban and rural landscape in the Capital Region of Upstate New York. This region is considered by both the Brookings Institution (Pendall, 2003) and Smart Growth America (Ewing, Pendall, and Chen, 2002) to possess high levels of what they term urban sprawl development. Although in this project I do not set out to measure or even research sprawl per se, because much of the development that has occurred in the Capital Region during the last thirty years and before has followed patterns befitting the term “urban sprawl” as defined by experts, in the next section I attempt to define the concept and compare other metropolitan areas in the country to the Capital Region in regards to development and land use patterns.

Elements of Urban Sprawl

Urban sprawl is a difficult term to describe and define. For this reason, sprawl and what it constitutes has been widely debated and discussed throughout the last fifty years. The author William Whyte has been widely recognized as one of the first and most influential critics of suburban sprawl and the loss of open space. In the 1950s, during the height of an unprecedented building boom in the country, more than one million acres of land a year were being converted to suburban housing subdivisions, shopping malls, and industrial parks. Developers left little green space in such developments arguing, in terms of the residential neighborhoods, that by expanding home lots, the front and back yards of
the suburban tract house would replace the public spaces of a traditional town center or park. Whyte, unimpressed by this rationale, advocated the creation of reserves of green space that would be managed by public bodies. He also lobbied for what can be termed as “clustered development,” in which houses, rather than being spread apart in large lots, would be built at higher densities. Subsequently, the land preserved by using smaller housing lots would be used for open space. Despite the popularity of Whyte’s writings the actions of the Johnson administration, and groups like the National Audubon Society and the American Society of Landscape Architects to create open space land preserves, suburban development continued unabated and actually accelerated into the 1980s and 1990s (Rome, 1998).

Though the loss of open space is typically understood as one of the basic outcomes of suburban sprawl, some measures of urban sprawl fail to quantify the phenomenon. As understood by most urban planners, demographers, and other social scientists, the simplest way to measure urban sprawl is to calculate the density of a given metropolitan region. While this component is important for our understanding of land use practices, it is far from an ideal or complete measure. Indeed, the organization Demographia, headed by the staunch libertarian conservative and critic of public transit and regional governance, Wendell Cox (2001), uses simply the density of a metropolitan region to calculate urban sprawl. By this measure, the Los Angeles-Long Beach MSA represents the least sprawled region of the country. Indeed, it sprawls less than even the MSA’s of New York City, San Francisco, and Boston which have large swaths of settlement that predate the automobile and freeway age. According to this measure Los Angeles also sprawls less than Portland, Oregon, a region heralded for its planning
ingenuity that has kept nearly all population growth during the last three decades within its 342 urban growth boundary.

The Los Angeles area, however, with its clogged freeways, highly segregated land uses and dearth of public transportation options is far from a sprawl-less region. This is quite evident to even the casual observer. Because of this, other measures of sprawl must be introduced. In addition to density, Ewing, Pendall, and Chen (2002), in the most ambitious attempt yet to measure the concept, add three other dimensions: (1) mix of homes, jobs, and services at the neighborhood level (2) strength of activity centers and downtowns, and 3) Accessibility of the street network. Numerous components underlie each of the four dimensions. For example, residential density is not calculated by simply computing the population density in persons per square mile like Cox had. Instead, Ewing and colleagues (2002) add seven other dimensions of density. A few examples of these are the percentage of the population that live at densities less than 1,500 persons per square mile (low suburban density), percentage of the population living at densities greater than 12,500 persons per square mile (high density), and the estimated density at the center of the metropolitan area.

Similarly, neighborhood mix of homes, shops, and offices uses six separate dimensions, strength of metropolitan centers has six components, and three separate dimensions are used to measure accessibility of street networks. The neighborhood mix of homes, shops, and offices is an important factor in measuring sprawl. Strict segregation of different land uses is a clear characteristic of areas that exhibit sprawl. In such places shopping centers, places of employment, schools, and other public buildings can be, at times, many miles away from residential areas. Even if residential densities are
high, if residents, for example, cannot walk, bicycle, or take public transportation to other areas, automobile use is necessary and creates more demand for highways and parking lots that leads in turn to further segregation of land uses because space is needed for these purposes. Sprawl thus continues outward. Los Angeles can be thought of as an ‘ideal type’ of a city that possesses both high density but also a strict separation of land uses (Ewing, Pendall, and Chen, 2002).

The third dimension of sprawl that Ewing and colleagues measure is the strength of metropolitan centers. Metropolitan centers are important for understanding sprawl in that they cluster jobs, stores, and typically homes into an area that can usually be accessed by other forms of transportation other than the automobile. Moreover, metropolitan centers, because they tend to be mixed-use, multi-purpose districts, do not force workers, shoppers, or residents to drive between different places within the center. Metropolitan centers include downtown business districts, but Ewing and colleagues also include other concentrations of activity including neighborhood town centers, suburban town centers, and even edge cities. Researchers have found that centeredness operates quite independently from residential density in regions that have strong centers with or without high population density. Therefore, it provides an important dimension to the understanding of urban sprawl.

Finally, Ewing and colleagues (2002) include the accessibility of street networks in their analysis. This dimension is important in that highly sprawled areas tend to have long blocks and cul-de-sacs connected to large, wide, arterial roads which carry the through-going traffic. This type of design undermines accessibility for everyone but automobile users—if even that. In contrast, street designs in older, urban neighborhoods
and traditional towns use a grid pattern that enables residents to easily walk between blocks to access stores, schools, parks, and office buildings. Though inter-related with density and the neighborhood mix of homes, shops, and offices, the layout of street networks operates independently. Indeed Ewing and colleagues found that some metropolitan areas score high on street accessibility but low on density.

These four, combined dimensions offer a significantly more nuanced and advanced approach to examining urban sprawl than what is usually pursued. Ewing and colleagues (2002) combined and standardized the dimensions to form an urban sprawl index. A score below 100 indicates higher than average sprawl, while a score higher than 100 indicates a metropolitan area with lower than average sprawl. Riverside-San Bernardino, CA at 14.2 sprawls the most, followed by Greensboro—Winston-Salem—High Point, NC at 46.8, and Raleigh-Durham, NC at 54.2. Conversely, New York City, at 177.8 is the least sprawled region, followed by Jersey City, NJ at 162.3, and Providence—Pawtucket—Woonsocket, RI at 153.7. The index is insightful in that it differentiates between the different dimensions of sprawl. For example, Atlanta and Raleigh, NC are sprawled in every dimension, while places such as Columbia, SC and Tulsa, OK have low density but strong centers. Therefore, their sprawl ranking is moderated. Finally, there are cities that are low-sprawling in every dimension: Boston, San Francisco, and Portland, OR (Ewing, Pendall, and Chen, 2002)

Development Patterns in the Capital Region

The Capital Region of upstate New York is typically understood as the four-county area enveloping the cities of Albany, Schenectady, Troy, Saratoga Springs, and
their respective suburban towns and outlying areas.\(^1\) The region is the third largest metropolitan area upstate after Buffalo and Rochester. In 2000 the four-county area had a total population of 794,293 (Capital District Regional Planning Commission, 2005). The region is relatively prosperous compared to other urbanized areas upstate and has posted population gains in contrast to the losses experienced in Buffalo, Syracuse, Utica-Rome, Binghamton-Elmira, and Jamestown (Federal Reserve Bank of New York, 2006). The bulk of the population growth in the Capital Region, however, has been centered north of Albany in Saratoga County. Its 2005-estimated population of 214,859 represents an increase of 7.1 percent from 200,635 in 2000 and an 18.5 percent increase from the 1990 figure of 181,276. The uneven growth patterns have contributed to land use and congestion problems in the Capital Region. While Saratoga Springs has gained population, Albany, Schenectady, and Troy have all lost people between 1990 and 2005 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2008).

The Capital Region has certainly not been immune to overall national trends of suburbanization, decentralization, and sprawl. Moreover, upstate New York in general—despite very slow population growth and population losses in many areas including Buffalo and Utica-Rome—is considered to be one of the most sprawling regions in the country (Pendall, 2003). The Capital Region, in particular, ranks as the 19\(^{th}\) most sprawled metropolitan area in the country as measured by the sprawl index underlined in the preceding section. It scores particularly high on the sprawl dimensions of residential density and the accessibility of the street networks—twelfth in the nation. It scores

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\(^1\) The U.S. Bureau of the Census also includes Montgomery and Schoharie Counties in the Albany metropolitan area, but for our purposes, I will be focusing on only the four principle counties in the region. The data in the coming sections only includes those of the four-counties discussed.
somewhat lower in the other two dimensions of sprawl: strength of town
centers/downtowns (where it ranks thirty-eighth), and mix of homes, jobs, and services,
(twenty-ninth) (Ewing, Pendall, and Chen, 2002). Table 1-1 illustrates how the Capital
Region compares with other metropolitan areas in the state of New York and around the
country.

Table 1-1. Sprawl Index Scores and Rankings (83 Metro Areas)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metropolitan Area</th>
<th>Sprawl Index</th>
<th>Overall Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rochester (NY)</td>
<td>77.93</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syracuse (NY)</td>
<td>80.27</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albany-Schenectady-Troy (NY)</td>
<td>83.28</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffalo (NY)</td>
<td>119.09</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverside-San Bernardino (CA)</td>
<td>14.22</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta (GA)</td>
<td>57.66</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detroit (MI)</td>
<td>79.47</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston (TX)</td>
<td>93.30</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles-Long Beach (CA)</td>
<td>101.79</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia (PA-NJ)</td>
<td>112.61</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland (OR)</td>
<td>126.12</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston (MA)</td>
<td>126.93</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco (CA)</td>
<td>146.83</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York (NY)</td>
<td>177.78</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ewing, Pendall, and Chen (2002). On the sprawl index, 100 equals the average sprawl score.

The Capital Region has lost substantial open space and farmland acreage to urban
development. Between 1987 and 1997, satellite imagery used by the Regional Planning
Commission (2005) indicated that roughly 15,000 acres were developed on land that had
been farmland, open space, and forests. This constituted a 15.8 percent increase in
developed land area. During the same period, however, the population of the region
increased by only 3.4 percent, meaning that the consumption of land was 4.65 times the
rate of population growth. This resulted in the ratio of 1.75 persons per acre of new
development. Planners and social scientists generally agree that in order for public
transportation and mixed-use development to be feasible, population densities must at least be in the range of 8-10 to even 16-20 persons per developed acre (Benfield, Raimi, and Chen, 1999).

Suburbanization in the Capital Region has had many consequences on the region’s central cities. Most notable have been drastic, absolute declines in the population of the central cities. Because the residents who left the central cities were disproportionately white and middle- and upper class, the result of the urban exodus since the 1950s has been a pattern of income and racial segregation in the region. Although Albany, Schenectady, and Troy contain only 26 percent of the region’s population, these cities contain 64.4 percent of the area’s minority population. Most distinctive is the area’s black population, 79.4 percent of which lives in the three central cities, and 52 percent just in the city of Albany (Capital District Regional Planning Commission, 2005). Table 1-2 documents the changes in population of the four primary regional cities.

Table 1-2: Population of Capital Region Cities 1960 and 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>1960 Population</th>
<th>2000 Population</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albany</td>
<td>129,726</td>
<td>95,658</td>
<td>-26.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saratoga Springs</td>
<td>16,630</td>
<td>26,186</td>
<td>57.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schenectady</td>
<td>81,682</td>
<td>61,821</td>
<td>-24.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troy</td>
<td>67,492</td>
<td>49,170</td>
<td>-27.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>295,530</td>
<td>232,835</td>
<td>-21.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Capital District Regional Planning Commission, 2005.

As the table displays, with the exception of Saratoga Springs, the Capital Region’s major cities have lost a considerable proportion of their residents since the 1960s. Not all of the population loss can be attributed to suburban growth, however. Household size in the cities declined, and many residents, due to extensive and pronounced de-industrialization, would leave the region and the state all together. The
most visible example of de-industrialization is the downscaling of General Electric in Schenectady over the past thirty years. Employing roughly 29,000 workers in 1970, employment would continuously decline to 11,700 in the late 1980s, to 8,000 in the mid-1990s (Rabrenovic, 1996: 128-130), to just shy of 4,000 workers by 2007. The case of Saratoga Springs is interesting in part because it is one of only a handful of cities upstate that have experienced any population growth over the last fifty years.

Despite economic restructuring that led to the loss of thousands of manufacturing jobs in the region, the population of the area’s suburbs has grown considerably. From 1990 to 2000 Albany lost 4,373 persons but the adjacent suburban towns of Bethlehem and Colonie gained 3,752 and 3,287 residents, respectively. Similarly, while Troy and Schenectady lost 5,099 and 3,745 residents respectively, suburban Clifton Park and Halfmoon gained 2,878 and 4,595 residents, respectively. Table 1-3 documents the population changes of the region’s four major cities from 1990 to 2000, as well as the four largest suburban towns.

Table 1-3. Population of Capital Region Cities and Largest Four Suburbs 1990/2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albany</td>
<td>100,031</td>
<td>95,658</td>
<td>-4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schenectady</td>
<td>65,566</td>
<td>61,821</td>
<td>-5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troy</td>
<td>54,269</td>
<td>49,170</td>
<td>-9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saratoga Springs</td>
<td>25,001</td>
<td>26,186</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban Towns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonie</td>
<td>76,497</td>
<td>79,258</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clifton Park</td>
<td>30,117</td>
<td>32,995</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilderland</td>
<td>30,011</td>
<td>32,688</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethlehem</td>
<td>27,552</td>
<td>31,304</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Capital District Regional Planning Commission, 2008.

Population losses among non-Hispanic whites were even more severe than overall population loss. Albany, for example, lost 16,041 white residents during the 1990s, and
the central cities lost a combined 35,526 non-Hispanic whites during this time. Conversely, at the same time the non-white, minority population increased by 17,129 residents in the three central cities (Capital District Regional Planning Commission, 2005).

The loss of non-Hispanic white residents coincided with an increase in poverty census tracts in the three cities. A census tract is defined by the U.S. Bureau of the Census as high poverty if 20 percent or more of its residents live below the poverty line. Albany had eleven high-poverty tracts in 1990 and by 2000 added seven more. Only one tract transitioned from high to low poverty during this time. The situation was similar in Schenectady and Troy. Schenectady, with five high poverty census tracts in 1990, added eight more by 2000, and Troy, with five in 1990, added three more tracts by 2000 (Pendall and Christopherson, 2004). Although the high poverty tracts tend to be located in neighborhoods with substantial minority populations, certain tracts in Albany and Troy were located in neighborhoods with a substantial student populations. Overall, the tracts that transitioned to high poverty during the 1990s tended to be adjacent to existing high poverty tracts.

Vacant housing is another serious issue facing the three central cities—an issue closely related to the loss of population and the intensification of poverty. Table 1-4 documents the number of vacant housing units among the three central cities in 1990 and 2000.
Table 1-4: Vacant Housing Units in Albany, Schenectady, and Troy in 1990/2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Vacant Units</th>
<th>Total Units</th>
<th>Percent Vacant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albany (2000)</td>
<td>4,579</td>
<td>45,288</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1990)</td>
<td>4,078</td>
<td>46,199</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schenectady (2000)</td>
<td>4,007</td>
<td>30,272</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1990)</td>
<td>2,484</td>
<td>30,232</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troy (2000)</td>
<td>3,097</td>
<td>23,093</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1990)</td>
<td>2,110</td>
<td>22,871</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Apparent in the table is an increase in housing vacancy in the three central cities. Although housing vacancy grew in all three cities, Schenectady and Troy experienced particularly large increases. The number of vacant housing units increased by over 1,500 in Schenectady alone! All three cities, however, face serious problems in this regard.

Added to this problem is the number of vacant homes that are abandoned. Abandoned homes present a particularly serious issue in that they are often havens for drug dealing and other criminal activities. Abandoned homes also depress the value of neighboring properties and pose a major health and safety risk to residents. In a survey undertaken by the Historic Albany Foundation in 2003, the group counted about 800 abandoned buildings in the city of Albany alone. Most of the abandoned homes were concentrated in the city’s oldest and poorest neighborhoods including the South End, Arbor Hill, and West Hill (Nearing, 2006). Abandoned homes are properties that are chronically vacant and uninhabitable. The owners of such properties take no active steps to bring the property back onto the housing market. In comparison, vacant homes are unoccupied and can result from normal turnover or long-term or even permanent un-occupancy (Vacant Housing Initiative, 2003).
Vacant and abandoned homes are a problem in cities throughout the upstate region of New York. In 1990 eight percent of city housing was vacant. By 2000, based on the continual drain of residents and households out of the central cities, that figure increased to 11.5 percent. Of cities with populations over 50,000, the vacancy rate stood at approximately 13 percent. Moreover, vacancy rates increased in 45 of upstate’s 53 cities. The lower Hudson Valley area was the only upstate region in which housing vacancy rates did not rise. This region had only one city that witnessed an increase in vacancy rates. The economy in the lower Hudson Valley has generally fared better than elsewhere upstate because of a growing number of middle class and affluent residents who commute to jobs in the New York City metropolitan area (Pendall, 2003).

While perhaps less drastic than population declines and housing vacancy, the cities in the Capital Region also lost business establishments to the suburbs during the 1990s. From 1994 to 1999 the central cities in the region lost approximately 150 businesses, whereas suburban towns and outlying fringe areas gained nearly 500 business establishments (Pendall, 2003). The loss of these establishments does not bode well for employment opportunities for inner city residents. Indeed, numerous scholars (Wilson, 1996; Powell, 2003; Goering, 2005; Ewing, Pendall, and Chen, 2002) have discussed the issue of a spatial mismatch between the location of employment opportunities and available affordable housing. Increasingly, new job opportunities are located in places that are not conveniently accessible to urban dwellers, particularly those that lack certain skills and educational credentials (Lewis, 1996). Indeed, the majority of new entry-level jobs in most metropolitan areas are located in outlying suburban nodes that provide little
in the way of public transportation or any alternative to automobile use (Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom, 2004, 66-71).

Central City Tax Bases: The Case of the City of Troy

The loss of affluent and middle class residents along with declining numbers of business establishments also affects the integrity of central city tax bases. The following table documents the per-capita tax capacity in the three central cities, Saratoga Springs, and the ten largest suburban towns in the Capital Region. Tax capacity per capita is measured as the total assessed value of property in a municipality divided by the population of the municipality.

Table 1-5: Municipal Tax Capacity Per-Capita 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Tax Capacity Per-Capita ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albany</td>
<td>37,817</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schenectady</td>
<td>25,789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troy</td>
<td>23,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saratoga Springs</td>
<td>98,368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Suburban Towns</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonie</td>
<td>84,707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clifton Park</td>
<td>80,464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilderland</td>
<td>75,765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethlehem</td>
<td>79,965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rotterdam</td>
<td>58,457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glenville</td>
<td>51,365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niskayuna</td>
<td>80,192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halfmoon</td>
<td>65,787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milton</td>
<td>46,390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Greenbush</td>
<td>56,818</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The per-capita tax capacity in the ten largest suburban towns exceeded substantially—with the notable exception of Saratoga Springs—that of the major cities in the Capital Region. Indeed, the gap between the tax capacity of Colonie and that of Troy was
between three-to-one and four-to-one. The per-capita tax capacity of the Town of Colonie which is both closer geographically and in population size to Albany still exceeded the latter’s by over two-to-one.

Within the region, Troy scores the lowest on a number of economic figures. Because of this, Troy, in a succeeding chapter, will be part of an in-depth case study that compares the city both to its wealthier suburbs as well as to Saratoga Springs. With a per-capita tax-capacity of $23,250 in 2005, for example, Troy’s property wealth is lower than even Schenectady’s ($25,789), a hard-pressed city that has suffered greatly from the massive retrenchment of industry and extensive population loss. In addition, median household income in Troy stood at $29,844 in 1999, an amount comparable to Schenectady’s ($29,378) but a figure far lower than in Albany ($42,935), a city grappling with a whole array of economic and social problems of its own and therefore hardly a benchmark for urban stability or prosperity.

Troy is also saddled with other problems including housing vacancy and abandonment as well as population loss. The number of vacant housing units in 2000 stood at 3,097, or 13.4 percent of all units. This compares with 13.2 percent and 10.1 vacant units in Schenectady and Albany, respectively (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2008). The number of vacant homes reflects continual population loss more broadly as well as the drain of middle income households from the city in specific terms. Indeed Troy, with its heyday and therefore its main period of growth in the nineteenth century, possesses a very old housing stock. For example, nearly 60 percent of all homes in Troy were constructed before 1939. The figure in Albany, a city founded nearly a century before Troy, is only about 30 percent. The age of housing is important in that century-old
homes require expensive and continual upkeep and maintenance. Meanwhile, the cost of
rehabilitating Troy’s aging stock of wooden row houses and hefty, brick and stone
townhouses often exceeds by considerable margins the amount either for which the
homes can be sold or the kinds of rents that landlords can extract. Therefore, substantial
tracts of homes stand vacant, owned by absentee landlords waiting mostly in vain for
property values to eventually rise.

Vacant homes reflect the dearth of middle income households in the city—people
with incomes high enough to afford the rents or mortgages necessary to live in an
extensively rehabilitated housing stock. The loss of middle income residents mirrors the
ongoing population loss that Troy has witnessed for decades. The population loss
experienced in Troy since 1960, 27.2 percent, is even greater than the losses witnessed in
Albany and Schenectady which stand at 26.3 percent and 24.3 percent, respectively.
Troy’s 2000 population of 49,170 is about 40 percent lower than its peak in 1920.

In 2000 Troy had a poverty rate of 14.3 percent for families and 19.1 percent for
individuals. Poverty in Troy is also intensifying. In 1990 Troy had five census tracts in
which poverty rates stood at twenty percent or higher. By 2000, the city had eight
(Pendall, 2004). The existence of poverty is even more visible in the city’s school
districts. Two school districts operate within Troy: the Troy City School District and the
Lansingburgh Central School District. The percentage of students in 2006 deemed
economically disadvantaged in the Troy- and Lansingburgh school districts was 58.4
percent and 46.5 percent, respectively. Conversely, the comparable figure in the Saratoga
Springs City School District was only 5.2 percent (School Data Direct, 2006). Poverty

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2 Lansingburgh had been a separate municipality up until 1900 when Troy annexed the community.
disproportionately affects families with children and specifically single-parent, female-headed households with children. Such families in Troy and in the Capital Region are no exception.

**Added Implications of Fragmentation**

The implications of these disparities are quite important, and political fragmentation, or the proliferation of disparate jurisdictions over a geographic area, exacerbates and complicates some these problems. With comparatively low tax bases, central cities find it more difficult to raise the necessary revenues to fund city services such as police and fire protection, public education, libraries, and street and infrastructure maintenance. Another issue that compounds this process is that central cities, based on demographic variables, the age of infrastructure, and the disproportionate share of highly patronized but non-taxable land uses such as hospitals, universities, and churches, typically must spend more money than outlying suburbs on services without having an adequate base on which to levy them. This affects tax rates in that central cities, because of their relatively low tax bases, typically need to set higher tax levies to offset their dearth of property wealth.

Morgan and Mareschal (1999) in a study of 97 large American metropolitan areas found that political fragmentation (regions divided jurisdictionally by central cities and numerous suburbs) had little negative effects on the health of central cities. They measured the ability of the central cities and suburbs to raise revenues for needed public services. Although there was a definite range of fiscal health in which Newark, NJ and Greensboro, NC ranked as having the lowest and highest, respectively, overall there was no significant relationship between the level of political fragmentation and central city
fiscal health. Morgan and Mareschal, however, used a standardized measure of fiscal health that represents the relationship between a city’s service needs and its revenue-raising ability. Service needs, however, are not equivalent among municipal jurisdictions. Central cities, with disproportionate numbers of poor residents, old buildings, and aging infrastructure, typically possess significantly greater service needs than suburban areas.

Orfield’s (2002) analysis of 30, large central cities found that the central cities compared relatively well with their outlying regions in their ability to raise revenues. The average tax-capacity in the 30 cities was 102 percent of the regional average. Orfield notes, however, that in five of the 17 cases in which central city tax capacity exceeded that of the regional average, those cities had special access to tax levies not available in the suburbs. Access to added taxing authority, however, can put cities at a comparative disadvantage with their suburbs in attracting economic activity in that business may be wary of additional levies and regulations.

Orfield’s research also noted that cities typically have greater access to state and institutional aid than the suburbs so that the tax capacity in his sample of cities was, on average, twelve percent higher than in suburban counterparts. Greater service needs in the cities, however, far exceeded this 12 percent advantage. Poverty adds substantially to the cost of providing public services, and slow population growth or outright decline adds to the per-capita cost of providing services. Poverty adds considerable costs to providing service needs in a variety of ways. In 29 of the 30 cities in Orfield’s sample, just the cost based on the difference in the percentage of elementary school children eligible for free lunch between the city and the suburbs exceeded the difference in total revenue capacity
(Orfield, 2002). Added to this are the greater costs of maintaining older housing stocks, aging infrastructure, and providing fire protection and law enforcement. The latter two service costs are of considerable importance in that decaying buildings and crime are disproportionately centered in central cities.

These are all major factors that affect the central cities of the Capital Region. Albany, Schenectady, and Troy all have full-time, professional fire-fighters and police officers. Conversely, many affluent suburban towns such as Clifton Park and Niskayuna have volunteer fire departments, and the county government mainly provides law-enforcement. The central cities also have aging infrastructure including roads, sewers, and pipelines. New York State law, however, requires that cities pay for much of the maintenance of city streets and arterials while in the towns, the county government is responsible for road maintenance. This system is largely based on outdated and arcane policies from the 19th Century in which the towns were largely rural and poor, while cities were both the centers of population and wealth (Pendall, 2003).

Rusk (2003) argues that the ability of cities to expand their borders outward in order to capture new growth and therefore new property wealth is essential for their fiscal wellbeing. In contrast, fragmentation, which separates the needs in the central city from the resources in the suburbs, exacerbates stratification and poverty. In addition, research conducted surrounding school district fragmentation (Bischoff 2008), suggests a direct relationship between the proliferation of districts and racial residential segregation between school districts. Although school districts are used here instead of municipalities, they represent another layer of government with authorities over taxes and expenditures. Furthermore, because racial minorities on average have lower incomes than
whites, racial residential segregation indirectly concentrates poverty (Massey & Denton 1993).

Research by Fischel (1992) also supports the argument that political fragmentation facilitates the consolidation of local power and resources. For example, key local groups such as homeowners associations tend to have significantly more political influence in relatively small, homogeneous suburban communities than in either large, central cities, or in cities that have been able to expand their borders outwards to accommodate new development. Homeowners associations in the fragmented suburbs are more adept at “effective fiscal zoning” or zoning that protects homeowners and keeps out lower status land uses, including affordable housing. In large cities, in contrast, homeowners associations are only one of dozens of key interest groups competing for influence. Indeed, in these places the preferences of developers, social service agencies, public sector administrators, homeowners groups, and others must all be negotiated.

Central cities are not the only places that have been impacted by political fragmentation. Baldassare (1992) notes that problems related to fragmentation are increasingly being faced in suburban communities including the lack of comprehensive planning involving service delivery, transportation infrastructure, and affordable housing. Furthermore, Hamilton, Miller, and Paytas (2004) found that structures of government matter in regards to the capacity for metropolitan regions to adapt to shifting economic conditions. Decentralized metropolitan areas located in states with a highly centralized state government have the worst outcomes. Finally, Vicino’s (2008) study of older, inner-ring suburbs of Baltimore suggests that serious policy changes that limit urban decentralization, including an urban growth boundary or new zoning tools, need to be
implemented in order to avert disinvestment in even relatively affluent inner-ring suburban communities.

Suburban Development and Open Space

While the last several pages have largely laid out the fiscal and demographic consequences of the ongoing decentralization and fragmentation, this section discusses a similarly important issue in the paper: the impact of dominant land use patterns on the rural landscape. The Capital District Regional Planning Commission (2005) predicts that based on historical population trends and density patterns (which average two persons per acre in suburban areas), 40,549 acres of land in the region will be developed by 2040. The organization estimates that 90 percent of all population growth (81,097) will occur in suburban and rural areas.

Most of the suburban population growth and sprawl in the Capital Region since 1950 has occurred in Saratoga County, which added 125,766 residents during this 50-year period—an increase of 168 percent. Comparatively, the entire region added 204,934 residents during this time frame. Therefore, Saratoga County captured roughly 61 percent of all population growth in the four-county area. It is predicted that Saratoga County will contain most of the population growth in metropolitan area during the next four decades.

The 40,549 acres of land expected to be developed by 2040 is in some ways a conservative estimate. But even at that level the loss of farmland and open space would be substantial. Indeed, from 1987 to 2002, the USDA Census of Agriculture estimates that the Capital Region lost 21,357 acres of farmland, an average of about 1,400 acres every year. New housing developments were built on much of this farmland. Much of the land lost was prime farmland—or the most productive land in the region (Capital District
Regional Planning Commission, 2005). This trend is similar to current patterns of development across the United States. Whereas proponents of status quo development patterns argue that only a small fraction of the available land in the United States has been developed, 400,000 acres of prime farmland was lost to suburban development every year between 1982 and 1992 (Benfield, Raimi, and Chen, 1999).

Because the best farmland—due to its well drained soils and relatively level terrain—tends to also be the most suitable land for building settlements, it stands to reason that much of the nation’s best farmland is located within the suburban and exurban counties of metropolitan areas. Indeed, most cities lie in productive river valleys and plains. Because of this, the American Farmland Trust estimated that by 1997, 32 percent of prime farmland had already been consumed within the 127 highly productive farming regions across the United States. These regions together grow 79 percent of the nation’s fruit, 69 percent of its vegetables, about 52 percent of our dairy products, and about 25 percent of the nation’s meats and grains. Prime agricultural areas, for example, in Southern California and in the state’s Central Valley centered near Fresno produce several $billion worth of food products every year, but they are increasingly under threat by suburban development. The same trends are highly visible outside of Chicago, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Indianapolis, Columbus, and Grand Rapids, MI (Benfield, Raimi, and Chen, 1999).

So far, we have looked at the concept of sprawl and some of the consequences of the current patterns of suburban development in the United States. Again, I only introduce the concept of sprawl because a number of experts have described the Capital Region as an area that has witnessed much of development patterns that befit the term. I,
however, do not intend to prove or disprove the existence of sprawl in the Capital Region. Rather, I intend to examine how the ROS affects general development patterns and the work being done by regional-oriented groups to address such development. Whether this growth should be classified as sprawl is a topic that I will leave to others. The central issue of suburbanization and its effect on central cities, however, is a topic that deserves more attention. How did these patterns come about and what issues, policies, and structures continue to reinforce them? In the next chapter before discussing the specific theoretical and conceptual framework of this study, I spell out some of the most popular and empirically salient theoretical orientations that have been developed to explain the processes of urban development and urban decline. This theoretical work has contributed greatly to our understanding and knowledge of these issues.
CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS/RESEARCH OUTLINE

The current, overarching patterns of urban and suburban development are inherently political, and therefore most theories of urban development include elements of politics, economics, and policy and the respective actors involved in each body. Although the causes of both urban growth and decline are multifaceted and complex, I will present the theories most often upheld by urban and metropolitan scholars. Each theory has its strengths and weaknesses, including the framework that I utilize for the study. Nevertheless, each theory has provided scholars with a discerning lens for exploring the relationships between various actors and structures and urban development outcomes.

Economic Theories

The economic context of a metropolitan area must certainly be taken into account when attempting to understand urban development patterns. Economic approaches generally focus on inter-jurisdictional competition under conditions of international capitalism as the core influence of urban political systems (Lewis, 1996). Urban social scientists in this framework generally seek to measure how domestic and international capital and investment flows impact the decision-making processes of urban government officials. Inter-jurisdictional competition includes competition both within and between metropolitan regions. Cities not only compete for capital investment with their suburbs, but with cities and suburbs in other regions and countries.

Although the economic approach offers insight into the ways in which competition for capital affects governance in cities and metropolitan regions, except for residual effects, it fails to offer much understanding into the variations between cities and
regions. Instead, the economic approaches are better at discerning political and policy continuities across wider regions. For example, capital flows have without a doubt shaped and constrained the policy actions in cities in the American “rust-belt.” Examining capital flows, however, provides much less explanatory power in regards to specific governance issues in Cleveland versus Pittsburgh versus St. Louis, for example. Be this as it may, I will provide a brief sketch of the two primary ideological traditions within the economic approach. The two models, Public Choice Theory and Neo-Marxism, offer very divergent explanations for urban development.

The Public Choice Model

Much of the public choice model surrounds the notion that residents and businesses, “vote with their feet” in regards to their preferences for the type of community they seek. The model is based off the neo-classical economic principle of actor choice in which consumers, possessing perfect information, choose the goods that will offer them the most utility. When applied to urban politics, the public, seeking residential, employment, educational, shopping, and entertainment opportunities, will pick communities that best provide these services. Similarly, businesses, seeking out low taxes, minimal regulation, and good access to transportation and a quality workforce, choose locations in which these factors are abundant (Siegal, 1999).

Public choice theory also assumes that local governments must compete with one another because residents and businesses are able to choose in a free market the locale in which they seek to settle. This inter-municipal competition benefits “the consumer” in that competition forces communities to provide the best services they can at the lowest possible cost to the taxpayer (Tiebout, 1956; Boyne, 1996). Highly efficient
municipalities, therefore, function well, have transparent and open governance, provide
good services, and do not tax at a level that raises concerns or a backlash among the
constituencies. Conversely, communities with corrupt and ineffective governments, high
taxes, and poor services will be faced with both population and financial decline because
residents and businesses will subsequently choose to leave and few new people will
replace them.

Public choice advocates consider the dominant forms of urban and suburban
development as an inevitable, if not beneficial outcome of the free market. Wendell Cox
(2005), for example, argues that responsible, hardworking, and financially successful
individuals and families have chosen to live and work in new suburbs and developing
areas because of their desire for safety, good schools, large-lot homes, and uncongested
roads and highways. Gregg Easterbrook in an article appearing in the New Republic
argues that suburbanization had occurred in many instances because people initially
wanted to move away from African Americans and racial tensions, but he argues that
people now primarily seek out new suburban areas because they prefer “detached homes,
verdant lawns, {and} lower crime rates” that cannot be found in older areas (cited in

Many people who subscribe to free market ideas argue that suburbanization
enabled the middle class to prosper by offering residents less expensive homes and better
services than what was available in older urban neighborhoods. Cox (2005) claims that
the middle class would not have been nearly as strong as it is today had suburbanites been
forced to pay higher rents in urban neighborhoods than what they ended up spending for
mortgages in new, suburban communities. Suburban homeownership also enabled an
entire generation access to the wealth that home equity establishes. Cox also claims that the automobile-oriented suburbs provided residents with greater convenience and freedom than what could be found in older urban neighborhoods in which residents relied on costly, slow, and outdated public transportation systems.

Businesses too, were enticed by new suburban areas and overwhelmingly chose to locate there. Suburban areas typically had cheaper land, laxer regulations, lower taxes, and greater accessibility to transportation networks than old, inner city commercial and industrial districts. The new, outlying areas were also closer to middle- and upper class customers. Overall, this model claims that both residents and businesses preferred the suburbs to the city and by their own autonomous choices, made the decision to relocate there.

The public choice model captures a few interesting points, but overall the paradigm is flawed. It is true that residents seek out areas with nice homes, safe streets, and good schools, but the free market neither signaled them to move there, nor did it create the suburbs in the first place. Indeed, a perfect free market system does not exist, and even when the market is allowed “to operate,” government bodies and structures regulate how it operates because government structures are embedded within the market system. For example, functioning markets necessitate and rely on legal and regulatory frameworks established by the government. At the core these include the recognition and protection of private property, patenting, and intellectual property rights. The government has also established policies to protect against monopolies and oligopolies.

Public choice theory also ignores the fact that personal choice seems to work better for middle class homeowners than it does for the inner city poor (Dreier,
Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom, 2005). Public choice theory contends that people will live in areas that best optimize their preferences. A substantial proportion of residents, however, because of the lack of resources or simply because they have the “wrong” skin tone, cannot choose the places that will optimize their utility. In addition, local government policies such as zoning and minimum lot sizes tend to act as de facto exclusionary tools to keep low income and persons of color (because of their correlation with having low incomes) out of certain neighborhoods or communities.

Public choice theory also ignores historical circumstances and their effects on the options available for consumers, businesses, and public officials. What can be thought of as path dependency is extremely important in regards to urban development outcomes. The path taken in former times highly influences the choices and options available in the present. For example, Cox (2005) argues that freeways and highways are more convenient than public transit for both commuters and for people needing to accomplish day to day tasks such as dropping off children to school and doing errands. Cox, however, does not recognize that circumstances could have been far different if the nation would have chosen to invest and expand public transit rather than superhighways. If the suburbs would have been developed around transit nodes and not freeway interchanges, the use of buses, trains, and trolleys (not to mention walking and bicycling) would have been far more efficient and appealing than they are today.

But this did not happen. The Federal Interstate Highway and Defense Act of 1956, signed into law by the Eisenhower Administration, ushered in an unprecedented period of road and highway building within and between metropolitan areas. From this point onward, metropolitan mobility would now be based on the automobile (Jackson,
The policy actually emerged in part as a response to the perceived threat of attack by the Soviet Union or other “enemies,” with the reasoning being that freeways would enable residents to evacuate cities promptly and orderly. However, it soon became clear that freeways encouraged suburbanization in that they provided suburbanites with easy access to jobs and stores in central business districts. Moreover, as suburbs grew, radial and ring freeways were added, making it easier for suburb-to-suburb mobility.

Construction of freeways was funded by a national gas tax that ended up ensuring that money would be available for road construction. More freeways meant more drivers and more gas consumption. Higher gas consumption led to more gas tax revenues to build more freeways, and so on. Between 1975 and 1995, $1.15 trillion was spent on road and highways in the United States. This compares with $187 billion and $13 billion spent on mass transit and Amtrak, respectively, during the same period (Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstron, 2004: 117).

The bankrolling of highways was also met with the subsidization of suburban houses by the Veterans Administration (VA), the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), and the Home Owners Loan Corporation. In the 1950s, roughly one-third of all private housing was financed with FHA or VA assistance. Nearly all of these homes were built in the suburbs. Powerful homebuilding lobbies defeating federal legislation that sought to promote higher density, urban residences such as the garden-style apartments that had been popular before World War II. These same lobbies pressured Congress to facilitate lower density, suburban housing development. While many returning vets and other households desired to live away from their former urban neighborhoods, government
subsidization, in most cases, made owning a new home in the suburbs far less expensive than renting in the city (Jackson, 1987).

Other important non-market factors exist for the popularity of suburban houses including the federal home mortgage tax deductions, property tax deductions, and exclusions of capital gains on the sales of homes. These exemptions and deductions totaled $106 billion in 2002. These policies are heavily tilted toward middle- and upper-class suburbanites. In fact, the richest 10.2 percent of households received 59 percent of all federal mortgage deductions. These policies encourage people to buy larger and more expensive homes at further distances from the central city (Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom, 2005).

Urban renewal and freeway construction also pushed millions of city dwellers out of their homes unwillingly. Urban renewal programs which sought to redevelop existing “slum” areas into office complexes, public spaces, or middle-class high-rise housing often ended up destroying vibrant neighborhoods and furthered the concentration of African Americans into poor, segregated neighborhoods (Massey and Denton, 1993). For example, the Dan Ryan Expressway in Chicago was designed to segregate the historic African American community of Bronzeville3 from the Irish neighborhood of Bridgeport—the neighborhood of the first Mayor Daley and his scion (Royko, 1988). Similarly, Interstate 94 in Minneapolis was situated as it was beginning in the African American neighborhood of Jordon because the lack of political power held among blacks made it easier to demolish substantial tracts of the neighborhood in comparison to the

3 Bronzeville is the widely recognized, but unofficial name of the historic black community on Chicago’s South Side. Bronzeville encompasses the official neighborhoods of Oakland, Douglas, and Grand Boulevard.
middle class white neighborhoods of Northeast Minneapolis. Los Angeles presents another case in which block after block of the largely black neighborhoods of South Central Los Angeles were demolished to make room for Interstate 110, the Harbor Freeway. Overall, from 1956 to 1972 urban renewal and freeway construction displaced 3.8 million people from their homes (Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom, 2005).

Ultimately, public choice theory is a-historical, ignores the contemporary realities of racial and economic exclusion, and is oblivious to the role of government institutions within operations of the economy. At the other end of the economic spectrum is the Neo-Marxist model which, above all else, elevates the impact of financial capital on the processes of urban development.

The Neo-Marxist Model

Business, by controlling the generation of wealth and investment, largely holds the advantage over the public and the government at the bargaining table. The Neo-Marxist model assumes this relationship and makes the interests of the public subservient to the interests of capital. Unlike capital, cities are fixed spatially or graphically, and this means that they must attend to the financial concerns of firms and investors or risk threats of capital flight and subsequent decline. This model also notes that because cities are fragmented politically, they have little political sovereignty compared to state and federal governments (Pickvance, 1995; Savitch and Kantor, 2002).

These characteristics have wide ramifications for cities and metropolitan areas. In order to attract investment and retain mobile firms, cities are encouraged to offer a “business-friendly” environment that typically includes lax regulations, generous tax-incentives, subsidies, and low overall taxation. This also means that cities must keep in
check social expenditures and redistributive policies for the working class and poor so that money will be available for the maintenance and construction of infrastructure to support business.

The model sees the interests between business and citizens as diametrically opposed. Constructing or maintaining a business-friendly environment generally implies that cities must focus primarily on economic development to enhance the tax base. Many urban scholars see the preferential treatment of business as exacting a financial and social toll on the citizenry. Neo-Marxists generally believe that what is good for business is typically bad for the public—with subsidies for corporations, in particular, being frowned upon. For example, a particularly controversial local issue, publicly-financed sports stadiums, are seen by those in the Neo-Marxist field as ventures that disproportionately benefit the rich owners of sports franchises at the expense of tax payers (Delaney and Eckstein, 2006).

The Neo-Marxist model illuminates many important issues that cities confront. Older industrial cities in the Northeast and the Midwest have been the victims of capital flight to both the non-unionized American South as well as to regions overseas. Shuttered factories have caused substantial economic turmoil in many of their former locations. Cities also compete with each other over firm expansion and usually must offer subsidies and tax incentives to entice firms to locate within their boundaries. With larger projects, states even become involved as in the State of New York’s promised $1.2 billion subsidy to computer chip-maker AMD (Rulison, 2007).

Although this model adds much to our understanding of urban development, it is not without its critics or faults. It is true in many ways that during the last few decades—
with changes in manufacturing, labor costs, international trade, and automation—business has become more mobile and cities more interchangeable. Indeed, “Fordist” modes of production and policies that included supporting consumption and full employment have, since the Reagan years, given way to “neoliberal” programs emphasizing deregulation, privatization, and “free” markets (Harvey, 2005). These policies have exacted a toll on manufacturing dependent cities in the United States and elsewhere. But the theory tends to oversimplify the relationships between capital and labor and businesses and citizens.

Cities are dependent in many ways on capital and business, but the reverse is also fairly recognizable. Cities possess both resources and opportunities to leverage business in ways that do not solely benefit private interests. Fundamentally, the dichotomous statement, “if business wins, the public looses” is far too clumsy a proposition. Local government in many cases does have different interests than business, but their goals can overlap. For instance, a business may decide to locate in an underserved city or neighborhood because it seeks the business from urban customers. Similarly, in many cases local governments seek business expansion as a way to raise public revenues including those connected to the sales and property tax. Therefore, both parties can benefit by expanding development. The different interests come together to bargain for their own respective interests while also sorting through common goals (Pickvance, 1995; Savitch and Kantor, 2002).

Furthermore, even though public officials often seek out policies that are favorable to business, such actions are sometimes fairly popular with the public. Many residents see growth as adding to the community’s quality of life if the growth is
associated with more employment opportunities, higher property values, and a greater array of stores and entertainment venues. Growth and economic expansion are particularly favored by the working-class due to the perceived growth in employment that is expected (Gainsborough, 2002). If growth enhances the tax base, thereby leading to greater resources for public officials, these actors will also have more options on the table. Public officials’ options may range from having more leverage when it comes to negotiating subsequent business deals, to being able to enhance services and amenities, to cutting tax rates if the overall tax base is increasing (Lewis, 1996).

Moving beyond different sets of interests is the role of capital in the Neo-Marxist model. This model assumes that business and capital have the upper hand in regards to transactions and relationships with cities in that capital is highly mobile while cities, with fixed geographies, are not. However, many factors call into question this assumption. In the growing knowledge-based economy in which human capital skills often supersede that of cheap labor, companies, especially larger, globally-based firms that rely on highly trained workers, often seek out locations that possess a highly-skilled and educated workforce, good public services, and numerous quality of life amenities. The former two are important for finding quality employees, while the latter is important for attracting and retaining them (Kanter, 2000; Savitch and Kantor, 2002).

Case in point is the high tech sector which has emerged largely in areas with highly educated and trained workers, particularly near large or highly regarded universities or colleges. For example, Silicon Valley, California emerged largely from the engineering and scientific pursuits at Stanford University. The North Carolina Research Triangle, an endeavor located in the prosperous high-tech region of the Raleigh, Durham-
Chapel Hill area, was created in 1959 through a collaborative effort of businesses, public officials, and local universities. Duke University, the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, and North Carolina State University were all partners in the project (The Research Triangle Foundation, 2006). Madison, Wisconsin has become a center for biomedical research largely through public-private collaborate work with the University of Wisconsin-Madison, one of the nation’s top public universities. Biomedical research is also one of the largest economic sectors in Baltimore thanks to the initiatives of Johns Hopkins University. Other examples of “new economy” centers of innovation near educational centers include Austin, Texas (the University of Texas at Austin), and the Route 128 corridor outside Boston (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard University).

Furthermore, research conducted in Minnesota revealed that the number one issue concerning small businesses was not taxes or regulations but the lack of skilled workers, particularly in the technical trades (electricians, machinists, programmers, etc.). The survey revealed that small businesses leaders sought, rather than tax cuts, more funding for the state’s technical- and community colleges. They felt that economic growth was being hindered by the lack of state investment in education and training (Egerstrom, 2007). Therefore, there is evidence that both large global firms and small businesses desire highly skilled workforces, and the places in the country that possess them will have advantages over those that do not.

The discussion of human capital is related to what is termed, the agglomeration effect, meaning that businesses increasingly seek out locations that have concentrations of resources, talent, economies of scale, and producer and inter-firm networks. As
Savitch and Kantor (2002) explain, “local jurisdictions offer enormous benefits to businesses that depend upon complex information systems, concentration of human resources, proximity to research centers, just-in-time production, and small-batch manufacture” (p. 25). Moreover, the dispersion of capital often coincides but contradicts with the need to centralize communication and coordination. Saskia Sassen (2000) calls the most prominent of these command centers “global cities” and lists New York City, London, and Tokyo as among the most important of this type. Overall, location seems not to have lost its importance as capital disperses, and some regions, including the ones discussed above, but others as well—notably Washington, D.C., Brussels, Moscow, and Geneva in regards to political access—have become even more important in the knowledge-based economy.

Finally, the Neo-Marxist model has placed too much emphasis on the “dependency approach” related to the international political economy. This approach has mainly been applied to global states in which emphasis is placed on the external influences and their impacts on developing nations, while largely ignoring the tangible political choices made by government actors. In the realm of urban studies, dependency theory alleges that global capital accumulation leads to uneven development. Some cities and regions are favored while others suffer the consequences of capitalist accumulation. Ultimately, the model understands that development in the United States’ economically weak towns and cities are part and parcel of a larger malignant process of uneven capital accumulation rather than the outcome of local and national political struggles (Lewis, 1996). While certainly offering a compelling interpretation of urban growth and development, the Neo-Marxist model ends up ignoring the important effects of local-,
state-, and even federal policies (including the United States’ essentially non-existent industrial policy) on how cities and suburbs grow.

Growth Machines and Regimes

Two other models of urban development go further than the economic models in providing a nuanced understanding of urban growth, politics, and governance. Growth Machine theory emerged out of the work of Harvey Molotch and John Logan (1987). Although the theory arose from Neo-Marxist and Neo-Weberian approaches to urban theory, unlike the Neo-Marxist model that assumes an over-riding influence of capital on urban development, growth machine theory provides greater understanding of power relations in a local context. Similarly, urban regime theory, emerging from the work of Elkin (1987), Stone and Sanders (1987), and Stone (1989), provides a similar grounding in local contexts by examining the relationships between government officials and the private sector.

Growth Machine Theory

Growth machine theory has been the more popular analytical framework in studies of urban governance and growth. It is a fairly straightforward concept that argues that land is a city’s central commodity, and that a city’s “growth machine”—a coalition of business and government elites—have a mutual interest in its augmentation or maximization. In this theory business generally takes the lead from which local government officials follow (Domhoff, 2005). Logan and Molotch’s understanding of urban power follows a dichotomy in which the business or rentier interests stand at odds with the interests of regular city residents. In this sense it is similar to the dichotomous Neo-Marxist model, but it differs in that the division exists because the rentier’s primary
interest is to maximize the profits or the “exchange-value” derived from properties, while the main concerns of the residents lie in quality-of-life and sentimental, “use-value” issues such as affordable housing, access to parks and recreation, good schools, and public safety. The theory, along with the majority of research conducted within this area, claims that growth interests generally prevail because they are highly organized and possess institutional power. The growth machine is first and foremost composed of real estate interests and developers but can easily expand into other industries that benefit from urban growth such as the banking and insurance sectors, local media companies, universities, utility firms, small business owners, and even certain non-profit agencies (Whitt, 1988). The process is reinforced by the heavy reliance on the property tax for funding public services.

Research has found that residents are most likely to challenge growth interests when they perceive that their communities are becoming too “city-like” as a result of rapid growth (Baldassare and Wilson, 1996), when growth interests push public officials to subsidize development and infrastructure through new taxes and fees (Kerstein, 1993), and when residents perceive that development will impact quality of life factors including traffic congestion, increased pollution, rising housing costs, and reduction of green-space (DiGaetano and Klemenksi, 1991). Moreover, Logan and Crowder (2002) found that Hispanics, and residents with at least a college education, are more likely than others to support anti-growth measures, while research by Baldassare and Wilson (1996) suggests that as income rises, so too does support for growth control measures. Conversely, renters and African Americans are less likely than other groups to support measures to limit growth (Logan and Crowder, 2002).
Whereas considerable research has documented conflicts between growth machines and residents, other studies have challenged the theory’s stark dichotomy between the exchange values of rentiers and the use values of regular citizens. For example, Logan and Rebrenovic (1990) and Rebrenovic (1996) found that neighborhood organizations representing poor urban neighborhoods will largely support growth interests—even if this might result in the loss of affordable housing—in the hopes that larger metropolitan growth will spill into their neighborhoods, spur investment, and thereby attract middle class residents into their struggling communities. In addition, research conducted by Johnson and Floyd (2006) illustrates that poor and working class communities will support growth policies if they foresee that the projects will usher in greater economic opportunities and needed infrastructural updates. Moreover, Hogen-Esch (2001) found that growth elites and ordinary residents will sometimes join together (as in the case of the secession movement in the San Fernando Valley of California) when fundamental objectives concerning political representation and autonomy override general issues surrounding urban development.

Lubell, Feiock, and Ramirez (2005) present a more nuanced view of business and private sector involvement in issues of urban development in that the pursuits of growth interests are mediated and conditioned by the structure of local government institutions. This is similar to the framework that I will be employing in this study. Simply stated, the way in which local governments are structured and arranged affect the growth machine’s ability to obtain its desired objectives. For example, their research finds that when development pressures are weak, counties that employ professional county managers, as opposed to those with only an elected county commissioner, are more likely to favor
environmental and managed-growth policies. However, as development pressures intensify, counties with only elected commissioners have more ability to restrain growth interests than counties that also employ professional county managers. The researchers explain this outcome on the assumption that if growth interests are relatively strong, the presence of a county manager will provide them with an additional lawmaker to whom they can lobby and subsequently foster as an additional ally.

Finally, researchers have also noted the numerous occasions in which private growth interests have been constrained by community opposition. Bennett and colleagues (1988) illustrate how Chicago’s emerging historic preservationist community in the 1980s was able to halt a massive commercial and residential development in Chicago’s Near North neighborhood. DeLeon (1992) also points to the relative success of slow-growth coalitions who, acting with a newly-elected mayor, worked to restrain San Francisco’s long established business-dominated, pro-growth regime. Finally, Clark (1994) in a nation-wide study and Schneider and Teske (1993) note the importance and success of “anti-growth” groups and “anti-growth” entrepreneurs, respectively, in the struggle to moderate the power of growth interests in metropolitan areas.

Although the effects of the growth machine on urban development are fairly clear, the theory has much less to say in regards to suburban development. While it is true that large, central cities, in their attempts to revitalize downtowns, neighborhoods, and distressed corridors, have largely supported policies of the growth machine, the situation in the suburbs is far different. To maintain the quality of life to which suburbanites are generally accustomed, political leaders as well as residents mainly seek to limit growth within their jurisdictions. Although the theory has little to say in this regard, the use
values sought by suburban residents and officials, can, in a sense, very much contribute to haphazard development outcomes. This occurs because development projects are often opposed in already-urbanized areas in that residents largely want to maintain their communities as they are. They fear what redevelopment projects would do to traffic congestion, noise, the community’s appearance, housing values, and their overall lifestyle. Therefore, out of fear of changes to the community, most suburban residents support status quo municipal policies (Burns, 1994; Lewis, 1996). Because of this, projects that could be part of urban redevelopment- or infill sites are pushed further out to the periphery where local government capacity is poor and where there are relatively few land use restrictions.

These projects can take the form of residential, commercial, or office development. Any of them, however, can encourage development at urban fringes. For example, a shopping center built in an outlying exurb would probably attract home developers in that future residents could be enticed by the conveniently located retail in the community. Newly constructed office parks in outlying suburbs also attract residents because of the increasing availability of employment opportunities that those offices provide. Ultimately, because of opposition from suburban interests—typically homeowners associations—projects that could have been developed in existing suburbanized areas are pushed out to the fringes where residents are less organized and where public officials, because of a generally less diversified tax base, are more eager to accept growth.

In light of these issues, the growth machine model explains much less in the suburban context than it does in realm of central city development politics. Central city
interests—both downtown- and neighborhood based—are typically much more willing to work with developers out of economic development opportunities than suburban interests (Lewis, 1996). Research has also increasingly pointed to aspects that are more independent of the growth machine such as the critical role that certain individuals, (largely those holding public office), play in regards to influencing growth outcomes (Clark, 1994). These individuals often lose support when promises cannot be fulfilled. Subsequently, these circumstances can dramatically alter policy decisions when new leaders emerge. For example, unsuccessful slow-growth policies forged in one administration can either be completely discarded or left un-enforced—positioning growth interests to take advantage of new political openings. Therefore, although the model does a better job of explaining urban development outcomes than the public choice and Neo-Marxist models, it falls short especially when the discussion moves outside of central city jurisdictions.

Urban Regime Theory

Urban regime theory provides a useful framework for the study of urban and regional governance. This approach contends that institutions and actors are interwoven into a complex web of interdependence in which power and decision-making are fragmented at the public level. Though governments are accountable to some level of public oversight and no single group or actor can exercise complete control, some groups have more access to power than others, and regime studies focus on how these segments, “of command power combine forces and resources for a publicly significant result – a policy initiative or development” (Stoker, 1995). Although governments must operate within a system in which private sector decision-making and investment are often the
driving forces that influence economic outcomes, regime theory sees government as a catalyst and coordinator of resources as well as an entity that mediates between different parties to accomplish specific goals. For governments to succeed, they must blend their capacities with non-governmental forces to achieve a level of governing latitude. Thus, coalition building is a central concern for regime approaches. Coalitions are formed out of structured processes in which various actors conjoin to accomplish specific tasks.

A regime can be understood as, “an informal yet stable group with access to institutional resources that enable it to have a sustained role in making governing decisions” (Stoker, 1995). Elected officials, having assumed office through a public vote, must nevertheless cultivate relationships with other influential groups to be effective at governance. Partnering with groups that possess important resources is essential for effectuating policy goals. In this sense, regime theory does not view power as something that is seized by electoral victory or through other manners, but rather as a form of social production constructed by a set of cooperating actors who converge for a shared purpose. For a regime to be successful it has to possess a stable and intense system of relationships that once established, can many times be the driving force in urban politics (Stoker, 1995).

Research conducted by Miranda and Rosdil (1995), following the types of governing coalitions or regimes that Stone (1989) develops in his work on urban growth politics in Atlanta, finds a continuum of regime types or growth coalition strategies. These include classic boosterism and entreprenuerism which elevate the principle of unfettered markets over social and community objectives to achieve economic growth, historic preservation which places restrictions on redevelopment and building-types in
order to pursue growth from tourism and neighborhood gentrification, *environmentally harmful growth promotions* which relax environmental and zoning regulations to attract industry, *redistributive growth* which places emphasis on empowering women- and minority-owned firms as well as policies employing local residents for large development projects, and finally *qualitative growth or amenity-rich growth* which does not view growth as undesirable, but uses growth to add community amenities such as aesthetic improvements, improved pedestrian access and recreation facilities, and signage controls. Each regime type views economic growth and urban expansion as desirable ends but acts through different means to reach those goals.

Although regime theory has no doubt aided in the empirical study of community power relations, it has not been without its critics. Domhoff (2005), for example, illustrates the underlying theoretical weaknesses of the theory. Regime theory, seeing local government as weak, needs to find coalition partners in the private sector in order to govern, but “it does not make a very specific, substantive argument about who holds power in urban America and why they want it” (Domhoff, 2005: p. 6). In contrast, it is quite clear that the core of growth machine’s argument is the intent of the private sector to increase the exchange value of land. Furthermore, Domhoff states (p. 6) “{regime} theory does not have any real dynamism because it does not start with the relatively ‘fixed preference’ that the growth machine has for exchange values. Nor can this theory grasp the inherent tensions in the system because it is not grounded in the relatively fixed preferences that neighborhoods have for use values.” Though Domhoff offers a very compelling point, one could also argue that while regime theory does not grasp the
inherent tensions within a community, growth machine theory takes tension and conflict as a given.

Regime theory primarily adds to our understanding of urban governance by emphasizing elite coalitions, campaign contributions, and backroom deals. In doing so it has mainly been applied to large, central cities, including Stone’s original analysis of Atlanta. In large cities in which corporate firms hold considerable influence, it is not surprising that governing regimes exist. What is less obvious, however, is the presence of regimes in suburbs and smaller towns. Reese and Rosenfeld (2002), for example, contend that business involvement in urban politics is not uni-dimensional but varies considerably by locality. They claim that many smaller cities even lack what could rightfully be considered a regime because—due to the small size and the lack of complexity in these communities—urban governance can be accomplished without substantial private sector involvement. Instead of a regime, local civic culture provides a more powerful understanding the private sector’s role in local government—a position taken most notably by Elazar (1970).

Regime theory also cannot explain what types of development will occur and why. For example, is a governing regime more likely to influence firms to construct large single-use housing and commercial developments, or will they encourage mixed-use developments? Moreover, how will smaller, less-connected firms approach urban development? Not all developers have influence within local government. In contrast to larger actors, less sophisticated, smaller developers tend to be more entrepreneurial and less politically connected. In these instances, it is likely that these parties will follow the path of least resistance. Small firms do not have the resources to hold onto land if they
have to deal with prolonged land hearings and legal cases. Therefore, it is likely that these firms will choose to operate in locations in which regulatory hurdles are not overly cumbersome (Lewis, 1996).

Political Culture

Daniel Elazar (1970) in his book *Cities on the Prairie*, pointed to the salience of political culture in explaining state political systems. Political culture, which he defined as the persistent, generational patterns of political attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors, is largely a product of the historical migration of religious and ethnic groups in the United States. Elazar focused primarily on the religious backgrounds of settlers and labeled the various groups as moralistic, individualistic, and traditionalistic—all ideal type categories. He subsequently created an index of political culture for each state and proceeded to show how political culture impacted the way in which groups approached politics and government in those regions (Johnson, 1976). Elazar argued that within government activities, a moralistic culture heightened or emphasized the “care of the people.” Moralistic cultures privileged popular participation in government and innovative public programs and policies, while de-emphasizing political parties, partisanship, and a centralized, hierarchical government. Individualistic cultures stressed the importance of a functioning market, a concern for government efficiency, and strong political participation and political parties. Traditionalistic cultures represent the polar opposite of moralistic cultures in that concern for public welfare is minimal, political participation is low and discouraged, power is centralized, and competition between political parties neither exists nor is promoted (Johnson, 1976).
Moralistic cultures tended to lie in the Upper Midwest and extended westward through the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Northwest. This culture encompassed such states as Minnesota, Iowa, the Dakotas, Colorado, Oregon and Washington. Individualistic cultures were largely centered in the Northeast and the lower Midwest and included the states of New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. California, a major geographical outlier, was also placed in this category. Finally, traditionalistic cultures were largely Southern with Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, and Florida being among the most traditionalistic (Johnson, 1976).

Concerning urbanization, in moralistic political cultures, fairness and equity would be privileged goals that would extend to the manner in which cities grew and developed. In individualistic cultures, land use and urban growth would ideally follow the currents of market, whereas fairness and equity would only be realized through latent functions of the market. Traditionalistic cultures would place even less value on fairness and equity than individualistic cultures. Instead, status quo policies that keep power entrenched and centralized in old hierarchies is the main priority. Markets are also less privileged in that real, free-market systems may undermine traditional authority and hierarchical power structures.

While the political culture thesis is an interesting set of ideas and notions, ultimately it is a problematic framework. First is the matter of operationalization. For example, how does one separate “political culture” from the overall, wider culture? Is not political culture intrinsically part of religious, ethnic, national, and popular culture? To equate political culture with religious background presents numerous problems, not the least of which is the declining relevance of traditional, religious cleavages and
denominations. Moreover, Elazar’s categorization of the South as traditionalistic based on its Anglican and Protestant background ignores the centrality of race and the region’s toxic history of race relations. Traditional and centralized authority, the discouragement of political participation, and the lack of attention to social welfare, are all outcomes of the institution of slavery and the subsequent racial apartheid system of Jim Crow, not a byproduct of religious and ethnic backgrounds. Hierarchical power structures and low political participation were central to the organization of the Southern agrarian economy, with the primary benefactors being the white, slave-owning, landed planter elites. Anything that sought to democratize the system, including political competition, universal public education, and other social services, were deemed as serious threats to the quasi-feudalistic economic system, and therefore were brutally suppressed. Overall, the religious ideology of the landed Southern whites was used to justify the system; religion did not create the system itself (Spong, 2005; Jacoby, 2008).

Secondly, although political culture might be an attractive rationale for why Minneapolis-St. Paul and Portland, Oregon are the only metropolitan areas with regional, equity-seeking governments (both metropolitan areas lie in regions considered moralistic), other reasons for the formation of such government bodies are more plausible. When Metro Portland was coming into fruition in the 1970s, little suburban opposition existed to block its inception simply because the area had very few suburbs at the time. The mayor of Portland, Neil Goldschmidt, supported strong land use laws and was met with an ally at the state level with Governor Tom McCall, who in 1973 enacted a policy that required counties and cities to draft comprehensive plans that conformed with the state’s new Land Conservation and Development Commission. Land use conservation
was of great concern in Oregon in that, although a very large state, much of its highly productive farmland, as well as the overwhelming majority of its population, lay in the Willamette River Valley, a much more confined geographic region (Weir, 2000).

In Minneapolis-St. Paul, the Metropolitan Council, (the regional government) was created in 1967 by the Minnesota legislature mainly to address the issues of wastewater and sewage infrastructure. Additional legislative acts in 1974, 1976, and 1994 added new roles and responsibilities for the government of which revenue sharing, transit operations, and fair share housing became central activities. The formation of the regional government was probably aided by demographic and geographic characteristics more so than cultural factors. Although Minneapolis-St. Paul has become more heterogeneous racially and ethnically, in 1967 the region was nearly all white, with even the central cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul being only about four percent minority (Schnore and Sharpe, 1963). Furthermore, leaders in Minneapolis and St. Paul, who once largely viewed their cities as competitors, began to realize that greater economic vitality would result if the cities cooperated in regards to planning, economic development, and transportation (Metropolitan Council, 2008). Therefore, economic motives, and those related to the rationalization of infrastructure were arguably the major impetus for the formation of the Metropolitan Council, not the political culture of the area.

Even though more recent research on political culture has attempted to fix some of the operational problems of Elazar’s research (Lieske, 1993), political culture remains extremely difficult to operationalize and measure. At best, it is probably a marginal factor in the realm of urban development as other factors including local political structures, economic conditions, demographic characteristics, geography, and the age of the
metropolitan region, all playing more central roles in the ways in which land gets developed.

Machine Politics

Traditional politics and politicking have long played major roles in how cities grow and are governed. Machine politics lie within this realm. Perhaps the most widely studied political machines are the Tammany Hall and Daley machines in New York City and Chicago, respectively. The longest enduring political machine in the country, however, was interestingly (in light of this case study) the Democratic machine in Albany, New York which—beginning with political boss Dan O’Connell and with his hand-picked successor, Erastus Corning succeeding—ran the city from 1921 to 1983 (Rabrenovic, 1996).

Machine politics is based on the system of political patronage in which the political “boss” rewards supporters of the machine through jobs, contracts, and city services. In Albany, for example, Mayor Corning controlled the city, Albany County, and the Board of Education, which in 1982 employed 7,000 people. Even though Corning had no formal authority over Albany County, political bosses since the early days of the machine controlled it regardless. In Chicago, Richard J. Daley had firm authority over all city departments, the unions, and even significant political matters in suburban Cook County, the second most populous county in the nation after Los Angeles County (Royko, 1988).

Opponents of the machine were generally marginalized. For example, if groups, neighborhoods, or city wards did not support Richard J. Daley in Chicago, those areas faced neglect or disinvestment. Streets and sewers would be unmaintained and parks and
public spaces, (if they existed at all) in a state of disrepair. If a resident wanted particular services in an area not favored by the machine, bribes would generally have to be extracted from residents and handed over to ward leaders in the patronage system. In Albany, if homeowners failed to vote for the machine candidate, they would often witness a sharp increase in their taxable assessments. The machine would also withhold funds to neighborhoods and wards that failed to “fall in line.” Many residents in Albany, particularly the white working- and middle classes, benefited from the machine. When white residents began moving uptown in the early 20th Century, those neighborhoods became the power centers of the machine and were favored by party bosses (Kennedy, 1983). African American neighborhoods closer to downtown did not come out as well and entered a period of steady decline that continues to this day. In this regard, machine politicians had a direct role in how cities were physically maintained and in the ways in which they were allowed to develop.

In Chicago the Daley Administration was known for its redevelopment projects that altered the physical landscape of the city. In order to both fortify the Loop and attain its unofficial goal of “Negro containment,” the large area directly west of downtown known as the Valley—a traditional Italian neighborhood witnessing racial and economic transition—would be sacrificed for the new, urban campus of the University of Illinois, Chicago. Daley also ushered in the Sandburg Village, a massive urban renewal project located about 12 blocks north of the Loop. The development, built on former “slum” properties, was initially slated to become moderate-income housing, but it emerged as highly desirable, higher-end housing for young, upwardly mobile professionals working for downtown firms. To a lesser extent, Lake Meadows, a similar project built along the
lakefront in the South Loop, ushered in similar results, albeit with more middle class African American residents (eventually) than Sandburg Village (Royko, 1988).

Because machine politics have been a political legacy of the American city, they explain less in concern to suburban development. Political patronage systems, however, are also present at the state level and can have a major impact on regional projects and developments. For example, Senator Joseph Bruno of suburban Albany, New York, has served in the New York State Senate since 1976 and has been President of the Senate since 1995. Dominating the politics of Rensselaer County (which lies across the Hudson River from Albany) for nearly two decades, he has been instrumental in gaining funds and subsidies for new highways, business parks, and major firms—including the AMD microchip plant located in Saratoga County. Traditional politics thus is an important component affecting the manner in which metropolitan areas grow.

Despite their shortcomings, I expect to find support for the other theories in the study. Given the nature of government and politics in the Capital Region, with its history of partisan politics and machine rule at least in Albany, I expect that both growth machine theory and traditional politics/machine politics will play a more than marginal role in development trends. Growth machines, for example, should play a role due to the venerable political actors and the equally enduring business interests in the region. Neo-Marxist theory may also be relevant given the concomitant importance and decline of manufacturing, which has been weakened by larger economic and global forces. Given the findings of prior research, I expect to find less support for regime theory, political culture, and the public choice model.
Interest Groups

Because I am studying local governments, growth interests, and regionalist organizations, it is important to note the significance of institutions and interest groups. For example, as an institution, local government acts as both a filter for larger, outside social and economic forces as well as more localized, community interests. This is why the theories that do not take into account local governance and political fragmentation miss a central component of urban development. Moreover, the issue of regionally-oriented institutions and organizations, in particular, necessitates a brief discussion of interest groups in that these organizations can be understood as such.

Recent political research has widely noted the centrality of interest group politics during the last 40 years in both metropolitan- and nation-wide public affairs (Lubell, Feiock, and Ramirez, 2005). Skocpol (1999; 2003) has written extensively on the topic with special emphasis on the way in which professional-based interest group politics have largely replaced broad, volunteer-based organizational political activities. Her diagnosis is largely pessimistic in that she sees the professional-based organizations which employ full-time, highly-trained advocates, as largely catering to elite and upper-middle class interests, while ignoring issues of concern to poor and working-class citizens. This process, in turn, erodes cross-class democratic forces that could otherwise gain traction as was visible following World War 2. The former organizations were large, membership-based organizations such as the Lions, Elks, and the American Legion, which fostered civic participation through building community ties, social networks, and social capital. In contrast, new types of interest groups—relying heavily on full-time professional staffs with large, centralized offices—do not foster civic engagement as they simply operate on
generous monetary donations from wealthy benefactors and substantive foundational grants.

While Skocpol may in some ways present what seems to be a far too bleak outlook on popular political involvement, recent achievements of the largely volunteer-based membership federation of the Gamaliel Foundation point to the influence that grass-root, community-based organizations can attain when members are highly motivated and organized. The national-level interest groups that lobby for “smart growth” policies, including the Sierra Club, the Urban Land Institute, and Smart Growth America, are however, the kinds of professional-based groups that Skocpol feels cannot achieve comprehensive reforms. These groups lack the strong, community-based networks of member activists that Skocpol argues is vital to the process. To be sure, many do possess numerous local chapters throughout the country, but most of their activities are centered in Washington, D.C. and funded by wealthy donors and major foundational grants (Skocpol, 1999). In the end, their activities are largely elite-driven with elites lobbying other elites. Due in large part to this, I plan to examine organizations that are based locally in the Capital Region without strong links to Washington, D.C. The next section offers more elaboration on this issue.

Research Plan

Although we have seen that the factors which determine land use are multi-faceted, the primary focus of this study examines how the interaction of political fragmentation regarding the nature of local governance and regional context form both hierarchies and an overall regional opportunity structure (ROS). In turn I examine how the ROS shapes growth coalitions. This question attempts to go beyond simply
examining how urban development and land use are affected by “said community’s” growth interests, and/or how political fragmentation leads to certain development outcomes.

Urban development has long been a prominent field of study in sociology and political science, but few studies have addressed the issue at the metropolitan or regional level. Despite offering a wealth of understanding, most studies including Logan and Molotch (1987), Stone (1988), DeLeon (1992), Hogen-Esch (2001), Gotham (2000), Fleischmann and Feagin (1988), Bennett et al., (1988) have focused either on how growth actors impact large, central cities or on the ways in which growth actors impact suburban landscapes (Kerstein, 1993; DiGaetano and Klemanski, 1991; Logan and Crowder, 2002). Very few studies have approached the issue of growth politics at the metropolitan level.

For the scholars who have taken a broader, metropolitan approach to growth politics (Benjamin and Nathan 2001; Johnson and Schmidt 2009; and Lewis 1996), these studies have not really focused on how hierarchical regional contexts impact development in different types of communities and the growth coalitions within them. Indeed, these studies primarily examine how the fragmentation of metropolitan governance (regions encompassing various political jurisdictions with their own authorities) impacts how development proceeds. Less attention has been placed on how political structures impact unequal resources between communities/jurisdictions in metropolitan areas and how this impacts growth outcomes. Orfield (2002) includes resource levels of communities in his analysis but does not examine how this subsequently impacts local growth coalitions. In addition, although Orfield investigates
resource levels, he does not examine how fragmentation impacts the ability of communities to utilize and exploit existing resources. In addition, Orfield (2002) and Lewis (2002) neither examine in depth the community and metropolitan responses to these matters, nor the involvement of regionally-oriented, private or civil society organizations. Instead, the focus is essentially limited to formal government agencies and institutions.

This brings me to the second major focus of the project: the prospects for and the characteristics of regional reforms that take into account the fragmented political nature of metropolitan areas. Similar to Lewis (1996), most scholarly studies have examined only the undertakings of formal governments. Their focus is generally either on government consolidation or cooperation (Benjamin and Nathan, 2001; Gainsborough, 2001; Rusk, 2003; Frug, 2000; White, 2003; and Lyons and Lowery, 1989). Yet metropolitan reformers such as Orfield (2002) argue that given the prominence of local control and a legal system that privileges the status quo, full-scale government consolidation will rarely be enacted, much less given serious concern. Furthermore, inter-municipal government cooperation—though much more typical than consolidation—often surrounds services and issues not related to land use but includes the merging of animal control and solid waste disposal departments, as well as emergency health services. Because of these factors, it is necessary to look outside the scope of formal governments to the involvement and activities of quasi-public and non-profit agencies surrounding the issue of inter-municipal collaboration and regionalism.

Gainsborough (2003) and Kanter (2000) have examined the involvement of the business community with respect to regionalism. Businesses are likely to become
involved primarily when regionalism is seen as an avenue to continued economic expansion. In turn, local governments look to business as a coalitional partner in the pursuance of metropolitan expansion. These studies, however, have not focused on the issue of land use but primarily economic development. Orfield (2002) has also studied the involvement of non-governmental bodies towards issues of regionalism, but his focus has primarily involved reforms sought by faith-based organizations. While a tremendous amount of work has been accomplished by the faith community, in addition to formal government agencies, I would like to examine the work done by non-governmental groups, including environmental organizations and non-profit land use planning groups, and how they attempt to address some of the undesirable effects and weaknesses of political fragmentation and regional stratification. Questions include: what can these groups do to work with governments to advance regionally-oriented policies, how is this pursued, and are issues actually being tackled in an effective manner?

Finally, despite the research from Orfield (2002) and others (Weir, Wolman, and Swanstrom, 2005) that have examined attempts at regional reforms by private and non-profit groups, these studies have not looked at how public policy has affected the groups themselves. This is important in that local or state governments can enact policies that either assist or undermine the actions of local organizations. It is highly probable, given the prominence of local control, that current policies limit much of the work that these organizations can pursue, but I would like to investigate whether or not these groups have been able to effectively navigate laws and find openings where new proposals can be attempted along the lines of regional land use and development.
Research Questions

Summarizing what I have laid out in the preceding pages is a set of research questions that attempt to examine the preceding issues.

Q1: How does political fragmentation interact with regional contextual factors to form a hierarchical regional environment: the regional opportunity structure (ROS)? In turn how does the ROS impact growth coalitions to affect land use outcomes on the local and metropolitan scale? How does political fragmentation impact the ability of communities to both utilize their existing resources and to attain new resources?

Q2: How do the processes outlined above vary by community/jurisdiction-type (i.e. wealthy, resource-endowed places versus poorer, resource-deprived places)? How has the ROS impacted political undertakings in regards to land- and economic development between these different types of communities/jurisdictions? How are political undertakings in communities/jurisdictions helped or undermined by their location within the ROS?

Q3: How do reforms that take into account regional concerns address some of the weaknesses of political fragmentation and regional stratification, particularly on the issue of land use and urban development? How does the process work, who are the actors involved, and are the policies of such groups actually fostering regional equity and political integration? Do higher levels of government assist or undermine their objectives?

These questions seek to fill a gap in the research literature surrounding growth interests and their effect on urban development, trends in metropolitan governance, regional collaboration in regards to land use, and how state and local policies and politics impact the work of regionally-oriented organizations.

Case Study

To understand these processes, I use a case-study approach that investigates the Albany-Schenectady-Troy metropolitan area of Upstate New York. Experiencing rapid land development in the context of a highly-fragmented local political environment, this

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4 I will refer to this metropolitan area as the Capital Region.
region represents a compelling and theoretically appropriate case study. The region is divided up between four principle cities: Albany, Schenectady, Troy, and Saratoga Springs, and numerous towns and villages that extend over several upstate counties. Added to this are dozens of other political structures such as special districts, business improvement and enterprise zones, service authorities, and of course, counties. The region has been identified by numerous organizations as possessing high levels of what is termed “sprawl development.” One factor identified as an important indicator of urban sprawl: the consumption of land for development that far outpaces population growth, has been widely noted in the metropolitan area (Pendall, 2003; Capital District Regional Planning Commission, 2005).

Although this issue will be explained in more depth in a later section, the three central cities in the Capital Region have all experienced substantial population losses, while most suburban areas have witnessed population growth. The central cities have also experienced an increase in the concentration of poverty households, a loss of business establishments, and corresponding challenges to their tax bases and municipal finances. Overall, the region offers both an empirically and theoretically appropriate case study as well as one that provides insights for policy-making.

Conceptual Framework

I essentially recast the “city as a growth machine” framework to account for stratified regional contexts and political fragmentation, which align or interact to form a regional opportunity structure (ROS). Because communities and local growth coalitions

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5 Saratoga Springs is the fourth largest city in the Capital Region. However, due to its divergent demographic and economic characteristics from the cities of Albany, Schenectady, and Troy, it is typically not identified as a “central city” or the “inner-city” as are the others cities in the region. Therefore, when I discuss central city economic and demographic patterns, I am referring to Albany, Schenectady, and Troy.
do not exist in isolation but operate and are embedded within regions, they are shaped by political fragmentation (fragmented authorities over local governance) and their regional context. Although stratification within a region may have ensued from multiple factors, the existence of fragmented governance and authority within regions enables the perpetuation of stratification. In other words, because of the dominance of home rule and local control in the American metropolitan landscape, certain communities are able to capture, protect, and exploit their resource base, while others struggle with simply maintaining basic services and their existing infrastructure. Therefore, beyond examining how a community’s individual characteristics impact growth coalitions and development, I explore the how the stratified regional context maintained by political fragmentation and inter-municipal relations assist or undermine work done by local actors.

Jurisdictions or communities that have benefitted the most from the ROS—which I call “resource-endowed”—have the ability to attain and leverage resources in ways that channel growth to maintain and enhance their desirable socioeconomic attributes. These places are less subservient to both capital as well as to growth interests. Meanwhile, the jurisdictions or communities that have been undermined the most by the ROS—which I will refer to as “resource-deprived”—not only have a deficiency of resources, but (more importantly for this study), that they lack the capacity to utilize their existing resources. Because of this, growth coalitions are less focused, while simultaneously pursuing projects that are less likely to capitalize on community assets. These findings are illustrated through the case studies of Saratoga Springs/Wilton, Troy/North Greenbush, and Saratoga County.
Metropolitan political fragmentation works differently between resource-endowed and resource-deprived jurisdictions. The former use political fragmentation to their advantage by selecting fiscally lucrative projects, as well as projects that will add to quality of life amenities, while less desirable projects are off-loaded to neighboring communities. In resource-deprived jurisdictions, however, political fragmentation works to further the polarization of socioeconomic disparities. Investors, homeowners, and market-rate renters are “pushed out” of the city because of limited tax bases (necessitating higher tax rates) and poorer quality services. Similarly, these actors are “pulled” to suburban jurisdictions because of more favorable tax and service levels. Although this is not a new assumption, my contribution in this specific regard entails how decision-making, as it applies to growth coalitions in even “resource-endowed” communities, must still be understood as a process impacted by their neighbors, regional concerns, and options granted to those communities through the ROS.

By using this framework (as opposed to growth machine theory or Neo-Marxism) I more aptly take into account the contexts in which decisions involving urban growth and development are occurring. In addition, this framework takes into account the differing contexts between central cities, suburbs, newly developing exurbs, and the rural countryside. It does not assume that political interests will be similar in all locations. In terms of its differences with traditional and machine politics, the ROS framework does not assume that a political machine—with party bosses and a system of patronage—exists which is important when discussing suburbs or newly-developing areas. Finally, in contrast to the regime approach—which essentially states that local politicians seek out support from business to form governing coalitions—this approach outlines how coalition
formation might actually develop (if at all) based on different governing arrangements, socioeconomic factors, and local identities and issues including perceptions of growth. The final factor: local identities and perceptions of growth, may have a strong impact on the support for new regionalist approaches.

Local Government and Fragmenting Institutions

The institution of local government has been central in the history of urban development. Local governments have acted largely as a mediator between larger economic and political forces and local interests (Lubell, Feiock, and Ramirez, 2005). Stated in another way, local government institutions have acted as a filter between larger, outside forces and local interests. Institutions, as characterized by Lewis (1996) include “formal and informal organizations, structures, rules, conventions, and standards of operating practices that structure the relationship between individuals in various units of the polity and the economy” (p. 24). The manner in which these organizational arrangements are structured largely defines the options that are available to pursue. In terms of metropolitan growth and governance, this concept can play out in a number of ways. For example, in a highly fragmented metropolitan area containing numerous, smaller spheres of governance, decision-making is highly decentralized and isolated in comparison to a less fragmented region. In a less fragmented region, decision-making is exercised by fewer public and private actors, and policies have a disproportionately larger impact on the population. Therefore, in a highly fragmented region, more actors and more sets of preferences are involved in the relationship, making the probability for incongruent urban growth and development patterns greater. Municipality A, for example, might be at odds with municipality B, C, and D in regards to the urban
environment deemed appropriate. Municipality A, for example, may want only large-lot single-family homes and office parks. Municipality B, however, experiencing large increases in traffic congestion because of an influx of residents from municipality A’s employment base, may push for municipality A to build more workforce housing with tensions and disagreements ensuing. Conversely, in a less politically fragmented region with fewer preferences and actors to consider, development is organized in a more coherent fashion because fewer public actors and private interests are involved at each step in the process (Lewis, 1996).

Assumptions of Actors

As political institutions act as a mediator between larger outside forces and local actors, it is important to underline some important assumptions about the behavior key actors. I argue that these assumptions will be present in most cases to a greater or lesser degree. The assumptions concern three core groups: growth interests, public officials, and residents.

1) Developers of suburban properties seek to maximize the returns on their investments and will pursue projects and sites that will enable them to best maximize profits. Because developers often rely on borrowed capital, sites in which development can proceed in a timely manner will also be chosen over other sites. This relates to local regulations in that developers prefer to operate in areas with fewer regulatory hurdles.

2) Private elites with economic interests in the local community will also seek to maximize profits and support projects that support this outcome. One caveat, however, needs to be added in that some local elites, who fear the ensuing competitive pressures
associated with new development, will likely be less favorable to new development than other elites.

3) Municipal elected officials seek to strengthen their approval ratings among the constituencies that are most important for short-term reelection success. Though developing and implementing public policy are seen as the primary goals of officials, staying in office is always central to the process of policy goals. Local officials generally must court business support in order to accumulate the resources needed to remain in office. Resources include campaign contributions, favorable investment locations, and employment decisions (Lewis, 1996). The role of the business community, however, is not equivalent in all jurisdictions. Central-city politicians typically have to cater to business interests far more than of those in suburban areas. Indeed, while businesses play some of the most important roles in governing decisions in central cities, the main political constituencies in smaller suburbs tend to be homeowners associations (Burns, 1994).

Of particular importance—though often overlooked—are special district governments. These political units are typically governed by an appointed board or committee that develops and oversees policy implementation. In this regard they are undemocratic and largely unaccountable to the greater constituency. Their leaders also seek to strengthen the financial position of their governing units by increasing their size, clientele, and power of their organizations. Special districts often involve commercial and industrial corridors that are deemed by public officials as requiring investment. Although many are located in existing urbanized areas, they are also often created in outlying areas for the purposes of attracting investment (Burns, 1994). Examples of special districts that
can be granted considerable land-use authorities include water and sewer districts, housing and community development districts, infrastructure agencies, and public transit authorities (Leigland, 1992).

5) Residents, notably homeowners, seek to optimize quality of life factors as well as property values, and the overall economic health of their community and region. At times these three underlying goals work against each other, but generally speaking, residents seek to balance them. Also, intuitively speaking, residents will seek the best public service to tax ratio. In suburbs, property taxes are a key political issue that can have enormous political ramifications. The mismanagement of local funds is surely one of the most important factors that can lead to electoral losses of incumbent officials.

In wealthier suburban areas, residents will also generally reject projects that they think will undermine existing community dynamics, even if the project would enhance the community economically (Baldassare and Wilson, 1996). Residential and homeowners associations tend to be the most organized political force in suburban municipalities. In general, they overwhelmingly seek development restrictions supported through strong zoning codes and development controls. Because homeowners tend to be much less transient than renters, these groups tend to support status quo policies constructed with the intention of providing community and neighborhood stability (Kerstein, 1993; Lewis, 1996; Johnson and Floyd, 2006).

Smaller suburbs and central cities also differ somewhat in their approaches to economic development. Although most local political leaders view that metropolitan areas as a whole require continued commercial and industrial growth to sustain economic vitality, wage levels, and employment prospects, at the neighborhood level these
concerns are ancillary. Moreover, because many suburbs are small enough to be the equivalent of neighborhoods in a central city case, we can also say that the concerns of economic growth are more or less secondary for smaller suburban municipalities. This is the case because in politically fragmented regions, residents tend to live in one municipality and work in another (Lewis, 1996)

Overall, whereas the preferences and behaviors of elites tend to be somewhat more consistent between urban and suburban areas compared to those of average residents, institutional arrangements will affect the way in which they perceive and carry out their goals. Institutional frameworks lay out the paths that can be chosen, relegating some options to be unsuitable from the start. Institutional frameworks also spell out the “rules of the game” important in agenda setting by privileging one set of claims while restricting others by not even allowing them to come to the table.

Municipal Fragmentation and Land-Use

For the purposes of this study, the main objective in analyzing municipal fragmentation is to examine how it impacts land use decisions. Municipalities control land use decisions mainly through their power to zone but also through various subdivision requirements, which have the effect of apportioning or rationing land for various uses. Indeed, even though no one can deny the powerful interests of actors including land developers, banking- and financial firms, and homeowners associations the preferences and choices for all of these groups rest on the geopolitical configurations of space in the metropolitan region. Political arrangements interact with the preferences and wills of individual actors and groups. Therefore, preferences and prerogatives always
exist within the institutional contexts of political arrangements. Interests always must interact with the authorities of local institutions (Lewis, 1996).

The significance of municipal power can be illustrated with a relatively simple demonstration. Let’s compare two regions that are undergoing substantial residential and commercial growth. One region is divided up into numerous municipalities while the other region is under one, unitary government. Lewis (1996) labels the former a “fragmented metropolis” and the latter, a “regional city.” Note that these two regions are ideal types. No, one region exists completely as one or the other, particularly in concern to the “regional city.” Indeed, Rusk (2003) might label a highly fragmented region, an inelastic city (a central-city that is confined geographically by other jurisdictions), while the regional city might be more of an elastic city (a large urban jurisdiction that can expand its borders to capture new growth). Most regions, however, have these properties to either a greater or lesser degree. Nonetheless, for reasons of clarity, let us simply use the terms “fragmented metropolis” and “regional city.”

Devolution of authority into dozens or even hundreds of municipal jurisdictions will have a pronounced effect on development patterns and land use outcomes in the fragmented metropolis. The land use policies of each governing jurisdiction are likely to include, “a combination of its past political and geographical ‘legacy,’ its current public opinion, and its own institutions and decision rules” (Lewis, 1996, p. 29). Moreover, in a fragmented metropolis, as a result of these characteristics, municipalities will be differentiated based on wealth, advantage, status, and location. These factors form circular patterns that subsequently affect the political values that guide the built landscape through zoning and other land use controls. Therefore, parochial concerns, not regional
concerns, are privileged through political fragmentation. The concerns of one jurisdiction—with its own unique constituency, history, and status—are likely to differ from another jurisdiction.

Parochial politics is therefore advantaged by the system of local governance. Residents may share metropolitan concerns over traffic congestion, housing affordability, and the availability of jobs, but because systems of authority are set up at the local level, general preferences are not likely to be reflected in government policy. What is likely to be manifested is the general preference of the “median voter” in each, individual municipality in that this is where “access points” to the political systems are located. Conversely, general, metropolitan-wide concerns typically take a back seat to local concerns if there is no other powerful governing apparatus other than local authorities (Lewis, 1996).

As it relates to urban sprawl, the greater the ability for small jurisdictions to regulate development, often in incongruent patterns with neighboring jurisdictions, the more likely that development will be uncoordinated within and between jurisdictions—a core characteristic that “anti-sprawl” activists decry. Moreover, developers, seeking to recover profits from their investments will likely be attracted to fringe areas in that they tend to have fewer regulations over development, thereby lowering overall metropolitan density and centeredness.

In comparison, development processes in a regional city will likely differ largely from those of a fragmented metropolis. The larger the governing jurisdiction, the less likely one, parochial interest can dominate local politics. For example, certain “use-value” concerns of residents are likely to be more difficult to attain in a regional city than
in a fragmented metropolis in that the larger structure of government makes it more difficult to voice a given concern or preference efficiently. Homeowners associations who have easy access to authorities in small places, have much more to contend with in a larger, regional city, which is much more likely to need to balance other concerns.

In a fragmented metropolis, dominant interests are also likely to differ across municipalities. Whereas homeowners associations might be powerful in most jurisdictions, in other places landowners and farmers might have the strongest coalitions, and industrial firms in another. This is likely to lead to growth that is more haphazard, uncoordinated, and less centered. In a regional city, however, development interests are likely to have the most political power in that growth elites are able to mobilize considerable resources that are important to public officials. Indeed, Fischel writes, “effective fiscal zoning {i.e., zoning that protects homeowners and keeps out lower status land uses} is least likely to be implemented where the political interests of developers and their allies balance that of homeowners. Development interests are most likely to have an important voice in large and heterogeneous jurisdictions such as states and large central cities” (Fischel, 1992, quoted in Lewis, 1996, p. 31).

A regional city is also far likelier than a fragmented metropolis to have a coherent set of zoning rules, development codes, and land use regulations. Having jurisdiction over a larger geographic area, a regional city is better able to plan coherent and compatible street grids, transportation networks, park and recreational systems, and commercial districts. Residential housing patterns and codes are also less likely than in a fragmented metropolis to be restrictive and defensive in nature. In a larger, regional city homeowners associations are less likely to control city housing ordinances, and therefore,
policies requiring minimum lot sizes and maximum densities are less likely to be as widespread as in a fragmented metropolis. Greater variation in housing types, including those of moderate and high density are more likely to be constructed as according to market signals. Other development patterns more likely to materialize in regional cities include commercial areas developed near residences and mixed-use developments that “comingle” residences with stores and offices.

Compared to smaller suburban jurisdictions, central city public officials are more likely to have regional development and economic health as a central focus of their administrations. Moreover, because of the larger size, specific neighborhood-level concerns are more likely to be overshadowed by city-wide concerns of employment growth and economic activity.

Ultimately, political fragmentation has three main effects. In addition to a greater likelihood of uncoordinated development compared to a regional city, these types of regions will also have greater disparities in development among suburban communities and weaker central business districts. Because suburban jurisdictions tend to employ status quo policies regarding growth, existing patterns of development tend to get reinforced. Politics in these jurisdictions tend to be defensive rather than productive, in that neighborhood residents “defend” what they already have against perceived threats that may alter the community’s character. Moreover, numerous decision points and veto opportunities make it more difficult in a fragmented region to advance substantive reform regarding development practices (Lewis, 1996).

New Regionalism
New regionalism brings attention to many of the problems brought about by the fragmentation of political authority in American metropolitan areas. It seeks a new focus on coordinated central city and suburban development with the intent of reducing income and tax base disparities. It represents a holistic approach to long-term planning that involves the physical, social, and economic health of the entire metropolitan region. New regionalism encompasses many of the recent trends in urban planning that are identified by buzz words such as “livable communities” and “smart growth”—concepts that seek to integrate equity, environmental, and economic concerns into the physical plans and spatial designs of communities and regions. Special emphasis is placed on specific territories and spatial planning that are regional in scope. For example, advocates of this approach would look at the entire Chesapeake Bay, and not simply Baltimore. As metropolitan areas continue to spread further into more territory, an emphasis on space becomes even more important than in earlier times (Wheeler, 2002).

To control for continued outward growth that places significant pressure on the natural environment and physical infrastructure, a major goal of new regionalism is “re-urbanization” or redevelopment of older, existing built up areas in central cities and older suburbs. Re-urbanization typically entails searching for ways to make better and more rational use of obsolete buildings, empty lots, and existing brownfields. Increasing commercial and residential densities are typically employed. This marks a complete reverse from the planning goals of the early 20th Century as in the “City Beautiful” movement. This perspective sought to develop new towns and communities on the edges cities in response to their overcrowded quarters and their real and perceived physical, social, and moral threats (Wheeler, 2002).
The real challenge to new regionalism is the actual implementation of its goals. Wheeler (2002), Foster (1997), Orfield (2002) and Drier, Mollenkopf and Swanstrom (2005) all point to the significant potential of non-governmental organizations of civil society for advancing new regionalism objectives. They see potential for numerous public-private partnerships in the realm of regional cooperation prompted by the activities of private, non-profit groups, particularly related to environmental conservation, growth management, and affordable housing. With the exception of the undertakings of faith-based groups, particularly the Gamaliel Foundation (Orfield, 2002; Weir, Wolman, and Swanstrom, 2005), very little research has examined the involvement of non-governmental organizations in the promotion of the issues and agendas of new regionalism. Much more attention has been placed on traditional regional governments and regional cooperation. Therefore, to better understand the perspectives of new regionalism, it is helpful to outline the main characteristics of the established systems before we return to some examples that have shown the significance of new regionalism.

Regional Cooperation and Governance

Numerous scholars, public intellectuals, and policy makers have argued that more needs to be done to address urban problems on a metropolitan and regional basis by the creation of either new regional governments or through increased cooperation through existing local governments (Richmond, 2000; Rusk, 2000; Rusk, 2003; Orfield, 1997; Orfield, 2002; Weir, 2000; Fishman, 2000; Dreier, Mollenkompf, and Swanstrom, 2004). Fishman (2000) and Weir (2000), for example, argue that local governments and local interest groups can do little to address the effects of haphazard urban development without regionally-enforced, comprehensive growth management plans. They have
concluded that parochial and ad hoc growth control measures undertaken by municipal
governments such as open space preserves and building moratoriums do little to address
the long-term problems associated with unchecked suburban development. For example,
their research has found that these measures either push new development even further
afield from the central city, or that they simply delay new development for a year or two,
with the result being even more aggressive development than what had occurred prior to
the growth-limiting policies.

Before more can be laid out concerning regional governance and cooperation, it is
important to define what is actually meant by these two terms. Norris (2000) offers an
illustrative definition of what he conceives of as regional governance and regional
cooperation. Regional governance can be thought of as:

The association of governments or residents in a defined geographic area for the
purpose of controlling or regulating the behavior within and performing functions
or providing services for the overall territory. Governance in metropolitan
territory is authoritative, occurs on an area-wide basis, and may involve a coercive
element. That is, governing decisions and actions are binding across the territory,
and, if necessary, may be compelled. Regional cooperation, on the other hand,
essentially involves voluntary association and lacks a coercive element. Also,
cooperation may or may not be area-wide (p.561).

In light of this definition, regional governance ought to be thought of as a public
governing apparatus in which the implemented policies have “teeth.” That is, compliance
with policies is made compulsory and non-compliance is punished. By far the best
example of regional governance is that of Portland Metro which will be discussed shortly.

On the other hand, examples of regional cooperation are far more numerous.
Regional cooperation typically entails the sharing of services between local jurisdictions.
These activities are generally pursued out of efficiency goals that allow for cost savings
by taking advantage of economies of scale. For example, a small suburban municipality
may share refuse, animal control, or emergency medical technician services with another local jurisdiction. In addition, many localities have combined their services with those of county governments. Municipalities are increasingly combining transit and economic development agencies with either county agencies or those of other municipalities. Regionally coordinated transit services are especially important in that many workers do not live in the same community in which they work (White, 2002). Regional cooperative agreements have their limits, however. Service sharing can easily be overturned if certain constituencies express discontent with new arrangements. Agreements may also terminate if newly elected leaders hold skeptical views towards these collaborations (White, 2002).

Wholesale government consolidation is a more drastic step than cooperation and can better be thought of as regional governance. The most dramatic (but also the most rare) form of consolidation is city-county consolidation. Examples of city-county consolidation include Jacksonville-Duval County, Florida, Indianapolis-Marion County, Indiana, and Nashville-Davidson County, Tennessee, all of which occurred in the 1960s. More recent consolidations have occurred in Louisville, Kentucky and Kansas City, Kansas. The consolidations, by annexing suburbs as well as undeveloped land into the city proper, have added greater tax-bases to the cities as well as wealthier residents. In many of these consolidations, however, school district boundaries (as well as other taxing authorities) have remained unchanged. Indeed, consolidation would not have been agreed to without these types of provisions that conserved other local political boundaries (Rusk, 2000). Even with these provisions that maintained local control and local decision making around public services, full-scale government consolidation has been extremely
rare and in most cases not even contemplated. Because of this, other processes that encourage regionalism are required.

Regional Governance Outlook/New Regionalism Approaches

Despite the seemingly intractable political barriers to regional government that will be elaborated upon in Chapter Four, advocates such as Myron Orfield and David Rusk still contend that propositions of the sort can be achieved. They point to converging political, economic, and racial trends between suburbs (particularly inner-ring suburbs) and the central cities. For example the Democratic Party, long dominant in central cities, is gaining strength in older suburban areas. Indeed, in 2000 Al Gore actually won 52 percent of the suburban vote. Moreover, because of urban gentrification, suburban and urban income levels have begun to converge in some metropolitan areas including Chicago, Seattle, and Portland, OR. In urban areas particularly in the southwest such as Houston, Los Angeles, and San Antonio, rapid immigration and minority population growth have also muddied the urban/suburban racial distribution.

None of this may matter, however, if the political will among government and business leaders for regional governance is not present. Gainsborough (2003), in her study of business organizations in Houston and Los Angeles, concludes that business can play a powerful role in regional cooperation if it perceives that sustained regional economic health is reliant on efficient and effective management of regional assets and infrastructure—including work-force housing, transportation, and public schools. Business involvement, however, will vary based on the type of business and on the extent to which business interests are unified. For example, home-grown companies or businesses that have their headquarters in the city may be much more involved in local
government decision-making. On the other hand, multinational corporations may take less interest in city politics. Nevertheless, in a time of increased firm competition, multinational companies with local offices may see the quality of life and the training and education of a region’s workforce as factors that weigh heavily on the productivity of their respective firms (Gainsborough, 2000; Kanter, 2000).

Business involvement in matters of regional cooperation and governance, however, is a complicated matter that in many instances fails to achieve its intended goals. Leibovitz, in an illustrative Canadian example (2002), points to the difficulties in achieving regional cooperation among various business groups that represent three neighboring cities in southern Ontario. The economic development corporations in the three different cities did not wish to be subservient to the regional government, even if it meant that by combining, greater economies of scale could be realized. Competitiveness among the three cities and strong local identities also impeded regional collaboration and cooperation. Each city wanted its own fair share of incoming investment because, as in the United States, Canadian cities—though to a lesser degree—rely heavily on local property tax revenues to operate government. One of Leibovitz’s interviewees (2002) explains, “everybody wanted to have a little bit of an edge. That’s the way the system works” (p. 2,627). Indeed, it is apparent that a proper balance between regional collaboration and local autonomy is very difficult to attain. Leibovitz’s study also illustrates the difficulties of private-public collaboration toward regional affairs. For example, public officials in the Guelph, Kitchener, and Waterloo area of Ontario at times remained suspicious of private sector intentions, whereas the latter often held antagonistic attitudes towards the lack of efficiency in government.
Nevertheless, regionally oriented organizations have made significant inroads when political common ground is sought. Actors include mayors, leaders of non-profit agencies, faith-based associations, and business groups. Chicago Metropolis 2020 is a business-backed organization seeking regional solutions to metropolitan problems. The Gamaliel Foundation represents an important faith-based organization working for regional reforms, and the Chicago Council of Mayors is a group that was spearheaded by Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley to provide a venue in which urban and suburban mayors could meet on an ongoing basis to discuss issues of metropolitan-wide importance.

Because of the inherent tension that exists between the private sector and public institutions in many important matters, the work of non-profit agencies might provide the best chance of real progress towards regional collaboration, cooperation, and eventually governance. The Gamaliel Foundation has been upheld as a model for what can be accomplished when community organizations work together to effect real metropolitan reform. The organization is a network of approximately 40 faith-based community organizing affiliates. In 1996 with the assistance of Myron Orfield, a well-known advocate of regionalism, Gamaliel instituted a “regional equity organizing” agenda which linked the problems of central city and inner-ring suburban communities to regional dynamics.

The group has achieved important goals. For example, in 2005 Gamaliel worked with 300 different grassroots groups to amend key provisions of the $286 billion federal transportation bill. One amendment included granting local governments the authority to negotiate local hiring agreements surrounding the employment of racial minorities and
women. In St. Louis the Gamaliel affiliate Metropolitan Congregations United made history when they successfully demanded that 30 percent of the jobs for the planned $535 million expansion of Interstate 64/40 in St. Louis go to women, minorities, and low income persons, and that 0.5 percent of the budget, or $2.5 million, be allocated for job training programs that assisted low-income persons in developing construction skills (Swanstrom, 2006). In the Chicago region, Gamaliel affiliates—fearing the sprawl it would induce—successfully worked to block the planned Chicago South-Suburban Expressway into southern Lake County, Indiana. The federation of groups also persuaded metropolitan transit officials to shift a new commuter-rail line that would have run from downtown Chicago to new subdivisions south of Gary, to serve the struggling inner-ring suburbs of Gary and Hammond. In order for low-income persons to take advantage of the new commuter line, the groups also fought for a state law that authorized a new regional transit authority. Paid for by a new earmarked tax, it will assist low-income city residents who commute to suburban jobs (Rusk, 2003).

The importance of the work of community organizations in achieving new regional cooperation and governance is also vital for maintaining it. Indeed, if not for the work and lobbying effort of the 1,000 Friends of Oregon, the Portland area’s land use policies—including its urban growth boundary—would have most likely been severely weakened. Oregon Governor, Tom McCall, formed the group as he left office in 1975. It monitors the enforcement of the land use legislation, files lawsuits to set precedents that strengthen and extend the law, and pressures local governments to eliminate restrictions on development such as exclusionary zoning measures that contribute to economic segregation and urban sprawl. The latter activities subsequently helped the group win the
support of the home-building industry—thereby dividing the business community. The group also works to build political support for its initiatives by conducting studies, lobbying officials, and mobilizing grass-root support. By building political support from both the bottom-up and the top-down, the organization has helped to ensure the integrity of the Portland urban growth boundary against five major challenges in statewide initiatives. As the Portland case demonstrates, laws that seek to promote regionalism are only effective if they can be maintained and enforced.

These cases point to the work that can be accomplished when private organizations collaborate and form coalitions with other organizations and governments. These cases represent accomplishments sought by groups that espouse the goals of new regionalism: environment, equity, and economics. It is for this reason that I seek to study organizations that attempt to address one or all of these goals of new regionalism.
CHAPTER III: METHODS

This study relies on a case-study approach using archival and qualitative interview data to examine the three overarching questions presented in the last chapter. I chose the Capital Region of upstate New York for a number of theoretical and empirical reasons. Most importantly, the Capital Region represents an area with both high, local government fragmentation and rapid development of land. This study focuses on the four major counties in the metropolitan area, but the six-county Metropolitan Statistical Area has nine cities, 75 towns, 41 villages, and 60 school districts (State Commission on the Capita Region, 1996). This totals 191 governments, or one unit of government for every 4,319 residents. This number does not include special districts which add another 101 local governments, for a total of one government for every 2,825 residents (Nunn and Schoedel, 1997). In regards to land development, the Capital Region ranks as the nineteenth most sprawled region in the country (Ewing, Pendall, and Chen, 2002). Because of the characteristics, I argue that this region presents a highly relevant case for the study of these phenomena.

Second, I chose this region based on its convenience and location near the University at Albany in Albany, New York. This allows data collection to be conducted with relative ease and minimal financial expense. The data for this study are drawn from archival sources and in-depth interviews. The researcher drew the archival data from many sources including newspaper and business journal articles, editorials, local government websites, and organizational materials, meeting minutes, pamphlets, and
websites. An important source for the archival data was the M E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives at the State University of New York at Albany. Among other items, the collection includes information from the local print media, organization newsletters and memos, and other historic documents on important events regarding local politics in Upstate New York. Newspaper sources include *Albany Times-Union, The Saratogian, Glens Falls Post-Record,* and *the Schenectady Daily Gazette.*

With a circulation of approximately 100,000 during the week and 145,000 on Sundays (Readership Institute, 2005), the *Albany Times-Union* is the major, regional paper in the metropolitan area, though other local papers, the *Saratogian* in particular, provides additional information regarding local politics and growth management issues in Saratoga County. The articles were selected on the basis of their relevance to the issue of growth politics and urban development in the Capital Region. The time frame of the main analysis was from 1980 to 2009. I chose this time frame because the 1980s marked a period in which considerable public discussion on development and land use emerged in the region.

I also conducted structured and semi-structured interviews with 24 participants over a 14-month period between September 2008 and November 2009. Most interviews were conducted between October 2008 and June 2009. Based on purposive sampling drawn from newspaper coverage, membership lists, and websites, I conducted interviews with municipal planning officials, local elected officials, directors and staff from state government agencies, and leaders from local non-profit organizations in the Capital Region. I chose these participants because of their involvement with local land use and development issues. In addition, I interviewed further participants based on snowball-
sample methods. In essence, the initial officials and stakeholders directed me to these additional participants.

I had different interview guides for the various participants. One set of interviews was undertaken with public officials from various municipalities in the Capital Region. In particular I interviewed public officials from Saratoga Springs, Troy, Wilton, North Greenbush, and Saratoga County. I chose to examine Saratoga Springs and Troy because they are positioned on the opposite end of the continuum concerning both wealth and how political structures have shaped the respective communities. One of the largest cities geographically in upstate New York, Saratoga Springs has benefitted more than most from the state’s local municipal structures. In contrast, Troy’s development has been undermined by these structures. Wilton and North Greenbush were chosen because they lie adjacent to Saratoga Springs and Troy, respectively, and they have had very different experiences surrounding governance and development. Finally the analysis of Saratoga County was included to shed additional light on the importance of local political fragmentation and the regional opportunity structure (ROS) on development.

I also interviewed several leaders of local environmental and land use organizations in the Capital Region. In particular I researched the activities of Saratoga PLAN, the Hudson River Valley Greenway, ECOS, and the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission. These were also purposive interviews in that I sought to interview key informants from these organizations that possessed the information I was seeking. I chose the four groups based on their activities concerning land use and preservation issues as well as their organizational structure and reach. The four groups had programs and policies that dealt with either community planning, land preservation, environmental
sustainability, or such that encompassed all three. The Hudson River Valley Greenway and ECOS operated throughout the region, while Saratoga PLAN and the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission had a far more local constituent base. The groups were also a mix between private, non-profit organizations, and public, state agencies.

Gaining access to the key informants was accomplished primarily through contacting the public offices and organizations through e-mail and/or by making phone calls. I introduced myself as a Ph.D. student in sociology at the University at Albany who had been conducting his dissertation research. Gaining access and negotiating entry into a research setting is the process stated by Glesne (1999) as, “the acquisition of consent to go where you want, observe what want, talk to whomever you want, obtain and read whatever documents you require, and do all of this for whatever period of time you need to satisfy your research questions” (p. 39).

Each interviewee was given a consent form consisting of the purposes, benefits, and risks of the study as well as information regarding the researcher and what would be done with the data that were collected. The interviews with both the key informants from the public sector as well as those from the private organizations lasted from 60 minutes to three hours in length. The duration of most interviews was approximately 90 minutes.

Tape recording and transcribing interviews, along with taking notes during and after the interviews, aid in the process of achieving description validity. Description validity is one of three types of validity that exist in qualitative inquiry, the others being Interpretation, and Theory (Maxwell, 1996). The leading threat to description validity, which surrounds the issues of what one hears or says, is inaccuracy or incompleteness of
the data. A way to remedy this is to tape record all in-depth interviews and take notes during and after each interview.

Interpretation validity rests on the attempted objectiveness of the researcher. Although it is impossible to be entirely objective, it is possible to limit the imposition of one’s own subjective framework or meaning and attempt to understand the perspectives of the people being studied and the knowledge and understanding that they have gained from their own experiences. Ways to avoid overly subjective interpretation include not using leading, closed-ended, or short-answer questions, and of course, to be a fully conscious listener.

The archival data collected from primary sources will also aid in establishing validity. Using primary data sources assists in the process of triangulation. Triangulation is perhaps the most effective method to augment the validity of the trustworthiness of one’s data (Glense, 1999). Triangulation refers in part to the use of multiple data-collection techniques. By using archival data, I have access to information that may or may not support the contention of a particular interviewee. The primary data also assists in gaining a contextual understanding of a particular situation. For example, reading and analyzing numerous newspaper articles provided a benchmark for understanding and conceptualizing growth and land use planning in the Capital Region. In turn, this allowed me to ask more relevant and appropriate questions to the key informants. Moreover, having this background information helped me navigate through the interviews. For example, if a research participant offered an unclear or suspect answer, I had the ability to question his or her assertion in a respectful and articulate manner.

Theoretical Analysis
Theory validity relies on the researcher not limiting himself or herself to one principle or cardinal theory, but rather recognizing other explanations and the discrepant data that exist. Although I used the ROS framework which accounts for the effect of regional context and metropolitan political fragmentation on the decision-making processes of growth actors, part of my analysis consists of how the different theories of urban development spoke to my findings. For example, were the findings consistent with the main assumptions of growth machine theory or Neo-Marxist theory? In what ways do the findings support the theories, and in what ways do they challenge them?

The goal of scientific inquiry is not to prove theories or models to be true, but to amass evidence to falsify existing understandings of phenomena (Bird, 2000). Research bias is an overarching threat that can impact theoretical- and interpretation validity. A researcher must first identify his or her preconceptions and biases and then attempt to isolate those factors.

Limitations

Even though I argue that examining the Capital Region will provide an insightful analysis of political fragmentation, regional stratification, and regionalist reforms, limitations exist in this study. I am only examining one region out of the hundreds of metropolitan areas in the country. Areas of newer settlement, particularly cities of the American West, do not share many of the political characteristics present in the Capital Region. Rather, metropolitan areas in the Northeast and the Midwest are probably more suitable for comparative purposes.

Yet, we still must be careful to make generalizations. Because state laws impact the powers of local government as well as environmental and land use issues, what
applies in Saratoga County, NY, would not necessarily apply in Berkshire County, Massachusetts, for example. State government and various land use regulations also impact organizations. Saratoga PLAN and ECOS, for example, operate within the context of New York State laws and regulations. Similar organizations that operate in Connecticut or Minnesota, for example, would experience variant processes of governance. Nonetheless, I argue that the activities of the local environmental and land-use groups will be fairly typical of those performed in many other regions facing the loss of open space and farmland, especially in locations possessing delicate landscapes and eco-systems.

Quantitative analysis is generally seen as more useful for making generalizations to larger population than other types of research, yet I take a more qualitative approach based on a number of factors. While it is the case that broad measures of urban sprawl and political fragmentation exist, data concerning these issues have generally had important shortcomings. For example, simple measures of fragmentation fail to consider the variations in powers and capacities granted to local governments across metropolitan areas. Functions of local government vary by state, meaning that simple comparisons across jurisdictions cloud actual realities on the ground. Similarly, not all local governments have land use authority. Moreover, studies in the past, because of incomplete data on a number of measures, have had to rely on relatively small samples of cities (generally fewer than N=100) making quantitative analysis, particularly OLS regression, problematic because of the loss of degrees of freedom (Lewis, 1996).

Qualitative analysis and archival research enable the researcher to understand phenomena that is situated and embedded in a specific context. This helps avoid taking
research questions out of context. It also takes into account the specific history and political background of an area. An in-depth case study also offers richer explanations of what is actually going on and why. Finally, using a case-study approach—though not as generalizable to other cases—does provide rich explanations of particular phenomena under “said” conditions. Therefore, if conditions differ elsewhere, this can be dealt with in a way that does not distort actual circumstances on the ground.

Finally, the personal biases I hold limit the study in a couple of ways. I am a strong urbanist, meaning that I hold favorable views on policies that promote density, human-scale and mixed-use development, and economically integrated communities. These are all traits of the traditional city or town center—characteristics that were largely abandoned by both policy makers and urban planners after World War 2. My philosophy on urban development largely reflects the views of urbanists like Jane Jacobs, who in her groundbreaking book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), decried the mainstream planning philosophy at the time, which encouraged highway building, segregated land uses, low density, and the demolition of traditional-style neighborhoods for central city office development. Her ideas sparked a renewal in the planning profession but have yet to be implemented in large areas of suburban America.

**Outline for the Dissertation**

The layout of the dissertation consists of five substantive chapters and a conclusions chapter. Chapter Four examines the roles of the different types of local governments including county governments, special district governments, and regional governments in general, as well as in the context of New York State. This chapter provides an overview of the different “players” on the governance side of issues
involving land use and growth decisions. It also offers some historical context to the issues of growth politics and land use in the Capital Region today. The State of New York has one of the most complex and fragmented systems of governance in the nation, and therefore it is important to understand how this history plays out in modern political decision-making processes, particularly how it limits the kinds of policies that can be pursued.

The remainder of the dissertation focuses on the findings and analyses of the main research questions. Chapter Five is primarily a case study of Saratoga Springs, the community in this study that has experienced the most benefits from its regional context and local political structures. Part of the chapter also explores its relationship with one of its suburban neighbors, the town of Wilton. The chapter describes and analyzes how the ROS has operated to facilitate growth and development in Saratoga Springs and Wilton. Chapter Six explores how the ROS has impacted Troy and the interactions between the city and its outlying suburban neighbors. In particular, this chapter describes and analyzes how the ROS has impacted politics in the city, while also undermining development opportunities. Chapter Seven explores development in one of Troy’s neighbors—North Greenbush. The purpose of this chapter is to describe and analyze how development occurs in a community of relative wealth that is nonetheless adjacent to an economically declining city. In essence, the chapter examines how regional dynamics influence development in the context of highly uneven wealth between communities. This stands in contrast to development between the two wealthy communities in Chapter Five.

The remaining chapters expand the analysis of development to the county- and regional levels. In Chapter Eight, I turn to an in depth examination of development
politics in Saratoga County. Here, we see how the county has used its favorable regional context, with its middle class commuter-oriented and upscale tourist economy, to accumulate resources and development. County leaders utilize political fragmentation between the counties in the region to protect it from the weakening tax bases and the demographic transitions in the three older, urban, and historically industrial counties in the Capital Region. In addition, the county utilizes its economic and demographic homogeneity to strengthen political integration within the county as a way to attract investment.

Finally, after examining how the ROS impacts development in the Capital Region, in Chapter Nine I turn to analyses of local organizations and state agencies that seek to incorporate, at least in some respect, regional-oriented approaches to development and planning. Analyses in this chapter surround the extent to which these interests are actually promoting regional integration, or whether their work only continues the dominant trends of regional fragmentation and inter-jurisdictional stratification. The chapter also includes analyses of the effects that local and state governments have on the work of the groups, and how these governments might limit policy undertakings. Finally, the Conclusions chapter provides a summarized outline of the main findings of the project, how the findings correspond to various social theories, policy ideas, and further questions of importance to the issue of land use and urban growth that go beyond the scope of this project.
CHAPTER IV
GOVERNMENTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON LAND USE

Regional Governments

Actors concerned about the adverse effects of metropolitan fragmentation often highlight the work accomplished by formal regional governments. Those advocating for either regional government or greater regional collaboration between governments look to Portland, Oregon—national model for what can be done to address issues related to urban development and land management. In 1973 the Oregon legislature enacted the Statewide Land Use Law, which made compulsory, the drawing of urban growth boundaries for every municipality in the state. Later, Governor Tom McCall worked with the mayor of Portland, suburban leaders, and rural constituencies and groups, including farm groups, to devise the Land Conservation and Development Commission, which was responsible for implementing the 1979 urban growth boundary around Portland. Outside of the boundary, land was zoned exclusively for agricultural use—severely curtailing development in these areas. Conversely, inside of the line, development was deregulated to allow developers greater flexibility for building what the market called for. While real estate and development interests were at first opposed to the urban growth boundary, once aware of the relaxing of restrictive zoning regulations, resistance weakened. The policy has been extremely successful for what it had set out to accomplish. For example, despite the population of metropolitan Portland growing by nearly 70 percent between 1980 and 2000—adding nearly one million residents—the overwhelming majority of this

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growth occurred within the 342-square mile growth boundary (Rusk, 2000; Weir, 2000; Fishman, 2000).

Instrumental in the success of Portland’s land management outcomes was the strict enforcement of land use policies by the regional government, the Columbia Region Association of Governments (CRAG). County compliance with the state’s land use plan was made mandatory by the legislature in 1973, and CRAG was given oversight authority. Membership in CRAG was also mandatory for the three counties in Oregon that composed metropolitan Portland. Because voting in the regional government was weighted by population, the city of Portland possessed nearly 40 percent of the votes—a proportion that has subsequently declined as suburban population has swelled. Nonetheless, bipartisan support from urban and suburban leaders alike has continued for the regional government and its comprehensive land management policies (Weir, 2000).

Most experts, however, agree that the outlook for regional governance and cooperation is not encouraging. At the present time, only two full-fledged, regional governments exist in the United States, representing a mere 0.6 percent of the country’s population (Norris, 2001). Besides Portland, Oregon the only other regional government, the Metropolitan Council, lies in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, and its powers are considerably weaker than Portland Metro’s.

The bleak outlook for regional governance stems from an array of historical, political, economic, and cultural/ideological factors. Most fundamentally, the American populace believes in local government as it is that which is closest to the people. This ideal has been a central tenet of American politics at least since Jeffersonian times. The belief in the power of localities has given local government strong political autonomy
award by state constitutions. The legal basis for local government, conversely, limits
the ability to establish regional governments. Indeed, in the United States, it is far easier
to establish a new municipality than a regional government (Norris, 2001). This is
especially evident in newer, urban regions in the southwest in which localities often
incorporate to protect private-property interests. Los Angeles County in the second half
of the twentieth century provides a nearly ideal example of this tendency. The 1954
Lakewood Plan allowed communities that wished to incorporate, the right to contract
with county governments to obtain vital services such as police and fire protection that
would have otherwise been financially unfeasible. The Lakewood Plan, for all practical
purposes, ended the practice of annexation, which prior to the policy had been the
primary way in which new developments could obtain services. From 1954 to 1969, 32
new cities incorporated in Los Angeles County alone! The practice of local incorporation
accelerated economic segregation as well as stratification by race and ethnic status in the
Los Angeles region (Weir, 2000).

Institutional frameworks also stymie the prospect for regional governance, in
particular, the territorial jurisdictional authority of local governments. General-purpose
local governments—granted through the state—have the right to exercise powers such as
the levying of taxes and the distribution of services. Local governments as a result are
loath to surrender local sovereignty and powers to a regional authority, and they are not
compelled to do so. This is one reason why certain regional organizations such as
metropolitan planning councils have very little actual power to effectuate growth
decisions and outcomes. Their objectives are often overridden by local officials or
homeowner groups who wish to maintain status quo policies based on either political inertia or the benefits they receive from current policies—or the lack thereof.

State officials, in turn, some of whom may actually favor greater state and regional involvement in local affairs, fearing constituent backlash, are extremely hesitant to propose legislation that may limit the autonomy of local governments to formulate their own policies and ordinances. Furthermore, many state officials that climbed the ranks of power, began in local government. Because of this, many of them respect the institution of local government and are cautious to encroach upon its authority. State officials are also conscious of the fact that if they were to meddle in the affairs of localities, because state electoral boundaries also encompass smaller, local boundaries, they would surely be challenged in the next primary or general election by aggrieved political contenders (Norris, 2000).

Political support for regional government in both central cities and suburbs has tended to be very low based on different reasons. Because of the central importance in the United States of the property tax to fund everything from public education to fire protection, and because suburbs still tend to be more affluent than their urban cores, any type of revenue sharing scheme between cities and suburbs would surely face fierce opposition by suburban interests and residents who would likely see this practice as an unfair and undemocratic redistribution of their hard-earned resources. This is especially the case in metropolitan areas that possess a high degree of racial segregation by residence. For example, if (largely white) suburban residents believe that their “rightfully” deserved resources may in some way be shifted (even if the sum is quite modest) to another group (racial minority residents of central cities)—persons who are
seen as different or separated from the mainstream—the political support for regional institutions will be very weak (Swanstrom, 2006).

Gainsborough (2002) also notes that overarching concerns about growth, urban sprawl, and development vary by geographic location, socioeconomic status, and racial/ethnic characteristics. This may undermine a coherent and coordinated political project involving regional government and regional policies. In her study of the Los Angeles and New York City regions, she found that homeowners, households with higher incomes and education, and residents who lived in suburbs with increasingly “city-like” characteristics were significantly more likely than African Americans, households with less education, and residents living in exurban, or more rural-like areas, to support slow-growth measures. In the Los Angeles region, she found that residents of the city of Los Angeles were also much less likely to support slow growth measures than other residents in the region. The weaker support for slow-growth measures among African American and central city residents might reflect their concerns that policies of the sort would dampen job-growth—something about which suburban, more educated, and higher-income residents would tend to worry less.

To complicate matters further, weak political support for regional government from central city political leaders has tended to be the norm. Even though most central cities would stand to gain economically from such regional policies such as fair-share housing and revenue sharing, central city leaders may also see regional bodies as a new infringement on their autonomy. This is especially relevant if racial/ethnic minorities control central city politics in that regionalism might be characterized as diluting minority voices and political power. Indeed, there was considerable concern in the merger of
Louisville and Jefferson County, Kentucky, that minority political voice would diminish. Central cities governed by political machines have also been very reluctant to embrace regionalist policies for the same reasons that some minority city governments have given—fear of a dilution of local authority and control (Norris, 2000; Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swantstrom, 2004; Swantstrom, 2006, Knudson, 2009).

Based on all these reasons it is highly unlikely that new comprehensive regional governments will be formed in the coming years. Government consolidation, despite it being more common than regional government formation, is also not likely to be a popular option for most localities and metropolitan areas. Proponents tout consolidation as promoting economic growth and greater economies of scale, but in many cases these goals have not materialized. First, it is nearly impossible to isolate the effects of government consolidation on metropolitan economic growth. Too many other factors including the national economy, the regional economy, interest rates, and technology-based gains in productivity all have significant effects on metropolitan economic growth.

Second, research has documented that consolidation has often led to increased costs of services (White, 2002). There are a few reasons that explain this. Consolidation of different agencies or governments often involves purchasing new signage, software, equipment, vehicles, and even real estate. Moreover, consolidation tends to increase the costs of services as a whole when a less dense and less urbanized area is brought into the jurisdiction of one that is larger and more established. Older, larger, and more established jurisdictions tend to have more professional staff with more formal duties assigned to them. Established areas also tend to have higher pay scales and higher rates of employee unionization than jurisdictions in developing areas. Combining agencies or jurisdictions
often means bringing the pay scales of the developing areas up to the same level as the established jurisdiction (White, 2002). Therefore, even if economies of scale are realized at some later date, the upfront costs of consolidation often amount to more than what local voters and lawmakers deem reasonable, and so proposals are seldom brought forth. Overall, large-scale consolidation cannot be counted upon in most areas to foster greater integration of land use and development between urban, suburban, exurban, and rural areas.

Interaction of Governments at the Local Level

Special District Governments

The interaction of different governments at the local level only strengthens localism while concomitantly undermining regionalism. Special districts are limited-purpose governments generally established to support development or redevelopment activities. Although they tend to perform only one function, they can come in a variety of forms including sewer, water, and utility districts, as well as housing, transportation, library, and port authorities. These governments often overlap geographically with other local governments. They are able to tax, float bonds, or impose user fees and are largely governed by appointed boards, many of which operate with considerable discretion. Therefore, they tend to be fairly anti-democratic and relatively unaccountable to taxpayers and residents (Burns, 1994).

As with the formation of most governments, the establishment of special districts typically requires the backing of highly organized and/or well financed groups (Burns, 1994). Developers and manufacturers—seeking favorable regulatory and tax climates, as well as devices for increasing land values at small cost—have tended to lead in the
creation of these units. Moreover, by imposing user fees for new residents or developments, special districts more or less eliminate the issue of growth from municipal budgetary policies.

Special districts, in forming relativity insulated and autonomous areas of development, generally advance peripheral development in that they lower the costs of development on the metropolitan fringe. This, in turn, tends to promote speculative projects because investment risks are minimized. Moreover, with little or no oversight by larger planning boards, such developments are less likely than others to be well coordinated with existing infrastructure and development (Burns, 1994).

Not all special districts, however, lead to greater fragmentation. Indeed, Lewis (1996) discusses both fragmenting and integrating special districts. While special districts set up by developers, businesses, or manufacturers tend to be fragmenting, others such as metropolitan transit agencies, water and sewer districts, and port authorities promote integrative governance. For example, the Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) in the Capital Region of upstate New York is a transit agency that coordinates mass transit within the four-county area. Buses operate within and between the four larger cities and extend into suburban areas. However, integrating special districts are less common than fragmenting special districts. Fragmenting special districts, in addition to being more numerous and dynamic, are also very powerful. Set up with very concrete intentions and goals, and along with their anti-democratic nature that makes dissent very difficult, fragmenting special districts often achieve what they set out to accomplish with great success (Burns, 1994).
County Governments

Further governance at the local level can be found in county governments. In most metropolitan areas in the Northeast, county governments do not play a major role in governance surrounding land development. In many older areas of the country, counties are largely or completely subdivided into existing municipalities, including cities, towns, townships, and villages. For example, in New England, counties now have little to no authority over any jurisdiction. Local governance rests in towns or cities that have strong home rule powers. In the American West, however, counties play a stronger role, including those relating to land use. Therefore, metropolitan areas in the West that lie either within a single county or in very few counties, are more likely to resemble the “regional city” model than metropolitan areas in the Northeast.

Defensive suburban interests are less likely to be in a commanding position in a county with land use controls than in an incorporated suburb in which more “access points” to government bodies exist. Like the regional city, county officials—who must factor in numerous constituencies—will be less beholden to homeowners than smaller, suburban governments. The picture, however, becomes far messier if special districts proliferate within county territories. If special districts exist, development authority lies within their realm, not in the county.

Case of Fragmenting Local Governments in New York and New Jersey

That the Albany-Schenectady-Troy-Saratoga region lies in the state of New York matters significantly in terms of land use and the manner in which development is pursued. New York State has long had a relatively complex system of local governance, and much of this apparatus continues into the twenty-first century, complicating reforms
that would moderate many of the less desirable ramifications of local political fragmentation. This section offers a brief overview of the chronicled development of New York’s local government system. Exploring the progression of this system enables us to ascertain the situation at present within a broader historical context and offers a deeper understanding of the challenges and available options that communities possess today.

New York’s system of local governance is a product of roughly four centuries of modification and evolution. Shifts in patterns of local government were largely the result of population growth, urbanization, and industrialization. The growth of human settlements and communities necessitated more sophisticated political structures largely based on the Anglo-Dutch practices and functions of local government. Generally speaking, as localities grew, laws were formed and amended to allow for such places to gain greater control and autonomy over their own affairs. Over time executive and legislative functions became more compartmentalized and direct democracy gave way to representative democracy in rural areas (New York State Local Government Handbook, 2008).

The evolution of New York state government has resulted in four pronounced categories of general-purpose local government: counties, towns, cities, and villages. Appropriated in the constitution in 1777, counties, towns, and cities actually predate the establishment of the State of New York. Villages, however, were created in the last decade of the eighteenth century (New York State Local Government Handbook, 2008). The following pages offer brief overviews of the four different local governments that exist and operate in New York State.
Despite the existence of four categories of local government, the similarities between them are more numerous than the differences. The following table offers an overview of the privileges and responsibilities given to the local municipalities.

Table 4-1: Privileges and Responsibilities of New York Local Governments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rights/Responsibilities</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>City</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home Rule</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoning</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax Levying</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare Services</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Services</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courts</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Charters</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate Executive</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1963 the state granted new and expanded home rule authorities to all local governments in New York. Despite the expansion of home rule, cities still have the most authority of any local government body. Unlike villages which overlap with towns and whose residents can be taxed by both governments, cities are completely autonomous from towns and other jurisdictions. Cities also possess independent charters and they can vary widely by city. Charters spell out how cities are governed and organized. Villages, conversely, are subject to a uniform, statewide Village Law (New York State Local Government Handbook, 2008).

Not dissimilar to nearly every other social system, laws and procedures created in New York State at one point in time for specific purposes had a way of becoming

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6 Counties are responsible for certain functions of planning and governance for all areas within their borders that are not delegated to lower levels of government
7 Cities are not required but have the right to operate their own social services, including welfare social services
8 Cities are not required, but have the right to operate some of their own health social services
9 Towns do not have separate executive branch in their governments. The town board exercises both legislative and executive functions.
institutionalized—taking on lives of their own. Such an occurrence is common for a number of reasons. First, the status quo is conserved through institutional inertia derived from the stake that local elected officials have in the system. These individuals desire to keep their jobs and the authority and recognition that come with them. Second, sentiments of the local population act in powerful ways to preserve status quo arrangements. Residents fight vigorously to maintain the traditional character of their communities, their own school systems, and other important local institutions even if changes would result in greater efficiencies. Finally, patterns of state aid perpetuate the traditional structures of local institutions even if such practices carry other, often hidden costs that can be largely externalized to other political bodies (Benjamin, 1990).

Numerous lawmakers in New York have attempted specific reforms in local government, but in most cases institutional inertia has made the process nearly impossible. In the late nineteenth century the growth of towns complicated the way that the state interacted with them. Noting this, Governor Hill recommended that, “when towns become so populous that they have outgrown the simple form of town government applicable to all towns, then they should be incorporated as villages, and when villages have become so large that they require more extension of municipal powers and privileges than are needed by villagers generally, then they should be incorporated as cities” (Public Papers, Vol. 8. p. 1100, quoted in Benjamin, 1990, p. 32). The governor’s recommendations, however intuitive, were not put into law, and therefore as the population of towns grew, town officials increasingly pressured state officials for new authorities and responsibilities.
Another attempt for local government reform occurred in the 1920s, when Governor Al Smith argued that the state possessed considerable redundancy in its array of different counties. In 1926 Smith attempted to reduce the number of counties to make for greater economies of scale. However, because of institutional inertia and fear that local areas would lose their identities, Smith, like Governor Hill, was unsuccessful.

More recent attempts to reorganize government have also failed. After the number of school districts in New York State declined from 2,915 to 746 between 1952 and 1972—a drop of nearly 75 percent—between 1972 and 1992, there was a decline of only 33 districts. The decline was minimal even though New York still had about twice as many school districts as the national average. During the 1990s school consolidation had powerful supporters including Thomas Sobol, Commissioner of the State Education Department, and the Long Island Regional Planning Board who proposed a minimum district size of 4,000 in Nassau and Suffolk Counties. A change of that magnitude would reduce the number of school districts from 127 to 66 (Benjamin and Nathan, 2001:169-173).

Despite these powerful interests, nothing changed. The idea that larger districts are necessary to provide adequate educational instruction has increasingly been discounted. Indeed, most districts are either large enough to offer strong K-12 instruction or have the wealth necessary to operate schools on a smaller scale. In addition, the “small is beautiful” educational paradigm has gained resonance over the last two decades—discouraging consolidation. Finally, in many smaller areas, the local school either is the community, or the community is in almost every sense organized around the school. This
makes local residents and leaders particularly vigilant about maintaining districts (Benjamin and Nathan, 2001:169-173).

An example from neighboring New Jersey also provides another case of the enduring nature of localism. Princeton, New Jersey, home of the world renown university of the same name, is actually made up of two parts: Princeton Borough and Princeton Township. The former is the wealthier, inner section where Princeton University lies and Princeton Township surrounds the Borough. Although the inner section is wealthier, both Princetons share similar demographic characteristics and have similar feelings towards the role local government. Because of this the two jurisdictions have long collaborated on shared services, including education (Benjamin and Nathan, 2001: 161-164).

In 1995, however, recognizing the substantial costs of constructing a new municipal building, leaders of both areas took steps to formally consolidate the two Princetons. Supporters of consolidation framed the issue as one of efficiency. They argued that one city government would represent the community effectively and save taxpayers money. Opponents of consolidation, however, organized the campaign, “Save Our Historic Borough.” They argued the borough was culturally unique and that consolidation would weaken local democracy. In the end voters in the township approved the consolidation while a majority in the borough did not. Opposition in the borough was strongest among older voters and public employees. Although a majority of voters approved the consolidation as a whole, majorities were needed in both places for the measure to pass and so the consolidation failed (Benjamin and Nathan, 2001: 161-164).

As these historical cases illustrate, the history and inertia behind the various bodies of local government strongly reinforce the continuance and survival of such local
units. In terms of regionalism these underlying forces block reforms that seek to integrate the various localities into a more collective whole. Extensive powers have been given to localities to decide their own fate. Conversely, power is not located at the regional level, and thus localities are under no legal obligation to work with other localities in developing greater regional collaboration or governance.

Despite the political fragmentation that exists in New York State, other states are even more politically fragmented than the Empire State. Table 4-2 illustrates the number of local governments per-capita in a select number of states. The total number of local governments include county, city, municipal, town, school-, and special district governments. Except for New York, the table is arranged from the lowest to highest number of persons per local government.

Table 4-2. Local Governments and Persons per Local Government

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number of Local Gov’ts.</th>
<th>Persons per Gov’t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>3,403</td>
<td>5,639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>733</td>
<td>844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>6,994</td>
<td>1,809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>4,835</td>
<td>4,574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>5,367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>1,383</td>
<td>6,246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>4,344</td>
<td>8,168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>645</td>
<td>8,652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>1,623</td>
<td>10,486</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Illinois, Vermont, Texas, Connecticut all have fewer persons per local government than New York.

Special Districts in New York and the Capital Region

Using the number of special districts as a gauge, political fragmentation is continuing to deepen in the Capital Region and New York State as a whole. For example,
in 1997, 6,464 town special districts operated at the state level. By 2004 the number had grown to 6,927. Town special districts encompass anything from sewer and water districts to park districts, districts for refuse and garbage, to lighting districts. Specifically within the Capital Region, these entities have also grown. Table 4-3 documents the number of town special districts in 1998 and 2004 by county in the Capital Region.

Table 4-3: Town Special Districts in the Capital Region 1998 & 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Districts in 1998</th>
<th>Districts in 2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albany</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rensselaer</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saratoga</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schenectady</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The number of town special districts in the Capital Region increased by approximately 15 percent between 1998 and 2004. Town special districts in the Capital Region grew at more than twice the rate (15.1 percent versus 7.2 percent) compared to the state as a whole. The proliferation of districts was the most advanced in Saratoga County—which saw more than a 20 percent increase. Albany County, conversely, at approximately six percent, witnessed the slowest rate of growth. The faster rate of proliferation in Saratoga County can be partially attributed to increasing population and commercial growth in rural and semi-suburban areas in which new services are required. The population of the entire county grew by 10.7 percent between 1990 and 2000.

Population growth cannot explain all of the difference, however. For example, Albany County saw a slight population increase between 1990 and 2000 (0.6 percent),
while the population in Schenectady and Rensselaer Counties actually fell (1.8 and 1.2 percent, respectively). Yet, the number of special districts in the latter two counties increased at a quicker pace than in Albany County. Despite absolute population declines in Schenectady and Rensselaer Counties, growth did exist in outlying areas—requiring the expansion of residential and commercial services in those sections.

The number of town special districts excludes school districts, which have enormous ramifications for how communities develop. They represent a further barrier for inter-municipal cooperation and coordination. In recent years, special district reform has been higher on the agenda than in the past among state leaders in New York. Recognizing the inefficiencies that often arise from their implementation, reform proposals have been sought particularly within jurisdictions in Long Island and western New York (Nassau County Office of the Comptroller, 2005; New York State Office of the State Comptroller, 2007).

Despite their continual growth, the rate of town special district expansion has been slowing in New York State. The largest growth was experienced in the 1950s and 1960s. Indeed, the number of such units increased from approximately 2,500 in the early 1950s to 5,500 by the early 1970s. After abating between 1990 and 2000, however, it appears that the pace in the current decade has accelerated. It is unclear what effect the severe recession beginning in 2008 will have on special district growth, but one could assume that the slackening demand for new residential and commercial development would translate into fewer demands for new services offered by special districts.

The purpose of this chapter was to present the ways in which local governments impact how development is pursued in the metropolitan context. Because power rests at
the local level—due to a long progression of new authorities granted to localities by the state—plans that seek to promote regionally-balanced development—whether they surround the requirement of denser developments or minimal affordable housing codes in suburban locations, revenue-sharing schemes, public transportation services, or new pedestrian-friendly infrastructure—will often be pushed aside or completely ignored based on the fact that localities are under no legal obligation to enact such plans. The development of Home Rule, in particular, granted special authorities to localities to pursue projects and the type of governance that they deemed most desirable, even if such actions have negative or unintended consequences on neighboring communities. This outcome points to the need to develop coalitions that seek to work with communities to devise and develop plans that will at least counteract some of the less desirable consequences of fragmented local governance.

In sum, political fragmentation, specifically that of municipalities or special districts, (but also including counties at times) leads to a wide array of land use approaches, more sets of preferences to be maximized, more access points from which to lobby public officials, greater stratification of space, and less-planned and coordinated development at the regional scale.
CHAPTER V: SARATOGA SPRINGS AND “RATIONALIZED” DEVELOPMENT

In this chapter I begin with a case study of Saratoga Springs, the fourth largest city in the Capital Region and arguably its most prosperous. I argue that the interaction of regional context and political fragmentation—in turn forming the regional opportunity structure (ROS)—has played an integral role in Saratoga Springs becoming the resource-endowed city in the region. Its position within the ROS has assisted the formation of a healthy investment context and a mostly successful, coherent development vision.

Saratoga Springs’ position within the ROS has played a significant role in the decision-making processes of community leaders. Being situated in the midst of rapidly suburbanizing Saratoga County has created both opportunities to capitalize on new growth to enhance its resource base as well as challenges in regards to maintaining the city’s unique identity as a tourist center within the region. Simply speaking, its location within the ROS, essentially laid the groundwork to which community leaders and residents responded. Its heightened position also provided community leaders with expanded options and resources to strategically steer the growth coalition in a manner that would best perpetuate and expand its favorable position within the region.

The chapter closes with a brief discussion and analysis of Wilton, a suburban and rural town adjacent to Saratoga Springs. Similar to Saratoga Springs, Wilton has benefited from the ROS, albeit in slightly different ways based on its varying context from that city. Nonetheless, I include Wilton to better illustrate the importance of the ROS on the decision-making processes of the local growth coalition. However, because I understand Saratoga Springs as the main benefactor of the ROS in the region, most of this chapter will be devoted to the discussion and analysis of this city.
Brief Background on Saratoga Springs

Saratoga Springs has had a different historical trajectory than the other major cities in the Capital Region. The city is located approximately 25 miles north of Albany, and 180 miles inland from New York City. It lies directly south and east of the Adirondack Mountains and a short distance west of the Hudson River. Referred to as the “Spa City,” the city is well known for its natural mineral springs, which made it into a popular tourist destination by the early nineteenth century. In fact, Saratoga Springs is considered to be the first community in the United States to have had its economy centered around entertainment (Corbett, 2001).

The attraction of the mineral springs dates back to the end of the American Revolution and was particularly appealing to wealthy Southerners who traveled north to escape the summertime heat in their sub-tropical regions. After the Civil War, the city became a popular place for wealthy Eastern industrialists who built grand Victorian summer “cottages” and enjoyed mingling with their peers in the upper echelons of society throughout the community. With the opening of the Saratoga Race Course in 1863 and the expansion of Richard Canfield’s elegant Renaissance Revival Casino in 1902, the city would also become a national center for horse-racing and gambling, solidifying its identity as a resort community. Indeed, the city was home to two of the world’s largest hotels at this time: the Grand Union and the United States Hotel—two ostentatious Victorian structures that catered to tourists, gamblers, and members of both the new and old elite (Holmes, 2008; Kunstler, 1994).

The city, however, would face many challenges by the 1920s. This was the era of prohibition, and as a result, gambling and drinking activities scattered in more remote
rural areas around the city and left much of Saratoga Springs quiet and stark.

Furthermore, in 1941 a significant segment of the horseracing business moved to Belmont on Long Island, and “standard bred” or harness racing was introduced with a smaller following in Saratoga Springs. Casino gambling moved west to Nevada, and the giant hotels built with cheap labor became too expensive to maintain and fell into disrepair.

The United States Hotel (which suffered extensive fire damage) and the Grand Union Hotel were demolished in 1946 and 1953, respectively. Moreover, many of the grand Victorian and Greek Revival mansions that had once graced Saratoga’s tree-lined boulevards had fallen into disrepair during the Depression. Finally, following World War 2, because of economic shifts and the formation of the new middle class—people who preferred new and less costly suburban-style homes—few households in the area desired or had the resources to rehabilitate historic structures in the city.

Nevertheless, even by this time the city remained relatively wealthy, and though not as vital as it once was, the Saratoga Race Track continued to draw large crowds and bring in substantial tourist dollars to the city during the active summer racing season. This continues today. A study by the Capital District Regional Planning Commission (CDRPC) estimated the racetrack’s economic impact at about $150 million in 2007 (Cooper, 2007). According to Jackie Hakes, city planner of Saratoga Springs, the redevelopment of the racetrack’s flat track for thoroughbred racing, “is what really drives a lot of our summer business” (Jackie Hakes, personal interview, 10/17/08). In addition, according to John Dennehey, senior planner at the Hudson River Valley Greenway, an important state agency that works closely with communities in the region, noted that, “the
Racetrack is really the anchor especially during the summer months for the community. That’s what makes the city unique in a lot of ways” (John Dennehey, personal interview, 09/11/08). Be this as it may, community leaders have realized that for the city to be successful through the long term, the racetrack could only be one component of its economic base.

Indeed, the business community was successful in building upon the city’s regional context as a tourist center. At the heart of the business community was Pete Wait, president of the locally based Adirondack Trust Company. Wanting to keep ownership and payrolls local, Wait and the Adirondack Trust, invested heavily in local entrepreneurs and business startups. Perhaps the most significant project supported by Wait was the Saratoga Springs Performing Arts Center (SPAC). Leaders knew that a large performing arts center could bring substantial resources into the city. A plan for an outdoor amphitheater in the Saratoga Spa State Park had been introduced in the 1930s, but the Depression had stifled those plans. By the 1960s, however, local leaders worked with New York State Conservation commissioner Dr. Harold G. Wilm to inquire into the project and a study was authorized. The effective collaboration between local leaders and the state attracted the interest of the New York City Ballet (NYCB) and the Philadelphia Orchestra, both of whom use the new venue for their summer concerts and performances.

Local leaders established a not-for-profit corporation to raise funds for the new amphitheater. The corporation would both construct and maintain the new facility. Local residents and businesses were able to raise $250,000 in pledges, enough to convince Governor Nelson Rockefeller and his family members to donate funds to the project. The facility opened on July 8, 1966 on schedule with the NYCB onstage with George
Balandine’s *A Midsummer Nights Dream*, and it has since entertained millions at more than 1,000 NYCB performances, 500 Philadelphia Orchestra concerts, and a large assortment of other live performances and bands (Holmes, 2008).

SPAC has been an economic windfall for the city. Besides the significant tourist draw, homeowners have also been lured to the city because of the cultural attraction. Julie Stokes, a long-time community activist, noted, “I can remember again Pete Wait saying to me that bank deposits and population decreased steadily from the beginning of the (twentieth) century. SPAC was built and from that period of time they increased. And he said, ‘I used to ask when people moved here, why did you move here, and one of the answers would be, well the performing arts center is here.’ It changed the cultural perspective of the community entirely” (Julie Stokes, personal interview, 10/30/08).

**Background on Politics**

The Republican Party has until recently dominated politics in Saratoga Springs and continues to have almost complete control of Saratoga County. Political strength in the wider Saratoga area is wielded through upper middle class suburban residents, developers, and small- to medium-sized private businesses. Though registered Republicans far outnumber registered Democrats in both jurisdictions, Democrats have gained ground in both the city and the county. In 2003 out of the 16,631 registered voters in Saratoga Springs, 7,588 were Republicans, 4,463 were Democrats, 3,494 were independents and 1,086 were enrolled in other parties such as the Conservative- and Working Families Parties (Crowe, 2003c). According to Robert Turner, professor of government at Skidmore College, Democratic strength lies in the city’s older, inner district, whereas Republicans hold strong majorities in the newer, more suburban-like
outer district (Robert Turner, personal interview, 05/20/2009). Despite the numeric advantage of the Republican Party, the number of Democrats and independents has increased dramatically since the 1970s and 1980s.

The growth of the Democratic Party in the Saratoga area is largely attributed to the continuing suburbanization and influx of residents from Albany County—an area in which registered Democrats outnumber registered Republicans by a nearly 2 to 1 margin (Shaffer, 1999). In addition, beginning in the 1990s Saratoga Springs began to attract an increasing number of middle and high-income households from outside the region itself. Drawn by its quality of life attributes, many professionals who, because of technological advances, do not necessarily have to live in any particular place, chose to live in Saratoga Springs. Indeed, 40 percent of the city’s voters have lived in the city for ten years or less\textsuperscript{10}. Newer residents tend to be better-educated and more politically liberal than “old-timers.” This shift has had important effects on the politics of the city (Robert Turner, personal interview, 05/28/09).

Furthermore, many of the Republicans are supposedly what some locals call RINOs, or “Republicans in name only” and tend to vote based more on specific issues than on party loyalty in local races. According to Tom Kelly, a professor of history and American Studies at Siena College just outside of Albany, many newcomers to Saratoga Springs register as Republicans simply because that has been the dominant party in the city for so long, and so they feel more comfortable as Republicans than as Democrats. Furthermore, Julie Stokes, an active member in Saratoga Springs affairs and politics for

\textsuperscript{10} These data are from a survey undertaken by Dr. Robert Turner at Skidmore College. The survey relies on a random sample of registered voters available from the city’s Board of Elections. The poll was conducted Nov 7-11 with 233 respondents.
the last 40 years noted, “Saratoga Springs is really a fiscally conservative and socially liberal city” (Julie Stokes, personal interview, 10/30/08). Because of this, local elections in Saratoga Springs are generally quite contested, competitive, and close (Crowe, 2003a).

The Salience of Regional Context for Saratoga Springs

Controlling for aggressive local leadership, I argue that Saratoga Springs’ regional context has played a significant role in the prosperity and economic growth of the city by essentially providing multiple avenues for city leaders to assume in regards to development as well as helping to ensure a relatively positive response to the city’s undertakings from investors and the general public. Regarding regional context, the city has been uniquely situated to capture the benefits of growth while also preserving some of its best features.

Although the city had been struggling from the 1930s to the 1960s, one of the city’s key assets and a central reason for its renewed prosperity was that it lied in the heart of rapidly suburbanizing Saratoga County. Suburbanization began in earnest in the area during the late 1960s. Therefore, Saratoga Springs was able to capitalize not only on tourism-related development, but also on an increased tax base premised on new, upscale suburban developments. This dynamic continues today and has been facilitated by Saratoga County’s unique role within the region.

Importantly, unlike most cities and counties in upstate New York whose economies were historically centered on manufacturing, Saratoga County lied adjacent to the government center of the state and its relatively stable employment base. Indeed, manufacturing in the three older sections of the region began its steady decline in the 1950s, resulting in significant public service reductions by the 1970s. Service reductions,
moreover, coincided and combined with the growing necessity for higher tax rates because of weakening tax bases. Rocco Ferraro, president of the Capital District Regional Planning Commission (CDRPC) noted, “this just expedited the attitude about moving beyond the city boundaries” (personal interview, Rocco Ferraro, 04/13/09).

Saratoga County has also long enjoyed demographic characteristics favorable to development and subsequent population growth. Also noted by Rocco Ferraro, Saratoga is the only county in the region without an old, central city within its political boundaries. Albany, Rensselaer and Schenectady counties all contain dense urban areas with impoverished and working class neighborhoods that have simply not been present in Saratoga County on a comparable level. Because of this fewer services requirements have been needed (or demanded) in the county. This holds local taxes in check, an important factor given New York State’s notoriously high property taxes.

Ken Green, the former longtime director of the Saratoga County Economic Development Corp. (SEDC), echoes and builds on Ferraro’s assessment. Saratoga County had the advantage of being adjacent to the government center of Albany without, in turn, actually having the state government’s large physical plant. For example, although the city of Albany and Albany County benefit by having thousands of public sector jobs within their boundaries, the properties on which the physical plants lie are taken off the tax rolls. Indeed, almost half of the property (not all of which is public) located in Albany city is tax exempt (New York State, State Commission on the Capital Region, 1996). Although state government transfers are intended to mitigate most of these discrepancies, a gap persists, and the significant presence of tax-exempt properties still necessitates higher rates of taxation on those that remain. While the percentage is
much lower on the county level, the presence of a considerable number of tax-exempt properties still impacts tax rates within the entire county of Albany. When Schenectady and Rensselaer counties, with their declining industrial cities of Schenectady and Troy, respectively, are taken out of the picture, what remains is Saratoga County (Ken Green, personal interview, 07/10/2009).

The second major factor related to regional context has been infrastructure. When the Northway, a public investment, was constructed in the 1960s, the interstate opened up a key corridor between New York City, Albany and the tourist Mecca that the Adirondacks represent. Indeed, suburbanization in the southern half of the county mushroomed following its construction with Clifton Park and Halfmoon capitalizing the most on new suburban developments. Suburbanization, however, has marched continuously northward through Saratoga Springs, and it is the far northern towns of Moreau and Wilton that are projected to gain the most residents by 2010 and beyond. With the exception of the tourist-dominated economy of Lake George in the southern fringe of the Adirondacks, the further north one travels away from Albany County, the lower the home prices become, and this has been an additional inducement for residential development (Rocco Ferraro, personal interview, 04/13/09).

In all Saratoga Springs and Saratoga County’s population has grown substantially since the 1960s. In Saratoga County the population grew from 89,096 in 1960 to 214,859 in 2005—an increase of roughly 141 percent. In 2000 Saratoga Springs had a population of 26,186 compared to the 1960 figure of 16,630. In contrast, during the same period, the population of Albany County grew by only 9 percent, from 272,926 to 297,414. Moreover, the central cities of the capital region: Albany, Schenectady and Troy, have
each lost thousands of residents to suburban areas, many of whom would settle in the sprawling Saratoga County towns such as Clifton Park, Halfmoon, and Wilton. Figure 5-1 documents the population growth in the four-county capital region from 1960 to 2000.

Figure 5-1: Capital Region Population Change 1960-2000

Source: Capital District Regional Planning Commission, 2005.

Political Fragmentation
Saratoga Springs’ status within the region is also premised on political fragmentation, or the divided authority over land use and other local decision-making processes. Whereas the city’s regional context as a tourist center lying in the heart of rapidly suburbanizing Saratoga County acted as a key harbinger for development, political fragmentation gave the city land use and taxing authority over its relatively expansive geographic and political footprint. Fragmentation, by its very nature, also created different municipalities and different development policies in the city’s neighbors. Because of this development decisions undertaken by its neighbors impacted development decisions in Saratoga Springs and vice-versa.

Unlike the other Capital Region cities whose boundaries were fixed decades ago, Saratoga Springs encompasses an expansive geographical scope with large tracts of remaining land suitable for development. Indeed, Saratoga Springs, by evolving from town to village to city, encompasses a large area with inside and outside taxing districts. This has promoted a diversity of development and land use. The different taxing districts were initially developed as a response to the need to relocate gambling outside of the city center during the 1920s. A latent effect of this has been that Saratoga Springs still has a number of working farms within the city limits as well as other lands that could be developed for residential and business uses (Holmes, 2008)

Ken Klotz, former mayor of the city from 2000-2003, noted that the city is one of the largest (in land area) in upstate New York. Because of this the city was in a good position to expand its tax base (Ken Klotz, personal communications, 05/29/2009). Saratoga Springs’ larger and open political boundaries also provided a key asset that was not available to Troy, Albany, and Schenectady whose boundaries were set “since Henry
Hudson times” (Rocco Ferraro, personal interview, 04/13/09). Because city boundaries were set within the already existing built-up areas, those cities were constricted in regards to expanding their tax bases outward. In contrast, the municipal boundaries in Saratoga Springs went beyond the existing built-up area. With a wider tax base than the three older central cities, Saratoga Springs has considerably lower property tax rates.

In addition to much of the outer district being undeveloped, many of the city’s wealthiest neighborhoods lie in the affluent subdivisions within it (ERSYS, 2009). Although downtown and parts of the city’s west side were struggling, the more affluent east side and the outer district kept the city’s tax base much healthier than those of the other major cities in the region. Saratoga Springs has a per-capita tax capacity of $98,368—a figure higher than even Albany’s wealthiest suburbs—and about four times higher than Troy’s. Municipalities with high property wealth have the ability to offer better services at lower tax rates than in low property wealth municipalities. Saratoga Springs’ experience, therefore, has largely been the opposite of most of the larger cities in the state such as Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo which have seen continual divestment over the last quarter century and beyond.

Lastly, in contrast to the three central cities, Saratoga Springs was not beset with problems surrounding its school district. Political fragmentation matters in this regard as well in that the political boundaries of the school district have not segregated even the relatively few low-income students in the city from their more affluent counterparts as they have in the other parts of the region. For example, (not dissimilar to national trends), impoverished students in the region are concentrated in the urban districts of Albany, Schenectady, and Troy, whereas middle class and affluent students are concentrated in
the suburbs that surround those cities. Indeed, the Saratoga Springs school district is not only part of a fairly wealthy city with relatively few poor families, it also encompasses parts of the middle- and upper middle class suburban towns of Wilton, Greenfield, and Ballston Spa. Therefore, from a residential standpoint, Saratoga Springs, was more inviting. They didn’t have the same crime issues {as Albany, Schenectady, and Troy} and the school district always had a good reputation. Plus you had the suburban part of the town so even though you were in the city of Saratoga Springs, you didn’t know it because you had your nice suburban house on a quarter-acre lot of land on a cul-de-sac, and life was perfect for you” (Rocco Ferarro, personal interview, 04/13/09).

Political Fragmentation and Policies in Saratoga Springs

Political fragmentation has been a key component for aiding two of the city’s central policies since the 1980s: downtown renewal and open space preservation. These policies and priorities have arisen largely as a response to fears about overdevelopment both within and outside the city’s borders. In regards to downtown renewal, by the 1980s rapid commercial growth in the neighboring towns was beginning to cause concern for the health of the downtown business district and Saratoga Springs’ commercial viability. Therefore, the proposals of historic preservationists in the city were met with open ears among the downtown business community. Political fragmentation has probably been even more important for the advancement of open space preservation. The large areas of open space over which the city has planning authority have given the city opportunities to preserve land as a way to guard against unattractive over-development within its own borders. Moreover, it has also enabled to the city to begin the process of a establishing a “greenbelt” to act as a hedge against overdevelopment in neighboring municipalities.

Political fragmentation also affected local decision-making in another way. The ability for historic- and open space preservationists to organize, develop strategies, and
lobby officials was facilitated by the fact that political fragmentation filtered out other interests—notably rural and town interests—and focused lobbying and organizing on a smaller, more homogenous governance body. This was a body that could also be fairly easily voted out of office when citizens and organizations viewed their decisions as being unfavorable for the city. In a sense, the government was “closer to the people” and fewer barriers and opposing interests existed than had Saratoga Springs encompassed a wider and more diverse area. Once the city agreed to enhance the downtown and preserve open space, it had the wherewithal and authority to do so. Saratoga Springs officials, neither had to seek open space support and approval from officials in neighboring communities such as Wilton, Malta, or Ballston Spa, nor did they need the consent of Saratoga County.

The Overall Impact of the Regional Opportunity Structure on Development

Although downtown renewal and open space preservation have been highly linked in Saratoga Springs, I begin with the latter in this section of the chapter, followed up with a narrative of historic preservation and downtown redevelopment. I argue that historic- and open space preservation were essentially organized to “rationalize” the city’s growth coalition. Indeed, these interests would attempt to save and enhance what they believed were some of the best elements of the city during a time of expanding “nowhere USA” suburban subdivisions and commercial establishments and the related challenges to the city’s open spaces and historic character. These initiatives illustrate the city’s ability to maneuver both capital and the growth coalition to serve community interests.

Overall, the open space and historic preservationists interests have largely succeeded in shifting and “rationalizing” the city’s growth coalition. This process largely
began by local residents organizing to both educate and lobby city officials on development guidelines. Therefore, these interests at first largely operated from outside the government. Eventually, however, they would succeed in persuading local officials to adopt many of their policies. Finally, the organizations, rather than operating from the outside, evolved to become key partners with the city—guiding its growth policies in a way that rationalized the growth coalition.

These policies and projects cannot be divorced from the city’s position within the ROS. Ever increasing development, in part a product of Saratoga Springs’ and Saratoga County’s favorable and attractive context within the larger metropolitan area, helped to spur these calls for preservation and eventually forced growth interests and city officials to adopt the new development policies. Increasing numbers of residents and groups arrived at the conclusion that unfettered growth and development would not necessarily translate into continued economic enhancement. Instead, preservationists successfully argued that the best method of maintaining and enhancing the city’s regional position through the long term was to both protect and build upon the qualities Saratoga Springs already offered—notably a strong tourist economy, numerous historic districts including a distinctive downtown, and, because of its wide political boundaries, a surplus of open spaces that would buffer the city from encroaching development in neighboring communities. This is what I refer to as the rationalization of the growth coalition. After considerable contention, community officials largely accepted these policies and growth actors found new ways to prosper, notably through the intensification of existing neighborhoods in and around the city’s downtown area.
Therefore, although this chapter is mainly an overview of the work of groups and individuals within Saratoga Springs, the decisions that were made were based on what residents and community leaders, in large part, possessed given the city’s place within the ROS. Similarly, leaders and groups pursued projects thought to be vital and productive given the city’s regional context and the options provided to them enabled through political fragmentation. This is why we cannot overlook these important factors which together constitute the ROS.

Saratoga Springs Open Space Issues

From this basis we can now examine specific issues and policies within the city. By the mid-1980s rapid housing and commercial development—including the advancing development fostered by the migration of residents and businesses from Albany, Schenectady and Troy—led to increasing concerns over growth and land use practices among leaders in both Saratoga Springs and Saratoga County. In 1986, the Saratoga County Planning Board met to discuss ways that would encourage cooperation among the county’s 19 towns and two cities over development projects. Cooperation was deemed necessary given that only about 25 percent of developable land in the county remained. Board Chairman, William Dake, however, noted the challenge that inter-municipal cooperation would face because, “they all talk a different language,” meaning each locality has its own way of seeing and doing things in regards to what should occur within their respective communities (Albany Times-Union, 1986).

Besides the quality and type of development occurring in the county, according to Chairman Dake, growing concerns over traffic congestion necessitated ongoing discussions between the different municipalities in the county. In a 1987 meeting called
by Dake, 50 key Saratoga County planning- and town board members met to identify and
discuss areas where municipalities needed to work together to control growth. Dake
recommended sessions in which representatives from Saratoga Springs and the
neighboring towns of Ballston Spa, Malta, Milton, Wilton and Greenfield would meet
twice a year to discuss issues and problems related to county growth. Besides rapid land
development and increasing traffic congestion, Dake noted the problems pertaining to
adequate water supplies—a very contentious political issue that would continue to arise
over the next two decades (Gesensway, 1987).

Within this context of rapid development and inadequate infrastructure lay
Saratoga Springs, positioned in the heart of Saratoga County. In large part as a response
to accelerating growth and the loss of open land, the Saratoga Springs’ planning board
worked for nearly two years on its comprehensive development plan that would establish
guidelines for future growth over the next ten years (Murman, 1987b). Among other
items the plan included building a by-pass around downtown and steering development
towards the east end of the city where less activity was occurring.

Though touted as a framework for guiding development responsibly, some in the
community were highly critical of the plan. For example, city Democrats, including
Democratic chairwoman and candidate for mayor, Jane Weihe, viewed it as
overwhelmingly pro-development and lobbied for changes in the plan. The plan,
however, had strong support by Republican officials and development interests.
Republican Mayor Ellsworth Jones and GOP chairman John Roohan largely supported
the plan and accused opponents of making it into a political issue at the expense of the
city. While occupying the position of Chairman of the local GOP, John Roohan was also
a successful developer and therefore held a large stake in future city growth plans (Murman, 1987b). Another developer, Wayne Senecal of Interlaken Development, also urged for the plan’s passage, and expressed that the city should not be limiting growth but, “working to accommodate it” (Murman 1987a). Local Chamber of Commerce President Joseph Dalton also expressed support for the plan, and argued that allowing more development would expand the city’s tax base.

Based on this level of support, the master plan was approved just weeks later by the city council along party lines. Only one Democrat served on the city council, Thomas McTygue. McTygue, however, was one of the most powerful figures in the city. As the long-time Public Works Commissioner, McTygue had substantial leverage over the expansion of waterlines and other significant infrastructure. Indeed, without water, there can be no development. McTygue voted against the plan. He argued that the city ought to focus on making improvements to existing infrastructure to the benefit of the people already living in Saratoga Springs instead of attempting to lure even more new development into the city (Murman 1987a). Democratic candidate for mayor, Jane Weihe accused the Republican administration of not practicing sound planning, and used development and growth issues for the platform of her candidacy. She referred to the election as a “referendum on Saratoga’s future” and added that, “City Democrats view Saratoga Springs as a small city in the country which should have a viable downtown surrounded by a low-density greenbelt area for its suburbs” (Albany Times Union, 1987).

To no one’s surprise, the growth plan did little to quell concerns about over-development during the early 1990s. As a result, a considerable amount of “open space” discussion was occurring in the early 1990s in the Saratoga area among city leaders,
businesses, organizations, and regular residents. In general, the discourse by individuals and groups was highly critical of what was perceived to be “un-planned” and “haphazard” growth that led to a diminishment of the city’s distinctive aesthetic characteristics. Furthermore, “cookie-cutter” developments and disorganized housing and commercial projects were seen as spoiling the natural landscape and historic heritage of the area. Wary of these trends local residents formed partnerships and groups to steer the city’s policies towards preservation.

Saratoga Springs Open Space Project

The Saratoga Springs Open Space Project (now called Saratoga PLAN) has been a key group that has worked and formed partnerships with local political leaders in the city to rationalize the city’s growth coalition by encouraging development and projects compatible with the city’s historic character and identity. It has also lobbied against projects that would threaten such attributes.

The founding of the group dates back to the late 1980s. The prior master plan called for the city to develop an open space plan that would essentially set aside land on a case-by-case basis to be preserved from future development. Failing to see these recommendations fulfilled, a group of community residents began meeting on a loose basis in 1987 and later formed the Saratoga Springs Open Space Project in 1989. The group’s initial mission was to assist the city in developing the open space supplement to the 1987 master plan. Julie Stokes and Barbara Glaser led the group as an off-shoot of the Saratoga Institute, a not-for-profit educational organization of which Glaser was the director. By 1991 they created the Open Space Plan which called for Saratoga Springs to become the “City in the Country.” Importantly, the work to advance Saratoga Springs
through this framework was a viable option only because the city spanned a large
geographic boundary with ample open spaces remaining over which it possessed political
jurisdiction.

The group’s open space plan consisted of 24 recommendations for the
preservation of historic, natural, and rural spaces as well as locally significant landmark
buildings in the heart of Saratoga Springs. Through community meetings and
presentations the group was able to convey its key open space propositions, and by 1993
the group secured a grant through Rural New York’s Environmental Action Fund to
formally publish the open space plan. In 1990 the Open Space Project, through gathering
public donations, offered to provide matching funds to the city to prepare an open space
plan. Besides calling for preservation of farmland and other open space, the plan would
improve recreational facilities, regulate the city’s entranceways and vistas, and develop
trails for bicycling, walking, skiing, and horse riding (Smero, 1991). The city council,
however, declined the group’s offer.

Approval of the Saratoga Springs Open Space Plan

It was not until 1994 that the Saratoga Springs city council approved an open
space plan that had been a key recommendation in the 1987 master plan. The open space
plan—developed by the Open Space Project with a $5,000 grant (Smith, 1994a)—and the
process by which it was discussed, debated and finally approved, further illuminates
important elements of growth politics in Saratoga Springs. By this time the Open Space
Project was not simply an interest group that operated on the sidelines of city politics,
rather it became an important partner with the city itself—providing important technical
assistance to government leaders to advance its agenda.
Despite being turned down by the city council 1991, the Open Space Project pushed ahead with some of their goals and objectives. It assisted with the development of a 47-mile bike path, the clearing of canoe routes, and worked to protect the city’s water source at Loughberry Lake. Eventually the group was able to secure funding from the New York State Council on the Arts to develop a nature trail and even won funding from the Federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act to create more than 40 miles of bicycle lanes in the city. The group also planned a conference on farmland protection and organized public forums along with the Downtown Business Association, Chamber of Commerce, and the Saratoga Springs Historical Society that dealt with issues surrounding downtown renewal and open space. Open Space Project co-founder and chief spokesperson, Barbara Glaser noted that, “Each group had its own rationale (for participating). Ours was we believe that by working for downtown development, we can find a moderate position that supports growth and the preservation of open space” (Ceceri, 1994).

The work that the Open Space Project had accomplished impressed a number of influential leaders, agencies, and institutions within the city. Mayor A.C. Drake, despite being at odds with the organization over a controversial project at Exit 14 along the Northway, explained that, “They are trying to influence public policy, but they’re doing it in a very good-citizen way” (Ceceri, 1994). The organization was also gaining supporters on the city’s planning board. Although some members of the planning board were concerned that an open space plan would take land off the city tax rolls, the general feeling was positive towards the proposal that would in part “actively discourage ‘inappropriate’ commercial development at city entrances” (Fitzpatrick, 1994c). Open
Space Project member, Libby Smith told the Board that, “City officials should keep in mind the ‘amenity value’ of open spaces.” Similarly, Brian McMahon of the Open Space Project noted that, “Open spaces don’t require water and sewer lines, they don’t put children in the local school system and they don’t have buildings that require fire and police protection” (Fitzpatrick, 1994c).

Even some Republicans were warming up to the open space idea. The 1994 platform of Saratoga Springs Republican Committee included the adoption of the open space plan because, “of its importance to the city’s ambiance and positive quality of life (and) because it would help preserve historic areas and green space” (The Saratogian, March 11, 1994). City Democrats, however, accused the Republicans of being silent on the issue up to this point and indicated that the Republicans had supported a controversial development proposal along Exit 14 (Chin, 1994). The local newspaper, The Saratogian, also weighed in on the open space plan. Like members from the Open Space Project, the paper focused on the economic benefits that an open space plan might bring to the city. Even though it reported that open space does not add to the tax base, it “does contribute to the city’s overall appeal. Parks and green space draw residents and business to the community. A commitment to open space must coexist with a commitment to growth that helps secure the city’s financial future” (The Saratogian, May 29, 1994).

After gaining considerable momentum, the open space plan was unanimously approved by the city planning board in September of 1994 and subsequently by the full city council in October. Planning board Chairman Thomas Curley was impressed by the organization and stated, “I give credit to the Open Space Project for putting together an extremely good product” (Fitzpatrick, Saratogian, May 29, 1994d). Moreover, Curely
asserted that, “The Open Space Plan is a good example of government and private interests working together” (Smith, 1994b).

Preceding the approval of the open space plan, however, were some contentious proposals, notably a project adjacent to Exit 14 off the Northway that, had it been approved, would have altered one of the city’s preserved entranceways. The following narratives offer accounts of some the city’s most significant conflicts regarding growth management and the preservation of open space during the early 1990s. The narratives suggest an important distinction between long-time interests that desired to maintain the largely pro-development, growth machine-oriented status quo, and those, including that of the Open Space Project, who contended that more rational growth management was needed to ensure the maintenance of Saratoga Spring’s unique community identity in the midst of rapid suburbanization adjacent to the city and throughout the county.

Interestingly, however, both sides emphasized the economic importance of their positions. One side, usually dominated by business interests and developers, argued that continued and sustained economic growth in the community hinged on free-market principles that deferred to and upheld the individual interests of property owners. Conversely, the Open Space Project, along with others, maintained that future economic viability rested on greater community planning, which would mean that certain development projects—if they did not conform to long-term goals of managed growth and open space preservation—would be prohibited. The aspect both groups shared, however, was the necessity and importance of maintaining and enhancing the city’s resource-endowed status within the regional context. Contention arose, therefore, about
how to best realize and maintain this position. Nonetheless, by the mid-1990s, city governance had begun to shift to these “managed-growth” ideals and policies.

I argue that managed-growth policies (the rationalization of the growth coalition) cannot be divorced from the ROS which had been channeling substantial development and subsequently, new wealth into the area since the 1970s. Therefore, the overall political climate in the city surrounded how best to maintain and expand upon what was largely already in place. Indeed, growth was not seen as inherently good but would only be supported as long as it did not compromise the city’s high status. Contention surrounding developments at Exit 14 and along Excelsior Avenue illustrate how decisions came to be made (albeit by local leaders) within the context of the city’s unique position within the ROS. Overall, these two events illustrate that residents had become disenchanted with growth “as usual” and desired different land use policies to preserve the status of the city.

Ultimately, the success of the residents and interests opposed to these projects were also assisted by political fragmentation. Fighting the suburban-style commercial development was made easier by the fact that developers, fed up with the politicking in Saratoga Springs, could simply move across the Northway and approach Wilton officials who, in need of the sales- and commercial property tax revenues to maintain their town finances in the absence of any residential tax, welcomed the new development. Furthermore, jurisdictional fragmentation, essentially limiting the size and homogenizing Saratoga Springs, made it easier for upset residents to throw out politicians that they deemed unsympathetic to their concerns.

Controversies over Exit 14
In November of 1993 Adirondack Community College (ACC) announced that it intended to build a $6 million branch campus in Saratoga Springs on privately-owned land near one of the city’s main entrances from the I-87 Northway. If approved ACC would become the first community college to establish a base in Saratoga County. The plans, however, quickly ran into staunch opposition from some city leaders, residents, and preservation groups, including the Open Space Project. The opponents argued that the project would spoil the last pristine entranceway into the community from the Northway and further decentralize business and commercial activity away from the downtown area. Indeed, alongside the Exit 14, Union Avenue entrance into the city stood soaring mixes of deciduous and conifer groves that had been preserved up to this point. Union Avenue subsequently extends through districts with numerous nineteenth century mansions that abut the Saratoga Race Track.

Several city and county leaders, including Phil Klein, the city representative on the Saratoga County Board of Supervisors, were highly impressed and supportive of the project. Thomas Deveno owned the 14 acre site on which the college branch would be built and would have to gain support by the city council to change the site’s zoning from rural-residential to institutional and commercial. Deveno, however, would find that his request would come under intense scrutiny and debate with the final outcome being unfavorable to him and ACC (Roy, 1993).

Proponents of the development emphasized economic development arguments to establish support for the project. Deveno’s attorney, Michael J. Toohey, argued that project would not contribute to suburban sprawl and stated that it would bring people into the city and enhance its white-collar job base which he argued was lacking in the
city. Other advocates, including city planner Geoffrey Bornemann, contended that the project would create 195 new jobs. Similarly, Kenneth A. Green, President of the Saratoga Economic Development Corporation (SEDC), asserted that, “it is harmful for a city to go against the natural demands of the marketplace, and the market has targeted the Exit 14 site in part because of its easy access to the Northway” (Fitzpatrick, 1994a). Interestingly, it was the State of New York and the federal government that built the Northway to begin with—hardly a design of the “free market.”

Meanwhile, the planning board supported Deveno’s project and voted to change the city’s master plan that had placed restrictions on the property. This allowed Deveno to ask the city council for the needed zoning change. A.C. Drake, the Republican mayor at this time, also supported Deveno. With the makeup of the city council consisting of four Republicans and one Democrat, Deveno thought he would have little problem securing the project’s approval. Objections to the plan, however, were raised by the Yaddo Artist Colony, a famous writer’s retreat that owned a substantial tract of land adjacent to Deveno’s site. Yaddo filed a formal protest, and based on a city ordinance, the approval of Deveno’s project would now require a two-thirds majority in the city council.

Furthermore, premised by residential opposition and Yaddo’s protest, Deveno’s attorney encouraged that the second-phase, commercial portion of the project, which consisted of a separate three-story, 45,000 square foot office complex, be dropped all together (Jonas 1994; Lopez, 1994). Despite the downscaling of the project, it failed to secure the needed votes on the city council. Commissioner Thomas McTygue, the lone Democrat on the council who thought the branch campus should be built downtown, voted against the rezoning. Also voting against the plan was Republican Commissioner
Lewis Benton, who worried that the property’s rezoning to strictly “educational” could pose problems in the future if the market for college buildings collapsed—leaving an empty building right in the city’s entrance.

Individuals and groups opposed to the project celebrated the council’s decision. Opponents argued that the development would compromise the city’s heavily tourist-dependent economy. Barbara Glaser of the Open Space Project stated that although the city should not completely ignore the market, the vibrancy of Saratoga Springs rests on maintaining open spaces and the distinctive character of the city. She explained that if the city only looks out for developers’ interests, “we risk killing the goose that laid the golden egg” (Fitzpatrick, 1994a). Indeed, Glaser explained that the group is not necessarily opposed to development, but that new development should not be built in sensitive locations. For instance, it supported the new Congress Park Center, which was built on a redeveloped section of Broadway in downtown Saratoga Springs because the group believed it would enhance the attractiveness of the central business district. Glaser explained, “What makes Saratoga special is that it’s somewhere. Let’s not make Saratoga into ‘Anywhere USA’” (Fitzpatrick, 1994a).

The Open Space Project was not the only group in the community fighting for preservation of the land off of Exit 14. The Saratoga County Land Conservancy (SCLC) had also been an active partner in the preservationist community in the early 1990s. Similar to the Open Space Project, they did not discourage all new development, but desired to manage it so that, in their view, the city could continue to prosper economically. An active member in the Land Conservancy, Harold H. Hagemann Jr. wrote in an Op-Ed that, “the Conservancy accepts that development is essential to our
communities...SCLC is striving to promote development that is compatible with the landscape, not dominant over it...There are economic advantages to the community with effective open space conservation” (The Saratogian, November 12, 1992). Hagemann went on to quote a study in Massachusetts that found that home values in new developments that combined denser housing with open space parcels were on average $20,000 higher than homes in conventional suburban layouts. He also explained that in many instances open space reduces the costs to local governments because services do not have to be provided in these areas. Finally, noted local writer and staunch critic of urban sprawl, James Howard Kunstler, author of the popular book, The Geography of Nowhere (1994), contended that the current patterns of development in Saratoga Springs will, “Even in the short run, bankrupt us” (Fitzpatrick, 1994b).

Although I would not argue that the preservation and open space groups have little concern for environmental sustainability, their arguments surrounding the Exit 14 issue suggest that economic enhancement, not simply ecology, was a top priority. To be sure, it was necessary for both the Open Space Project and the Land Conservancy to be able to “sell” their plans to the public, and researchers have pointed out that using financial arguments have generally worked well in attracting the public’s attention to different policy goals (Rusk, 2003; Benjamin and Nathan 2001). Be this as it may, despite the importance that the Open Space Project placed on land preservation and reducing urban sprawl, their opposition to the Exit 14 development—which helped to kill the project—led Adirondack Community College to build its branch campus further away from Saratoga Springs in the suburban town of Wilton, an area with little public transportation or pedestrian access (Jonas, 1994). This outcome, far from aiding
downtown Saratoga Springs, probably exacerbated sprawl-like development to a greater
degree than if the branch would have been built at Exit 14.

Controversy over Home-Depot/Big Boxes

Saratoga Springs residents would not only oppose development adjacent to Exit
14 but also a planned Home Depot and “big box” retail strip along another of the city’s
entrances on Excelsior Avenue. In 1997 Syracuse-based developer Whitewaters Group
proposed a 274,000 square foot retail project on a 55-acre parcel adjacent to Exit 15
along the Northway. A Home Depot store would occupy about half of the space in the
development. The project would require a city-council approved rezoning of the area
from light-manufacturing to retail and would be located close to both the city’s northern
entrance and to a single-family home residential area. Because of this hundreds of
residents would put significant pressure on city council to reject the project (Crowe,
1998b).

The Concerned Citizens of Saratoga Springs, the group that organized to oppose
the project, argued that the project would have harmful effects on the downtown business
district and neighboring residential areas. As part of their opposition, the group brought
in the famous “sprawl buster” Al Norman who successfully worked to defeat the
construction of a Wal-Mart in his hometown of Greenfield, Massachusetts as well as 20
other proposed Wal-Marts in other locations. Norman explained to the Albany Times-
Union, “Why would a community see a compelling need to rezone the land? Why would
they want to put a huge development on the outskirts of a community that's trying to
maintain itself? In a city that touts its quality of life as a major attraction, this project will
not add to it” (Crowe, 1998a). Indeed, a similar line of reasoning was used against the project at Exit 14.

Facing this opposition, the Whitewaters Group downscaled the project by eliminating two of the proposed buildings. The changes, however, did little to dampen opposition to the project, and after spending a year attempting to work with the city, the developer canceled the project and approached neighboring Wilton about the possible development. Wilton officials—noting that it would strengthen both property- and sale tax collections—welcomed the project. The Home Depot and other stores were eventually built in Wilton on the site of the defunct Saratoga Mall, which was razed (Crowe, 1998d).

The Concerned Citizens were pleased with the decision but spokeswoman Nancy Butcher noted, “We won't be breaking open the champagne until Whitewaters is gone altogether” (Crowe, 1998c). Indeed, even as Whitewaters abandoned their initial plans, they were still determined to develop the site albeit with a smaller 130,000 square foot building that they proposed later in the year. Target was now the sought after retailer for the site. The Concerned Citizens were equally opposed to the smaller project and Butcher noted, “We're surprised that Whitewaters didn't get the message the first time” (Crowe, 1998d). In the end, however, opposition from the group along with other Saratoga Springs residents killed the project and forced Whitewaters to again move their store to neighboring Wilton.

Despite Whitewaters’ withdrawal of both plans, many residents in Saratoga Springs had still been upset that the mayor and city council did not take a firmer stance against the big-box projects. Reflecting this discontent, in 1999 Democratic candidate for
mayor, Ken Klotz, defeated the incumbent Republican Mayor J. Michael O’Connell. The Democrats were also able to win control of the city council for the first time since 1915 when the city was established! This was no small feat given the dominance of Republican voters in the city. O’Connell, who held a non-committal stance towards the big-box projects, lost in the heavily Republican neighborhoods along Excelsior Avenue where the new Home Depot store would have been built. Voters were also upset by the city’s new master plan, which they deemed as still too favorable to developers. Tellingly, Klotz did very well in the areas of the city that were to be most affected by the new master plan. Overall, voters perceived the Democrats as the party that would seek well balanced and managed growth, while the Republicans were deemed as too pro-business and who would at best sit on their hands in the face of undesirable development (Rogalski, 1999).

Saratoga Springs Open Space Referendum

Citing the contentious examples outlined above, the Open Space Project continued to work with city leaders during the next decade on issues related to city development and the preservation of natural lands. The city’s new comprehensive plan, passed in 2001, focused new development within the existing built up areas and discouraged development at the fringes of the city. The Saratoga Springs city planner noted that the comprehensive plan:

really sets forth a progressive vision for the city and that’s the city in the country. And the focus if you look at our zoning map is that most of the intense development is in the inner core, surrounding the Broadway area. And then on the outer area we have what’s called the rural-residential district where the concept is let’s conserve open spaces, rural areas, active agriculture areas, kind of like our own version of a green belt if you will...There has much less {development} in the outer area than in the downtown, and it’s function of the zoning. (Jackie Hakes, personal interview, 10/17/08).
The plan does not prohibit development but only focuses and limits the kind development that can be pursued in certain locations. Because of this some residents see the comprehensive plan as pro-development (Jackie Hakes, personal interview, 10/17/08).

In addition to the comprehensive development plan for maintaining the city’s quality of life and identity, community leaders would turn to a public referendum that if passed would allow the city to use tax revenues to purchase and maintain open space. Using tax money to purchase and conserve natural lands became more widespread throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s in upstate New York and in many other regions in the country. Although forming land preserves is not seen as a viable long-term strategy to coordinate development on a regional scale (Orfield, 2002: 118) leaders in Saratoga Springs nonetheless pursued it as a response to what they saw as continuing over-development and undesirable development adjacent to the city.

In the winter of 2001 Republican city commissioners Michael Lenz and Thomas Curley proposed a voter referendum that would authorize the city council to purchase and set aside open or “green” space not available for development. If approved by voters a dedicated tax to fund land purchases would be added to resident’s property tax bills as a separate line item similar to the library tax (Parker, 2001). Commissioner Lenz noted the desire to work with the Open Space Project in regards to developing the referendum as well as determining what land the city should consider preserving. Alane Ball-Chinian, executive director of the Open Space Project, was eager to work with the city in developing the plan and noted, “We’ve been working really hard to educate the {city} council on the potential of doing a bond act” (Spagnoli, 2001).
Indeed, the organization had been investigating the feasibility of a public vote on open space preservation for a considerable time. Its first involvement with the city on this matter would consist of presenting the referendum proposal to the entire city council and attempting to persuade skeptical council members to weigh in on the proposal. It also assisted in deciphering which properties ought to be targeted for preservation, and worked with the city to draw up the actual referendum itself. The organization also led education and outreach efforts for the city, organized public forums, and lobbied for funds to help move open space acquisitions forward (Jackie Hakes, personal interview, 10/17/08).

After a year of wrestling over legal issues the open space referendum was finally put the voters in November 2002. Voters approved the referendum by a wide margin and the open space provision passed 4,074 to 1,750. The provision, an amendment to the city charter, allowed the city to borrow up to $5 million to fund the acquisition and conservation of open space (Crowe, 2002). The fund has allowed the city to acquire and conserve hundreds of acres of undeveloped land near the city’s entrances and outer edges. The most expensive of such acquisitions was the $3 million purchase of roughly 100 acres bordering Saratoga Lake in 2006 (Leon, 2006).

Beyond the efforts of the Open Space Project, support for the referendum was most likely strengthened by continuing population growth and the types of residents moving into Saratoga Springs. Again, this reflects the city’s context within the region, particularly for people who desire a community with an urban feel but do not want many of the associated problems that have arisen in the region’s other urban centers. Therefore, while the Open Space Project’s work was necessary to bring the project to the table, the
new residents were essential to making sure the referendum passed. Indeed, a city-wide survey conducted in 2007 suggested that 40 percent of the electorate had resided in the city for ten years or less. Furthermore, the more recent residents tended to be better educated and more liberal-minded than the “long-timers.” This demographic shift probably lent itself to the preservation of open space in that liberal and Democratic voters saw the pace of development and the water supply as the most important issues in the city, whereas the Republicans cared most about taxes.¹

Indeed, many of the newcomers into Saratoga Springs would be referred to as members of the “creative class,” a term coined by writer and social critic Richard Florida (Robert Turner, personal interview, 05/20/2009). Members of this post-industrial class—because of their high levels of human capital and competitive skill-sets—can essentially choose to live anywhere, and communities can do much to attract them. That to which members of the creative class are supposedly partial include customary quality of life attributes such as well-kept parks and open spaces, jogging paths, multi-seasonal outdoor activities, independent restaurants and theaters, and appealing nightlife. Interestingly, these are the types of attributes on which Saratoga Springs, beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, has focused.

While community groups and residents sought to regulate and limit new development near the city’s interstate entrances and in the outer district, many of the same interests had a desire to restore and remake downtown, both as a way to preserve the city’s economy as well as to slacken the demand for development along the city’s fringe. Although much of the city’s most recent projects have surrounded the
construction of new downtown buildings, downtown as a district was first revived through efforts at restoring existing buildings.

Historic Preservation and Downtown Renewal

The preservationists believed that Saratoga Springs could capitalize on its unique history and regional context as a tourist center. Historic preservation and downtown redevelopment would also, in theory, offset the opportunity cost of development lost to open space preservation on the fringe, while also bringing new investment to the heart of the city to counter suburban retail growth. Historic preservation and downtown renewal were also related to the city’s regional context as a tourist center. Although tourism shielded the city from the industrial decline elsewhere in the region, much of it, notably horseracing, was highly seasonal. By reinvesting in historic structures and enhancing the downtown district, the city would not only expand its tourist season (the districts would be an additional attraction), its tax base would also be strengthened.

The preservationists argued the city was ripe for renewal and that by reinvesting in the downtown and inner districts, Saratoga Springs could further accentuate its unique identity in relation to the “Nowhere USA” development that had been mushrooming throughout suburban Saratoga County since the 1960s. Even though the outer district was continuing to witness substantial upscale residential development and the east side of the inner district remained relatively well kept, downtown and adjacent areas had seen little investment since the 1930s. Downtown in particular possessed a number of vacant buildings, and many of the occupied ones were owned by absentee landlords who had little interest in maintaining the structures. Because of the rapid growth in outlying areas of Saratoga County, much of the retail had shifted to the suburban malls and shopping
districts. Given the city’s context in relation to its neighbors, downtown would become the focal point for city’s plans to expand its economic base while also strengthening the physical- and quality of life appeal of the city.

Civil society groups and the private sector have been the main drivers of downtown renewal. These groups educated both leaders and residents and lobbied public officials for funds and the implementation of new programs. Unlike open space issues, downtown renewal was not as conflictual between different parties. One of the first groups to organize around downtown renewal and impact public policy was a group that would later become the Saratoga Springs Preservation Foundation. The founder, Julie Stokes, was able to convince the mayor at the time to form a historic preservation committee that would work to pass a strong historic zoning ordinance. She, along with a group of citizens, would eventually form the non-profit Preservation Foundation in 1977. The group worked to raise money and attract grants to restore buildings and stabilize historic structures. Stokes explained:

When I was with the Preservation Foundation we did all the testifying. It was when we got the IRS changes to do the tax credits for historic buildings. Saratoga Springs was one of the main examples that was used. I used to go down {to Washington, D.C.} every year and testify about what we were doing in Saratoga Springs, and the congressman used to lean across the table and say, ‘so glad you’re here, now how’d you do this year?’ (Julie Stokes, personal interview, 10/30/08).

Later when asked about the main mission and concerns of the foundation, Stokes added:

The reason the foundation was formed is…I started to talk about community development and the plan for action. When we set aside the community development money the hope was that we would begin to be able to do some renovations to the facades in downtown Saratoga Springs; the place was falling apart. One of the issues that the plan for action came up with was that there were a lot of absentee landlords in downtown Saratoga Springs, and the retail businesses were only as loyal to downtown as the length of their lease, so there had to be a way to get to the owners of the buildings, and Saratoga Springs in the
mid 1970s was also very much a seasonal town. Nobody was living on the second or third or fourth floors of the buildings downtown; there was no nightlife.

The objective of façade program was to try and see if we could draw in the owners of the buildings. The other thing we did was, I spent a lot of time in the assessment office and working with the assessors, we were able to prove that the old buildings were more valuable in terms of taxes than the new buildings that were being built on the vacant lots which gave us the backing to say to the city council, you have got to invest money in the old buildings, you need to pay attention to them.

The program that we put together to begin to save the old buildings was that the building inspector got to go inside the buildings, and because he hadn’t been allowed into the buildings, even though legally he could have, they weren’t allowing him in, and he would do an inspection, and he would write up what the building code violations were. The deal was the owner had to bring the building up to building code and then they would get the façade easement grant from the outside. And there had to be something…the façade easement had to be held by somebody, and it had always been held by the city. The discussions that we had in community development was that, if it was held by the municipality, it was always going to be subject to political pressure, so the decision was made to form the Preservation Foundation, so that the façade easements were held separately. So we convinced the city council set up the Preservation Foundation and to fund it. So the initial funding, and again it never happened nationally—city council for years put in $15,000 to $20,000 a year and gave us space after a while. The façade easements had a twenty-five year lifespan and the Foundation was to be the spokesperson for the buildings (Julie Stokes, personal interview, 10/30/08).

The program restored building exteriors in a way that would create a uniformly historic streetscape.

The Preservation Foundation would also work with the city’s planning board to establish six local historic districts in the city (though the first historic district was formed before the establishment of the group in 1969). Beatrice Sweeney, the city’s historian, developed the first historic district in Franklin Square—an area that had been threatened by the Route 50 highway expansion. Downtown businesspeople also fought for the designation and opposed the Route 50 expansion, which would have taken out Franklin Square and diverted truck traffic off of Broadway, the heart of downtown. The downtown
businesspeople knew that if truck traffic was diverted away from downtown, it would spell the demise for the district. “All you have to do is go around all of the cities that did ring roads at that time, and by and large their downtowns are dead, so they did not want the traffic off of Broadway” (Julie Stokes, personal interview, 10/30/08). Sweeney’s successful fight to make Franklin Square a national historic district limited the options for the Department of Transportation to remake the city’s highway arteries. Sweeney, subsequently encouraged Stokes and the Preservation Foundation to push for districts on Broadway and Union Avenues, North Broadway, and a district on East Avenue.

Saratoga Springs’ city planner echoed the importance of strengthening the historic downtown core of the city for maintaining the city’s quality of life and economic position. Jackie Hakes, city planner for Saratoga Springs noted:

Inherently, Saratoga has, even when it wasn’t in its prime, has great bones. As an urban planner you take a look at a community and what does it have as its skeleton in terms of infrastructure and neighborhoods, existing roadways, and great architecture. It had great bones, it just needed to be freshened up a bit and brought back to life, and we’ve seen that done in a very successful manner (Jackie Hakes, personal interview, 10/17/08).

The Preservation Foundation continues to be a key player in downtown revitalization with the city. The Saratoga Springs city planner stressed the open, two-way communication that exists between the organization and the city and noted that:

For example, many times there will be a project before the planning board that is either in the historic district or might have some archeological significance or the structure itself might have some historic significance, or a new project might be adjacent to a structure with historic significance, and we want to understand the impacts of that, so they’ll request feedback and input from the Preservation Foundation, and that input will happen. And quite often the executive director of the Preservation Foundation will come and explain to the planning board at the meeting what the issues are, so you have that give and take (Jackie Hakes, personal interview, 10/17/08).
Samantha Bossman, the current director of the Preservation Foundation noted that whenever new city leaders become elected, including a new mayor, “you spend all of your time doing historic preservation 101, teaching them in person” (Samantha Bossman, personal interview, 10/30/08). The Foundation also holds the city council to its own policies and laws, including the steps by which the commissioner of public works has to abide to gain permission to change buildings that are listed on the national register. The organization also communicates with developers in order to express their viewpoints about the removal of historic structures and does extensive monitoring of the plans for new structures and the changes to existing buildings (Samantha Bossman, personal interview, 10/30/08).

City Center

Leaders in Saratoga Springs would not only work to preserve important, historic structures, they also desired to build new structures, particularly on sites where historic buildings had been demolished during the inner district’s declining years from the 1930s to the 1960s. Related to political fragmentation, the threat of the Pyramid Mall built in the 1980s in neighboring Wilton, also encouraged the downtown business community to take stronger initiative in promoting downtown renewal. Julie Stokes, explained, “the thing that really helped coalesce downtown was the Pyramid Mall at Exit 15. That was a big threat, a big changeover. That was just huge.” Indeed, the threat of continuing commercial development in other jurisdictions helped expedite the entire downtown renewal project (Julie Stokes, personal interview, 10/30/08). One of the most significant projects was City Center, a new conference and hotel project built in the heart of downtown.
The idea of building a new downtown civic center that would attract convention shows and conferences had been floating around for years ever since the old civic center burned down in the 1960s. City leaders believed that a new facility would enhance the city’s tourism-related economy and identity. Such a facility would generate year-round activities and bring in tourists during the months that the racetrack was not in full session (Julie Stokes, personal interview, 10/30/08). Therefore, it was seen both as a boon to the downtown area and to the city as a whole, with conventioneers and tourists filling up hotels and patronizing restaurants and stores. In 1984 the new $4 million facility, called the Saratoga Springs City Center, and an adjoining luxury hotel were built on a vacant lot on Broadway on the northern edge of downtown.

Using all practical measures, City Center has been a success. The facility attracted 24 events over a 63 day period after it opened in 1984. By 2003 it attracted 109 conventions, consumer shows, banquets and community gatherings over 228 days—operating at 80 percent capacity. Saratoga Springs officials calculate that in 2003 events brought nearly 130,000 people, 21,730 overnight guests, and 107,372 day- visitors to the city. Furthermore, Mark Baker, executive director of City Center noted that it generated $19 million in revenue for city businesses, plus $1.4 million in local taxes. Managers of downtown businesses, including those of cafes, bars, gift shops, hoteliers, and clothing retailers overwhelmingly say that the convention center increased foot traffic and sales for their establishments (Poist, 2005).

Despite the added business and amenities that City Center has brought to downtown, it has not come without a cost. The center receives a considerable property tax break that has a more than marginal effect on the local school district. In 1999 the
Saratoga Springs City School District pushed for an end to the payment in lieu of taxes agreement that enabled the City Center Authority to hold onto the property taxes from the hotel owner as a way of offsetting the center's operating deficit. The property taxes for the City Center are roughly $325,000 per year, with $266,000 of that in school taxes. But Mayor Lenz argued that eliminating the tax abatement would add more than $500,000 to the center’s operating deficit for which the city would then have to assume (Crowe, 1999a).

The Saratoga County IDA along with the Chamber of Commerce argued that the tax abatement should not be allowed to expire and pushed the city to extend it until at least 2007. The groups noted the economic importance of the center of bringing visitors and money into the city during the racing off-season as the rationale for their position.

Ultimately the tax abatement was extended, and by the early to mid-2000s, work was underway to expand City Center to allow for more events. The City Center Authority and other leaders pushed for a $16 million expansion. In 2003 the city council voted to raise the hotel occupancy tax by 50 percent from four to six percent. This would generate $6 million by 2007 for the $16 million expansion. Much of the remaining funds came from a state grant secured by Joseph Bruno, the Senate Majority Leader whose district includes Saratoga Springs. The expansion doubled the size of the center allowing additional shows to be held in Saratoga Springs which meant more visitors spending more money in downtown shops and restaurants (Crowe, 2003b).

Continuing Downtown Momentum

Partly as an effort to reduce development on the rural fringes of the city, open space interests were also involved in attempting to revitalize downtown. Barbara Glaser
and Jeff Olson, co-chairs of the Open Space Project, spurred education and public
dialogue in the cause of urbanism. The group organized a community forum, ‘The Next
Steps and Beyond,’ that brought planners such as Fred Kent of the Project Public Spaces
to discuss ways to strengthen traditional business districts. The public dialogue has
supported public action to concentrate development. Reflecting the push for concentrated
development, the city's zoning ordinance was eventually amended to remove the on-site
parking requirement for downtown development—a major boost towards increasing the
density of developments—a step taken in many major cities, most notably Portland,
Oregon. (Environmental Protection Agency, 2006). The city also circulated a request for
proposals for new development that would combine retail, office and apartments on city-
owned downtown plots, which at that time were used mostly for parking (Bray, 1995).

In 1998 in another bold step, the city council approved large, new tax exemptions
designed for spurring office development in downtown Saratoga Springs. Leaders viewed
office development as being a key strategy to strengthen downtown. New office workers
would in theory patronize downtown stores and restaurants—bolstering the main retail
hub of the city. New office buildings would also fit in better with new design standards
put in place by the city. For example, it was easier to make a multi-level office building
look historic than a building catering to big-box retailers. The new emphasis on
downtown was also a shift for developers. Being rebuffed by suburban-style projects that
would have compromised open space and the city’s entrances, downtown intensification
enabled a prominent place for them within the new “rationalized” growth policies
adopted by the city through intense community pressure.
The new tax incentive amounted to a 50 percent cut in city taxes for any new commercial or industrial development or expansion worth at least $50,000. County and other taxes would remain unchanged. The 50 percent cut would slide down five percent annually over a ten-year period. A special commission appointed by Mayor O’Connell would oversee the tax exemption and determine the areas of the city that would be eligible for the exemptions. Running through the heart of downtown, O’Connell’s focus was on developing Broadway and the areas immediately to the east and west of the strip in which a number of parking lots stood—places ripe for development because of the new incentives (Crowe, 1998c).

A number of projects benefitted from the new tax incentives. The Pfeil Building built on Broadway by J.W. Pfeil and Company was designed to blend in with the adjacent historic structures. It houses several offices and an Eddie Bauer clothing store. The Pfeils also brought in a Borders Books & Music store and a Starbuck's. In addition, in 1997 Brause Reality went ahead with his company’s plans to construct the first phase of the new multipurpose Congress Park Centre building, which lies across the street from the Pfeil Building. Like the Pfeil building, the Congress Park Centre was constructed in a Victorian style akin to Saratoga Springs’ older buildings. Tenants of the new building included the Gap, Baby Gap and Banana Republic retail stores. The Pfeils did the brokering for these stores as well (Furfaro, 2001).

The Congress Park Centre also benefitted from the assistance of the Saratoga County Industrial Development Authority (IDA). In 1999 the IDA approved the $3.57 million loan to Brause Reality for the four-story office building on Broadway. The new building, besides housing retail on the bottom floor, housed the expanded offices of Flow
Management Technology who needed the larger space because of a growing workforce. By securing funding from the IDA, Brause Realty saved $112,000 in sales tax and $28,800 in mortgage taxes (Crowe, 1999c).

The Congress Park Centre would expand again with the arrival of Ayco, a Goldman Sachs-owned financial services company that moved its corporate headquarters from Colonie, New York (an older suburb of Albany) to Saratoga Springs in 2003. Ayco would lease 88,000 square feet of a new five-story, 110,000 square foot building constructed (again) by Brause Realty. Ayco, with its 300 employees at the corporate headquarters, leased the top four floors of the building, while Brause brought in the retail chain stores Ann Taylor and Talbots to occupy the street-level frontage of the building. Saratoga officials praised the venture noting that Ayco’s 300 new employees meant more foot traffic and customers for downtown establishments (Harlin, 2003).

The Congress Park Centre would also expand into another new building with planned luxury condos and apartments. Brause Reality constructed the Three Congress Park Centre as a 44,000 square foot building housing thirty luxury apartment buildings on the top three floors, with retail again being placed on the main floor (Crowe, 2001b).

Higher density, higher-end residential development in particular gained considerable momentum in downtown Saratoga Springs in the early 2000s. Developers such as Pfeil and Brause took advantage of market trends that suggested more demand for condominium and higher-end apartment living among younger professional workers and retired or near-retired older adults that desired to downsize as their children, now fully grown, had left the household. Officials in Saratoga Springs largely welcomed these developments as they saw higher density residential developments both adding to the
downtown mix of activities as well as their multi-story profiles and high quality construction materials fitting in well with older downtown structures.

Figure 5-2: New Upscale Mix-Use Projects in Saratoga Springs

One of the most significant mixed-use developments that combined residential and commercial space was Excelsior Park developed by Pfeil and John Witt of Witt Construction. Interestingly, the development was planned on the same site that Home Depot had once eyed for its big box store—a plan that was whole-heartedly rejected by city residents. Pfeil and Witt sought to quell concerns over the development by noting

Source: Albany Times-Union
that the $50 million project would consist of high-end residential, retail, and office
development designed in a “new-urbanist” fashion that clustered homes and businesses in
a traditional neighborhood layout that intended to blend in nicely with the existing
downtown streetscape.

In the last several years circumstances surrounding downtown development have
shifted. The city planner of Saratoga Springs noted that by the latter half of the 2000s,
the city has not actively sought out downtown projects and that few if any incentives are
now offered to developers. “We’ve been lucky in Saratoga Springs in that people are
coming to us…we’re on the map now” (Jackie Hakes, personal interview, 10/17/08).
With strong bargaining power over developers as well as possessing the ability to attract
development without large incentives, these circumstances further reflect the favorable
status of the city.

Beyond the individual successes of local developers, the city’s regional context
has helped the city to realize the successful rehabilitation of downtown. Indeed, Robert
Turner, professor of government in Saratoga Springs-based Skidmore College, noted that
tourists, shoppers, and residents, particularly newcomers, who want an “urban
experience” in the Capital Region are naturally drawn to Saratoga Springs. Possessing
many of the same urban amenities (walkable neighborhoods, density, public spaces) as
Albany, Schenectady, and Troy, but without many of their detractors (crime, poor
schools, housing abandonment, high taxes, and shifting racial and ethnic demographics),
Saratoga Springs presents a compelling package.

Wilton Development and Open Space
Akin to Saratoga Springs, the case of Wilton underscores the importance of the ROS as it relates to development. Like Saratoga Springs, the town has been quite successful at attracting lucrative development and middle class residents. Similarly, it has been able to find a good balance between development and preservation that maximizes both exchange and use values in a coherent fashion. Both communities offer good services, have new infrastructure and suitable undeveloped plots, and are largely seen as desirable places by growth actors.

Despite having neither the Saratoga Racetrack nor Saratoga Springs’ downtown and other historic districts, the ROS has assisted Wilton’s development efforts. Like Saratoga Springs it lies in the heart of the Saratoga County growth corridor and its open political boundaries have enabled the town to exploit those qualities. Related, its proximity to Saratoga Springs has aided its development. For example, as that city’s residents and leaders became more conscious of the effects of runaway development in the 1980s and 1990s, many of the rejected projects deemed as threatening to Saratoga Springs’ character would end up being pursued by the same developers in Wilton.

Overall, by the late 1990s and early 2000s, according to Saratoga Springs’ director of urban planning, development competition between the two communities was relatively minimal, and the projects pursued in both communities largely complemented one another (Jackie Hakes, personal interview, 10/17/08). For example, Wilton secured big-box, national retailers including Wal-Mart and Target, while Saratoga Springs, in rejecting them, instead opted for smaller, upscale specialty retailers as well as boutique restaurants, hotels, and high-end office and multi-residential luxury buildings. This stood in marked contrast from the 1980s when downtown business leaders in Saratoga Springs
were quite concerned about the loss of retail establishments to Wilton, and as a result, boosted their efforts to remake downtown into a boutique destination.

Before turning our attention to specific development issues in Wilton, it is important to proceed with a brief overview of the town. Wilton lies to the north and east of the Saratoga Springs. In 2000, Wilton had a population of 12,511 residents, which represented an increase of over 73 percent from the 1980 figure of 7,221. Wilton occupies a territory of nearly 36 square miles, making its average residential density relatively low at 347 persons per square mile. Much of Wilton resembles a typical suburban subdivision dotted with raised ranch and Colonial homes spread apart on large lots with expansive front lawns. During the 1980s and 1990s, substantial housing tracts were built along the west side of the Adirondack Northway. The main commercial center in town is off Exit 15 of the Northway along Route 50. Other parts of Wilton, mixed with forest, farmland and pasture, are still quite rural and undeveloped.

With a per-capita tax capacity of $85,642, Wilton, like Saratoga Springs, is quite wealthy. Median household income in Wilton, at roughly $54,000 in 2000, was actually a bit higher than Saratoga Springs. The considerable number of college students residing in Saratoga Springs, however, depresses the income figures in the city. The town has been able to organize its fiscal capacity around commercial and retail developments. Indeed, with total town revenues of $7,053,600 in 2006, $4,051,100, or 57 percent came from sales taxes derived from the large retail stores in the community. Property taxes accounted for only $471,900 in revenues, and the town has had no residential property tax since 1982—a point town leaders do not hesitate to mention when pushing for economic and residential development (Crowe, 2004d).
Wilton has been able to operate without residential property taxes for over two decades in part because of political structures and service requirements. The town relies on the state police and the country sheriff for law enforcement—an arrangement that saves hundreds of thousands of dollars for the town. Much of the retail development off Northway Exit 15 was also facilitated by the fact that Saratoga Springs built the water and sewer lines along the commercial corridor. Noting the importance of neighboring cities, former town supervisor Roy J. McDonald, admitted in an interview with the *Times-Union* newspaper that Wilton needed the city and noted that, “The downtown of Saratoga Springs is the downtown of Wilton (Crowe, 1998a).

To offset the lack of property taxes, Wilton, relies heavily on the sales tax. These political structures have influenced the actions of the town’s growth coalition in that the town has needed to attract retail in order to boost sales tax revenues. Joseph Dalton, president of the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce noted that,

Wilton has been very receptive to retail commercial development. They are fast-tracking it to get the commercial tax base to offset residential growth. There is an unusually high amount of retail development that has taken place at Exit 15. If you look at the entire Capital Region and you look at the retail development that has been going on in the Northway corridor, it boggles the mind (Brown, 1993).

Dalton, however, spoke of some concern regarding the amount of building taking place and noted that the Wilton Mall had an occupancy rate of only 80 percent.

Saratoga Mall, Wilton’s first indoor shopping center, was deemed as a serious threat to downtown Saratoga Springs merchants when it was first built, but eventually it was razed and replaced by a Home Depot and other smaller stores. Among the numerous retailers in addition to Home Depot that built stores in Wilton during the 1990s and early
2000s were K-Mart, Target, Wal-Mart, Lowes, Barnes and Noble Bookseller, Staples, Circuit City, Best Buy, and a Shop n’ Save Supermarket (Crowe, 2000a).

Roy McDonald has perhaps been the most important individual in the town’s growth coalition. McDonald served as town supervisor during Wilton’s major growth period from 1979 to 2001. Raymond O’Connor, President of the Saratoga Springs-based Saratoga National Bank & Trust in an interview with the Capital District Business Journal said, “I like to say that Roy McDonald is the man who put Wilton on the map” (Pinckney, 1997). McDonald also takes partial credit for the building up a $2 million economic development fund for the SEDC that was utilized for luring two, multimillion dollar distribution centers and other firms to the area.

Although McDonald and other leaders of the growth coalition aggressively worked to develop retail, they were impacted and aided both by lying adjacent to Saratoga Springs as well as Wilton’s favorable regional context. In addition to the market forgone by Saratoga Springs—a community that rejected large, big-box retailers—Wilton lies approximately 30 miles north of the established urbanized areas in Albany County. Noted by Rocco Ferraro, executive director of the CDRPC, this is important because 30 miles is just about the minimal distance required between major retail markets given the population density of the Capital Region. For example, Clifton Park, despite its relative affluence and suburban location akin to Wilton along the Northway in Saratoga County, has not developed into the retail destination that Wilton has largely because the town is simply too close to the major retail centers, including Crossgates Mall and Colonie Center in suburban Albany County (Rocco Ferraro, personal interview, 04/13/2009).
In addition to retail development along Northway exits 15 and 16, McDonald promoted industrial development along the Route 9 and Route 50 corridors (Lebrun, 2001). The town used tax incentives to lure the giant regional distribution centers for Ace Hardware and Target employing 500 and 750 people, respectively. Being a town supervisor also allowed McDonald to serve on the Saratoga County Board of Supervisors where his main objective was to attract business to the county with tax incentives, a grant program for individual towns, and an educational program in which the county pays for training when a company hires Saratoga County residents (Pinckney, 1997).

McDonald and other local business and political leaders sought out distribution centers for a couple of reasons—one of which was directly influenced by the town’s position within the ROS. First, these projects constitute “green” industry in that because no raw materials are processed, little to no pollutants are emitted into the air, water, or topsoil. Therefore, these projects would not spur rampant community opposition. More importantly, however, and directly related to regional context, growth officials desired industries that would fit with local skill-sets. Because of the wider region’s ongoing experience of deindustrialization, former factory workers with relatively narrow skill sets needed new employment opportunities. According to Michael Tucker, president of the non-profit business group, Center for Economic Growth (CEG), distribution centers provided acceptable wages and benefits for this significant segment of the unskilled workforce. Although much of this workforce resided in former factory cities such as Schenectady, these places did not have the large plots of land needed that Wilton possessed (Michael Tucker, personal interview, 6/23/2009).
While industrial, commercial, and residential development has been brisk in Wilton—for example, the town issued 881 residential building permits between 2000 and 2004 (Hornbeck, 2005)—to boost livability the town has also made recreation and parks a priority. Beyond requiring residential developments to contain 35 percent open space in each project so as to provide what the town terms a “conservation subdivision,” the town also developed an extensive trail system. In 1998 with the help of the Nature Conservancy, a national and international environmental conservation group, the town also formed the Wilton Wildlife Preserve that protects 800 acres (Wilton Wildlife Conserve & Park, Inc., 2008; Crowe, 1998a). These projects have been possible in part because the town’s substantial property wealth has enabled the community to preserve some of its best ecological assets without causing major concern to its fiscal capacity. Partnerships with other interests also made a significant difference.

Indeed, the Wilton Wildlife Preserve was an important collaborative effort between Wilton, the Nature Conservancy, Saratoga County, and the New York Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). The preserve encompasses parts of the threatened Pine Barrens that span over a fairly wide area between Albany and northern Saratoga County. The Nature Conservancy funded much of the planning for the project because of their concern over habitat loss for the Karner Blue butterfly, with land in Wilton being some of the last healthy habitat for the species. According to town planner Kate Maynard, although the Nature Conservancy and the State DEC funded much of the project, Wilton owns the Boy Scout camp within the parameter of the project and the town provides considerable financial support for the preserve itself. For instance, the town constructed the new headquarters office for the preserve and views the preserve
as a quality of life issue for residents. In this regard the financial resources of the town to protect land are central. “{Financial resources} are probably a primary thing in terms of looking at how you protect things” (Kate Maynard, personal interview, 10/24/08).

To maintain the quality of life appeal of the town, in 2000 and 2001 Supervisor McDonald also spearheaded the Wilton Wildlife and Open Space Initiative that would provide a $3 million bond to purchase land and development rights to preserve open space. The bond would be paid for through a new town tax on which residents would have to vote. The tax would amount to about $50 on a home assessed at $100,000. Importantly, the tax would represent the first type of residential tax in 18 years for the town. In large part because of this factor, voters in the summer of 2001 rejected the bond issue. Though disappointed by the vote McDonald believed that the town could still save open spaces in other ways (Rogalski, 2001).

The rejection of the bond issue was significant in that it spoke to the strength of the status quo in the town. For two decades, Wilton residents have paid no residential property taxes, and the bond act would have changed this. In addition, without residential taxes, the town is highly dependent on sales taxes from its bustling commercial corridor and the continual development of that corridor. Perhaps residents responded to this fact as well, and interpreted open space preservation as somehow threatening continual commercial development. Indeed, the town planner for Wilton noted that in most of the recent past the town has been very “pro-development” but also offered other explanations for the rejection of the referendum:

In think some of it came to education. To me and especially as a planner I’m a firm believer in the public process, a firm believer in getting it out early, getting people—even if they disagree—getting people to attend and to understand what’s happening so you can make that public decision. So my understanding is, perhaps
a little bit more education, or the how and why’s, people just didn’t have a complete grasp. That’s one item I noticed. The second one was the nature of how that money would provide for open space, the management, and what it would actually go for, and also the private property aspect of it, you know the government’s getting involved here. That’s I think that underlying conservative streak that’s been present in the town as well, that was really seen as maybe going a little to far (Kate Maynard, personal interview, 10/24/08).

The education aspect is particularly important given the outcome of the process.

In Saratoga Springs the open space referendum was successful in part from heavy educational efforts by Saratoga PLAN. In Wilton, however, there was no coordinated effort from community and non-profit groups to push the plan. Furthermore, one cannot ignore the salience of political fragmentation. Whereas in Saratoga Springs fragmentation “filtered out” the conservative property-rights orientation that was more present in Wilton and surrounding rural and suburban towns, fragmentation allowed Wilton to pursue its own interests. Wilton’s town planner explains:

A benefit of the local control is that, the town has no town tax, that’s huge, and they’ve really prided themselves on that for a number of years. So that most definitely is considered one of the positive things by many, to be able to control your own destiny, the sense that government is approachable. I think that this town is very approachable. I see that the scale and the folks themselves, just the staff coming to town hall, and obviously the town board members are extremely approachable, and they try to stay connected to the community (Kate Maynard, personal interview, 10/24/08).

Ultimately, the ROS has allowed Wilton to capture the benefits of growth, including growth spillover from Saratoga Springs, and subsequently largely deciding by itself how that growth will be used to buttress its fiscal condition. Even though voters rejected the open space referendum, the financial strength of the town also enabled McDonald to push for and provide substantial funding for the Wilton Wildlife Preserve and other quality of life amenities for town residents.

Discussion

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How has the ROS impacted development in these communities? Let’s begin with Saratoga Springs. The ROS essentially laid much of the groundwork for which community leaders and residents responded. Unlike the next case study, Troy, in which the ROS has exacerbated the city’s marginal position, the ROS has helped elevate the socioeconomic condition of Saratoga Springs. Having been shielded from the exodus of manufacturing in the neighboring cities by its tourist-centric economy, Saratoga Springs worked to extend its relatively high position in the region by continuing to build upon this industry. It also captured substantial growth that was occurring in rapidly developing Saratoga County. Therefore, community leaders strategically used the city’s existing resources to the city’s advantage while also leveraging and steering new growth in a way that would best maintain and enhance its heightened regional position.

In essence, the city’s regional context largely acted as the pull factor. Historically a tourist city, situated along the Northway apart from the region’s decaying central cities, with their declining tax bases and associated punitive tax rates, Saratoga Springs’ regional context proved to be an enticing place once the downtown was “cleaned up” a little bit. One could veritably think of the city’s regional context as the “demand-side” of the equation. Political fragmentation, in turn, largely acted as the entity to supply this demand. The city’s large political borders, expansive school district, and remaining open space enabled the city to capture new upscale development. These attributes also enhanced the city’s tax base, which made downtown redevelopment feasible from an investment and tax standpoint. Indeed, before downtown redevelopment that brought new money into the core, the more affluent outer district essentially subsidized new development in the less wealthy inner district.
The city’s position within the ROS successively influenced the operation of the city’s growth coalition. It not only allowed for the city to amass additional resources, it enabled—largely through its substantial spatial-political territory—the city to utilize and build upon its existing resources. This led to substantial development. Because community groups and residents subsequently understood that rapid development could lead to a loss of quality of life and threaten the city’s character, they pushed to moderate the growth coalition in ways that would protect the city’s long term quality of life and related financial base. Therefore, policy actions promoted by the Open Space Project and others that would eventually rationalize the growth coalition were largely initiated as a reaction to real and perceived rapid growth in and adjacent to Saratoga Springs. Saratoga County’s overall rapid growth translated into greater construction of suburban strip malls, shopping centers, and residential tract development—projects that threatened Saratoga Springs’ downtown business district and its overarching cultural and historical identity.

Indeed, “development as usual” meaning big-box retail and sprawl-style developments, might be fine for the suburban towns of Saratoga County, but because of the city’s unique regional context, development that might benefit Wilton or Clifton Park, for example, might actually be detrimental to Saratoga Springs’ long term economic and cultural base. Therefore, groups such as the Downtown Preservation Foundation strongly advocated for the city to reinvest in its historic buildings and to promote policies that would create more density in the city’s heart as a way to offer consumers something unique and special in comparison to the suburban malls. Downtown intensification also solved another problem: reducing the need to develop the city’s delicate open spaces, which acted as a buffer from the suburbanization in the surrounding towns.
The case of Wilton further illustrates the importance of the ROS. Wilton shares many of the same attributes of Saratoga Springs, notably its regional context within the Saratoga County growth corridor and its large and wide-open political boundaries that have enabled it to capture growth while also preserving land for its “amenity value.” Where the main differences lie include Wilton’s lack of a traditional urban layout and a traditional downtown. Therefore, Wilton, lacking Saratoga Springs’ historic charm, focused on development best suited to its political structures and interactions with neighboring communities: retail and light industrial development. Even though Wilton’s development was highly influenced (and even somewhat determined) by inter-community and regional factors, the outcome was favorable with a strong tax base that, akin to Saratoga Springs, allowed for substantial open space protection in that the town was wealthy enough to set aside land to protect quality of life amenities.

In light of this, the activities of civil society groups, particularly the work promoted by the Open Space Project, calls into question one of the key arguments within the city as a growth machine framework. In these examples, what Logan and Molotch (1987) refer to as use values (quality of life and sentimental features) were effectively mobilized and utilized to enhance the city’s “exchange values” (capital and financial investments). This suggests that use and exchange values are not necessarily diametrically opposed forces as Logan and Molotch argue. Put in another way, what Savitch and Kantor (2002) refer to as post-material values, including environmental and livability concerns, were co-opted or assumed to aid in the advancement of material values: the continual economic expansion of the community. However, the findings do suggest that citizens and citizen organizations have to work to regulate the local growth
coalition so as to ensure that exchange and use values interact and work for their mutual enhancement.

This entire project was facilitated by political fragmentation, which allowed for both proactive and reactive qualities that impacted the growth coalition. Concerning the latter, because of fragmented authority, the undesirable development that threatened the character of Saratoga Springs could be off-loaded to neighboring communities like Wilton that wanted such development (ACC, Target, Home Depot, and others). Moreover, the perceived over-development in the neighboring towns by leaders and residents in Saratoga Springs, in part led the city to develop its own greenbelt and open space preserves. Concerning proactive qualities, political fragmentation allowed the city to pursue what it deemed as desirable including a referendum to preserve open space, the creation of numerous historic districts, and the redevelopment of downtown. Fragmentation both filtered out suburban-conservative, property-rights interests and made it easier for organized groups such as the Preservation Foundation and the Open Space Project/Saratoga PLAN to educate and lobby city officials and residents. Therefore, political fragmentation was a necessary element.

In the next chapter we turn to Troy, a city that has been on the opposite pole in regards to the ROS. Unlike Saratoga Springs, the ROS has not aided Troy but helped to undermine its already weak socioeconomic and sociopolitical base. Here I examine how this has affected politics surrounding the growth coalition and the diminished options Troy officials have in regards to rebuilding the city.
CHAPTER VI:
TROY: JUMPSTARTING THE GROWTH MACHINE

If Saratoga Springs has benefited more than most from the ROS, assisting its resource-endowed status, I argue that Troy’s status has been undermined more than most from the ROS, making it the comparatively resource-deprived community within the region. Therefore, this chapter intends to illustrate how regional context and political fragmentation have interacted to impact Troy in divergent ways compared to Saratoga Springs. These factors have essentially impacted the context and environment in which community leaders make decisions regarding growth and development. Unlike Saratoga Springs, whose position within the ROS has enabled the city to capitalize on its assets and assume a coherent, “rationalized” development vision, Troy’s position has undermined not only development but also its ability to utilize and capitalize on existing resources and assets. Troy’s context has also negatively impacted its internal political climate in that the city does not possess the resources to adequately accommodate various community interests groups.

Instead, Troy’s suburban neighbors have witnessed development, much of it premised on Troy’s assets. To illustrate this, in the next chapter I turn to North Greenbush, a suburban town that has arguably experienced much of the growth that Troy could have achieved had one of the factors, political fragmentation, not been as large of a factor. Here, development has been proceeding at a steady pace, a momentum that is not
aligned to interests of the residents most affected by such growth. This chapter, however, focuses specifically on growth and development matters in Troy.

Before we look at major issues regarding development in Troy, I provide a brief overview of the historical growth and development of the city—one of wealthiest and most prosperous cities in the country during the nineteenth century. The section, in addition to noting Troy’s initial growth and prosperity, briefly documents the subsequent decline of Troy by the early to mid-twentieth century when industry and commerce began to shift to the suburbs, other regions in the country, and to areas overseas.

Historical Background on Troy

It would probably be difficult for the average observer today to picture the Troy of a century ago. By the mid-nineteenth century Troy was one of the most prosperous and dynamic places in the country. In 1750 about a dozen people lived in the area that would become Troy. The settlement was incorporated as a village and then as a city in 1798 and 1816, respectively. Lansingburgh, a community that stretched for some six miles on a narrow flood plain along the Hudson River, was founded in 1807 immediately to the north of Troy. It developed as a separate town until 1900 when it was annexed by Troy, which had emerged as the larger and more important city. To this day, however, Lansingburgh continues to have its own identity with its own institutions, including the independent Lansingburgh Central School District.

Troy as it is now recognized, however, emerged as a uniquely important commercial, trading, industrial, and educational center. Though it would become one of the most important industrial centers in the country, the city began as a trading and commercial center with its unique and strategic location near the confluence of the
Hudson and Mohawk Rivers, about 10 miles north of Albany. When the Erie and Champlain canals opened in 1825, Troy’s population stood at 8,000 but would soon surge as water-based trade and shipping expanded. The water routes were located near natural resources and also provided Troy with access to imported goods, as well as to markets in New England, Canada, and in the Great Lakes region. Merchants and traders used the canals to transport both raw materials and finished products (Turbin, 1992).

With unparalleled access to water and lying near large mineral deposits, including mineral resources necessary to manufacture iron, Troy in the early- to mid-Nineteenth century became a center of the textile and iron industries. Flowing water provided ample energy to power mills, and newly built railroads expanded access to other markets. By the 1850s Troy possessed four large iron mills and more than a dozen smaller iron foundries. Shirt-making and the manufacture of collars were Troy’s other primary industries. Troy would become famous for fashioning the first detachable collar—a novel design that dramatically reduced the time and labor of washing and cleaning shirts. Hannah Lord Montague, the daughter of a Revolutionary War officer, is credited for having invented the detachable collar. Soon, enterprising businesspeople opened scores of other collar and cuff factories so that by the 1880s, approximately 33 firms produced an assortment of collars, cuffs, and shirts (Turbin, 1992).

Women were the primary workers in the collar and shirt factories and their corresponding laundries, whereas men worked in the iron and steel plants. Largely because of the city’s substantial and active female labor force, Troy became the site of the first women’s trade union, the Collarworkers Union, formed by laundry workers Kate Mullaney, Esther Keegan, and Sarah McQuillan.
Beyond Troy’s significant textile and iron industries, printing, shoemaking, cigar making, and furniture manufacturing were also widely present in the city. Combined with its vibrant commercial and shipping sector, Troy enjoyed a nearly unparalleled level of economic dynamism. The significant number of important institutions reflected the sheer strength and upward trajectory of the city’s economy. For example, Troy is home to the nation’s first science college, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, founded by the father of American geology, Amos Eaton, and the first women’s college, the Troy Female Seminary that would become the Emma Willard School. Indeed, more than a few observers have commented that Troy was the Silicon Valley of the nineteenth century (Rittner, 2002).

Troy’s economic strength would continue through the end of the nineteenth century up until the 1920s. By this period wealthy mill owners including Erastus Corning, John Winslow, and John Griswold dominated the local industrial scene, as they had pursued mergers and consolidations in the ironworks industry. Textiles also had consolidated with a few firms dominating in the area. In 1920 the city’s population peaked at 81,014, and by 1930 the industrial behemoth began to wane. The iron and steel industry moved west, particularly into Pennsylvania and Ohio where mills sprouted closer to the copious coalmines in the Appalachian region. Textile manufacturing shifted to the South to take advantage of the cheaper and more docile labor force. The last textile factory in the city, Cluett Peabody & Co. Inc., maker of Arrow Shirts, closed in 1989 (Schreck, 2001). Finally, with the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway in 1959, the Erie and Champlain Canals lost much of their comparative advantage, and barge traffic and shipping-related business slumped.
At the same time that deindustrialization and the waning of the shipping industry were wreaking havoc on the city’s economy, Troy also had to contend with another factor: suburbanization. The policies that accelerated suburbanization in the post-war years throughout the country such as federally subsidized mortgages and federal highway programs were fully present in the Capital Region. For example, I have already discussed the construction of the Adirondack Northway in the 1960s, which greatly facilitated the suburbanization of Saratoga County and aided development in Saratoga Springs. Closer to Troy, however, was the construction of Interstate 787, an auxiliary highway that connected Interstate 87 with the downtowns of Albany and Troy, as well as with a few older river cities in between. The first segment of the highway opened in 1971, and in 1981 the Collar City Bridge, which connects downtown Troy with I-787 on west bank of the Hudson River, opened for traffic. The highway dramatically reduced the time it took drivers to enter and exit the city from outlying areas, incentivizing auto usage and commuting from surrounding areas. Moreover, construction of the Collar City Bridge, which was positioned over the Hoosick Street corridor, wiped out dozens of structures, homes, and businesses that had all been part of a dense and vibrant urban neighborhood in earlier years.

Large portions of Troy’s main commercial heart were also demolished through urban renewal schemes in the 1960s and 1970s. Thousands of historic residential and commercial buildings were put to the bulldozer in an effort to open up large tracts of land for new suburban-like developments. City leaders believed that they had to recreate Troy in the image of the new suburbia in order to compete with the novel, indoor shopping malls that had begun sprouting up in neighboring suburban areas. Not surprisingly, the
concept failed with only a small hotel and a suburban-style restaurant and parking garage to showcase the results from the demolition of hundreds of historic structures (Rittner, 2002). To make matters worse, at the current time, in which some of the only investment the city has witnessed has been in the rehabilitation of unique and historic downtown buildings, the wholesale demolition of much of the central core in the 1960s and 1970s leaves the city with fewer such properties of which to take advantage.

Political Background

Unlike its larger neighbor, Albany, in which Democrats dominated the city for most of the twentieth century, Republicans have done relatively well in Troy. Politics are competitive in the city first, and perhaps most importantly, because an unusually large number of voters are unaffiliated with either major party. In addition, the local Democratic Party in recent years has been, totally dysfunctional. There are huge intramural splits between them. There is no consensus on who runs the Democratic Party, and the last time the Democratic Party had a chairman who managed to get a pretty good cross-section of support from all factions in the party, they won everything easily inside the city of Troy (Joe Fama, personal interview, 05/06/09).

In 2003, the year that Republican Harry J. Tutunjian won the mayors office, seven of the nine city council seats also went to Republican candidates (O’Brien, 2003). Nevertheless, throughout much of the 1990s and earlier, Democrats controlled the city council and Republicans, the mayor’s office, or vice versa.

Politics in Troy and Rensselaer County have been significantly influenced by Republican State Senator Joseph Bruno. Before his retirement in the summer of 2008, he had been in the New York State Senate since 1976 and the President, or majority leader of the Senate since 1995. Bruno has been a significant force in bringing state and federal
funds to both Rensselaer County and to the Capital Region as a whole. Because of this,
his retirement has brought political uncertainty to the New York Senate Republicans and
to local Republicans in the county.

Although it is impossible to delimit Bruno’s success in a district that contains a
substantial number of low-income, urban constituents, Bruno has been able, through
savvy political skill, to appear to “understand the people.” Importantly, at some level that
understanding is also genuine. “He makes sure he knows that his constituents are being
taken care of. It’s like the politics of the past in that he fostered tight relationships and
rewarded loyal supporters.” (Rocco Ferraro, personal interview, 04/13/09).

Furthermore, Bruno concentrated on improving the delivery of services that
affected the people on an everyday level. As Rocco Ferraro explains,

{His style and concentration} was similar to {Mayor} Giuliani’s. Giuliani
focused on quality of life issues—making the neighborhoods work for the people
who actually lived there. How else did an overwhelmingly minority and
Democratic city elect him? Well, Joe Bruno focused on the same issues as
Giuliani and was very successful. Here{in New York State} we accept the fact
that our leaders are responsible for making the decisions on our behalf to make
my life easier, and Senator Bruno did that very well. He made his constituents
happy (Rocco Ferraro, personal interview, 04/13/09).

Republicans have also dominated politics for much of the recent history in
Rensselaer County. Despite having a very narrow registration advantage: 26,179 versus
25,683 for the Democrats (Voter Contact Services, 2008), Republicans have been able to
control the position of Chairman of the Board of Supervisors since its inception in 1970.
The position is the equivalent of the County Executive in neighboring Albany County.
Somewhat akin to Bruno’s approach, the Republicans in Rensselaer County, including
County Chairwomen Kathleen Jimino, have been successful because they have focused
their attention on the delivery public services. “This is not a Republican or Democratic
thing. Kathy Jimino is sensitive to these issues {public services, including services to
tlow-income and special needs communities}. It’s regardless of political affiliation. It’s a
personal philosophy that exists.” (Rocco Ferraro, personal interview, 04/13/09). Beyond
services, partisan political competition in recent years, like that of Saratoga Springs, has
largely surrounded issues over development, and specifically whether it is proceeding at a
pace and in such ways that are compatible with what constituents see as appropriate.

Troy’s Response to Regional Context and Political Fragmentation

Troy and Saratoga Springs rest on complete opposite sides of the ROS. While the
factors within regional context have interacted with political fragmentation to boost
Saratoga Springs, they have hamstrung the city of Troy. Saratoga Springs, once city
leaders realized the items on which they could capitalize, had the ability to implement a
comprehensive and coherent development strategy. The city’s plethora of open land for
development, due to its spatial-political factors (political fragmentation), enabled
development to actually occur within the city. Conversely, in Troy at least four regional
contextual factors have interacted with political fragmentation to handicap Troy. (1) A
depleted industrial city (2) far from the I-87 growth corridor, isolated by its (3) tight
political boundaries with the (4) ensuing high taxes, have left city leaders with much
fewer avenues to pursue. These factors have also led to an inconsistent development
policy and an ensuing lack of development.

This premise leads to a strikingly different view of development in comparison to
Saratoga Springs among city leaders and residents. Whereas in Saratoga Springs in which
voters have ousted city commissioners and mayors for promoting what constituents
understood to be too much “unchecked” development, this mentality is largely an
aberration in Troy. Furthermore, the growth coalitions also differ in the two cities. In Saratoga Springs, non-profit organizations including Saratoga PLAN and the Preservation Foundation have essentially rationalized the growth coalition to include quality of life amenities in the city and considerable land preservation on the outskirts of it. Using Logan and Molotch’s (1987) terminology, Saratoga Springs (in addition to Wilton) has largely been able to achieve a good balance between use- and exchange values.

Such circumstances in Troy, however, could be understood as almost entirely foreign. Because of the underdevelopment of the city, the central concern surrounds simply growth—whatever growth the city can attract. This has led to an inconsistent vision, including both the preservation of older and historic structures as well as their demolition. Historic preservation in the downtown, for example, is coming up against or affronting the desire to build new space for high-tech companies. Redevelopment in existing neighborhoods (the only tracts the city possesses) is also alarming some leaders in the social service community. Joe Fama, the executive director of the Troy Architecture Program or TAP, a forty-year-old non-profit that assists low-income homeowners improve their residences by offering design and technical support, attempts to mediate the political environment by saying,

The more Troy becomes a healthy community, the better it is for everybody…to an extent. I don’t want that to sound like trickle-down, but Troy’s median income is so low that having neighborhoods improve, any neighborhood, improves all neighborhoods to some extent. We’re on guard against someone trying to improve Troy by forcing low-income people out of town. We don’t want to see displacement. We’re very strongly against displacement. (Joe Fama, personal interview, 05/06/09).
The different contexts between Troy and Saratoga Springs have also led to different interactions between Saratoga Springs and its neighbors, particularly Wilton, and Troy and its neighbors. Because both Saratoga Springs and Wilton are communities with favorable contexts for development and investment, development is shared between the city and the towns around it. Conversely, the context surrounding Troy does not create a good atmosphere for investment. Joe Fama again explains:

Really, there is one major impediment {to redevelopment in Troy} and that’s return on investment. And there are just a host of factors that contribute to it. Taxes are one of them. When you do the analysis of the project, in the end you need not only to make some money, but you need to make as much money as you could in other places or people won’t do it, in general…The patterns of development over the last 50 years are really patterns of development where people built the most houses in the place where they could make the most money and not necessarily in any logical or rational {from a planning perspective} place (Joe Fama, personal interview, 05/06/09).

Because of this, growth coalitions will operate in a more uneven manner as they center their activities on the wealthier suburban neighbors where the investment and spatial environment is advantageous. Home rule, possible through fragmented political authority, allows and exacerbates this uneven development between Troy and the wealthier neighboring towns.

Tim Mattice, the director of the city’s office of community development, in a way sums it up best in that even though he believes that it was essentially bad policy decisions that contributed to much of the current inequities between suburbs and cities, metropolitan political fragmentation perpetuates inequities in that it polarizes the population. "There are simply more resources in the suburbs to meet the needs of market-rate, middle-income residents. You’re going to attract a different kind of person there—professional people, educated people, people who want to become involved in the
community” (Tim Mattice, personal interview, 02/23/09). He noted that the towns outside of the city offer lower taxes and better services, notably schools. In addition, because the suburban towns have open spaces and newer infrastructure, “they can respond faster to market forces” in regards to the type of housing that is desirable, the lifestyles that people are seeking, the stores at which people want to shop. Indeed, “everything is new, vacant, and greenfields. In the city you have to do urban renewal, demolish buildings. There’s more bureaucracy, more steps that need to be taken in the city. The city has more barriers” (Tim Mattice, personal interview, 02/23/09). One of those barriers is the housing stock, which I take up in the following section. Because of its position within the ROS, Troy has divergent and limited options for redevelopment in comparison to Saratoga Springs. This impacts the decision-making processes of the city’s leaders, including growth interests.

Strategies for Housing

In broad terms, Troy faces three essential and inter-related problems in regards to housing. First, the city possesses an aging and deteriorating housing stock. The age of the city’s housing stock is considerably older than even Albany’s, itself a very old city in the American context. In addition to other concerns, older housing involves expensive maintenance and upkeep costs, burdens that are directly related to Troy’s second major housing problem: abandonment. When property owners see little potential payoff for any investment in the city’s housing (related to the city’s declining population and low residential incomes), the alternative is to let the property go. Finally, Troy faces another hurdle in its development, a disproportionate share of government-sponsored or public housing units. Such units if concentrated to a high enough degree inhibit private
investment in the city’s housing stock by making those neighborhoods unappealing to market-rate consumers and investors.

Troy has made a concerted effort to spur housing construction, attract new homeowners, and shift renters into homeownership. Indeed, the majority of housing units in the city, 57.1 percent, are rental units. This compares with the national average of 32.7 percent. Moreover, the percentage of rental housing units in Troy is roughly equal to the percentage of owner-occupied units in Saratoga Springs: 59.3 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2009). The majority of housing units in the suburbs of Troy are also owner-occupied: 68.4 and 63.4 percent in North Greenbush and Brunswick, respectively. As in the case of housing age, political fragmentation has allowed for the concentration of older, less valuable rental properties in Troy while more valuable, single-family, owner-occupied housing dominates in the suburban towns adjacent to the city.

The city has laid out both general strategies and specific programs for addressing the issues of an aging housing stock and vacant homes, while also attempting to boost home ownership. In some ways, however, they are inconsistent with policies towards downtown development. Tim Mattice explained that Troy is attempting to tackle all three of the preceding issues by promoting a general strategy of “de-densification” in the city. According to the city the de-densification of residential neighborhoods is necessary simply because, “we have more units than people” (Tim Mattice, personal interview, 02/23/09).

De-densification is largely undertaken through what is known as the down-zoning, or rezoning neighborhoods in a way that reduces density and crowding. The strategy which has been taken to the extreme in rust-belt cities such as Youngstown,
Ohio, in which leaders have literally, through public policy, “shrunk” the city by demolishing structures and dismantling infrastructure in an effort to conserve dwindling public funds, is seen as an effective method—albeit one practiced at a much more limited scale—in Troy (Fairbanks, 2008).

Leaders in Troy have favorable views of the strategy for a number of reasons. First, they explain that the city contains large numbers of residential structures that are functionally obsolete and not attractive to middle income homeowners. Even when blocks contain a majority of inhabited dwellings, for example, vacant and abandoned homes depress the property values and desirability of such areas. Therefore, the strategy typically employed would surround, for example, demolishing four vacant and/or abandoned, multi-family row-houses and replacing them with two single-family homes. The strategy addresses two problems: reducing the number of vacant homes and adding new housing with, in theory, more market appeal to middle income homebuyers—the same kind of buyers who now flock to the suburban towns around the city (Tim Mattice, personal interview, 02/23/09).

The down-zoning of specific neighborhoods is, however, only one strategy for reviving the city, and Troy’s leaders admit that it alone is not sufficient for making up ground lost to the suburbs over many decades. Furthermore, due to the lack of state and federal funds for housing, Troy has not been able to administer this strategy to the degree that is desired. Indeed, replacing, for example, four old structures with two new homes in the city introduces complications and expenses that are simply not present if the same two units were to be built on greenfields in the suburbs.
From a broader perspective, what is interesting about the program, however, is that it is directly at odds with one of the main goals for downtown: reinvesting in older and historic structures. Like Saratoga Springs, Troy is not bereft of solidly built, historic buildings, and the city sees historic preservation as a key method of reviving the local economy in that the buildings provide an important distinction between Troy and outlying, suburban areas. Although the row-houses in Troy’s neighborhoods do not possess the same aesthetic cache as the downtown structures, well built and unique—in comparison to the particle-board homes going up in their place—the row-houses do provide a unique architectural element that could potentially be an asset to the city if the economy can be revived in other ways. In addition, will these new, suburban-style homes attract the buyers the city desires in light of the city’s mediocre public services? Therefore, it is important to ask, will the demolition of these structures have unforeseen consequences?

Specific Programs

Beyond the general strategy of de-densification, the city’s leadership has also implemented specific programs to improve housing in Troy. These programs seem to be more viable than de-densification. To balance out the housing stock, Mayor Tutunjian in 2004 proposed a new housing plan based on a relatively successful program in Columbus, Ohio in which new homes built on abandoned city lots would remain tax-free for five years. The tax abatements would be targeted to specific neighborhoods, including the city's most economically distressed areas. He explained, “we’re going to target specific areas in the city that need investment and have been victims of destruction of buildings by fire and that have gaps in rows of housing. It would give an incentive to an
owner to buy a lot” (O’Brien, 2004). Property owners would only pay taxes on the value of the vacant land. The new buildings, however, would also have to harmonize with adjacent structures. For example, a modular or manufactured home would not be allowed to be built or assembled next to a brownstone. The program has since been enacted.

The city council also enacted another proposal by Tutunjian. The Reinvest in Troy program, which allows residents to make improvements to their homes without immediately seeing their property assessments raised, was enacted by the city council in the fall of 2006 (O’Brien, 2006a). Another successful program Tutunjian promoted provided grants to moderate- and low-income homeowners to help them bring their houses up to building code. In 2006 the city was able to secure nearly a $400,000 grant from the (Federal) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. Funds from the grant were distributed in amounts ranging from $15,000 to $40,000 (O’Brien, 2006b).

Public Housing

Government-sponsored housing or public housing is an issue faced in every major urban area in the country. This is particularly the case in low-income or impoverished urban areas in which much of the nation’s public housing is situated. Troy is no exception as political maneuvering throughout the country segregated public housing in largely low-income, racially segregated, and undesirable urban neighborhoods. Within the regional context, Troy represents such a setting. Echoing almost Foucauldian notions of the practice of surveillance, Tim Mattice, director of the city’s community development agency, also noted that regrettably, housing agencies in years past tended to centralize their residents in certain, dense locations so that it would be easier to monitor, filter, and process them through the system (Tim Mattice, personal interview, 02/23/09).
The institutional needs of the Authority also handicap reforms that in some cases need to occur. Indeed, Joe Fama from TAP explains that the Housing Authority even today, has an institutional need which is at slight variance to I think the best solutions. The Housing Authority has a portfolio of buildings, and many of those buildings are in difficult neighborhoods, and they have sort of a project boundary to them. In the long run it does the Housing Authority a lot more good as an institution to build projects than it does to send out Section 8 vouchers, and I think the mayor would agree with me on that (Joe Fama, personal interview, 05/06/09).

Despite reforms undertaken in local housing agencies, notably the move towards “scattered-site” housing, former (as well as some of the current) policies were reliant on the basis in which anti-urban policy shifts, combined with metropolitan political fragmentation, resulted in the types of neighborhoods (low income and segregated) in which the construction of large public housing developments would not face major impediments by either property owners or residents. Therefore, the place-positioning or orientation of public housing, similar to the case of low-cost housing, was only possible with the help fragmented political authority.

As in other cities, in the 1990s and 2000s much of the dialogue in regards to housing and development in Troy surrounded either rehabilitating or demolishing old public housing structures that had either become obsolete or simply uninhabitable—an issue largely absent in Saratoga Springs. Table 7-1 compares the number and proportion of public and Section 8 housing between Troy, Saratoga Springs, Wilton, and the Troy suburb of North Greenbush.

Table 7-1: Government-Sponsored Housing by Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Government-Sponsored Units</th>
<th>% of Dwellings</th>
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186
Troy & 2,150 & 9.3 \\
Saratoga Springs & 429 & 3.4 \\
North Greenbush & 6 & 0.1 \\
Wilton & 30 & 0.02 \\


The city has been highly involved with the issue of public housing for a number of reasons. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD’s) CDBG program requires the city to incorporate public housing into its Five-Year Strategic Plan for housing and community development. Without public housing in the mix, Troy would simply not receive CDBG grants (Tim Mattice, personal interview, 02/23/09). Second, many of the largest public housing communities were either downtown or adjacent to downtown. This is salient for a number of reasons, including acting as an encumbrance to a coherent and comprehensive development plan for the city.

Beginning in the 1980s when leaders in Troy sought to find new uses for shuttered factories and industrial warehouses, they looked to rehabbing these structures for residential and commercial uses. The deteriorating public housing buildings, however, represented a clear disincentive for new development. Second, and perhaps no less politically important, apart from the fact that long waiting lists existed for such housing, leaders of the city believed that Troy simply had too much of it. In 2008 approximately ten percent of the housing in Troy was either public housing or housing units in which the inhabitants received Section 8 housing vouchers through HUD (Caprood, 2009).

The situation was much the same in the early 1990s when discussions and various plans were underway with how to best deal with the aging and vacant John J. Ahern Apartments. The 144 apartments, all within four, seven-story buildings, were built in 1954. Since 1989 when the Troy Housing Authority shut the site down because of
chronic crime and drug-related problems, the city had been seeking federal money to renovate the buildings and turn them into affordable family housing. Hope arrived in 1993 when Black United Front, a faith-based housing organization in New York City, offered to purchase and renovate the buildings. The organization sought to eventually sell individual housing units as an opportunity for affordable home ownership in the city, as well as to offer a lease-to-own plan for low income households. The project, however, like many in the city, fell through, and the buildings continued to sit empty idle (Sandberg, 1993).

Another notable attempt was made to rehabilitate the apartment complex into veterans housing. In the mid-1990s, Uncle Sam’s House Inc., a local organization that already managed housing in the city, proposed an $8 million plan to renovate the existing buildings into 140 units of permanent, affordable housing for veterans of low and moderate incomes. The plan, however, was contingent on receiving federal low income housing credits, and the group's application was rejected in 1996. Because federal assistance for the project could not be attained, the veterans project, like that of the Black United Front could not be realized.

Alvin Knoll, a builder, developer and architect from neighboring Columbia County sought to revive a plan he once presented to the Housing Authority to renovate the buildings for low- and moderate-income rental units. Knoll, who had done many similar projects in New York City, said the Ahern Apartments were structurally sound and quite appropriate for new residential uses. He noted, "I could get it done in two years. I know how to do it, through the financing agencies and subsidy programs” (Tuthill, 1997). Nevertheless, not one of the plans made it off the drawing board, and the
buildings were eventually demolished to make room for a park and parking lot adjacent to the Rensselaer County Family Court building.

Issues surrounding public housing continued into the next decade. In 2006 in a speech to students at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI), Republican Mayor Harry Tutunjian stated that he desired to reduce the number of public housing units in the city by half. The speech triggered substantial criticism in Troy and forced the mayor to explain his position: “The Troy Housing Authority themselves have been reducing the number of units. We'd like to see our residents in home ownership. Statewide, the Troy Housing Authority has more housing units than other cities of our size” (O’Brien, 2006c). HUD, however, rejected the mayor’s ambitious plan in part by the ongoing lack of available public housing units in the city and the corresponding waiting lists for existing units.

Indeed, Mario Musolino, the executive director of the Troy Housing Authority, noted a waiting list for 1,250 apartments at the time. Musolino explained, “We have a waiting list currently of 600 to 650 seniors and families for public housing. Another 650 to 700 are waiting for federal vouchers that help them pay for apartments” (O’Brien, 2006c). Musolino explained that the city withdrew the initial plan to cut the number of public housing apartments.

There was in the city's initial draft of the plan a proposal as the mayor describes, the language that they finally included talk about eliminating obsolete public housing. What the mayor is talking about was something that was out there for public discussion. I'd ask the question: How would you meet the need when you have these waiting lists? (O’Brien, 2006c).

Though the mayor’s plan was dead, the Housing Authority did have plans to reduce the number of units. Much of those reductions came from the Authority’s plan to
demolish part of the Taylor Apartments. Like the Ahern Apartments, the Taylor Apartments were an aging high-rise complex built in the 1950s adjacent to city’s commercial heart. The site also lies on Troy’s riverfront—a strategic location for private investment by developers.

At the time of this writing, the city is in the process of applying for HUD funding to demolish two of the four residential buildings at the site. The demolition would eliminate 140 housing units. The other two buildings, refurbished from HUD funding that had been stockpiled since the late 1990s, would remain. Mayor Tutunjian stated that, “the cramped site that the two buildings sit on is not ideal for any family living situation. The buildings are not consistent with historical architecture in our downtown and they are sitting on valuable waterfront property. It makes all the sense in the world to remove these buildings and find another alternative for this site” (Caprood, 2009).

Even though Tutunjian believed that Troy housed too many public housing residents, he explained that he might change his position if officials in the Obama Administration placed a larger emphasis on federal funding for public housing. He explained:

> If there is going to be an increase in funding for public housing under the Obama Administration, the Troy Housing Authority should do all it can to capitalize on this, and provide superior housing options for the people of Troy in the most need. More than 50 percent of the people on the waiting list for public housing in Troy are seniors in our community. That is a need that should be taken care of first, and I hope this project will first address that section of the community (Caprood, 2009).

To aid public housing residents, the mayor announced that the city would develop a list of properties that were either vacant or on which were about to be foreclosed. The Troy Housing Authority would then select eligible and qualified tenants for the program.
and direct them to the list of homes that the city had acquired. City-selected contractors would then repair the properties, and tenants would subsequently be provided with a low-interest federal loan to purchase the building from the city. The purpose of the program was to enable the city to make new homeowners of public housing tenants, with little or no cost coming from city coffers (O’Brien, 2006b).

Related to this was a program to both crackdown on landlords who failed to keep their properties up to code while assisting public housing residents. Tutunjian said the city would begin prohibiting landlords from renting apartments to government-subsidized tenants until every code violation was addressed. Tutunjian noted, “for too long, irresponsible property owners have ravaged some of our greatest assets while skirting around the codes meant to preserve our neighborhoods and historic structures” (O’Brien, 2006b).

Nevertheless, Joe Fama argues that Tutunjian does not have much of an interest in coming to the aid of public housing- or low income residents. He explains:

I don’t disagree with the mayor on every issue, but in terms of his attitude about public housing…Troy has a very low median income, and there’s a lot of people here who qualify for public housing. Now public housing itself, if the mayor’s position was, ‘I’m against the nature of public housing and the project-style home, and I want to do other types of housing for low and moderate income people,’ well that would really frankly be something I think we could talk about, but his actions and his positions seem to be, we don’t want to generate low income housing, we don’t want subsidies certainly, and he doesn’t seem to want to do much about in terms of creating projects for people who are in the low and the very low income neighborhoods. Home ownership is wonderful, and he has built a few buildings for low- and moderate income homeowners, but they’re at the high-end of the qualifying range, eighty- to one-hundred and twenty percent of medium income. People who are at fifty- and sixty-percent of median income, I don’t think homeownership is much of a solution for them. (Joe Fama, personal interview, 05/06/09).
Tutunjian, in the end, has had to walk a fine line between attempting to facilitate private investment in the city, while not appearing callous towards the needs of public housing tenants. Whereas public housing is a giant hurdle that muddies the development vision in Troy, this is a near non-existent situation in Saratoga Springs. Tim Mattice noted that dissenting positions exist between the larger social service community in Troy and interests, both in the public and private sectors, that seek to promote new development and investment in the city. Social service groups worry that new investment in housing and commercial projects, for example, will displace poor and vulnerable residents in the community. Because very few public housing units exist in the suburbs, these agencies are (understandably) concerned about where these individuals and families would go (Tim Mattice, personal interview, 02/23/09). Therefore, the political fragmentation component of the ROS, by assisting residential segregation along the lines of income and housing status (public vs. private), has also encouraged the emergence and strengthening of differing interest groups between the cities and the suburban towns. Social services interests are powerful stakeholders in the city, while in suburbs (and to a lesser extent in Saratoga Springs), virtually no institutional presence exists. Instead, homeowner associations and development interests dominate suburban politics. In the end, the ROS polarizes political interests, and in turn the specter or presence of interest groups.

Middle- and High-End Development in Troy

Low income and public housing projects have not been the only issues regarding development in Troy. Troy has seen some high-end redevelopment in recent years that is concentrated in riverfront and downtown areas. Beginning with the Quayside Apartments
in the late 1980s, a project that rehabbed an old warehouse overlooking the Hudson River into market-rate loft-style apartments, Troy’s downtown has seen some rehabilitation of older buildings into new residential and commercial space. One of the most significant recent projects has been the redevelopment of the former Stanley’s Department Store on Third and State streets. In 2007 the Saratoga Springs-based Pfeil & Company rehabbed the five-story Beaux Arts building to include nineteen luxury apartment units with underground parking. The main floor also contains a hardware store operated by the Pfeil’s (DeMasi, 2007).

Joe Fama’s group, TAP, was involved with project offering design assistance. The former department store had,

been abandoned for decades and was converted to high-end housing, and we helped do it. We’re glad to do it. Nobody got displaced. It was the Stanley building that’s now the conservatory, and we worked with {the developer}. We {also} worked with John Hedley {another developer in Troy} to put stores in vacant store fronts, and some of those stores are high-end stores, and we think that just helps the tax base. Troy’s tax base is terrible, and we want to help bring in people. As long as we’re not part of some scheme to move low income people out and move high income in (Joe Fama, personal interview, 02/23/09).

New middle- and high-end construction has also been planned, and the city government has been directly involved with its promotion. The director of community development explained that the city essentially envisions what they would like to see occur in specific neighborhoods and subsequently seeks requests for proposals (RFP’s) from developers. If any interest arises from private developers, the city subsequently undertakes reference checks to investigate the reliability and reputation of such firms. In a statement that that highlights the different ways in which the growth coalition operates between communities, Tim Mattice noted in a comparison to Saratoga Springs, “we have
to solicit developers, there {in Saratoga Springs} developers will just come to them” (Tim Mattice, personal interview, 02/23/09).

Nevertheless, Troy has been able to attract interest from developers. One that includes new construction in addition to renovating existing structures, is the proposed Congress/Ferry Street project, a $150 million development plan consisting of a mixture of residential, office, and retail space. The developer of the site, United-Hedley, is working with the city, Rensselaer County, Troy Housing Authority, and RPI to develop the project. In addition, the developer, First Columbia, has proposed a $32 million hotel, conference center, and parking garage next to the United-Hedley’s project on River Street. In both cases, the city has offered support in the form of tax breaks from its Industrial Development Agency and state money earmarked for economic development (Standford and Crowe, 2008). It is not clear, however, if either project will get off the ground in the near future.

The companies have the financial resources to make the projects possible. Nevertheless, obstacles exist for the company and other potential investors, including the city's high property taxes which stand at $41 per $1,000 of assessed valued for city and school taxes, (based on the equalization rate). Indeed, taxes were a major factor in the decision of NADC, a Brooklyn company that owns the former Mooradians Furniture building along the Hudson River, to cancel its plans to convert the building into 48 high-end condos. Mooradians buyers, for example, would have paid $7,000 to $8,000 a year in property taxes, a considerable amount of money by any standard, and this led NADC to conclude its project would neither be competitive nor feasible. Ad Hereijgers, a partner with NADC, said the firm considered approaching Troy officials in regards to a tax
break, but ultimately decided the process would be too time consuming (Churchill, 2008a).

One cannot separate the high tax burden in Troy from the ROS which has concentrated property wealth in the suburbs. Low property wealth in Troy, conversely, has forced the city to tax its properties at a higher rate to make up the difference. Meanwhile, this environment has also helped to foster economic segregation whereby economically marginalized households are disproportionately located in the city. Low-income households typically require more services than their middle or high income counterparts. For example, Orfield’s (2002) comparative analysis of U.S. metropolitan areas suggested that aid for school lunches alone depletes nearly all of the extra funding that impoverished districts receive from higher levels of government. When other costly programs including special needs education, additional after-school programs, and non-educational essential services, including greater demands for police and fire protection (New York State Office of the State Comptroller, 2008b), the service needs in Troy far outweigh those in Saratoga Springs and its outlying suburban neighbors.

If the ROS exacts a higher tax burden on Troy, it also affects its ability to offer services and amenities. Troy’s lack of services has even limited residential growth in its more desirable downtown and adjacent areas. Elizabeth Young, a small business owner who is also the director of the Downtown Business Collaborative as well as the leader in the initiative for forming a downtown BID notes, “there’s no grocery store. The new food cooperative would be huge if it got off the ground. I think we need, for the overall health of the city, we need more service and entertainment type venues. There’s nothing to do
here…there’s very little to do here I will say. We don’t have a movie theater. We have very few kinds of restaurants” (Elizabeth Young, personal interview, 02/06/09).

In addition, even though RPI has been working for years to bring neighborhood renewal to Troy’s downtown including successfully drawing some professors to buy homes in the area, the dearth of services and amenities, including a full-service grocery store has limited the neighborhood’s appeal (Aaron, 2005). The lack of neighborhood services, including quality supermarkets, is not unique to inner city neighborhoods in Troy. Rather it is a common problem in most urban areas, particularly those suffering from high levels of poverty. Indeed, the problem has become so widespread, that a new term has even been coined for such areas: “food deserts.”

The improvements in services, if achieved at all would be overdue. A survey conducted in 2003 with roughly 1,200 residents along the Hoosick Street corridor, a low to moderate income neighborhood in the heart of the city, suggested that residents strongly desired better stores, most notably a better grocery store and a general merchandise store, and more restaurants. Residents were also strongly dissatisfied with their housing and neighborhoods compared to other areas in the region. For example, 33 percent of residents in the Hoosick Street area desired to leave Troy. An additional nine percent desired to move to another neighborhood within the city. In comparison, results from a study conducted in 2002 by the Center for Social Demographic Analysis (Center For Social and Demographic Analysis, 11th Annual CSDA Capital District Survey-2002), suggested that only ten percent of residents in the wider capital region are

11 The survey questionnaire was distributed at random based on election records to residents in the voting districts closest to the Hoosick Street corridor. 347 surveys were returned for a response rate of 30 percent
dissatisfied with their community (O’Brien 2003; Capital District Transportation Commission, 2004).

In part to address the issues of housing and amenities, in 2005, RPI, the city, and the Troy Housing Authority proposed a joint project that would include a major housing, retail, and office project on a 14-acre site along Ferry Street. The project would be designed essentially to better connect the school with the downtown and to help attract residents to the neighborhood. As of winter 2008, the project is still in the planning stages and substantial infrastructural work, including realigning major streets, would have to occur before any actual construction takes place. In addition, Mayor Tutunjian managed to eliminate the public housing segment of the project. Joe Fama explains, “where the public housing will be reconstructed is theoretically being pursued, but I have my suspicions that it probably isn’t going to happen” (Joe Fama, personal interview, 05/06/09).

These examples illustrate that even when new, higher-end development is planned, it is often delayed or even derailed because of problems associated with high taxes, limited services, and the overall physical landscape of the city. Tim Mattice offered another example, specifically senior housing that, because of the rapidly aging population of the country, is quickly becoming a desirable commodity in the housing market. Yet in part because of the ROS, the city lacks both the financial resources and the physical resources (open land) to develop such housing, at least at the rates with which suburban towns can proceed. He noted, “It’s simply easier for the suburbs to respond to market forces” (Tim Mattice, personal interview, 02/23/09).

RPI and Downtown Development
One of Troy’s best opportunities for development lies in its relationship with RPI. One of the top science and engineering schools in the country, the school has been immensely lucrative for the region as a whole but not especially so for Troy. Although much more attention to this project will be given in the next chapter, RPI has been very successful in forging partnerships with private investors. For example, RPI students have started numerous technology companies locally, and partnerships with the private sector have lured outside firms to the area. The most significant project between RPI and the private sector was the Rensselaer Technology Park—a campus that houses dozens of firms in neighboring North Greenbush. The park also contributes nearly $2 million a year to the town’s revenues.

Because the tech park required hundreds of acres of open space to house the companies, and because Troy (due to political fragmentation) lacks any significant parcels of open space, RPI’s investment flowed out of Troy into neighboring North Greenbush. Indeed, although there is no doubt that RPI has benefitted Troy, neighboring communities have siphoned off much of its assets. RPI’s campus in Troy is tax-exempt so that its facilities do not add to the city’s beleaguered tax base. A few homegrown tech companies with ties to RPI have set up in the city’s downtown, but their presence so far has been marginal.

City leaders want to change this and have been working with RPI to bring high-tech companies to downtown Troy. Central to this was the sale of the old Proctors Theater in downtown Troy to RPI. The land on which the building sits, which had been an idled property in the city’s possession for years, might now be redeveloped as incubator for emerging firms with ties to RPI. Still, its redevelopment is uncertain. An
influential group of residents in Troy, including preservationists, is organizing to restore
the theater instead of demolishing it for RPI’s office building, a process that has
frustrated the mayor and officials at RPI (Churchill 2009).

The issue is complex. Allowing RPI to construct a new building would enable
Troy to finally accommodate some of the tech firms that before had gone to new
buildings in the suburbs. This would expand the city’s tax base and provide it with a key,
“new economy” industry. On the other hand, demolition would destroy an architecturally
significant structure—undermining the city’s vision for a rejuvenated, historic downtown.
Indeed, the project is simply another example of Troy’s inability to implement a
comprehensive development strategy, and it represents another political and economic
hurdle for built-out cities that lack open greenfield sites. It also illustrates how
communities with circumscribed political structures lack the resources to adequately
compensate and address divergent interests.

Ideally, the city could demolish the buildings constructed during the era of urban
renewal in the 1960s and 1970s. These buildings have no architectural significance and
could be replaced with new office buildings for tech companies with connections to RPI.
The companies, however, would only be interested in locating in Troy if the city could
reduce the taxes on the new buildings. This, of course, undermines the entire purpose of
luring the firms in the first place: expanding the tax base. Overall, these processes
undermine something vital for the future of Troy: the ability to exploit and capitalize on
its existing resources—notably human capital.

Saratoga Springs did not face this problem. Like Troy, a number of historic
buildings were demolished through urban renewal. Many of the sites became parking
lots. We saw, however, that by the 1990s, interest in constructing new, multi-story buildings on these plots arose, and this helped re-ignite the city’s downtown economic base. What makes the context different from Troy’s, however, is that Saratoga Springs’ wealthy tax base in the outer district made the construction of these new downtown buildings feasible from an investment standpoint. Troy has no such tax base.

The Politicking of Small Business Development

Not waiting for the fruition of major projects, small business leaders in Troy have been attempting to initiate a Downtown Business Improvement District (BID) designed to spur interest and commercial growth in the city’s core. Attempts up to this point, however, have not been very successful. Although many small business owners in the city have favorable opinions of a BID, others have voiced concerns over the added fees on business owners that would result from its formation. The fees would be used to improve the marketing of the downtown, (particularly marketing that would frame downtown as a unified district), plan special downtown events, improve business development and retention, and beautification. Certain business owners, however, have objected to the new fees in part because they would act as an added tax on top of already high property taxes in the city.

Elizabeth Young acknowledged the diverging opinions of some business owners in the district, but also took issue with certain political leaders in the city, some of whom, because of Troy’s relatively closed political structure, have strong connections and personal loyalties with particular business owners. Because of this, the political consensus necessary to move forward with new initiatives has not been present. For example, Young stated that:
Unfortunately one of the main folks that’s against the BID, his name is Michael LoPorto, and actually I get along with him just fine even though he says bad things about me in the newspaper (laugh), and it all goes back to these like Hatfield versus McCoy—old family feuds, it really does, it’s really funny actually. And this particular feud grew out of the fact that the mayor is married to Michael LoPorto’s favorite niece. So Michael LoPorto has this restaurant in Troy. When Harry Tutunjian became the mayor, Michael LoPorto wanted to have the catering contract for our big park, there’s a restaurant there. Harry said hey look, you can submit a bid like everyone else, but I can’t just give it to you because that would be illegal, and Michael LoPorto never forgave him for that. An enormous feud grew out of that where then Michael tried to run for city council even though he doesn’t live in Troy; he lives in Brunswick. Then he claimed that Harry Tutunjian tampered with voting booths and all these things.

Unfortunately, I have a close personal relationship with Harry Tutunjian’s kind of right-hand guy, so once he found out that and he knew that I was for the BID, he jumped on the bandwagon trying to lead this plight against the BID. He claims that his reason comes from the fact that the BID of course involves an additional assessment to commercial properties, and he says because the tax is mandatory, he’s against it. However, about a month ago he wrote an editorial in the *Troy Record* how he supports a new tax district for the library, which is an additional tax, which is mandatory, so…huh, exactly. And he’s stirred up a lot of press about it just because he’s really vocal, and because he’s this Italian character who kind of like comes out and says these pretty crazy things, and really thinks that he is the king of city over at his restaurant on Fourth Street. And he’s very influential because all of the Democrats on the city council go to his restaurant (Elizabeth Young, personal interview, 02/06/09).

This quote illustrates the political climate in Troy, which Young and others call highly personalistic. Although one could argue that Troy’s current political tensions are due to the “old-school” political culture of the city, it would be shortsighted to omit the importance of Troy’s economic position and its resource-deprived status within the metropolitan area. Because of Troy’s unfavorable socioeconomic environment, the city has been unable to attract many new middle- and higher-income residents relative to the suburbs. Indeed Joe Fama explains, “most of the people in the city of Troy don’t have a lot of other options but to live in the city of Troy. This is where they can afford housing” (Joe Fama, personal interview, 05/06/09).
Therefore, the ROS, by intensifying and preserving unfavorable conditions for investment and growth, has also indirectly weakened political competition by filtering out the votes and voices of residents whom might be more likely to hold public officials accountable--or even run for office themselves (the middle- and upper-classes). Again, Elizabeth Young states:

Most of the residents here have this old-school way of thinking. It’s hard to get someone new elected. I think on a county-level and state-level we seem to be more concerned about just getting someone of the right party elected rather than someone who has the right intentions. So it’s like Candidate A is new and exciting and has tons of ideas, is really smart, and has a fabulous background and would be a wonderful candidate, but they’re new here--they grew up in California and only have their little circle of friends. Candidate B went to Troy High, has lived here their entire lives, has fifty-two cousins who live all over Lansingburgh, they’re both Democrats. We’d rather have a Democratic majority, we’re going to pick Candidate B every single time. The only way someone new could get elected is if they had a lot of money to spend on a city council race and that really isn’t likely in a place like Troy (Elizabeth Young, personal interview, 02/06/09).

Overall, Troy’s demographic and economic landscape somewhat constrain the political climate of the city and act as a barrier against new leadership and policies that might take the city in a new direction. Political consensus-building is also handicapped by processes related to the enduring personality-oriented nature of city politics. Elizabeth Young explains:

The political temperature of Troy right now is very cold…actually it’s hot at the same time. It’s very contemptuous. There’s lots of old feuds. We have a Republican mayor and Democratic city council that could certainly work together on things and instead they choose to fight like kindergarteners. Things like that give Troy a very, very bad reputation, and I’m afraid it’s a correct reputation. There are a lot of people in Troy that are new, that are young, that are excited to be here, that are here because they want to be. And then there are, I’m afraid, a lot of people who are here in Troy who have been here for many, many years, maybe they’ve never been anywhere else. They love the city so much, but they’re very resistant to change, even if it’s good change. And I’m afraid we get mired down in, ‘oh Troy when I was a child growing up in the 50’s, it was this fantastic place and it was so great’ and that’s it. There’s no, well ‘what’s going to happen
in the future? It’s just, let’s think about the past and let’s not work towards the future.

{In regards to the economic conditions of the city}, politicians get away with being less accountable because maybe there aren’t as many people calling them up when they’re not really doing their jobs—beating down their doors saying, hey you’re supposed to be working for me because there might be a higher degree of apathy in Troy (Elizabeth Young, personal interview, 02/06/09).

Some in Troy, however, have hopes that the local political situation will improve. Jeff Pfeil, a local developer who rehabilitated the historic Stanley Building, suggested that with new, younger, and better educated people beginning to drift into the rehabbed apartments and converted lofts in downtown Troy, “we’ll begin to see some new political blood in the city” (Jeff Pfeil, personal interview, 02/12/2009).

Nonetheless, the economic and social conditions in Troy also act as a barrier against development in ways that are not directly related to the city’s high tax burden, problematic services, and at times ineffectual government. Instead, it is more a matter of priorities and what Troy will do with its limited financial resources. Elizabeth Young noted that the city simply has neither the time nor the resources to really promote and advance commercial and business development. She explains, “They’ve got much bigger issues. They’ve got potholes; they’ve got crime; they’ve got water mains that are constantly breaking” (Elizabeth Young, personal interview, 02/06/09). Ultimately, taking Troy’s socioeconomic condition into account, it takes private resources to promote and develop the city.

Education

Beyond Troy’s high taxes, lack of suitable sites for development, its aging and deteriorating housing stock, lack of service and retail amenities, and its personalistic political climate, another disincentive for development is the mediocre to poor condition
of Troy’s schools. This aspect, again, is related to specifically to the political fragmentation component of the ROS, in that children in low income and poor families are not evenly distributed throughout the metropolitan area, but rather are concentrated in inner city school districts. Low-income students, in general, have below par educational outcomes for a number of reasons. These include a relatively high rate of mobility between schools compared with more affluent students—which disrupts academic growth—lower educational attainment among parents, and numerous other factors.

Troy’s schools are not only set apart from those in the suburbs, two separate school districts actually operate within Troy itself: the Troy City School District and Lansingburgh Central School District. The former lies in the southern part or the original section of Troy, while the latter occupies what had been the independent community of Lansingburgh until it was annexed by Troy in 1900, as well as northwest corner of Brunswick and the southwest corner of Schaghticoke. Although the educational outcomes of both school districts are considerably lower than those in the neighboring, wholly-suburban, school districts, it is consequential that student attainment is higher in Lansingburgh schools than in Troy schools. In fact, both median household income and the percentage of owner-occupied housing units are higher in the Lansingburgh section of Troy than in what had been the original Troy. Poverty- and unemployment rates are also lower in Lansingburgh (Spatial Structures in the Social Sciences). This correlation would lead one to believe that Lansingburgh, with better educational opportunities, is maintaining middle-income families to a greater degree than the rest of Troy.

Table 7-2 documents educational attainment and other educational statistics of the school districts within Troy as well as with schools in neighboring suburban locations.
and Saratoga Springs. It is clear that student achievement is substantially higher in both suburban districts and the Saratoga Springs district than in the urban districts.

Table 7-2: Educational Statistics in Troy and Suburban School Districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School District</th>
<th>English Proficiency (%)</th>
<th>Math Proficiency (%)</th>
<th>Student-Teacher Ratio</th>
<th>Economic Disadvantage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Troy*</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>50.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lansingburgh*</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>46.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brunswick</td>
<td>76.4</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Greenbush</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Averill Park</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wynatskill</td>
<td>63.1</td>
<td>72.9</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saratoga Springs</td>
<td>83.0</td>
<td>85.2</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The educational context in Troy is the complete opposite of Saratoga Springs. The Saratoga Springs school district not only envelops the inner and outer districts of the city (which both have considerable higher socioeconomic levels than Troy), it also encompasses parts of the relatively affluent suburban towns of Wilton, Greenfield, and Ballston Spa. Therefore, no economically segregated and fragmented central city school district exists with the numerous and seemingly intractable problems facing Troy and Lansingburgh schools, which lie in economically marginal and working-class neighborhoods, respectively.

On a community discussion board regarding city issues, the majority of posts that concerned the quality of the city’s schools were decidedly downbeat. The following are quotes from a sample of posts that are fairly representative of the majority of opinions on the site.
There is no amount of money you could give me to send my kid to school in Troy. There's a reason the real estate is cheap! Troy has several bad areas. Some are dealing with drugs and gangs. There's sections where there's a lot of boarded up houses. Parts of Lansingburgh aren't as bad, but it's not the best place either.

Another post echoes the first:

I taught in Troy last year-middle school. I would NEVER send my kids there. Yes, some of the elementary schools are very good, but others are HORRIBLE. Eventually, they all go to the {same} middle and high school!! There is very little learning that goes on because of the behavior of the majority of the kids there. I'm sorry to say, but it is true. I have worked in a lot of schools, so Troy folks- don't beat me up.

As would be expected not everyone on the discussion board agreed:

I grew up in Troy and went to the Troy public schools, and I went to an Ivy League school. If you choose a good area as far as the elementary school goes, then you're in much better shape. In high school there is little intermingling between the kids in honors/college track and the kids in remedial/Vo-tech--or at least that's how it was when I went there. Also, kids who are college-track can take advantage of the proximity of RPI and Russell Sage to take real college courses (free!) during high school through an arrangement with the public schools and the universities. It is much better than AP credit--early exposure to a real college courses AND the credit is transferable.

While the last individual had a relatively positive experience in the schools in Troy, the overwhelming perception—which correlates with the subpar test scores—is that the school district is highly undesirable and will probably remain in that condition for the foreseeable future.

Improvements in the educational system would be required to lure the kind of residents that Mayor Tutunjian and other city leaders want to attract to the city. Based on all of the problems reviewed in this discussion, however, the task of accomplishing this would be enormous, in part because it is unclear what the city would have to attempt first. For example, the city cannot attract middle- and high-income families because of the unfavorable perceptions of the school systems. Even if reforms yielded improvements in
the schools, however, the challenges of high taxes and remaking the housing stock to appeal to middle- and high-income residents would still remain.

Elizabeth Young also notes other impediments to families moving in and investing in Troy. “We’re not a family-friendly city in my perspective. You don’t see playgrounds around the corner. You don’t see a lot of people with kids. In downtown, we don’t have that many families.” Yet Young did note the potential of a few projects in the city including the possibility of a new charter school and a Montessori pre-school. “We’re working on it little by little” (Elizabeth Young, personal interview, 02/06/09).

Perceptions/Discussion

Despite improvements along the downtown waterfront and the city’s newest attempts to head off housing deteriorating and abandonment, Troy still faces obstructions in its endeavors to remake the city. Perhaps one of the biggest hurdles, beyond high taxes, mediocre services, and a deteriorating housing stock is the jaundiced perception of Troy by the public in other communities in the region. Similar to how the ROS exacerbates the inequities between services and taxes, it also impacts public perception of the city by polarizing attitudes and viewpoints. Tim Mattice noted that anti-city bias by suburbanites impacts public support for reforms that might assist cities. For example, people in the suburban towns think of themselves as being different than city dwellers. They have this understanding that they have different attitudes, different priorities, and different lifestyles (Tim Mattice, personal interview, 02/23/09).

Elizabeth Young also noted the urban-suburban divide around the region. “People have old views of what they think Troy is like. They think of it as being crime-ridden and just a scary place to be” (Elizabeth Young, personal interview, 02/06/09). Furthermore,
she went on to explain that Troy’s layout and its perceived lack of conveniences pose a concern to suburban residents.

We compete with the fact that it’s easy for someone to go to a strip mall and park their car and see all the stores they want to go to, and they know the hours that they’re going to be open, and it’s very easy. We compete with the convenience of the suburbs…and people are deathly afraid of one-way streets {in Troy}! There’s a perception that it’s very difficult to find anything in Troy. We’re dealing with getting over convenience issues, getting over the scariness factor and people feeling unfamiliar” (Elizabeth Young, personal interview, 02/06/09).

The ROS has exacerbated key problems in Troy including housing deterioration and abandonment, public housing, the educational system, and issues regarding business development. In the next chapter, I will illustrate how regional context and political fragmentation have impacted Troy’s neighbors, particularly on issues of commercial and light-industrial development. Unlike Saratoga Springs and Wilton, two resource-endowed communities within the region, fragmentation within a context of a suburban town lying adjacent to resource-deprived city has led to markedly uneven development, with North Greenbush residents regrettably seeing themselves as having become the “employment and destination center” of Rensselaer County—an evolution that has disrupted what they see as a one-part small town and suburban and one-part rural.

Overall, uneven development has occurred in part by the way in which growth coalitions in and around Troy operate. Severely under-invested, city policies surrounding residential and commercial development are designed at heart to “jump-start” growth and development. In part because of political structures and complex regional dynamics, however, the city has not been able to implement a coherent and comprehensive development strategy. Historic preservationists do not agree with RPI and the city’s efforts to construct buildings for tech companies. Advocates for public housing spar with
those who desire market-rate housing. The city wants to renovate historic structures downtown but is pursuing the demolition of unique, older housing in the city’s neighborhoods. Fragmentation complicates these matters because the city lacks the spatial and financial capacity to adequately address and compensate these divergent interests. Therefore, development has been bypassing the city for the suburban towns in which the investment and spatial environments are more favorable. This, in turn, has led to disenchantment among many suburban residents in that they see development altering the character of their communities. This is where we turn to next with the case of North Greenbush.
CHAPTER VII:
NORTH GREENBUSH: RENSSELAER COUNTY’S CENTER?

In this chapter I present an overview and analysis of North Greenbush, a suburban and rural town adjacent to the city of Troy. Growth in North Greenbush is important because whereas Troy has been struggling to attract development and new investment, many residents in neighboring North Greenbush have become so frustrated with what they see as overdevelopment and an unresponsive and non-empathetic government that numerous schemes have been attempted to gain more representation and control over the manner in which development proceeds in the town. This has included forming a new political party and even attempting to secede from North Greenbush all together. While regional context and political fragmentation act to concentrate poverty, disinvestment, and crumbling infrastructure—and thus high levels of taxation and service needs in Troy—it has enabled North Greenbush to largely separate itself from those pressing issues while focusing on keeping taxes in check and maintaining good services—a favorable social and fiscal recipe for growth interests.

The town of North Greenbush lies directly to the south of Troy on the east bank of the Hudson River. The town is actually composed of three different hamlets: Wynantskill, Defreestville, and Snyder’s Lake, as well as four different school districts: Averill Park, Wynantskill, North Greenbush Common, and East Greenbush. Because of this North Greenbush does not possess a singular or common identity among its residents. Instead, residents are more likely to identify with either the hamlet or the school district in which they dwell (North Greenbush public official, personal interview, 02/11/09). This
has affected the view of development in the town in that much of the commercial and infrastructural development that has provoked the residents in Defreestville has had relatively little bearing on the residents in the other hamlets.

North Greenbush, as it is defined now, is a product of historical political fragmentation. North Greenbush was incorporated as a town in 1855 when the Town of Greenbush was divided into North- and East Greenbush. Meanwhile, because the towns were once unified, there still exists a modest level of shared identity between the two places, as well as with the neighboring, small city of Rensselaer.

Unlike Rensselaer and its larger neighbor to the north, Troy, however, the town has witnessed steady population growth in the last 25 to 30, and growth continues. In 2000, the population of North Greenbush was 10,805, while a 2007 estimate pegged the population at 11,764, an increase of nearly nine percent. Still, much of the town remains undeveloped, with rolling hills, meadows, and forests dotting much of the landscape.

The ROS and North Greenbush

Although lacking the economic dynamism of Saratoga County, regional context and political fragmentation have nonetheless aligned to assist development efforts in North Greenbush. Political fragmentation has shielded the town from Troy’s fiscal and social burdens. In regards to spatial attributes, the town’s political borders—encompassing 18 square miles—are also quite expansive, and this has provided open land on which to build. This attribute has enabled to the town to absorb substantial development and strengthen its tax base. Therefore, in regards to rates of taxation, North Greenbush is competitive with other towns in the region and substantially more inviting
than Troy. Overall, North Greenbush is close to major institutions in Troy, but it has more accessible land, and fewer service obligations and related taxes.

Therefore, akin to Saratoga Springs and Wilton, regional context and political fragmentation have aligned to produce a fairly healthy environment for development. Low taxes, good services, and its suburban location along major interstate highway routes have attracted investment from developers wishing to profit from its healthy business climate and strategic location. Like Wilton, North Greenbush has a fairly suburban-commuter driven economy as well as firms in the high-tech sector. It also has numerous businesses catering to both high- and low-end services.

As a long-time public official in the town notes, “we have low town taxes, and we are, and always will be—and can do nothing about that—the gateway…to Poestenkill, to Sand Lake, to the rest Rensselaer County…You can’t ignore us, and unfortunately, that leads to all of these developers looking and saying, look at the traffic that’s here. They also are looking at us because the largest per-capita income (in the county) sits in Sand Lake, right outside our border (North Greenbush public official, personal interview, 02/11/09). The importance of regional context and neighboring communities therefore cannot be ignored when examining growth decisions within the town.

Therefore, I examine North Greenbush to better flesh out the importance of interactions with neighboring communities on a particular municipality’s growth coalition. Again, much of the research in urban politics neglects the important dynamic that individual communities are thoroughly embedded within regions, and therefore one cannot examine a community’s growth coalition without taking into context phenomena occurring in adjacent communities. Although Chapter 5 highlights some of this dynamic
through examples of how, for example, downtown Saratoga Springs interests were affected by growth schemes in neighboring Wilton (and vice-versa), here I take a closer look at the importance of these tensions. This chapter, therefore, in part seeks to outline how growth and development in North Greenbush cannot be understood without taking into account its proximity to Troy, and how institutions in that city have an important effect on the town, regardless of what its residents consider appropriate or attractive. In addition, development in the neighboring town of East Greenbush has also had ramifications for development in North Greenbush. Residential attitudes and actions have also been impacted by these dynamics.

Within the parameters of this study, North Greenbush can best be compared with Wilton. Both communities are towns possessing strategic locations with significant authorities over their respective expansive, open spaces that have helped to account for their residential and commercial growth. Both towns are also similar in population and geographic size. However, unlike Wilton, which lies near prosperous Saratoga Springs, North Greenbush lies in the shadows of Troy and Rensselaer—two old, declining river cities. Therefore, the strained social and fiscal conditions of these places have an indirect but strong effect on what takes place in North Greenbush.

Finally, wrapped within these specific questions is a larger question and theme: As opposed to Wilton, why have residents in North Greenbush been so dissatisfied with the growth and development that has proceeded in their community, and what accounts for this difference? Indeed, North Greenbush falls somewhere in between Saratoga Springs/Wilton and Troy. For example, Troy is not witnessing much development, and residents and leaders are dissatisfied with the status quo. On the other hand, Saratoga
Springs and Wilton are witnessing considerable development and leaders and residents alike are fairly satisfied with the level and type of development. Unlike Troy, North Greenbush is experiencing growth and development, yet as opposed to Saratoga Springs/Wilton, residents and many of the town’s leaders are discontented by the current state of affairs. This has led to a decidedly weaker level of political consensus in the town in comparison to Wilton.

Although the discrepancy specifically between Wilton and North Greenbush might be complex, I offer an explanation that takes into account regional dynamics. Investors are not only conscious of the strong fiscal and social climate of North Greenbush, they also like the fact that the town is accessible to populations and institutions in Troy while still being politically independent from a city with poor services and high taxes. Therefore, unlike Saratoga Springs and its neighboring towns in which development is shared across municipal lines, the dynamic operating in Rensselaer County is one of decidedly uneven development.

Indeed, because North Greenbush not only lies next to Troy but also another stagnant or declining river city, Rensselaer, developers see North Greenbush as one of the only viable alternatives in eastern Rensselaer County (East Greenbush mainly being the other). Residents also recognize this, and fear their small town will become the shopping and employment center of Rensselaer County. No such dynamic or interpretation exists in Wilton, as Saratoga Springs and much of the rest of Saratoga County is understood as favorable toward development. Therefore, development is not concentrated simply in one area as it is in Rensselaer County.
Additional factors should also not be overlooked. Although North Greenbush is wealthier than Troy, it does not have the tax base of Wilton. In part because of its position in the ROS, Wilton’s per-capita tax base of $85,642 is one of the highest in the metropolitan area. This has enabled the city to undertake significant investments in land preservation. Therefore, even though Wilton has experienced rapid development, residents and leaders are also aware that large, designated tracts of land will also be free of development. This might help to explain why residents in Wilton are not overly concerned about levels of development. Indeed, the town planner of Wilton notes in regards to development, “Open space has offset this somewhat. Going back in history with {the former town supervisor} and the promotion of the Wildlife Preserve, the quality of life aspect has been there {in Wilton}. It has been a core component (Kate Maynard, personal interview, 10/29/2009).

North Greenbush, with its smaller per-capita tax base of $56,818, does not have the same fiscal capacity as Wilton to preserve land. Therefore, land has not been preserved. Moreover, because of its middling tax base, officials are likely to see development as necessary, and less leverage can be applied to developers than in Wilton. This applies to county officials as well. Although Rensselaer County contains areas of relative wealth including Brunswick and the Greenbushes, the county lies below Saratoga County within the ROS. As Rocco Ferraro, the executive director of CDRPC, explains, “{Rensselaer County’s} elephant in the room is Troy, and the elephant is not doing so well” (Rocco Ferraro, personal interview, 4/13/2009). County officials are conscious of this and strongly desire growth in the county. Because North Greenbush lies at the heart
of the eastern, populated edge of the county, substantial development has been steered to the town.

Finally, much of the commercial development affecting North Greenbush residents is not in North Greenbush at all but in East Greenbush. In this case, fragmentation matters significantly. For example, residents in North Greenbush, because of fragmented governance, have little control over what gets developed in East Greenbush. East Greenbush, like North Greenbush, lies in the middle as it applies to property wealth (per-capita tax base of $58,104), and as a result has been aggressively pursuing development. Conversely, Wilton lies next to Saratoga Springs, which since the mid-1990s has been very active in preserving its forested entranceways as well as developing a greenbelt. This also protects residential areas in Wilton. Again, without the resources to preserve land and form a greenbelt, North Greenbush cannot readily accomplish this and therefore, they are at the whims of what growth actors in neighboring communities desire.

The RPI Technology Park

Illustrating how regional context and political fragmentation interact to impact the groundwork for development, the salience of actors in adjacent communities on growth outcomes, and how investment gets channeled into areas with healthier development environments, I turn first to the example of the Rensselaer Technology Park (also called the RPI Tech Park), a major commercial and high-tech campus constructed in North Greenbush in the early 1980s. Noting the prominence and success of California’s Silicon Valley, the technology campus was the inception of RPI, the preeminent science and engineering university based in Troy. RPI president George Low, the legendary former
director of the Apollo Moon Mission, envisioned a project that would employ the human
capital of faculty and students at the university to attract technology companies to the
region (Johnston, 1999).

The State of New York, concerned with the continual loss of manufacturing jobs
in the region and desiring to bolster its high-tech economy, supported the technology
campus. The state believed that it could build off its already notable high tech base—
specifically the prominence of IBM, as well as newer and expanding tech companies
centered in Long Island. Therefore, the state initiated a program that offered $2.5 million
in loans to small, private firms starting up in the high tech field. Besides providing some
financing for the technology campus through the state’s Urban Development
Corporation, tech parks near Cornell University and the State University of New York at
Stony Brook received state funds (Saiter, 1983; Gottlieb, 1983).

Although RPI also has a tech “incubator” in Troy that assists start-up tech
companies, its technology campus, spanning 1,250 acres (nearly two-square miles), had
to be built in an area with considerably more open space than what was present in
landlocked Troy. Pertaining to regional context, RPI therefore chose North Greenbush for
both its proximity to the university in Troy as well as for its abundance of open,
undeveloped land. As a longtime North Greenbush public official noted, “Look at where
it is in relation to RPI. There was nowhere in Troy. So it’s as close as you possibly can
get in a setting that gave you open land. RPI wanted to secure that land for a long time”
(North Greenbush public official, personal interview, 02/11/09). The campus was also
conveniently located near Interstate’s 90 and 787.
In the 1970s, town leaders, including former town supervisors Bill Dedrick and Jim Flanigan, worked diligently to lure the tech campus to North Greenbush. The move, however, was somewhat controversial in that many residents thought it would lead to the town becoming a kind of “concrete jungle.” Indeed, a North Greenbush official stated that elections were lost over tensions and misconceptions about what the tech campus would mean to the area (North Greenbush public official, personal interview, 02/11/09).

Tax incentives were adopted and continue to be available for companies in the campus. The main incentives were payment in lieu of taxes or PILOT programs put in place by the Rensselaer County Industrial Development Authority (IDA). In typical PILOT programs, property taxes are set at half the rate the first year and then increase by five percent each consecutive year until the firm pays 100 percent of taxes by the tenth year. The tech campus has arguably been a success for both the town and Rensselaer County. Overall, it is home to about 70 companies employing some 2,400 workers, a significant number by most accounts, albeit less than the 9,000 workers that had been touted by local leadership in the 1980s.

The tech campus has no doubt benefitted Troy as its proximity is still attractive to workers who choose to live in the city. Moreover, there have been small tech companies such as Evident Technologies that have set up their offices in rehabbed downtown buildings in Troy (Axel-Lute). Nevertheless, the campus has disproportionately benefited North Greenbush, particularly in regards to its tax base. In 1999 it contributed $1.7 million in property and school taxes for the town and county (Johnston, 1999b).
The New Expressway

By the early 1990s discussions were underway to build a new interchange off Interstate 90 as well as a multi-million dollar connector expressway that would allegedly ease traffic to and from the RPI tech campus. Backers, including Rensselaer County Executive, John L. Buono, claimed that it would ease traffic congestion on the semi-rural Route 4. The Exit 8 project was also seen as an economic stimulus for the area as leaders noted that it would, as stated by Buono, “give developers access to more of our land” (Zielbauer, 1998). Much of the funding for the project was secured by the area’s congressional delegation including representatives Michael McNulty of Green Island and Gerald B. Solomon of Queensbury, and U.S. Senator Daniel P. Moynihan. The remaining cost of $1 million would be shared by Rensselaer County, the city of Rensselaer, and North Greenbush (Joe Picchi, 1994).

Certain community groups, including the Rensselaer County Greens, opposed the interchange and connector expressway early on. They argued the connector road would be built in an environmentally sensitive area that contained woodlands, streams, ravines, wetlands, and farmland. Spiking noise and air pollution, the group also argued that the road would disrupt the quality of life for residents in the community. Furthermore, because the Rensselaer County Regional Chamber of Commerce believed the project would attract more than $100 million in new development, the Greens warned that the noise and pollution from the connector expressway would only be the beginning of such disruptions. Russell Ziemba, a member of the local Greens noted that, “the people of Defreestville and North Greenbush have witnessed firsthand the destruction of their community the last time I-90 was expanded and they don't want any more. They don't
want to sacrifice their quality of life so that commuters can get somewhere five minutes faster” (Gardinier, 2000). Ziemba expressed that the group supported an alternative design that would direct traffic from Interstate 90 directly to the RPI tech campus and the Van Alstyne Corporate Parks, sparing large tracts of land from being used for the connector expressway.

The Defreestville Area Neighborhood Association (DANA) was another local group keeping a close eye of the project. Group member Fran Rogers declared, “I'm concerned that people who've made North and East Greenbush what they've been will be wiped out by this movement of roads, concrete, and buildings” (Bolton, 1999b). Rogers was not the only resident concerned of over-development in the town. Residents, in a survey undertaken by town officials in the mid-1990s, by a three-to-one margin favored maintaining the town's quiet, rural character to continued commercial and business expansion (Bolton, 1999b).

Residents in North Greenbush were quite aware of the growth taking place within their town. Beyond the RPI tech campus which at the time held 51 companies with 2,350 employees, the town was also the site of the new 248 acre Van Alstyne Corporate Park, and the $15 million Phoenix Home Life Mutual Insurance building. Incidentally, the Van Alstyne Corporate Park was developed after investors learned of the new Exit 8 interchange (Michaels, 1995). Residential growth followed business expansion. Some of the development projects included 42 homes at Daniela Place, the Hills of North Greenbush, Lake Meadows, Pond Hill Estates, and Homestead Estates. The tech campus also has a residential component to its overall master plan that contains 150 acres zoned for housing development. In all, substantial auxiliary growth followed RPI’s initial plans.
Therefore, the growth coalition of North Greenbush was paradoxically aided by an institution in Troy, but also by the corresponding weakness of Troy, in that few investors would consider the city for new development.

Over the objections of some local groups and residents, the new Exit 8 interchange opened in 1996, and work on the new connector expressway began in the early 2000s. Residents would also face new pressure from leaders over major plans for continued growth in the high tech sector.

**Semiconductor Controversy**

By far the biggest project on the development scene in the late 1990s was the proposed Sematech semiconductor chip plant. The 200 remaining acres at the RPI tech campus would be the site of the proposed project. Proponents of the chip plant, including officials at the Center for Economic Growth and Kevin O’Connor from the regional development organization, touted that the plant would bring 1,500 high-paying jobs to the region (Bolten, 1999c). Officials from both the county and the town supported the idea as well.

The semiconductor plant also had wide support from the regional business and educational communities. The Albany-Colonie Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce, the Schenectady Chamber of Commerce, and the Adirondack Regional Chamber of Commerce all joined the Rensselaer County Regional Chamber of Commerce in support of the project (Johnston, 1999a). Various leaders and representatives from local universities joined with these interests to form the Semiconductor Task Force to market the RPI site to Sematech.
Attracting a major semiconductor plant had been a long-range goal of leaders in New York for some time. Governors Mario Cuomo and George Pataki had been working at attracting a major semiconductor factory to the state since the 1980s. Joseph Bruno, a powerful state senator from Rensselaer County, had also been partnering with congressional leaders as well as with local political and business leaders to attract chip manufacturers to his district. The RPI site was one of nine sites in the state of New York competing for the semiconductor factory (Bolton, 1999c).

Despite the widespread support for the plant from local political, business, and education leaders, the residents of North Greenbush had mixed feelings about the plant. Many of the arguments against the plant used environmental appeals. The Rensselaer County Greens, the group that would also oppose the new connector expressway, came out strongly against the plant. The Greens were wary of the environmental impacts of the plant, including its six million gallons of daily water consumption—approximately the same amount that North Greenbush used in the entire town. Hundreds of town residents and some town officials also had hesitations. Maryjo Nabawaniecl, a member of the town master plan committee, noted the 70,000 pounds of solid waste per week, 28 million gallons of waste water and 16 million cubic feet of bulk gases that would have to be removed from the site (Bolton, 1999a).

Jim Flanigan, one of the strongest local backers, argued that the water would come from Troy's Tomhannock Reservoir—a body of water with a 32-million-gallon-per-day capacity—and that the plant would emit minimal air pollution. Flanigan also argued that tax revenues would balloon from the $20,000 per year currently received
from the 200-acre parcel to more than $6 million, with $3 million going directly to the school district (Bolton, 1999a).

Other residents were concerned that the town and the county were pushing ahead too far and too fast. Residents questioned the need for the plant as the community was already witnessing residential, commercial, office, and technology firm growth. In addition, with over 1,000 new workers projected for the factory, many residents feared the town would face intensifying traffic congestion and noise—conditions that had already heightened with the opening of the new interstate exit off Route 4.

Significant local opposition led RPI to drop the tech campus as a competing site for the chip plant in December 1999. On the day of RPI’s decision, U.S. Senator Charles Schumer met with town Democrats and chip plant supporters to discuss future opportunities should the town come together. A couple of months earlier in October, the North Greenbush town board voted three-to-two to reject an environmental review for the project, effectively killing the proposal (Bolton, 1999e).

In regards to political consensus, local leaders were divided over the technology firm. Town supervisor (a position akin to a city mayor) Jim Flanigan staunchly supported the plant. Flanigan had been a central figure in RPI’s initial decision to build the tech campus in the town in the early 1980s. Town Democrats, however, opposed the project. Democratic council members Al Spain, Dennis Nagengast, and Bill O'Neil formed the majority on the town board that voted to discontinue the environmental review of the proposed plant. Moreover, town supervisor candidate, Kevan Seidan, proposed a petition that would essentially bar further efforts at attracting the chip plant to town. Seidan declared, “North Greenbush is not going to be the employment agency for Rensselaer
County. The governor, lieutenant governor, and Senator Bruno cannot buy the people of North Greenbush” (Bolton, 1999d).

One cannot isolate North Greenbush, therefore, from its regional context within politically fragmented Rensselaer County. Residents and many leaders opposed the plant for reasons not only related to concerns over sprawl and environmental factors, but for what the development signified: the inevitable evolution of North Greenbush from a sleepy bedroom community into the commercial-industrial center of Rensselaer County. No such signification existed in Wilton as it lied close to prosperous Saratoga Springs as well as numerous other communities including Malta, Stillwater, Clifton Park, Halfmoon, and Ballston, which were all sharing in substantial development. Being at the apex of the ROS, development throughout Saratoga County was widespread and relatively even, whereas such a condition in Rensselaer County, with its poor cities and uneven development, did not exist. The burden, therefore, rested on North Greenbush.

Resistance to Retail and Residential Development

Such a dynamic also operated in regards to retail development. Retail development and the community reaction to it, have also been impacted by regional context and political fragmentation. By the early 2000s companies increasingly saw an untapped retail market in the area in and around North- and East Greenbush. A 2008 Times-Union article noted that up until this time:

Geography {had} isolated Rensselaer County from decades of development in other parts of the Capital Region. Its rugged hills make large-scale construction and the extension of sewer lines difficult and costly. And the Hudson River, a barrier more psychological than physical, has led many in the Capital Region to consider the nearby county a distant locale (Churchill, 2008: p. D1).
With all of the major indoor shopping malls located across the river in Albany County’s suburbs, large retail offerings had not been widely available in Rensselaer County. In addition, in the 1990s new, big-box retail development burgeoned in the Saratoga County growth corridor from Clifton Park to Wilton to the point of market saturation. Only at this point did developers seek out substantial projects in Rensselaer County (Churchill, 2008). Speaking to the significance of the ROS, despite a population of 50,000, no large retailer had a presence in Troy. Moreover, a large population sat just across the river in Albany—another city of which developers were not particularly fond. Working class and poor downtown neighborhoods in Albany were particularly underserved. Therefore, similar to the office and residential markets, North and East Greenbush became the retail centers for not only the entire county but also for neighborhoods in Albany as financiers and developers shunned the unfavorable climates in this other communities.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, developers, particularly the Nigro Companies of Albany, initiated large retail projects along the intersection of Routes 4 and 43 in the neighboring town of East Greenbush, another growing town that has benefitted from the overarching forms of suburbanization. Although much of the development occurred in East Greenbush, the retail projects were actually closer residential areas in North Greenbush. This situation led to conflict in that residents of North Greenbush encountered its effects but had no jurisdiction over the land or the projects—a testament to political fragmentation. This again, presents a different picture than what residents in Wilton experienced.
Whereas Wilton was attracting enough retail development to forgo a town tax on residential properties, the context in North Greenbush was almost the opposite: residents had to face the negative externalities of development (noise, traffic, pollution) without seeing much of the benefits (an added tax base) because much of the retail rested across jurisdictional lines. Conversely, in Wilton the town planner argues, “I think there is a sense that the commercial offerings in the town are paying their share. Residents see the direct connection as a benefit” (Kate Maynard, personal interview, 10/29/2009).

Nigro’s first project consisted of the first Wal-Mart supercenter in the Capital Region. North of that project across Route 43, Nigro subsequently developed the Shoppes at Greenbush Commons which first included a Target discount store, with Home Depot, Staples, and numerous other stores following. The projects were all able to clear the approval of the East Greenbush town board, which at heart has been seen as pro-development (North Greenbush town official, personal interview, 02/11/09; Aaron, 2001).

In an ongoing border “war” with East Greenbush, with North Greenbush “prevailing,” the land on which Home Depot and Staples were built now belongs to North Greenbush. The fact that some of the new development is now taxable by North Greenbush, however, still does not address the impacts it had on residents of Defreestville. This was apparent in an interview with a North Greenbush town official.

East Greenbush’s side of life over there is from the border of North Greenbush all the way down to {Routes} 9 and 20—full out, let’s go, perfect commercial, let’s just keep going. East Greenbush kept building and building and building, more and more commercial brings more traffic. It’s funny in East Greenbush. It doesn’t matter what {political} party is there, they want development because of the tax base. {They were also developing more in part} because East Greenbush has had water and sewer for many, many years. We just put water and sewer in recently.
Before, people had wells and septic tanks, which delayed some of the retail development (North Greenbush public official, personal interview, 02/11/09).

Nigro’s projects had a disproportionate impact on residents in the Defreestville section of North Greenbush. While the primary residential areas in East Greenbush lie more than one mile south of the developments, the 2,000-person hamlet of Defreestville, an area with an older, traditional village-like atmosphere, abutted the retail center. The retail projects increased noise and traffic in the hamlet considerably.

Witnessing this growth, residents in North Greenbush would vehemently oppose emerging residential and retail development within their own town. Similar to the perception that North Greenbush was emerging as, “the employment agency of Rensselaer County,” many residents in Defreestville were wary of the town becoming the retail center of the county. In a Times-Union article on town retail growth, a resident stated, “if we wanted to live in Colonie and Guilderland {two towns with the largest shopping centers in the region}, we would have. But we consciously chose not to” (Churchill, 2008b: B1).

Contentious projects included the proposed 220-unit Oak Hill luxury residential development led again by Nigro. The Oak Hill project a faced a lawsuit by DANA but eventually proceeded as the court sided with the developer. The Oak Hill project was able to secure major subsidies from the Rensselaer County IDA. Kathy Jimino, the Republican County Executive, supported the subsidy, and the IDA awarded Nigro a ten-year PILOT subsidy that through its duration would save the developers more than $2 million. The subsidy would cost the school district $1 million alone in lost tax revenue (Furfaro, 2003b).
Town Democrats pounced at the deal noting that the IDA’s purpose should be to use its resources for job creation, not for subsidizing luxury apartments that most workers in the area could not even afford. Democrats, in particular, targeted Republican Councilman Bob Ashe and his shadow committee, whom they charged as having accepted $2,500 from the owners of Oak Hill and securing the $2 million subsidy from his Republican friends at the IDA. Pointing to the $75,000 fine Oak Hill’s developers received by the state for improper drainage, town Democrats also emphasized Oak Hill’s shoddy construction practices (North Greenbush Democrats, 2005).

Another contentious project has been the Van Rensselaer Square retail mall led by BET investments, a Pennsylvania-based development company (Gardinier, 2007). The site of the Van Rensselaer Square mall attracted developers after Exit 8 off Interstate 90 opened in 1996, and since this time, residents in the area have been fighting retail proposals. DANA preferred professional offices for which the site had been zoned until the five-member town board, during a heated meeting that dragged on until after midnight, rezoned the site from professional business to retail in December of 2000 (Gardinier, 2007).

Beyond its favorable location along Route 4, political factors influenced the decision that permitted large retail development. Republican councilman Bob Ashe had connections to Bonded Concrete, a major firm in the neighboring city of Watervliet that would greatly benefit from the construction of the new shopping center. In fact, Ashe worked for Bonded Concrete and was able to get his boss’s wife appointed as town attorney of North Greenbush, an appointment that had pronounced legal ramifications for the project. Moreover, her predecessor, Linda Mandel-Clemente, resigned as town
attorney and took a position on the town’s planning board. CB Smith noted, “Ashe campaigned on giving support to DANA’s concerns, but he turned his back on them once he got to work for Bonded Concrete” (CB Smith, personal interview, 02/16/09). Although granted a town permit, due to a lawsuit by DANA, the Van Rensselaer Square project continued to be held up in court until 2009.

Incorporation and Annexation Conflicts

Frustration over the pace and type of development in North Greenbush reached such levels that DANA instituted the beginning processes of seeking incorporation of Defreestville and seceding from North Greenbush altogether. By incorporating as its own village, Defreestville would have control over land use and zoning now controlled by the town. Concerning the hamlet’s frustration, the tipping point came after North Greenbush’s approval of the Nigro Company’s controversial 220-unit Oak Hill luxury housing development (Lebrun, 2003). DANA formed the Defreestville Incorporation Committee and sought to collect enough petition signatures to bring the matter to a public referendum. At least twenty percent of residents—430 people—of the proposed 4.9 square-mile village would have to sign the incorporation petition in order for the process to proceed (Furfaro, 2003a).

To outmaneuver DANA and its threat of village incorporation, in 2005 landowners in favor of development in Defreestville organized and filed a petition in a bid to have the portion of land they sought to have developed annexed to the neighboring city of Rensselaer. The property owners involved, John and Thomas Gallogly, Oak Hill Apartments LLC, and Stephen Sullivan owned more than the required-by-law 51 percent of the assessed value of the 48 parcels that they were proposing to annex to Rensselaer.
The property owned by the Gallogly's was near the intersection of Routes 4 and 43, the intended location for the Van Rensselaer Square mall to be built by Nigrő (Perry, 2005a).

Paul Tazbir, the Republican town supervisor of North Greenbush, opposed both the annexation- and incorporation bids. He argued that either measure would amount to a loss of tax revenue and hinder job creation in the town. Furthermore, Tazbir noted that annexation would amount to property owners ceding land use authority to the city of Rensselaer. He argued, “it is unfortunate that if this annexation goes through, the town would have almost no say about how the property is developed, meaning the development at the site could be on an even larger scale”(Perry, 2005a).

The annexation would not include the entire hamlet of Defreestville. Only about 120 residents lived within the designated area. Furthermore, annexation would first have to clear hearings and be approved by the ruling bodies in both North Greenbush and Rensselaer. If cleared by municipal officials, the 120 residents within the designated area would vote on the proposal.

The debate over annexation, however, was largely quelled when voters in Defreestville voted 805 to 707 to remain in North Greenbush, a vote that was fairly drawn out as both sides challenged dozens of paper ballots in a process that lasted nearly eleven weeks. Supervisor Tazbir praised the outcome and noted that the vote provided an opportunity for the residents of Defreestville to move on and look to the future. John Eadie, chairman of the Village Incorporation Committee, however, argued that even though the measure failed, leaders in North Greenbush had been forced to take the group and its supporters seriously. Eadie noted, “For years the town treated us as if we were
nothing more than a splinter group of radicals, and they were wrong” (Perry, 2005b). A town official somewhat more sympathetic to DANA noted:

I was the one that ran the village vote. I had to by law; I had to. We had what was known as the master of elections, and he was appointed by a Supreme Court Justice. I had readied the election up to the end, and it was televised channels 6, 10, and 13 were there. Everybody was there, and he {the master of elections} was there, and I was grateful for that because it was the supervisor and myself, were the two, by state law, that ran it {the election} that day, and when he {the master of elections} stepped in, it was better because at the time they {the town board} were trying to throw me out of office. They thought, as dumb as this may be, if they could do that, that this vote wouldn’t go on because I had to run it. But I had a deputy (smile). It was really just being dumb.

(In regards to land development in Defreestville) The town board was not listening at all. DANA has been around for a very long time. They were very well represented on the master plan committee for years, before 2001. 2001 occurs and the master plan committee no longer accepts what many of them want, and their representation…it made no sense as to why you wouldn’t listen to these people. They had good ideas, and as I’ve always said, if you don’t live next to it, I may have something to say, but how do you really know? These people lived on top of all of that. This is nothing new, this is a thirty-year confrontation that’s going on, and it was not always a confrontation. It was, ‘what would you like us to do?’ The neighbors wanted office buildings. Of course what the developers wanted was not that, and they were the only ones that took an option on that property (North Greenbush public official, personal interview, 02/11/09).

Losing the incorporation bid, the residents of Defreestville would now have to work with the new town board. Besides voting down the referendum, on Election Day residents ousted all of the Republican board members who were up for reelection. Democrats now had control of the town and the supervisor’s seat. The Democrats, including the new town supervisor Mark Evers (a Conservative who ran on the Democratic line), campaigned on the issue of smart growth and promised to draft a new master plan once taking office. Despite the new town leadership, DANA promised that it would still keep up pressure on town officials. John Eadie, chairman of the Incorporation Committee explained that the new board must work with residents of the hamlet and
stated, “We expect them to take appropriate action. We expect them to hold to their campaign promises” (Perry, 2005c).

Election and Water-District Issues

Opposition to development in North Greenbush did not die down after the failed Defreestville incorporation bid. The Van Rensselaer Square retail project along Route 4, bogged down by lawsuits on each side of the debate, still had not been settled by the fall of 2008. Leaders of DANA, along with others, charged that Supervisor Evers and other members of the Democratic town leadership had become too amenable to the type of unfettered development that they had campaigned against. Critics also pointed to the problems within Water District 14, pointing at projects that came in over-budget as well as its political ties to specific contractors.

Because of these controversies, DANA, along with a faction within the North Greenbush Democratic Party, collected the required signatures to create the Greenbush Party in 2007. Leaders within the party included Charles “CB” Smith, a Democratic committeeman, Dan Ashley, the former chairman of the party, and Joshua Sabo, the current town attorney who planned to run against Evers for the supervisor seat. The three members were at odds with Jeffrey Spain and Evers. CB Smith noted, “both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party got taken over by development interests, and that’s why we had to do something” (CB Smith, personal interview, 02/16/09).

DANA and the Greenbush Party viewed Spain as overwhelmingly pro-development. He was also criticized for his close ties with town and county Republican Party leaders. Spain did not hide his pro-development positions. The following passage
printed in the weekly alternative paper, *Metroland*, offers an illustration of Spain’s feelings towards development in the town.

When you look at Wolf Road {a major commercial corridor in the suburban town of Colonie adjacent to Albany}, do you see anything bad? It is all thriving businesses. There is no reason why Route 4 from Hudson Valley all the way through East Greenbush couldn’t be just like that. I want to see development in this town. We need the sales tax dollars. C.B. and Josh Sabo have fought it every step of the way. Have you been over to routes 4 and 43 lately? That land has been zoned commercial for years, but the people in Defreestville have been fighting it, because someone saw a deer in there ten years ago. Seriously. Someone saw an albino deer like fifteen years ago, and now they want to keep that forever wild. So now everybody in North Greenbush drives past that intersection to go to Crossgates, to go to Colonie Center {large, enclosed malls in suburban Albany County}, to go to Wolf Road, to spend their money, when they could be spending their money in the town of North Greenbush, but the people in Defreestville have said ‘no.’ (Hardin, 30 (44)).

Water District 14

In addition to labeling him as too pro-development, the Greenbush Party was highly critical of Evers’ involvement in Water District 14 and his political ties to Casale Excavations, a firm that routinely receives town construction work. Michael Casale, one of the owners of the company, is the chairman of the town Conservative Party, a tie Greenbush Party members often emphasized. Evers in the next town election, however, secured the Conservative and Independence lines on the ballot, making his bid for reelection significantly less contested. “They ran on nearly every ballot line listed. We {The Greenbush Party} actually got the most votes—1,550—but because they ran on almost every other line, theirs’ added up to the most” (CB Smith, personal interview, 02/16/09). Moreover, even though Evers did not share the same vision as Spain for turning Route 4 into a Wolf Road-like commercial hub, he argued that the town must pursue “smart” development that would heighten the community’s tax base. Ever’s noted, “the town is doing great. I just proposed a budget with a slight decrease in taxes, and we
are encouraging more businesses and retail outlets to locate in town to further decrease taxes in the next four years” (Gardinier, 2007).

Although Evers promised to usher in an era of smart growth, his connections to and corresponding support of Water District 14 left many in the town doubtful (CB Smith, personal interview, 02/16/09). The new water line would essentially erase the barriers for additional development in the town. CB Smith noted, “All you had to look at was who was pushing the thing. It was {Michael} Casale, the Chairman of the Conservative Party and the principle of Casale Excavating. They have the contract for Water District 14” (CB Smith, personal interview, 02/16/09). In addition, the contract for the project, which had initially been $6.4 million, later inflated to $8 million. According to CB Smith, the inflated price had not come as a complete surprise in that, “Michael Casale’s got a member of his own committee serving on the town building department!” (CB Smith, personal interview, 02/16/09).

Casale Excavating engaged in a marketing campaign to advance the water line. Again CB Smith noted, “they had all of this direct mail and had little old ladies handing out promotional fliers all over town—little old ladies! What would they gain from the water line? You knew it was Casale who was directing it” (CB Smith, personal interview, 02/16/09).

The water line came at a great cost to the town residents whom resided within its boundaries. The district is composed of 1,050 benefit units (property owners) that are now taxed at $400 dollars a year for 30 years. CB Smith noted, “It’s a significant amount of money. It adds almost one-half onto the regular town tax! It’s going to push older, fixed-income residents out of their homes” (CB Smith, personal interview, 02/16/09).
In addition to the new water line, the Appellate Division of State Supreme Court in Albany rejected the last of the four different lawsuits undertaken by attorneys for DANA during an eight-year period to derail the Van Rensselaer Square shopping center. Therefore, the way was now clear for Nigro Development to begin construction on the 254,000 square-foot retail project (Wechsler, 2008). With the lackluster economy continuing through 2009, the project, however, has since stalled, leaving simply the shopping center’s physical infrastructure in place.

Traffic Concerns

Another recent consequence of the rapid development in the town has been a reduction in the desirability of single-family homes along Route 4. A public official who has been involved in town affairs for nearly twenty years noted,

that corridor is no longer able to sustain single-family residential, and everyone who’s on it who’s tried to sell their house has come here {to the town government} and proved, they can’t do it…It’s a domino effect because people can’t sell their houses because of the traffic, because, well, I would not want…I have a 12-year-old son. I don’t want to bring my son to Route 4 because I don’t want him to get killed” (North Greenbush public official, personal interview, 02/11/09).

Because of the situation along the corridor properties have subsequently been able to be rezoned, parcel-by-parcel, to other uses. The town, however, sees this type of piecemeal rezoning as undesirable in both the short- and long-run.

Traffic concerns have led to discussions in town about an additional connector road that would run from I-90 directly to the RPI tech campus. CB Smith explained that the new connector road would ease traffic along Route 4 and help mitigate the congestion at the intersection of the existing connector road and Routes 4 and 43. The intersection is particularly noted for the frequency and seriousness of automobile accidents. Supporters
of the project, including CB Smith, note that the connector road could potentially secure funding from the infrastructure component of the Obama Administration’s economic stimulus package. Despite the benefits that its supporters foresee, resistance to the connector road has emerged from development interests who argue that it would funnel traffic away from their retail projects (notably the Van Rensselaer Square project) situated at the intersection of Routes 43 and 4 (CB Smith, personal interview, 02/16/09).

Although development has slowed with the recession, the Greenbush Party and slow-growth interest have their work cut out for them. A proposed change in the town’s comprehensive plan by Supervisor Evers and board member Spain would essentially throw-out the comprehensive plan adopted in 2006 and rezone what is now a golf driving-range along Route 4 into high density commercial akin to the big-box development arising along the intersection of Routes 43 and 4. A leader of the town’s Greenbush Party explained:

We believe that this proposal will begin the process of turning RT 4 into another Wolf Road. There is no logical reason to reverse the land use designation for this area recommended by the first Committee, which was mixed commercial use, and change it to the most intense commercial use possible. Neither RT 4 in this area nor Bloomingrove Drive and its surrounding neighborhoods could withstand the impact of such development (Greenbush Party, 2009)

Discussion

North Greenbush’s place within the ROS, including its proximity to, and political and fiscal independence from Troy, greatly strengthened the town’s growth coalition. This led to aggressive development pressure that, in turn, led to major backlashes among residents and certain political leaders. Indeed, no large-scale political consensus existed in the town over development. This ultimately led to the delaying of projects or the shelving of them all together. Recognizing its regional and fiscal context, opponents of
growth feared North Greenbush would become “the employment agency of Rensselaer County.” This probably added another dimension that heightened tensions between the differing parties.

Much of the development pressure in North Greenbush was too much for local groups, including DANA, to counteract. Despite the final outcomes in many cases, DANA was able to dramatically slow the pace of development and vigorously obstruct processes that they believed were not in best interest of residents. The examples illustrate the lengths to which residents, specifically within the hamlet of Defreestville, went when they believed that town leaders were by and large working in the interests of developers. CB Smith noted, “DANA, {they are} well educated, have the financial means, have the attorneys, and they’re reasonable people. You can’t argue with them because they just want community-supported development” (CB Smith, personal interview, 02/16/09).

The example of DANA as an influential neighborhood organization possessing strong communication and legal skills, supports previous research on the effectiveness of neighborhood organizations when opposing outside development interests (Rabrenovic, 1996). Neighborhood organizations with such attributes have both the human capital and the financial means to advance many of their goals that their counterparts with fewer resources cannot successfully achieve.

Furthermore, although local groups could not stop much of the retail, residential, and highway development, the Rensselaer County Greens, through working with other concerned residents, were able to halt the process of competing for an extremely lucrative semiconductor plant. It is important to remember, however, that a firm had not already chosen the site. The RPI tech campus was merely one of many sites that were competing
for the project. Nonetheless, the opposition was quite successful in convincing town residents that the project would threaten key economic and environmental assets.

Development pressures were heightened by the interaction of regional context and political fragmentation, or the location of the town within the ROS. Indeed, without discounting the salience of leaders’ ties to developers and construction firms, regional context and political fragmentation instead laid the groundwork for which growth interests responded. The interaction of these factors essentially produced the context around which local decision-making actually revolved. The RPI tech campus was the catalyst for a significant chunk of development within North Greenbush. Located next to important institutions in Troy, but without having that city’s prohibitive investment environment, growth interests capitalized on this context. Troy being a (geographically) landlocked, resource-deprived city—conditions that work against a favorable investment environment—there were few opportunities and scant rationale for constructing the tech campus within Troy itself. The city had few parcels of land suitable for large-scale development. In addition, low property wealth in the city subsequently necessitates a relatively high level of taxation—a prohibitive condition for any type of development. Troy, because of its political boundaries, also lacked open parcels of land with easy access to major expressways and highways. Therefore, RPI had little choice but to locate in neighboring North Greenbush.

The under-development of Troy is in many ways related to the (perceived) over-development of North Greenbush. The tech campus spurred further development including the new interchange and feeder expressway off Exit 8 on Interstate 90. The new highway and interchange made properties along Route 4 desirable and developers
seized on the opportunities to build large, new shopping centers and housing developments. The result was anger and backlash by the residents in North Greenbush most affected by the new roads and development—the people of Defreestville.

Political fragmentation also compounded development problems in a way not directly related to Troy. The biggest of the retail developments near Defreestville was actually within the town of East Greenbush. Target, Wal-Mart, Home Depot, a large movie theater, and hosts of other stores were built at the junction of Routes 4 and 43. Although most of these were technically in East Greenbush, the developments had more of an impact on the neighborhoods in North Greenbush, in that Defreestville lies immediately north and directly adjacent to the biggest retail complexes. Comparable residential areas in East Greenbush, however, are at least a mile away from the retail.

These conditions matter because while the residents of Defreestville had to deal with the effects of the developments, including substantial increases in traffic, noise, and a loss of open and green-spaces, the developments did little to bolster the tax base or reduce the reliance on residential property taxes for residents in Defreestville. Because the largest retail developments were located in East Greenbush, they and not the residents of Defreestville would benefit most from the enlarged tax base. This is directly related to political fragmentation in that the financial gains made from development largely stay within the jurisdiction in which they lie. CB Smith notes in regards to the issues between North and East Greenbush, “we’ve got to have regionalism, regional cooperation” (CB Smith, personal interview, 02/16/09).

Smith is not alone in his concerns. Other leaders in the county fear a future in which disproportionately impoverished urban cores are flanked by increasingly faceless
suburbs of ubiquitous subdivisions, strip malls and office parks. Indeed, Joseph Durkin, an attorney and a leader in the group Brunswick Smart Growth, which advocates for managed growth policies in the neighboring suburban town of Brunswick notes, “Instead of development in areas that are now open space, why not have a regional, unified policy that would direct growth back into the cities?” (Churchill, 2008: p. D1).

In contrast to the perceived over-development and loss of quality of life in North Greenbush, CB Smith notes that, “there would strong community support in Troy to reinvest in the city, in the downtown. It would be well accepted by the people there. If there were the resources, if there was the money, all of these old and vacant buildings downtown could be redone, and the people would love it” (CB Smith, personal interview, 02/16/09). Joe Fama noted, “We are not helped by taking empty buildings and having nothing done with them. I see vacant buildings as the enemy” (Joe Fama, personal interview, 05/06/09). In summary, if a better development climate (better services, lower taxes, coherent development policies) existed in Troy for businesses and residents, redevelopment within the central city could gain traction which would potentially ease development pressures in the outlying areas. Such a climate would, however, first have to overcome Troy’s complex political environment saddled with an array of various interest groups fighting for the few resources the city can provide.

Broadly speaking, the ROS, by polarizing resources, services, and the population in general, has exacerbated the uneven development between Troy and its suburban towns. Importantly however, the ROS has helped strengthen the kind of circumstances that are seen as undesirable by a considerable number of both urban and suburban residents. For example, beyond the mediocre conditions of its schools, urban residents
are not content because Troy lacks retail stores, restaurants, and new housing. On the other hand, suburban residents are not content because they think they have too many of such features. Will this mutual discontentment lead to reforms?

In the next chapter we broaden the unit of analysis to the county level, specifically Saratoga County. Saratoga County is an intriguing case in that in terms of population, it is the fastest growing county in the state. Here I argue that political fragmentation between counties in the metropolitan area, while political integration within the county itself, has assisted growth and development there.
CHAPTER VIII: POLITICAL INTEGRATION AND THE GROWTH OF SARATOGA COUNTY

In the last three chapters we have seen how the interaction of regional context and political fragmentation impacts the capacities of growth coalitions in the Capital Region. These ultimately impact metropolitan development outcomes. After reviewing and analyzing the specific case studies of Saratoga Springs, Troy, and North Greenbush, the purpose of this chapter is to broaden the unit of analysis to the county level, and specifically to examine how the ROS has impacted Saratoga County as a whole and its relationship within the wider metropolitan region.

I argue that Saratoga County, akin to the status of its largest city, Saratoga Springs, has benefited to a greater degree from the ROS than the other counties in the metropolitan area. Similar to Saratoga Springs, the county has, with the assistance of the alignment of regional context and fragmented political authority, capitalized on public investments that have not been equally available to the other counties in the region. Moreover, whereas the county in relation to the wider metropolitan area has used fragmented political authority to its benefit by in effect isolating itself from the socioeconomic problems and responsibilities faced in the three other counties, it has also been able to foster political integration within the county itself to strengthen its underlying economic base.

"Favorable" Attributes of Saratoga County within the Regional Context

Since the 1960s Saratoga County has witnessed substantial employment and population growth and therefore has been in a strong economic position for some time. In fact, in the 1990s Saratoga County’s population grew at a quicker pace than any other county in the entire state, and similar rates of growth continue in the current decade.
Reasons for its growth are varied. They revolve, however, around three core factors related to its regional context: demographics, infrastructure, and geography. Intertwined with all three are fragmented political authority between counties and political integration within the county.

In Chapter Five we saw how regional context has heightened the city of Saratoga Springs and the town of Wilton. Importantly, many of the same features that have benefited the city have also proved to be a boon for the county. To review, these factors have included (1) the construction of the Adirondack Northway, which directed substantial investments to Saratoga County and away from the three other counties within the region. Indeed, the Northway supplied the avenue for which investors, wary of the (2) industrial decline and shifting demographics in Albany, Schenectady, and Rensselaer Counties, could subsequently pursue new opportunities for growth and strong returns on their projects. Furthermore, not only was new development now possible, it would prove to be attractive to both developers and residents because the county, isolated fiscally from the other counties’ challenged tax bases, (3) possessed desirable fiscal qualities including relatively low property taxes and service burdens.

Development in the county has proceeded at such a rate that numerous public, private, and non-profit groups and organizations have increasingly convened to discuss how growth can be managed in a way that best preserves the qualities that have made Saratoga County attractive for nearly 40 years. Preceding a discussion on county dialogue surrounding growth issues, however, is a brief overview of one of the municipalities in the region that has benefited more than most from the ROS embedded within the region.
This section also highlights in greater detail some of the specific processes that were involved in the new suburbanization of the county.

Clifton Park and Suburbanization in Saratoga County

The first large-scale suburbanization of the county began in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the development of Clifton Park. Before the opening of the Northway, the Town of Clifton Park consisted mainly of woods, pastures, and small, village-like hamlets. The Northway was the primary driver of new growth and opened up the area to full-scale development. Only a 20- to 30 minute commute to the large employment centers in the core cities, the town offered a new and affordable suburban-style lifestyle with easy access (by automobile) to the numerous jobs in government, healthcare, and education that were available in Albany, as well as the plentiful (at the time) manufacturing jobs in Schenectady. Indeed, even today the wages of the jobs offered in Albany County are higher than the average wages of jobs located in Saratoga County, and far more people continue to commute to Albany County from Saratoga County than vice-versa (Rocco Ferraro, personal interview, 04/13/09).

The time period of the Northway’s opening coincided with the nation’s growing appetite for suburban-style living. Residents in Clifton Park and southern Saratoga County could avoid the higher costs of living associated with the cities as well as escape the noise, crowdedness, growing crime and poverty, and poorer quality schools of the region’s central cities. Residents of Saratoga County paid lower municipal and school taxes, drove on newer roads, sent their children to newer and better-equipped schools, and enjoyed living in their relatively copious homes which were situated on large enough lots to accommodate if not in-ground swimming pools, large patio areas. The
characteristics of the homes available in the new developments simply were not present in the overwhelming majority of homes in the central cities, especially at price levels available in Saratoga County. Moreover, even the prosperous suburban towns in Albany, Schenectady, and Rensselaer Counties could not offer the types of homes Saratoga County had for such relatively cheap prices (Rocco Ferraro, personal interview, 04/13/09).

The development of Clifton Park, for all practical purposes, revolved around one person, Robert Van Patten. In the 1970s Van Patten began constructing suburban subdivisions including Clifton Knolls and Country Knolls that sprawled along the west side of the Northway. Featuring Stan colonials, ranch and raised ranch-style homes on generous-sized lots, the subdivisions twisted and turned around ponds, ridges, and maple and oak trees. His developments were unconventional in the sense that unlike in the cities in the region, which provided services, including water and sewer, these had to be purchased through Van Patten’s development company. In fact, his company built the water and sewer lines as well as the treatment plants. The Town of Clifton Park did not invest in services and infrastructure; it was privately controlled. Rocco Ferraro explains:

There weren’t any cities there to provide the expansion of services like Albany with Guilderland and Troy with Brunswick and places like that. In Saratoga County, you didn’t have those public drivers of infrastructure…Van Patten owned the systems. He controlled the development that was taking place, and he did not necessarily allow {other developers to come in}. If you wanted to invest in another subdivision there, you had to get his permission to connect into his treatment plant. Was he going to give you that permission? Not if you were a competitor. Why would he allow you to compete against him? He’s selling these houses to the folks who want to move from, his buyer base is Albany, Schenectady, Troy, he didn’t want to compete with you. (Rocco Ferraro, personal interview, 04/13/09).
The privately-led development of Saratoga County’s largest suburb meant that the growth of Clifton Park was not constrained in the same way had Van Patten been in a city and therefore under a public entity. Residents of Van Patten’s developments paid user fees instead of the property taxes for the services they used. In fact, Clifton Park, similar to Wilton, has no town tax—an attractive equation for potential residents and the maintenance of current ones. After his death during the late 1990s, however, Van Patten’s company sold the infrastructure and water treatment systems to Clifton Park for a hefty sum.

Businesses followed the residents up the Northway. The Clifton Country Mall, for example, was built in the mid-1970s as well as numerous other retail developments. Growth continued to spread northward into Malta and has been continuously strong in that town as well as Halfmoon, Stillwater, and of course, Wilton. Because of this a line of development along the Northway stretches pretty much uninterruptedly from Albany County all the way to Glens Falls in Warren County—an expanse of nearly 50 miles. Beyond the attractive investment climates in the towns, relatively low service levels and related taxation at the county level have also been attractive to business and residents. Before we examine specific expenditures on services in Saratoga County, however, it is important to note the major responsibilities that county governments provide in New York State. The size and breadth of these responsibilities matter because they impact taxation and the ability of counties to focus on other activities, including economic development.

Importance of County Services and Expenditures
Overall, county governments serve numerous functions in New York State. In 2003, county expenditures in the state totaled $16.4 billion (Local Government Handbook, State of New York, 2008). Economic assistance, including Medicaid and Aid to Dependent Children, forms the largest expenditure for counties. Counties’ share of Medicaid costs, however, has declined since the 1980s when counties were wholly responsible for providing this service. Overtime, state and federal governments have assumed 75 percent of Medicaid costs, while New York counties shoulder 25 percent. Education assumes significant costs as well. Counties, for example, are responsible for funding special education for pre-school-aged children as well as tuition assistance for community colleges to county residents. Public safety forms the third major responsibility for counties. Within this includes funding for county sheriffs, jails, and probation and rehabilitation services (Local Government Handbook, State of New York, 2008).

Counties, of course, do not provide all public services. Central cities focus on many of the same general services but differ in specific ways. For example, while counties fund sheriffs’ offices and jails, cities are responsible for police and fire services. Cities also fund water/sewer/sanitation services, roads and transportation, and recreation. In addition, cities provide some funding for healthcare and economic assistance, but overall their share of these responsibilities is relatively small in comparison to what counties provide for Medicaid and TANF (Local Government Handbook, State of New York, 2008). Table 8-1 provides a broad overview of the expenses assumed by the various units of local government in New York State excluding New York City.

Table 8-1 Local Government Expenditures by Function, 2005 (Amounts in Millions of Dollars)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Counties</th>
<th>Cities</th>
<th>Towns</th>
<th>Villages</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Gov’t</td>
<td>$2,260.1</td>
<td>$502.8</td>
<td>$905.4</td>
<td>$342.2</td>
<td>$4,010.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Safety</td>
<td>3,064.8</td>
<td>1,409.4</td>
<td>839.1</td>
<td>520.5</td>
<td>5,833.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>2,087.7</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>113.8</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>2,213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>957.7</td>
<td>228.0</td>
<td>1,073.6</td>
<td>210.9</td>
<td>2,470.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Assistance</td>
<td>5,839.0</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>5,933.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture/Recreation</td>
<td>282.4</td>
<td>179.4</td>
<td>498.1</td>
<td>137.2</td>
<td>1,097.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>931.1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>931.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Services</td>
<td>942.8</td>
<td>674.9</td>
<td>1,248.6</td>
<td>543.4</td>
<td>3,409.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$16,365.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>$3,028.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>$4,736.9</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,769.1</strong></td>
<td><strong>$25,900.1</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: New York State Department of State

Although all counties across New York State must offer the same services, the responsibility and burden of providing them vary considerably between counties. Overall, Saratoga County spends much less on services than the three other counties in the Capital Region. Two primary explanations exist for this. First, because of its demographic characteristics, including the presence of relatively few impoverished people, fewer service needs are necessary in the county. The second explanation essentially surrounds politics, specifically the notion that the county’s conservative political base does not want to provide comparable levels of services as the other counties in the region. We’ll look at the second question first. Indeed, political decisions arrived at in the county—possible through home rule county authority—have led some to argue that Saratoga County has been able to focus more attention on economic development and less on public services than the other counties in the region. Leaders have also used its relative homogeneity to argue that liberal social service expenditures are not necessary. Rocco Ferraro explains:

The fact of the matter is that Rensselaer County, Albany County, and Schenectady County have taken charge, taken responsibilities to all social and economic classes in their respective counties. Saratoga County leadership has not. They just assume give those people a bus ticket to send them all to Albany, Schenectady, and Troy, and they’ve said that much in so many words before. They don’t want
make that county attractive as a magnet for those people that come up here to their county. Okay, well that’s bullshit, because there’s a lot of poor people in that county that need services that are being ignored, and what they’re doing is that {people of modest means} are going to those counties where they are getting the services, which are Albany, Schenectady, and Rensselaer Counties because those counties are acting in a much more responsible manner in addressing these concerns.

I’m talking about everything ranging from healthcare to affordable housing, to special needs education and things like that—very expensive programs. No doubt you have larger numbers {of poor people} in those other three counties, but the leadership in Saratoga County in my opinion is not acting in a very responsible manner... So, it makes it easier for Saratoga County to dismiss those things and devote their energies to the economic development component of it. Which is important at the end of the day because you’re providing job opportunities. But what responsibilities do they have because the {new} jobs are up here {in Saratoga County} and the population center is down here {in the other three counties} (Rocco Ferraro, personal interview, 04/13/09).

One service area in which Saratoga County had been widely criticized involved tuition assistance for community colleges within the county. Up until the 2000s Saratoga County had been the only county in the state to not offer tuition assistance to high school students desiring to enroll in community college courses. However, the county allowed tuition assistance to those who had dropped out of high school. Several calls were made over the years to reform this practice, including appeals by political leaders within the county itself. Roy McDonald, who had served on the county board of supervisors before being elected to state office, argued that the policy did not make any sense because the county would end up paying for the tuition anyway after the students in question graduated from high school. The policy was finally modified in 1999 (Crowe, 1999b).

Data from the four counties on service expenditures illustrate that Saratoga County in fact spends considerably less on services per person than the other counties. Table 8-2 documents what the four counties spend on four major areas of public services. Importantly, in New York, unlike the majority of states, counties foot a proportion of the
bill for the federal Medicaid program, and therefore Medicaid expenditures vary between counties. Ultimately, these data illustrate the wide disparities in public spending between Saratoga County and the other three major counties in the region.

Table 8-2: Per-Capita Social Expenditures by Capital Region County, 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Public Safety</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Social Services</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albany</td>
<td>$76.77</td>
<td>$184.37</td>
<td>$136.61</td>
<td>$622.84</td>
<td>$1,020.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saratoga</td>
<td>76.04</td>
<td>95.08</td>
<td>149.98</td>
<td>225.99</td>
<td>547.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rensselaer</td>
<td>148.88</td>
<td>170.26</td>
<td>271.97</td>
<td>500.96</td>
<td>1,089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schenectady</td>
<td>$104.12</td>
<td>$135.19</td>
<td>$216.43</td>
<td>$648.04</td>
<td>$1,103.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: New York State Office of the State Comptroller, 2007

Certainly, one must take into account the fewer service needs and requirements in Saratoga County. For example, in comparison to the other counties, because Saratoga County has fewer individuals and families that lie below the poverty line, eligibility for Medicaid will also be presumably lower in Saratoga County. Therefore, is Saratoga County shirking its responsibilities as Mr. Ferraro suggests, or does this simply reflect the disparate needs between the counties? Table 8-3 illustrates county poverty rates and per-capita expenditures on services adjusted for the poverty rate. I use Saratoga County as a baseline, and therefore the data reflect what the levels of expenditure across the other three counties would be if they all had the same poverty rate of 6.6 and 4.4 percent for individuals and families, respectively, in Saratoga County.

Table 8-3: Adjusted Public Expenditures by Capital Region County, 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Individuals; Families Below Poverty</th>
<th>Per-Capita Expenditures Adjusted for Poverty Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Line (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albany</td>
<td>12.4; 7.2</td>
<td>$543.22; 609.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rensselaer</td>
<td>11.5; 8.2</td>
<td>624.99; 571.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saratoga</td>
<td>6.6; 4.3</td>
<td>547.10; 547.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schenectady</td>
<td>11.4; 7.0</td>
<td>$639.03; 678.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey

Adjusted for poverty rates, the notable gap between county service expenditures narrows considerably. Nonetheless, the adjustment I utilize is rather crude. For example, other items may also be salient including percentage of elderly residents by county. Still, even after controlling for poverty rates, Saratoga County still spends less than all of the others in the region when family poverty is used, and less than all but Albany County when expenditures are adjusted for individual poverty. Paul Sausville-R, the current town supervisor of Malta, noted, “they’re very, very conservative at the county level. I think they could be a little more progressive to be quite honest with you. My own personal view is that there’s some things that they could do that would be desirable.” (Paul Sausville, personal interview, 10/23/2009).

Political Integration and Consensus-Building in Saratoga County

Even though it is difficult to measure the extent to which Saratoga County is, or is not evading some of its service responsibilities, what is clearer is that its demographic makeup bestows certain advantages that facilitate economic development. In particular, the argument is that Saratoga County has essentially used its relative demographic homogeneity to foster political integration between disparate communities in the county. This has led to wider consensus on policies than in the more diverse counties of Albany, Rensselaer, and Schenectady. For instance, because the county is more demographically homogeneous, politics follows suit. Indeed, a particularly unified Republican Party has long dominated the county, and 18 of the 23 county supervisors are Republicans. The
constituencies of the county, for example, are more demographically similar than those of Rensselaer County, which includes a major distressed city, Troy, as well as middle and higher-end suburbs. Therefore, more competition and disagreement exist between the various parties in Rensselaer County (as well as in Albany and Schenectady Counties) than in Saratoga County. In Saratoga County, the homogeneity of the area minimizes political dissention. Leaders, subsequently are better equipped to “speak with one voice” to firms, investors, and new residents (Rocco Ferraro, personal interview, 04/13/09).

Paul Sausville-R, the current town supervisor of Malta, a community in Saratoga County that would be the site for the region’s largest development project in decades, (to be discussed below) explained:

{The government} does seem to work well in Saratoga County. Number one you have predominately a Republican Party, and there is you know, we party together, not in a big way, but we have our golf tournaments, and we have those relationships at those events that build relationships together, and we work cooperatively, because we’re all of the same tribe so to speak. That’s important—the teamwork, the tribalism, all of the things are so important to being successful...If you’re all together on the same page, all together working for the same goal, and you all have a sense of identity and a stake in the outcome, then you’re able to move forward (Paul Sausville, personal interview, 10/23/2009).

Sausville’s assessment of the role of Saratoga County’s homogeneous politics in fostering inter-community cooperation supports previous research findings. For instance, Hilde (2009) examined the link between local political party fragmentation and community social capital and found that increased party fragmentation or heterogeneity was associated with lower levels of community social capital. Although the study did not examine how social capital was subsequently related to economic development, Saratoga County’s experiences seem to suggest this additional link.
Beyond the political decisions made in the county, Saratoga County also has a different structure of government than the others in the region. Saratoga County has a board of supervisors structure in which the supervisors of every town and elected representatives from the cities and villages form the County Board direct policy at the county level. The other counties in the region have legislative forms of government in which legislative districts cut across municipal lines and are represented by lawmakers without direct municipal involvement within the localities they represent. Importantly, Saratoga County’s government structure is more amenable to fast-tracking development projects because, “it minimizes the political interference of the decision-making process because you have an administrator who takes the shots. Therefore, political interference is less likely to occur and when we’re talking about economic development, when you’re talking about reduced property taxes that all matters” (Rocco Ferraro, personal interview, 04/13/09).

Perhaps even more important in regards to the board of supervisors government structure, is that it acts to integrate the various local governments (town, village, city) to the county government. The integration subsequently facilitates county-wide consensus building. Because the board of supervisors is composed of elected municipal officials throughout the county, this structure helps to ensure that county policy can never be too far removed from concerns of localities. In a sense, the structure assists at penetrating the political and administrative hierarchies that exist between municipalities and the county in that the municipalities are linked to the county board of trustees in a way that is not present in the county legislature structure.
Ashford (1982) makes this sense of integration and linkage clear with his comparative analyses of local government between Britain and France. Historically, France has had a system of local governance in which local administrators have had comparable levels of expertise and training as their counterparts in the central government. More importantly, France’s tradition of administrative and bureaucratic law—with strong networks between local- and central civil servants—has given it a particularly unified civil service apparatus. It is not uncommon, for example, for dialogue and politicking to occur between local and central administrators. In addition, local political actors have had considerable policy leverage over central administrators so that political ideas from the local “communes” regularly migrate “upward” to leaders in the central offices.

In comparison, political elites in Britain have historically understood the importance, roles, and responsibilities of local government to be inherently different from those of the central government. Therefore, Britain has separate administrative services at each level of government, providing for a much more fragmented and disconnected authority structure. In this system, akin to the American apparatus, local officials and administrators have no regular contact with their counterparts in higher levels of government. Coordination is not common, and in most instances administrators at higher levels of government have to go out of their way to ascertain what is happening at the local level. Consequently, the needs of the localities are clouded in that no formal avenues of communication exist between the two levels of government. Overall, central governments are quite insulated from local governments in a way that simply does not exist with the French case (Ashford, 1982).
Although Ashford’s study of local governance between nation states brings in numerous points that are not directly relevant to local governments in the United States, his fundamental analysis of linkages between local and central governments can be applied to the New York case. In regards to policy and economic development, municipal officials have direct relationships and communication with county officials, because in the case of towns they are the very same people. The elected officials in the cities and villages also represent these jurisdictions at large, not simply legislative districts that cut across localities. Because of this it is likely that county officials can better gauge the political wind of the localities and propose and work toward policies and projects that are congruent with what local constituencies find appropriate. In turn, this may expedite and facilitate projects.

In addition to the linkages that occur between municipal and county administrators, Michael Tucker, president of the Center for Economic Growth (CEG), a regional, private economic development organization based in Albany, explains that Saratoga County is less fragmented along the lines of state industrial development agencies (IDA’s) as well. IDA’s were created in the 1960s to facilitate local governments’ access to the bond markets. They are funded through the fees generated by completed projects. Saratoga County has six IDA’s, while Albany County has nine dispersed amongst various cities and towns. The IDA’s in Saratoga County, however, are actually quite integrated. Indeed, the Saratoga County IDA in effect organizes the other five, and they are all staffed by people within the SEDC. Therefore, by promoting a single, unified vision, political integration (as opposed to fragmentation) in the arena of
economic development has been a boon for the county (Michael Tucker, personal interview, 6/23/2009).

Conversely, the fragmentation of the IDA’s in Albany County largely reflects long-standing political cleavages. Having historically been controlled by the Democratic Party, Albany County has agreed not to interfere with the authorities of the historically Republican suburban towns. Michael Tucker states that in the county there is the unofficial policy that, “the Republicans could run the suburban towns and stay out of the hair of the Democratic organization in the county and in the city” (personal interview, 6/23/2009). Because of this, home rule authorities over economic development, akin to that of land development, have arisen in the towns outside of Albany. In comparison to Saratoga County’s unified development vision, these divisions have subsequently led to fragmented and inefficient economic development efforts.

Regional Non-Cooperation

Whereas Saratoga County has been able to craft considerable political integration within the county to their advantage, it has strategically exploited the political fragmentation that exists between counties. In light of the demographic, political, and economic differences between Saratoga County and the remaining three counties, despite calls for greater regional cooperation by numerous public officials over many years, few if any reforms have been realized. Reform has been elusive for a number of reasons but boils down to two items: property rights and the competition for investment. Although investment and property rights are a major concern for every community and county within the Capital Region, Saratoga County has stood out relative to the others in that they have attracted a disproportionate amount of new investment and the corresponding
population that comes with it. Because of this leaders in the county are particularly skeptical and suspicious of regionalist goals including revenue-sharing and government consolidation.

Notwithstanding the advantages of Saratoga County within the ROS, its economic development efforts have been effective. Rocco Ferarro explains, “I have to give them credit because they are doing the right things as it relates to achieving their specific objectives” (Rocco Ferraro, personal interview, 04/13/09). These include making sites “shovel ready,” meaning that the county has done much of the prior work necessary to make developable land available and accessible to private investors. Furthermore, county development officials have streamlined the review and regulatory process to which investors and developers submit plans in regards to prospective projects. This has made Saratoga County attractive in a state, “where we over-regulate and under-plan.” (Rocco Ferraro, personal interview, 04/13/09). The county has recognized that if they have to compete with other states, they must streamline the regulatory process. The county’s marketing has also been good, and finally, “they’ve made the right political connections to achieve their objectives” (Rocco Ferraro, personal interview, 04/13/09).

Importantly, political integration rather than balkanized governance assists in and policy and regulatory overhaul—actions that are necessary in creating more nimble governance that can accommodate shifting economic factors. Indeed, county economic development officials have pointed to their economic policies as being more effective and aggressive than, for example, the policies of their counterparts in Albany County without taking into account some of the county’s inherent advantages. For example, although Saratoga County is heavily interdependent with the rest of the Albany-Schenectady-Troy
metropolitan area, public officials rarely seem to acknowledge this publicly. If they acknowledge it at all, the overall discussion usually surrounds the ways in which the quality of life in Saratoga County far exceeds that of Troy or Albany, and that if Saratoga County was to collaborate more with the rest of the region, it would have to forego more resources than it would gain.

A 1994 editorial in the local paper called attention to articles in *American Demographics* and the *Wall Street Journal (WSJ)* that ranked Saratoga County as one of the top counties in the country in terms of population growth, education, and wealth. The editorial quoted the *WSJ*, which argued that Saratoga and similar places, “have attracted business and families looking for relief from the crime, congestion, expensive housing and poor schools endemic in cities and now encroaching on the suburbs” (*The Saratogian*, March 12, 1994). The editorial, however, omitted the factors that led to the undesirable conditions in many inner cities and what role Saratoga County and other more privileged areas ought to play in the regional economy.

Indeed, the political and business leadership in Saratoga County have placed little attention on cooperative metropolitan issues, especially in regards to matters facing the cities of Albany, Schenectady, and Troy. Also compelling is that the leadership in the county has been developing and deploying policies that act at odds with what officials and civic groups had begun to put in place in Saratoga Springs in the mid-1990s. For example, whereas the city is attempting to control and manage growth that will add to the aesthetic, and therefore economic appeal of the city, the County seems to be promoting unfettered growth in the classic sense of Stone’s (1989) *corporate regime* or what Miranda and Rosdil (1995) would label as a *classic boosterism regime*. Unlike in
Saratoga Springs in which private organizations such as the Open Space Project (Saratoga PLAN) and the Preservation Foundation took the lead in developing a balanced-growth approach policy for the city, in Saratoga County, government officials seem to be in the “driver’s seat” in regards to the type of growth and development that they would like to see happen in the county. For example, an editorial in the local newspaper noted that:

Saratoga County has brought out its economic development arsenal and is hitting the targets, boom, boom, boom: a Frito-Lay warehouse in Halfmoon, the doubling of Alliant Foodservice in Clifton Park, an American Tissue plant in Waterford, and an Ace Hardware warehouse and possibly a Home Depot in Wilton, all announced this week. These businesses didn’t choose Saratoga County simply because it’s a lovely place to live and work. Businesses are wooed with grants, loans, and tax breaks. And all of these things are available in Saratoga County, thanks to aggressive economic development officials and a county government willing to provide financial incentives (The Saratogian, June 21, 1996).

Although economic growth is a top concern among county officials, the editorial seems to suggest that fear and competition are important motivators in the process of attracting development. The editorial continues by asserting:

One can question whether Saratoga County is being too generous to businesses that would have located here anyway. But better to be competitive than to sit back while the more desperate communities snag the jobs (The Saratogian, June 21, 1996).

Similar logic can be found in the words of Bruce Lenvinsky, Principal of Merlin Construction & Development in Saratoga Springs. Levinsky explains in an editorial in the local paper that the public officials in Saratoga Springs need to reorganize the government so that it can compete with its neighbors for new business and the accompanying tax base. He also states that, “City government can no longer be a host parasite that invites developers to the party and then allows them to be chewed up and
devoured by the system. City government and its planning and zoning boards must become user-friendly” (Kennedy, 1994). The overall tone of the argument surrounds competition and allowing more autonomy to the private sector.

Another article about employment and economic growth in Saratoga County takes it a step further and discusses the strategies that officials in the county hope to pursue to encourage economic growth, even if it comes at the expense of its neighbors. The article explains how the SEDC and DCG Development of Clifton Park, witnessing the large numbers of Saratoga County residents who commute to Albany and Schenectady for jobs, are working to relocate jobs from those cities to Saratoga County. Moving office workers from Albany to areas along the Adirondack Northway (Interstate 87) in Saratoga County would be a substantial boon for development companies such as DCG Development and others. Saratoga County Supervisor, David R. Meager, a Republican from the town of Malta, south of Saratoga Springs, applauded the idea, as did another County Supervisor, Phil Klein, a Republican from Saratoga Springs who works for developer John Wise, the owner of Wise Insurance of Saratoga Springs.

Not surprisingly, Michael Breslin, the Democratic Albany County Executive, decried the idea saying:

If Saratoga County is aiming efforts at luring business from Albany County to Saratoga County, I am disturbed. It's imitating the Governor Pataki example of economic development; that is to say, pitting one neighboring community against another seems to be contagious. Real economic development should be aimed at the creation of jobs (Crowe, 1996).

Economic Development Pool
Overall, there was little progress towards a regional approach to economic and urban development in the late 1990s. For example, Saratoga County officials, including Ken Green, President of the SEDC, were highly wary of a new tax-policy designed as part of Mario Cuomo’s State Commission on the Capital Region which sought, in addition to 63 other proposals, to collect taxes for a regional economic development plan. The plan would have had new businesses that located within the eight broader counties of the Capital Region contribute 50 percent of their property taxes to the new economic development fund. Green, however, scoffed at the plan and labeled it the, “Robin Hood effect” (Fasbach, 1997). He argued that because Saratoga County had been witnessing substantial business growth compared to elsewhere in the region, the plan would, indirectly, take money away from Saratoga County and redistribute it to the struggling Schenectady and Rensselaer counties. Indeed, in 1996, 1,000 new jobs were created in the county, and Green did not foresee any substantial slowdown in the coming years. Moreover, opponents such as Green argued that the proposal would mean a loss of local revenues for school districts.

Proponents of the plan argued that the regional economic development pool would allow for greater marketing and recruitment programs, the development of shared business sites, greater technical-, management-, and productivity assistance, the development of regional, national and international trade programs, regional travel and tourism programs, and the development and maintenance of business-assistance information systems (Fasbach, 1997). Although the regional economic development pool would not have altered any type of land use and development regulations, had the program taken effect, it would have provided an avenue for local officials to address at
least two important issues at the regional level. Indeed, some regionalists (Keating, 1993; Kresl, 1992) point towards regional economic development schemes as a way to enhance the competitiveness of metropolitan areas by inducing greater economies of scale and efficiency, yet many of their propositions have not been supported empirically (Norris and Frisken, 2001).

Beyond the competitiveness factor, a regional economic development program could have had the potential to develop and concentrate business sites in fewer and/or more centralized locations. This factor is important in that the potential for public transportation and even bicycle-commuting is much greater in areas in which employment and business sites are agglomerated or clustered. Conversely, where offices and employment centers are comparatively scattered, every mode but automobile commuting becomes problematic.

The success of attracting jobs to Saratoga County made the regional economic development pool seem like a liability to the county. The county’s achievements, however, did not come without a cost. For example, the luring of Quad/Graphic Inc. illustrates the lengths that Saratoga County officials had gone towards attracting business to the area. In 1983, with assistance from the SEDC and the Saratoga County IDA, Quad/Graphics Inc., a privately owned printing company based in Wisconsin, opened a plant in Saratoga Springs. The Saratoga County IDA offered substantial assistance to the company including $16 million worth of bonds to assist with the plant construction. The IDA’s deal has also saved the company over $6 million in property, sales, and other taxes since 1984. Part of the deal consists of a ten-year property tax exemption on each building at the plant site. Despite the significant revenues that the company generates,
company President, Harry V. Quadracci, has stated that the government assistance offered by local and state lawmakers has made a substantial difference in the company’s operation (Denn, 1998).

The AMD Semiconductor Plant

The luring of high-tech giant, AMD would amount to a project that made Quad Graphics’ courtship look like the work of amateurs. The loss of the RPI tech campus in North Greenbush in the late 1990s as a potential site for a major semiconductor operation did not deter business and political leaders in the region from continuing their search for a major firm to settle in the area. In fact, Robert Turner, a professor of government at nearby Skidmore College, noted that development officials incorporated many of the lessons learned from the failure to attract a plant to North Greenbush (Robert Turner, personal interview, 05/28/09). First, Ken Green from the SEDC and other partners visited semiconductor sites in Austin, Texas and Germany, and worked on forging networks and relationships with those firms. Second, the SEDC and other partners, including the large utility National Grid, worked to secure all the necessary permits and environmental reviews in order for preclearance and made the site shovel-ready for the firm to begin construction. Third, these entities made the necessary political connections vital towards securing a firm. Finally, better public relations with the communities in which the project would lie made a significant difference.

This work was made easier in light of the broad political integration in Saratoga County that existed in comparison to the other counties in the region. For example, leaders at the county level, including Green, had strong relationships with the right town officials. This is important given that it was local opposition in North Greenbush that
killed the project in Rensselaer County. This time the favored site of the project lied south of Saratoga Springs in the semi-suburban, semi-rural towns of Malta and Stillwater. Seventy-five percent of the site was in Malta, while Stillwater contained the rest.

The exact location would be Luther Forest, an area encompassing thousands of acres that had been initially developed by Thomas C. Luther, a local businessman from the neighboring town of Ballston Spa, in 1898. The site that Luther expanded from an initial 100 acres to nearly 7,000 became one of the largest pine forest plantations in the Northeast. Forestry, however, would later be usurped by industrial and high tech development. Developed in 1945, one of the most notable projects within the site was the Hermes Project Rocket Test Site. Another tenant included the Wright-Malta Corporation, a firm that also specialized in defense-related engineering pursuits.

The site would be consistently altered in the coming years. The area has proven popular for both residential and business growth because of its strategic location between Albany and Saratoga Springs along the Adirondack Northway. For example, from the 1970s to the present, developers built residential subdivisions containing more than 1,200 homes throughout much of the 7,000 acres. Apart from the housing subdivisions, 650 acres of land still remained for high tech development—a far higher figure than the plot that had been marketed in North Greenbush. The SEDC also liked the site because of its compacted soil and by the fact that it was not located near any rail lines—a major factor in that vibrations disrupt the manufacture of microchips (Michael Tucker, personal interview, 6/23/09).

But did local political leaders even want the plant? Importantly, local officials had told Green and Kelley during a Saratoga County economic development summit at
Skidmore College in 1998 that they desired to bring high tech manufacturing and research businesses to the county. Green drew on this as a sign of public support for pursuing these types of companies (Crowe, 2004b). With Luther Forest lying within two towns, the project site would have to clear the town boards of both Malta and Stillwater. Meanwhile, before a site application was debated, SEDC paid to fly Malta and Stillwater officials to Chandler, Arizona where Intel had a major operation. Here public officials took a survey of the factory and the community (Crowe, 2004b).

Because of economic development interests, some local officials, however, had views that were initially favorable to the project. This speaks to the salience of Saratoga County’s integrated political structure. Because town supervisors from across the county constitute much of 23 member county Board of Supervisors, Republican town supervisor of Malta, David Meager, for example, had served not only at the county level, but also as the head of the Saratoga County Economic Development Committee. Having served as town supervisor since 1972, Meager had considerable clout in Malta and was responsible for eliminating a proposed county garbage incinerator in the town in the 1980s. He had also served as the Chairman of the County Board of Supervisors in 1976 (Crowe, 2003a).

Meager also had direct ties to Ken Green and the SEDC in that the county had contracted with SEDC to manage its Empire Zone Program which provided tax breaks and incentives to companies. Meager, as Economic Development Committee chairman, also headed the county’s Empire Zone Board. Conscious of any appearances of conflicts of interest over the Luther Forest project, in 2002 Meager resigned his committee post. Art Johnson, the Republican town supervisor of Wilton, subsequently replaced Meager on the committee (Crowe, 2003a).
J. Gregory Connors, the town supervisor of Stillwater, also supported the Luther Forest project. Connor’s noted, “This is such an important project. It means so much to the residents of Stillwater and to the residents of the Capital Region. We’re on the same page with the town of Malta and the SEDC. It’s still a critical period” (Crowe, 2004c). Connors’ support for the project strengthened when an agreement was reached between Stillwater, the SEDC, and the Saratoga County IDA in regards to school financing. In effect, the IDA would ensure that school taxes from the town’s portion of the Luther Forest property would continue to go to the Stillwater district after considerable tax breaks would be granted to AMD. Because the SEDC staffs the various IDA’s in Saratoga County, policy cohesion and formulation was easier to achieve making for an overall streamlined process that benefited the project (Michael Tucker, personal interview, 6/23/2009).

In addition, the interest of the towns does not escape the Saratoga County IDA as it may in other counties in the region. For example, Raymond Callanhan, the Chairman of the Board of the Saratoga IDA, is also the town supervisor of Ballston, a community located directly west of Malta (Saratoga County IDA, 2009). In comparison, the Rensselaer County IDA has no one that represents municipalities on its board of directors, only local business leaders (State of New York, Authority Budget Office, 2009).

Finally, as opposed to North Greenbush, both county and local officials, including the mayor of Round Lake, a village inside the town of Malta, believed that the project would be the impetus for new infrastructure in the area. This was important given that rapid population growth in the county was beginning to strain existing infrastructure. For
example, the new water system that many county leaders strongly desired would only be feasible if a chip-fabrication plant located in Malta. Moreover, new roads in the area were also desired and Luther Forest construction would expedite the projects. Because most Saratoga County officials, including those on the Board of Supervisors strongly advocated for the project, and because local officials comprised the county administration, momentum for the project was mutually reinforced by a kind of “echo chamber” process.

After considerable environmental review as well as the project passing the respective town planning boards, in the summer of 2004 the towns of Malta and Stillwater approved the Luther Forest site for nanotechnology and semiconductor companies. With substantial funding from the state, including a $4.8 million grant and funding from the SEDC, Malta subsequently purchased 1,186 acres from the Luther Forest Corp. (Crowe, 2005). The groundwork had now been laid for the transformation of the site into a high tech campus.

Saratoga County, therefore, acted largely as the developer for the project, and by subsequently turning the project over to the Luther Forest Technology Campus, a subsidiary of the SEDC, an entity had been created that could the sign a deal with a prospective chip manufacturer—one that would include massive government subsidies. Before the SEDC went to state officials for the start-up funds, however, it organized a forum with some of the biggest players in the chip fabrication business, notably Sematech, a non-profit consortium of major semiconductor manufacturers that provides research and development assistance. The SEDC worked initially with Senator Joseph Bruno, who represented the district. It counted on Bruno to subsequently lobby Governor
Pataki and Speaker of the New York State House of Representatives, Sheldon Silver-D, for an incentive package (Ken Green, personal interview, 07/10/2009).

State leaders, whom had worked hard to attract a major semiconductor firm since the 1980s, would poor huge sums of public funds to lure a prospective technology company, specifically Advanced Micro Devices (AMD). The Pataki Administration assembled an assistance package to AMD that totaled roughly $1.2 billion worth of state, local, and federal funding. The subsidies included a $500 million grant to pay for its building and manufacturing equipment, $150 million for research and development assistance, $280 million for road and infrastructure upgrades, and $250 million of tax incentives and breaks coming from the state’s Empire Zone program.

Governor Pataki and Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno lauded the deal and argued that the package would pave the way for New York’s Hudson Valley to become the next Silicon Valley. Justification for the lucrative package arose from the estimated $3.2 billion that AMD would invest into the plant as well as the thousands of jobs the plant would create. Leaders estimated the plant would create 2,000 initial construction jobs, 1,500 permanent jobs at the plant itself, and nearly 7,000 support or ancillary jobs. The support jobs would range from other tech companies choosing to locate near AMD to new employment derived from servicing the plant’s workers and operations, including positions in retail, restaurant, janitorial, shipping, and transportation (Rulison, 2006).

Ultimately, the SEDC argued that the $1.2 billion package was similar to incentives given to computer chip manufacturers in other regions, both foreign and domestic, and that, through salaries and tax revenues, the $1.2 billion would be recouped in as little as three years (Ken Green, personal interview, 07/10/2009).
Doubts and Concerns

To the surprise of many, substantial physical groundwork for plant began in Luther Forest before AMD had even finalized its plans to locate at the site. Ken Green, of the SEDC, noted that preliminary site-work was necessary given that semiconductor firms rarely locate in sites that are not “shovel ready.” Noting AMD’s tenuous financial position compounded by its struggling market position relative to Intel, its chief rival, leaders at the local and state level expressed concerns surrounding whether any of the plans would actually materialize. The picture grew more complicated in 2008 when AMD, in an effort to bolster its revenues and competitiveness, spun off its manufacturing operations in the form of a multibillion-dollar joint venture with Advanced Technology Investment Co., an investment firm formed by the government of Abu Dhabi. The new firm would be called Global Foundries.

The spin-off complicated the financial incentives with the state and federal governments in that Global Foundries, because of its quasi domestic-foreign status, would now need to maneuver through new legal and regulatory hurdles in order to receive public subsidies. The deal, in particular, would have to be approved by the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS), a panel within the U.S. Department of the Treasury headed by Henry Paulson. Shareholders in Abu Dhabi, whom had invested between $8 and $10 billion in the project, also had to approve the deal (Rulison, 2009). Finally in the spring of 2009, AMD and Global Foundries cleared the remaining hurdles and officially announced plans to move forward with what now had become a $4.6 billion project.
Local Response

Because the build up to AMD’s decision began more than four years prior to the company’s official announcement, local leaders and residents had already come to their own conclusions over the costs and benefits of the plan. Most of the discussion regarding the pros and cons of the factory occurred in 2004 and 2005, when the initial plans had been examined. All in all, the project evoked mixed reactions among local residents. While many feared the extra traffic, noise, development, and the loss of forests and open space, others welcomed the project, mindful of the potential employment opportunities and addition to the area’s tax base.

Citizens for Responsible Growth was one group that came out in opposition to the project early on. The group was present at a community meeting in 2004 that attracted 250 residents from Malta and neighboring Stillwater. Most who attended opposed the plant. Fearing the project would trigger additional urban sprawl, tax existing public services, and lead to adverse heath impacts, including the fear of chemical spills, Citizens for Responsible Growth attempted to persuade, albeit largely in vain, town officials particularly keen on the project. ARISE, a coalition of non-profit and faith-based community partners whose focus surrounds incorporating social justice and equal opportunity measures into public policy, advocated for inclusion measures in regards to jobs and employment. For example, the coalition wanted specific guidelines drafted that would require any contractor involved with the site construction operation to hire a minimal and specified number of people of color and workers from low income communities and neighborhoods (Crowe, 2004a).

In addition to concerns over traffic, pollution, sprawl, and employment access,
critics of the project zeroed in on the lucrative public subsidies central to advancing the project. They pointed out that the $1.2 billion in subsidies amounted to $1 million per job created. Supporters of the project, however, touting the 7,000 support jobs predicted to be generated from the plant, argued that the $1 million figure was misleading. In addition, proponents contended that many of the plant’s workers and nearly all of the ancillary workers would be locals. Furthermore, the SEDC framed the project as bringing needed infrastructure updates to the county including a new water plant and a new highway interchange (Michael Tucker, personal interview, 6/23/2009). Overall, backers of the project argued that it would result in a marked improvement in the standard of living for local residents.

Despite the importance of all of these issues, one of the most pressing concerns involved transportation. With nearly 4,000 additional vehicles projected to travel within Malta and Stillwater, where would all of this traffic go? The state responded in 2006 with plans to build a new highway by-pass in Round Lake, a village inside the town of Malta. The new $29 million, 1.9-mile road would run from the Northway to the Luther Forest site. Most of the land in the right-of-way would be taken through eminent domain. The mayor of Round Lake supported the project, arguing it would divert cars and traffic congestion away from the village’s streets, and Senator Joseph Bruno lauded the highway as he called it the first step towards enhancing construction and development at Luther Forest (Yusko, 2007). Indeed, it was Bruno that secured the federal and state funding necessary for the project.

Not everyone was happy about the road site, however. Residents near the proposed highway worried that new residential development would now sprout near the
highway, spoiling the rural feel of their neighborhood. Saratoga PLAN also attempted to shift the site of the highway but was unsuccessful. The organization favored a roadway design more compatible with their existing network of trails. They also owned land along the right-of-way that would be taken via eminent domain. In a letter to the Capital District Transportation Committee, Alane Chinian, executive director of the organization, explained that, “The Round Lake Bypass and the Luther Forest Road system projects, as currently designed, do not provide trail connections that encourage alternative transportation methods. The proposed bypass merely reroutes the existing Malta Trolley Line {owned by Saratoga PLAN} and the Zim Smith Trail without connecting these two important trail links to the Luther Forest trail System and/or to each other. It is an important missed opportunity” (Crowe, 2006). Despite these calls, the state’s plan for the highway remained unchanged.

The roadway project also included the installation of a 5,600-foot water line extension running from Corinth to Luther Forest. This is important in that water had become a very contentious issue within Saratoga County upon the announcement of AMD’s initial plans. Speculation over AMD’s choice of Luther Forest largely advanced the water project. A secure and reliable water supply was necessary for any major semiconductor firm to consider the Saratoga County site (Robert Turner, personal interview, 05/28/09). Saratoga County officials would eventually favor a $66 million water plan that would involve constructing a water filtration plant in the town of Moreau on the Hudson River and then diverting the water through a 28-mile line along the Northway corridor to Malta.
The SEDC supported the water line and signed a contract to buy water for Luther Forest. In doing so they took advantage of their connections with the Board of Supervisors. Paul Sausville, the current town supervisor of Malta noted:

{SEDC} had to go to the county {to get a water system}. The town wasn’t going to do that. So they had to work their relationships with the County Board of Supervisors to convince {them}. And how was it going to be viable? They didn’t have any customers! They had to convince all of the County Board of Supervisors to stick their neck out on a limb and begin the financing of a water system for the county when there were no customers. That took quite a huge leap of faith. You need to have some good, strong relationships. There’s a lot of discussion behind the scenes, friendships are tapped into in that whole process (Paul Sausville, personal interview, 10/23/2009).

Eventually, Ballston and Wilton agreed to buy water from the county. But this still was not enough for two of the county’s five Democratic supervisors. Democrats Cheryl Keyrouze and Joanne Yepsen, both representing Saratoga Springs, voted against the project. In addition to apprehension that not enough users existed to support the line, they worried it would lead to other preventable problems. Keyrouze explained, “I think down the road we may find out the river is not the best source, and the sprawl that will result from this plan will cost taxpayers money, along with traffic and congestion” (Hornbeck, 2007). Leyrouze and Yepsen, however, were outvoted by the rest of the board members and the water line moved to the next stage of advancement.

A decision between the SEDC and Malta to preserve considerable acreage in the tech park as green space eventually dampened much of the local opposition to the AMD project. In fact, Luther Forest would contain 619 acres of designated wooded areas and 109 acres of preserved park areas (Luther Forest Technology Campus, 2009). Importantly, the SEDC made this known to residents with mailed fliers. Meanwhile, local proponents of the project noted that the SEDC showed a great willingness to seek
compromises and address concerns of the local town boards (Mertens, 2003). Paul Sausville of Malta explained,

{SEDC} came to the planning board in the town of Malta, and we had an outcry of people—I was chairing the planning board at the time—and we listened to them and respected their ideas and responded to them. And it passed the planning board after a number of meetings by a four to three vote. It then went to the town board. And the town board was skeptical, asked a lot of questions, negotiated the legislation to the benefit of our town’s people, required that there be host community benefits for example. We insisted that they not have their own commercial identity, that we’d have a downtown commercial identity. There was give and take. Again, the relationship that {SEDC} built with the town and the townspeople to well over fifty meetings we had. It was all about relationship building. I can’t emphasize this enough. (Paul Sausville, personal interview, 10/23/2009).

Overall, the political linkages and strong relationships between the towns, the SEDC, and the county facilitated discussions and compromises between the various parties. When asked about the key difference between North Greenbush and Malta, whereby Malta succeeded in securing support for a chip fabrication plant and North Greenbush did not, Paul Sausville noted:

Everybody’s on the same page, working as a team, having those relationships. Because you’re dealing with one {political} party here essentially in Saratoga County, there’s automatically these bridges that have been built between individuals, these relationships that are trusting relationships that exist. If you have people fighting over every issue, when the relationships weren’t strong enough and the trust wasn’t there…And when you get into party conflicts where people are just being disagreeable, they disagree just to be disagreeable, then things become counter productive… (Paul Sausville, personal interview, 10/23/2009).

Analysis and the Work of Majority Leader Bruno

New York’s and Saratoga County’s success in attracting a major semiconductor firm to Luther Forest was due to a number of important factors. Politics, both state and local, were salient in this regard. Once the local communities were on board, the political pull of Joseph Bruno could now be tapped. Bruno represented the State Senate district in
which Luther Forest is located. Having been Majority Leader of the Senate at the time, Bruno had been a part of all of the key negotiations surrounding the project. As Rocco Ferraro explains:

> In New York State politics, negotiations are a key component of whether or not you’re going to get the money or not. And those negotiations only take place with people who know each other…And being Majority Leader in the State of New York where all decisions are made behind closed doors, regardless of being Republican or Democrat, the three men in the room make all the decisions for all the other seventeen million people in the state. That’s the way they operated, and Senator Bruno knew how to play the system perfectly. His strategy, his approach was establishing the relationships that were necessary to achieve what he had to get done for his constituencies, and it was the fight by his constituencies to get that done” (Rocco Ferraro, personal interview, 04/13/09).

Bruno’s work with the project was crucial in that he subsequently championed the project to Governor Pataki and Speaker Silver. Joseph Bruno’s influence in state government also secured money for many other projects in the Capital Region, perhaps fostering a more attractive image of the region to large companies. For example, arguing that expanded air service was imperative for economic development, Bruno secured millions for a new and greatly enlarged Albany International Airport terminal that opened in 1998. Bruno also secured significant funding for Albany Nanotech. The new campus adjacent to the University at Albany currently employs about 1,000 workers. “{This} cutting edge research and development” going on in Albany is also attractive to major semiconductor firms (Robert Turner, personal interview, 05/28/09).

Local politics and the ROS were also crucial ingredients for the success of the project. In fact, Rensselaer County had also been part of Joseph Bruno’s district, yet it was not able to secure the semiconductor plant that leaders in the county had sought and worked towards in the mid-1990s. Indeed, there was substantial political dissent
surrounding the site which was located near the hamlet of Defreestville. Residents were divided as were the town representatives who would end up voting 3-2 to discontinue the environmental review.

Aware of community opposition, the well-funded, highly organized and integrated SEDC—a product of the county’s substantial resources for economic development—undertook substantial efforts to hold meetings and answer questions with town officials and residents about the project. As a way to calm fears and unknowns about chip fabrication, Ken Green even flew town officials, including those from fire, police, and public health to operational semiconductor sites in Chandler, Arizona and Burlington, Vermont. Still, the town representatives in Malta and Stillwater, however, were not as politically divided and this, once more, speaks to the issue of the relative demographic homogeneity and political integration of Saratoga County. These include the linkages between towns and the county as illustrated by the example of town supervisor Meager’s role in economic development on the County Board of Supervisors. Despite the growing political diversity of Saratoga Springs, the rural and suburban towns in the county have remained fairly politically homogeneous. Because of this projects encounter less political interference and have a greater likelihood of proceeding. Indeed, apart from representatives in increasingly Democratic Saratoga Springs, the Board of Supervisors broadly supported the county’s water and other infrastructure plans that would have far-reaching consequences on future county development.

Other factors also impacted the decision. For example, Albany’s nanotech campus near the State University of New York at Albany, has emerged and prospered since the semiconductor controversy in Rensselaer County. Organized by state leaders, including
former Governor George Pataki, Senator Joseph Bruno, and House Speaker Sheldon Silver, nearly $5 billion has been invested in high-tech research and development during the last ten years at the Albany Center for Excellence in Nanoelectronics and the Rensselaer (RPI) Technology Park (Michael Tucker, personal interview, 6/23/2009). Part of this included the much-coveted decision by Sematech to locate at Albany Nanotech in 2007. These “clustering” investments not only made the Capital Region a more attractive option for a semiconductor firm, the region’s greater exposure to high-tech development may have tempered opposition in a few ways. First, residents in the region have not encountered the environmental impacts that were at the heart of the opposition in North Greenbush. Second, witnessing the operations and their relative success has perhaps tempered some of the fears of the unknown in regards to high-tech manufacturing and development.

Albany’s Harriman Campus

The political integration within Saratoga County also stands in contrast to that of Albany County and the City of Albany. Politics and economics in Albany have intertwined to make new development in the city complex and elusive. The starkest example is the redevelopment of the Averill Harriman State Office Building Complex, a 330-acre site that dominates much of the west side of Albany and could potentially transform a large portion of the city. Discussions and plans have been underway for more than a decade concerning the redevelopment of the site that houses numerous state agencies and nearly 8,000 state government employees.

The common understanding has been that much of the campus, with its 1960s structures has become obsolete and that complete or near-complete redevelopment of the
site is necessary. Many of the buildings have also stood vacant since the early 2000s when various state agencies moved into newly constructed, high-rise buildings in downtown Albany. The downtown buildings were built as part of a collaborative effort between the city of Albany and the State to bring state workers downtown as a way to revitalize the downtown business district.

The campus, possessing the automobile-centric, human-devoid layout that had been the “lingua franca” of the planning field in the 1950s and 1960s, seems outdated if not anachronistic today. Indeed, much of the campus’s acreage consists of surface parking lots ringed by a six-lane expressway as wide as the Northway in Saratoga County. The generous scale of the roadways and the site itself were the result of plans by the Dewey Administration in the 1950s to move up to 25,000 state workers to the campus. That vision was halted, however, when the mammoth South Mall (now the Empire State Plaza) was constructed in downtown Albany during the Nelson Rockefeller Administration. In fact, no more than 11,000 people were ever employed at the site, and as a result the campus’s atmosphere feels particularly austere and empty. Furthermore, the pedestrian-oriented street layout in much of the rest of Albany is absent. For example, if one includes State Highway 85 and surface streets, one would have to cross 12 lanes of traffic to get from the adjacent Melrose residential neighborhood to the campus. Ultimately, the campus failed to bring much of any urban vitality to the city of Albany.

The Pataki Administration thus began to study new uses for the Harriman Campus and determined that a mixed-use site interwoven with parks and 3.6 million square feet of offices, housing, and retail stores offered the best approach. One key ingredient for the site would be a high tech campus linked with the other parts of the new district. With the
University at Albany’s main campus lying adjacent to the complex, the high tech and university communities would also be ideally situated to engender new public-private partnerships and develop collaborative ventures that would add to the economic vitality of the entire region.

The idea sounded great. Not only would an underused site be redeveloped into a thriving new center for high tech development, Albany, a geographically land-locked city with a struggling tax base, could reap the middle class population growth as well as the property- and sale tax revenues that would accumulate from the new commercial entities inside the district. It would be a win-win situation for the city and the state.

The project, however, has been bogged down for over a decade because of political disagreements. The political contentions in many ways are directly related to the fragile economic standing of Albany. One of the main disagreements rests on the type of housing included in the plans. The redevelopment calls for more than 1,000 new residential units consisting of apartments, condos, and townhouses. Although Albany is desperate for the population growth that 1,000 new units would accommodate, Mayor Gerald “Jerry” Jennings fears that the new district, designed in a New Urbanist fashion with mixed uses, would effectively and strongly compete with housing in downtown Albany, particularly the middle-income Center Square neighborhood (Rocco Ferraro, personal interview, 04/13/09).

Indeed, Center Square, a gentrifying neighborhood comprised of historic townhouses and apartments built in the mid- to late Nineteenth Century, stands as the premier downtown neighborhood in Albany. The area, diverse and vibrant, draws a number of young professionals, graduate students, and retired or “empty-nester”
households. Mayor Jennings fears that the new Harriman district would compete for the same types of households as the historic, downtown neighborhoods, and that because of this, demand and thus property values there would *decline*. Subsequently, the city would be faced with increasing housing vacancies and abandonment in the downtown area. With nearly 1,000 abandoned structures already present in the older neighborhoods of the city, the mayor’s fears are probably understandable.

Residents living near the campus also expressed concerns about the potential problems that could result from the redevelopment (Churchill, 2008c). The neighborhoods bordering the campus are primarily middle class with single-family homes, and like the majority of residents living in middle class neighborhoods (Gainsborough, 2002), they strongly desire to keep the existing qualities of their surroundings intact. They feared that the campus’s transformation, a site in which activity currently only occurs during the daytime hours, into a multi-use site, would increase noise, traffic, and activity and thus erode the tranquil ambience of the neighborhood. With uptown middle class homeowners being a key constituency of the Jennings Administration, they had the ear of the mayor and a number of other public officials.

Because of these impediments as well as changes in the master plan that the new Spitzer Administration desired, redevelopment of the campus remains far off on the horizon, imbuing the entire process with a thoroughly anticlimactic impression. At this point the Harriman site represents a missed opportunity for the city. It also illustrates the political and economic dynamics with which Albany is forced to contend in comparison to Saratoga County and its communities therein which can operate in a context of relative
economic homogeneity and political integration, with far fewer geographical constraints (including existing neighborhoods) to obstruct new development.

**Future Issues and Infrastructure Needs**

Political circumstances in Saratoga County, however, could easily change if development continues at a rapid pace. For example, continued rapid growth could easily compromise the quality of life factors that induced people to move to Saratoga County in the first place. Increasing levels of noise, traffic, and housing construction could easily lead to a backlash among long-term residents. This has already occurred in the comparatively left-leaning Saratoga Springs, in which its leadership has been moving towards preservation and managed growth. Furthermore, increasing populations require more services including roads, water and sewage systems, and schools. Increasing service needs, in turn, beget higher taxes. Rocco Ferraro explains,

> Maybe you’ll talk fifty-years from now in retrospect…and revisit Saratoga County and see if they’ve been able to continue that lifestyle that was established today over the longer term. With the changing demographics, it’s an open question. In terms of the costs of providing services, they continue to go up. Can we afford to continue that sprawl-like pattern of development? (Rocco Ferraro, personal interview, 04/13/09)

In truth, Rensselaer, Albany and Schenectady Counties’ earlier growth led to the need for more and a greater complexity of services and agencies. Saratoga County’s growth, in contrast, has been much more recent. Therefore, the county has not put in place much of the service needs and infrastructure that will be required if they want to continue to grow. As a public official in North Greenbush explains, “the towns in Saratoga County might have a health office, whereas here {in Rensselaer County} they have an entire health department. Albany County is set up like we are too. Our population was much, much higher, but they’re {Saratoga County} getting into the cost of a higher
population, more services, more roads” (North Greenbush public official, personal interview, 02/11/09).

Despite its growth, at this point Saratoga County has been able to finance a considerable amount of its development and infrastructural expansion (most notably Luther Forest and the new water line) through state funding. The same cannot be said for less “glamorous” but critically important projects in the older, urbanized sections of the metropolitan area. For instance, the CDRPC estimates that in order to ensure environmentally sound waste water management, including limiting contaminated run-off into the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers, the three central-city counties in the region will require up to $1 billion in new capital investment for sewer and wastewater infrastructure updates. (Rocco Ferraro, personal interview, 04/13/09).

Although wastewater treatment plants in Albany, Schenectady, and Troy can manage normal flows, heavy periods of precipitation are prone to overtax the system. Under normal circumstances, household, commercial, and industrial sewage flows into sanitary sewers which are separate from storm sewers. During periods of heavy rainfall, however, the flow rate can increase to, for example in Rensselaer County’s system, 150-187 percent of capacity. The consequence of this is the surge of untreated sewage into the Hudson River. Furthermore, in the towns with less sewage infrastructure than the cities, nearly all of the contaminated runoff heads straight into streams and creeks that subsequently discharge into the Hudson River (Bunnell et al, 2007). Despite these hazards, funding for these projects has not been forthcoming. Moreover, the $1 billion figure for updates is curiously similar to the $1.2 billion that Luther Forest in Saratoga County secured from the state.
Conclusion

The numerous examples conveyed in this chapter suggest that Saratoga County has been particularly adept at attracting investment and luring new development into the county. It has possessed disciplined leadership and employed smart and strategic policies, and the dividends of such inputs have indeed been impressive. Notwithstanding this, one cannot ignore the salience of access to pivotal political leaders, political integration within the county, and the manner in which these factors combined with the favorable regional context for Saratoga County to become the central beneficiary of the ROS.

Furthermore, metropolitan political fragmentation is once more at work in the process. Although counties do not enjoy as many authorities as cities, they continue to have key authorities within local government that preempt any type of regional collaborations and agreements which above all else are voluntary. Saratoga County’s Board of Supervisors, for example, has the ability to make important decisions surrounding taxation, services, and incentives. The latter two involve everything from determining major road and infrastructure projects, to tax abatements and direct grants given to the managers of capital. In fact, although counties represent a wider and more inclusive territory and constituency than cities, towns, or villages, within the metropolitan context, they still correspond to political fragmentation and the fragmented authorities that rest within an entire region.

Given that fragmented governance still exists between counties above and beyond the level of cities, towns, and villages, what can be done to bridge the stratified regional opportunity structure that exists within the region? To help answer this, in the next
chapter I turn to a discussion and analysis of various organizations and agencies that are involved with growth and development issues at the regional level.

CHAPTER 9: ORGANIZATIONAL PURSUITs AND REGIONAL PROSPECTS IN THE CAPITAL REGION
In this chapter I turn to a discussion and analysis of various organizations and agencies that are working to advance inter-municipal coordination and/or regional-oriented programs in the Capital Region. The organizations and agencies include two private, non-profit groups as well as a quasi, public-private agency, and one public agency. The common factor these organizations share surrounds their concern for environmental and land use reforms. In addition, reforms and new projects have been sought in part by creating partnerships and coalitions with other organizations and local governments. Therefore, part of this chapter will examine how and why these partnerships and coalitions were formed, the processes involved in them, and the outcomes attained by such arrangements. These questions are embedded within the larger research goal: the extent to which these groups are facilitating regional cooperation and integration, or whether they are simply extending or reinforcing the stratified and fragmented regional status quo.

I focus on organizations and agencies engaged in regional environmental and land use reform for two primary reasons. First, substantive activities have been taking place in these types of groups, and second, prior research has largely ignored the undertakings of environmental and land use agencies in regards to the pursuit of regionalist goals. Most of the literature on regionalism has focused either on local government involvement in regionalist goals (Lewis, 1996; Lyons and Lowery, 1989; White, 2002) or the involvement of the business community in such concerns (Gainsborough, 2000; Kanter, 2000; Gainsborough, 2003; Leibovitz, 2003). Although important findings have emerged from these studies, this research aims at filling this notable gap in the regionalism literature.
Premised on prior research, my initial assumption heading into this chapter was that these organizations, while attempting to forge and implement policies that in the past had been largely absent, would face multiple hurdles along the way, most notably the continuing authorities granted to local governments through home rule. Simply speaking, nothing exists at the regional level with the same authorities that, Saratoga Springs, for example, possesses over land use.

Although general impediments exist, each of these organizations has worked within the fragmented and stratified region, albeit in different ways. Not surprisingly, this has produced varying outcomes. Of the four organizations/agencies examined, only one, the Hudson River Valley Greenway, has addressed through its programs both regional stratification and political fragmentation. The work of Saratoga PLAN, on the other hand, has addressed political fragmentation but not regional stratification, and in fact, I argue that some of their projects have maintained regional stratification. The Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission, in turn, has worked to reduce political fragmentation, but its programs and scope do not address regional stratification. Finally, the Environmental Clearing House or ECOS, is largely an environmental education body, and therefore it is difficult to measure whether or not its programs are having meaningful effects on these two factors. Therefore, I outline this group mainly to illustrate both the upside and pitfalls of membership-based organizations in regards to how they approach matters of regional import.

The findings in this chapter illustrate the difficulty and challenges of forging effective organizations that span local political units. Moreover, when such connections can be fostered, much of the ability for organizations and agencies to implement their
objectives rests on the continuing capacity to attract and sustain private contributions and local, state, and federal government funds. Be this as it may, a key finding in this chapter speaks to the significance of voluntary-based programs backed by the authority and legal framework of the state, which in this case applies to New York state government. Beyond their legal backing, the significance of public agencies in promoting regionalist goals is highlighted by their abilities to convene and copartner with other state agencies. Furthermore, because they receive public money, these groups are not reliant upon the same private contributions—and the interests they represent—on which the non-profit groups must subsist. Before the analysis of this one particular state agency: the Hudson River Valley Greenway, however, I outline two organizations that have attempted to reduce political fragmentation, albeit fragmentation simply within one particular county. I begin with Saratoga PLAN, while following up with the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission. Although Saratoga PLAN has accomplished notable goals, most of its activities have only occurred within one county in the Capital Region. Therefore, while enhancing political integration within Saratoga County, I also discuss some of the drawbacks that arise in regards to the promotion of regionalism based on how this organization is structured.

**Saratoga PLAN and County Development**

With local government officials doing little on their own to promote inter-municipal cooperation and collaboration, non-profit organizations have seen an important opening and a need to advance these goals. One of the organizations that expanded its reach into inter-municipal collaboration has been Saratoga PLAN (formerly the Saratoga Springs Open Space Project). Beginning largely as an organization that focused on
policy advocacy concerning development and land preservation within Saratoga Springs, with the coming of AMD and its anticipated auxiliary growth, county-wide planning became an increasingly important component for the group. A few of the organization’s programs seem to be assisting inter-municipal dialogue and coordination, albeit only within Saratoga County (apart from a few exceptions). Furthermore, despite their work on inter-municipal planning that addresses some of the negative externalities of political fragmentation, the organization’s programs have not done much to temper regional stratification. In fact, I argue that some of the initiatives being promoted by the organization are actually maintaining the stratified regional context, with Saratoga County building upon its heightened fiscal position within the region.

Until the early 2000s, Saratoga PLAN mainly operated inside Saratoga Springs and with individual landowners in rural areas of the county to protect farms and forested areas. The organization was active in the practice of developing conservation easements in which it partnered with private landowners to set aside land for conservation. The practice usually takes place on an ad-hoc basis when land becomes available. Therefore, long-range planning on a comprehensive scale is not typically involved—or possible. Private landowners and non-profit organizations, however, like conservation easements because even though the land remains on the public tax rolls, when the land is passed down to younger family members, conservation easements typically reduce estate taxes considerably. In addition, if the land is sold, the easement remains—granting the land trust or the government agency the authority to govern the terms of the easement (Saratoga PLAN, 2007). Still as Diane Metz, a community planner with the organization stated, “We can certainly protect more land by influencing policy than we can by buying
it up. We work with the county and within each municipality in the county {to achieve this}” (Diane Metz, personal interview, 09/25/08).

The public in Saratoga County by and large supports policies that protect open space and promote growth management. According to a poll commissioned by Saratoga PLAN that was undertaken by the Siena College Research Institute in 2006 with 1,002 respondents, seventy percent believed that Saratoga County was being developed too fast, while 52 percent said that the county was not doing enough to manage and protect the remaining open spaces in the area. Furthermore, of the 26 percent of the respondents who had heard of Saratoga PLAN, when given the choice of what the organization ought to be spending more resources on, 38 percent thought that the organization should “help communities plan for growth.” This compared to 27 percent who thought that the organization should “buy more open space” and 22 percent who stated that the organization “should promote parks and recreation for economic development” (Saratoga PLAN, 2006).

The public’s support of open space protection is probably premised on the visible fact that Saratoga County has lost 140,000 acres of farm and forested land to development since the 1960s (Stock, 2006). While the results of the survey suggest that public support exists for greater land management planning within their own communities, whether or not the public would support overarching regional policies affecting growth patterns is another question yet to be answered.

Assisting in Inter-Community Planning and Inter-County Activities

One of the tasks of the organization is to reach out to the various municipalities in the county and attempt to bring different stakeholders and community representatives
together. The organization’s Community Partner’s Program aims to achieve this. In particular it assists smaller communities that lack trained planning staff in technical aspects of community planning. Its main mission is to assist participating communities with their long-term planning so that their goals will complement and coordinate with the planning goals of neighboring communities. This is an important objective in that political fragmentation makes inter-municipal coordination highly elusive. Metz explains that the program provides, “financial support from particular towns that allows us to focus more planning attention on them. Malta, the Town of Saratoga, {and} Ballston, have all been creative partners, and we’ve sort of grandfathered in the Village of Round Lake” (Diane Metz, personal interview, 09/26/08).

The organization faces a challenging environment, however, because it has to largely seek out communities that are willing to work with it. Metz again explains:

We would love for {the communities} to come to us more. I have fantasies of them seeking out our approval on projects, and what not. But for the most part, we approach them. We recently had a regional planning effort, The Battlefields of Saratoga preservation and protection plan and we approached each of the municipalities within an area considered “Old Saratoga” and got a grant once we had everyone on board with it, and that’s a grant from the American Battlefields Protection Program to do an analysis of historic sites that are not yet protected, and that gives the towns additional planning tools. But it depends, the Town of Day recently sought us out and said can you help us with our comprehensive plan, and the Village of Round Lake sought us out so it’s a mix, but it’s usually us saying, would you like to play with us in our sandbox (laugh)” (Diane Metz, personal interview, 09/26/08).

Within land management, the Capital Region is a small world, and therefore it is not uncommon for staff at one agency to know or even work with employees at other local organizations. Although Saratoga County remains the organization’s central focus, the group is now forming partnerships with other organizations in the region, including the Washington County Agricultural Stewardship Association (ASA). Washington
County is still a primarily rural and agricultural region lying on the east bank of the Hudson River across from Saratoga County. Based in Greenwich, NY the organization works solely on farmland preservation. Diane Metz explains:

We certainly work with them on a number of issues, and in fact our new executive director is coming from ASA, so I think we’re going to be closer partners. When you think about agricultural land protection, there’s a tipping point when it actually makes sense to protect agriculture. There needs to be enough agriculture to support all of the industries that farmers need. You know, is there a big animal vet, is there a tractor repair place, and Washington County is located in a wonderful position in that they still are agricultural enough that if they protect it, they can actually keep that tipping point. So they’re in a unique position to be able to maintain themselves as really a breadbasket (Diane Metz, personal interview, 09/26/08).

The Washington County ASA has protected roughly 5,400 acres of farmland in the county over the last 15 years. Its board consists of local farmers as well as community planners and attorneys. In addition to noting the economic importance of agriculture, the organization also emphasizes the low service needs required for agriculture. For instance, it claims that for every tax dollar generated by farming, farmland requires only $0.16 in service needs. Assertions along these lines have become increasingly common in areas experiencing rapid suburbanization and growth in service requirements (Smart Growth America, 2009).

Maintaining Regional Stratification?

In 2003 Saratoga PLAN merged with the Land Trust of the Saratoga Region and began to operate with an increasingly county-wide outlook. In 2006 the organization, along with county officials, developed and drafted the Green Infrastructure Plan for Saratoga County and undertook a series of community workshops across the county to present the plan and obtain community feedback. The plan sets out comprehensive goals to protect working-farms, open spaces, and watersheds, while developing a coordinated
system of parks and recreational trails. The committee overseeing the process is formed of representatives from four major towns across Saratoga County including Clifton Park, Northumberland, Wilton, and Malta. Each of these towns has experienced rapid population growth over the last 30 years and the corresponding pressures of residential and commercial development. While the plan is a start, the actual fulfillment of its goals presents a very difficult undertaking. Nevertheless, Metz noted that:

The county has a Green Infrastructure Plan, which is unique in the state, and we’re quite proud of ourselves for that. Saratoga PLAN was actually the reason that that got started. We worked with all of the {county} supervisors and other legislators on the county level and convinced them that it was a good idea. We worked to get it through {the county bureaucracy} and helped get it adopted by the Board of Supervisors” (Diane Metz, personal interview, 09/26/08).

The anticipation of AMD’s arrival in Luther Forest made the Green Infrastructure Plan all the more prescient. Saratoga PLAN, working to influence development policy in relation to Luther Forest, was itself directly impacted in that the new Round Lake by-pass for the plant required the condemnation of land owned by the organization. Metz explained, “we want to be able to influence {Luther Forest} in a good way so that the county trails will connect with the historic, internal trail system. We want to be able to have a good connection there.” Metz explained that if trails connect, many of the new workers at the AMD plant will be able to use them for bicycle commuting. She noted that representatives from the company have explored the trails and if AMD should come, the company is very interested in providing that option for their workers. Metz noted, “AMD told us they anticipated that many of their employees had an interest in commuting by bicycle” (Diane Metz, personal interview, 09/26/08).

The implementation of the Green Infrastructure Plan required gaining the support of the County Board of Supervisors. Because the Board of Supervisors is comprised of
elected officials from the municipalities in the county, working with the individual communities was vital for the Green Infrastructure Plan as well as other “smart growth” development projects.

Although it is arguable that the plan, by incorporating a county-wide, coherent vision for greenfields protection and a network of trails and parks, has helped to counteract political fragmentation within Saratoga County by encouraging the various localities to coordinate many different aspects of planning, the plan may also boost or reinforce the county’s position at the top of the regional hierarchy. For example, the plan’s primary goals, which include preserving natural features, “heritage areas” (important historical sites), and “working landscapes” (farms, pastures, ranches), also serve to protect the county’s economic stature. Indeed, within the plan’s executive summary we read that:

By protecting our working farmlands and natural resources now, we can ensure the character of the county, the sense of place, will be part of our economic prospect for current and future generations…They help to sustain important economic, scenic, historic and recreational landscapes that attract residents and visitors to live, work, shop and recreate in Saratoga County. And, most importantly, protecting green infrastructure helps to maintain the intrinsic values of the county’s highly-respected landscape for future generations (Green Infrastructure Plan of Saratoga County, 2006).

In addition to this summary, Alane Ball-Chinian, executive director of Saratoga PLAN, stated in the Saratoga Business Journal that, “{in addition to quality of life, open space} is also good for the bottom line. Studies have shown that corporate CEOs consider quality of life for employees as a key factor in locating a business” (Stock, 2006).

To be sure, environmental concerns, including efforts to curb water pollution, have strongly motivated the supporters of the countywide plan, but the other major factor has been economic development. This component consists of two smaller parts:
maintaining natural and historic landscapes to safeguard the tourist-driven segment of the economy, and conserving greenfields to protect the quality of life and thus the investments of its new and existing residents.

In addition to the Green Infrastructure Plan, Saratoga Plan has been a supporter of an inter-county plan, which despite having admirable goals—including fostering additional inter-municipal coordination within Saratoga County, may also further reinforce many of the economic advantages of the county. The project is called Old Saratoga on the Hudson. Similar to the Green Infrastructure Plan, Old Saratoga aims to protect and enhance natural and historic features, particularly the battlefields and waterways in the county. Nevertheless, the project is by-and-large a means to end, rather than an end itself, with the objective being to protect and cultivate the county’s important tourist-based sector of the economy.

The $30 million project began in 2003. It is part of the larger Historic Saratoga-Washington on the Hudson Partnership, a new state commission created by then state assemblymen Roy McDonald with the assistance of Steve Englebright of Long Island and Jack McEneny of Albany. Funds for the new state commission stand at about $250,000 to $300,000 a year and come from a new line-item in the state budget (Diane Metz, personal interview, 09/26/08). McDonald, the former town supervisor of Wilton, had played a key role in the SEDC which brought in major projects, including distribution centers for Target and Home Depot to Saratoga County in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Having run for the seat vacated by the retirement of Joseph Bruno, McDonald now represents the region in the New York State Senate (Saratoga PLAN, 2006 Annual Report).
The project is an inter-municipal and inter-county effort to create new parkland and infrastructure in Saratoga and Washington Counties along the Hudson River that will connect various historic, scenic, and recreational sites. The municipalities involved with the project are the town of Saratoga, Schuylerville, Victory, the town of Greenwich, and the town of Easton. Saratoga PLAN itself secured funding for the initiative from the American Battlefield Protection Program of the National Park Service and the Saratoga County IDA. With part of the funds, Saratoga PLAN hired a planner/program manager to work with the six municipalities involved with the projects. Moreover, various other public and private sector officials were brought in to assist with the plans.

Besides developing a park system and a series of interconnected hiking and bicycling trails, the project aims to reopen boat traffic on the Old Champlain Canal and Harbor, permanently protect the Saratoga Apple Orchard and neighboring farmland from development, and work with the National Park Service and other partners to establish a regional visitor center. Indeed, the entire project aims to encourage new tourist-related development in what has been called “the drastic under-utilization” of the Hudson River area including its scenic and historic resources. Part of this includes the Waterfront Revitalization Area (WRA) that seeks to “clean-up” sites along the Hudson River, Champlain Canal, Fish Creek, and the Batten Kill River to, “enhance natural and cultural resources and stimulate additional tourism and economic revitalization” (Saratoga PLAN, 2006).

Part of the project also includes revitalizing the struggling river city of Schuylerville. To that end are plans to advance the New York State Department of Transportation’s (DOT) road reconstruction project in downtown Schuylerville that will
redevelop the district to emphasize pedestrian access. The project also seeks to rehabilitate historic structures downtown and make “adaptive reuse” of the city’s old industrial district and brownfields along the Hudson River. The goal of this component is to reduce uneven development and suburban sprawl by focusing on redevelopment in, and reuses of the existing built-up areas of the city.

Although the brownfields component is important in that it attempts to dampen sprawl and neighborhood divestment by reinvesting in already built-up areas, the program simply focuses on Saratoga- and to a lesser extent Washington County, not on the struggling, older river communities in Albany and Rensselaer Counties, for example. Because public funds through the New York State Department of State are critical for the ongoing operations of the project, the policy has also directed additional public money to the county. In turn, the funds are used to leverage additional investments from the private sector that, in theory, will strengthen the economic base of the county.

Overall, already one of the most prosperous parts of the state, in part through the efforts of Saratoga PLAN, additional state and federal monies are nonetheless being directed to Saratoga County. Moreover, the county’s established prosperity has arguably propelled the work of these initiatives in that to lure capital, one must already possess capital. In line with the ROS framework earlier developed, just as the resource-endowed nature of Saratoga Springs expedites the promotion of land preservation in that wealthier communities (more content with what they have)bestow use values to enhance exchange values, the same dynamic operates at the county level. Patrick Clear, executive director of ECOS, a regional environmental educational organization explains:

Saratoga County is a perfect example {of preserving open space and being pro-environment}. They are by far the best in the state in preserving open space. They
have the most active open space fund users for the state funds. They’re buying up tons of property. Saratoga PLAN, the land conservancy in the county, is very active with the county and the state…The success they’ve had up there is partially attributed to the economy. They have some very wealthy communities up there. And you will find that in wealthy communities, when they don’t need the tax base brought in for industry, they’re more open minded to preserving what they have, to preserve farms and rural areas. Whereas places that are more economically depressed—low incomes, high unemployment, they need jobs. They’re willing to sacrifice the town park for an industrial complex…{People in Saratoga County} have jobs. They just want nice, comfortable rural areas, and they’ve got the economy to support it…They want growth, but they’re doing a good job of controlling it, with the exception of some municipalities where the subdivisions are getting out of hand (Patrick Clear, personal interview, 02/04/09).

Ultimately, with its main focus as Saratoga County, Saratoga PLAN perhaps cannot be considered a truly regional organization. In fairness, though, the organization’s constituency has grown from simply Saratoga Springs a decade earlier to the entire county today. Furthermore, with its work surrounding the Old Saratoga on the Hudson initiative as well as with the Washington County ASA, the organization has also added key partners elsewhere in the region, notably in Washington County. In addition, programs like the Community Partners Program, Old Saratoga on the Hudson, and the Green Infrastructure Plan have all encouraged inter-municipal coordination and cooperation—acting as a counterweight to continuing local political fragmentation. Still, the organization’s mission revolves around the enhancement of the Saratoga County, which helps contribute to continued regional stratification.

Continuing on the topic of the groups that operate only within one county, I turn next to the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission, a quasi, public-private organization. Like Saratoga PLAN, this agency is centered only in one county: Albany, and specifically within three municipalities. The work of the agency is important, however, in that it spans urban and suburban jurisdictions and does have some level of authority over
development and land-use practices within its jurisdictional boundaries. Furthermore, whereas I argue that Saratoga PLAN’s activities are actually buttressing regional stratification with Saratoga County at the apex of the ROS, it does not appear that the same can be said of the next group’s work in Albany County.

Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission

Further inter-municipal coordination has arisen through the work of the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission. Because the Commission only works within Albany County, however, its work does not really impact regional stratification in any meaningful way. Before discussing its inter-municipal undertakings, however, I turn to a brief overview of the Commission. The Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission is a public-private partnership that was established by the New York State legislature in 1988 to oversee and protect what remained of the threatened Pine Bush, a geologically distinctive ecosystem that lies between Albany and the northern edges of Saratoga County. The Commission, housed within the State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), was formed primarily at urging of citizen groups, most notably the group Save the Pine Bush, whom had been working for decades to establish laws and bodies to protect the ecosystem from encroaching development within the municipalities of Albany, Guilderland, and Colonie. The Commission oversees about 3,000 acres of Pine Bush that has remained despite rapid suburban development over the last several decades.

Rather complex, the agency is a public benefit corporation made up of two state agencies including the DEC and State Parks, the City of Albany, the Town of Guilderland, the Town of Colonie, Albany County, and the Nature Conservancy which is
the world’s largest land preservation organization. The agency receives public and private funding, though the vast amount of operating funds comes from the state and federal government.

The agency works with all of the Commission members very closely, including the town supervisors of Guilderland and Colonie, and the mayor of Albany. This is important in light of the continual loss of the Pine Bush to development in all three municipalities. Even though the 3,000-acre study area boundary of the Commission is fairly delimited, it occupies parts of three different municipalities within which land management is overseen by representatives in each municipality. Therefore, land management within the Pine Bush is coordinated across municipal boundaries. The commission’s quarterly board meetings also provide an important venue for dialogue between the different municipalities that would otherwise not occur (at least not to the same extent). Chris Hawver notes:

When you have groups like ours, even though its small, it helps facilitate communications within {the various municipalities}, so it’s about a very focused issue: the Pine Bush, conservation, the environment, environmental education, that’s what we do. But it still fosters communication…Our board meetings alone bring the {Albany} County Executive, the Mayor of the city of Albany, the Town Supervisors of Colonie and Guilderland for two hours, quarterly, and yes we talk about the Albany Pine Bush, but they take the time to discuss other issues that may be impacting their municipalities, obviously taxation, maybe {the discussion} has something to do with water infrastructure (Chris Hawver, personal interview, 02/25/09).

Concerning development, the Commission works and engages with the other members of the board to determine future land use goals and priorities. By law the it has to produce and update a management plan every five years. The plan is fundamentally oriented around conservation and protection in a certain study area boundary. As a result, developers that wish to build within the study area boundary have to submit plans to the
Commission for review and comment. For example, if a developer wishes to build a hotel in Guilderland, the town’s planning department would have to send the development plans to the Commission which would then be studied by both the Commission’s staff and the technical committee. The technical committee is a subcommittee of the Commission’s board. Both parties view the plans and subsequently offer comment. The planning board of Guilderland subsequently considers the comments, and most often they incorporate them into the development proposal.

The Commission’s delicate and complex goal is to expand the preserve from 3,000 to 4,700 acres within the context of continual suburban development. As Chris Hawver explains:

The Commission doesn’t look at it as one is exclusive over the other. The preservationist groups look at it as, ‘it’s got to be all protected.’ Developers look at it as, ‘it’s got to be all development.’ So we try and balance it. We can’t always. We don’t always see eye to eye with developers, quite often we don’t. So we provide those comments...We’re not a regulatory agency. We’re an advisory agency, so anything we provide is nothing but a recommendation, but our recommendations are taken pretty strongly. On one hand it might be more beneficial to have more authority to stop some project, but realistically, it wouldn’t be as effective. We work hard to maintain relationships with the planning departments, with the town boards, the common council in the city of Albany, the elected leaders, so they know what the priorities are to maintain a balance (Chris Hawver, personal interview, 02/25/09).

The inter-municipal cooperation to protect the Pine Bush is salient in light of its precarious existence. The majority of the ecosystem has already been lost due to suburban development, particularly between 1950 and 1990. Although numerous smaller projects have taken their toll, there are two that stand out: the construction and subsequent expansions of the Crossgates Mall, the third largest shopping center in the state, and the expansion of the Albany landfill. Over the years Save the Pine Bush, a citizens group concerned about ecosystem degradation, filed numerous lawsuits over both
projects, many of which have delayed and stalled activities surrounding the two entities.

As Chris Hawver explains:

Say a developer had an opportunity to develop a piece of property, Save the Pine Bush had sued, either the municipality over some issue or the developer themselves. The developer decided to walk away and another group, say the Nature Conservancy, that’s one example, came in and actually purchased the property and protected it for part of the Pine Bush. Save the Pine Bush has had a lot of success over the last thirty years” (Chris Hawver, personal interview, 02/25/09).

Crossgates Mall opened in Guilderland in 1984 to a sharply divided community. Some in the community wanted the tax revenue the retail center would provide while others, beyond the disruption of the Pine Bush, argued the mall would bring in extra noise, traffic, and crime, and compromise the small-town feel of the community. The initial construction of the mall had a decidedly adverse effect on the Pine Bush and its corresponding animal species habitat. The mall’s expansions in 1989 and 1994, which more than doubled its size, only exacerbated the ecological and habitat loss. As Chris Hawver explains, “the original development impacted from what I was told, quality habitat, a large amount of quality habitat. The expansion, when they doubled the size of it, impacted some quality habitat, but some of it was degraded, but still it’s an enormous footprint” (Chris Hawver, personal interview, 02/25/09).

The Albany landfill has presented further challenges in regards to conservation. Confrontations between the city and local groups occurred frequently in previous years, but many of the most heated debates have been essentially resolved. For example, as part of a mitigation for one of Albany’s landfill expansions, the city provides operating funds as well as funds through an endowment for the Commission’s work on habitat research and habitat management.
The Commission and Regional Stratification

In the end, although the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission has a fairly selective policy- and geographic scope, it does represent another venue for inter-municipal cooperation and dialogue and this assists inter-municipal integration. In addition, little, if any of the agency’s undertakings impact or strengthen regional stratification in any significant way. First, the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission does not involve itself with lobbying or policy outside its fairly delimited jurisdiction within portions of Guilderland, Colonie and Albany. Within the jurisdiction itself, lobbying only takes the form of recommendations to municipal planners when projects inside the Pine Bush study area are proposed by developers. Furthermore, when quarterly meetings are convened, officials from the three communities—two suburban and one urban—meet and discuss practical issues within the study area. Discussions may also turn to other matters of concern to the three communities. Because of the urban-suburban composition of the Commission, however, it is unlikely that one set of interests (suburban) takes precedence over the other (urban, or vice-versa). Rather, thorough consensus over the objectives of Commission exist between the municipalities (Chris Hawver, personal interview, 02/25/2009). This is largely the result of the agency’s work over the last three decades to achieve some level of balance. Finally, because the Commission subsists almost entirely on state funding, the hierarchal structure of the region is not very relevant to its operations.

In all, because the geographic focus of both the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission and Saratoga PLAN are comparatively delimited, they contribute minimally if at all to regional integration. Conversely, the next organization/agency I will outline,
the Hudson River Valley Greenway—with jurisdiction throughout most of the Hudson River Basin—represents an agency with a truly regional scope and reach.

**Hudson River Valley Greenway**

Unlike the private, non-profit status of Saratoga PLAN, the Hudson River Valley Greenway is a public agency within the state of New York. I examine the agency because of its role in promoting regionally-focused land use and environmental programs and policies. The main services the agency provides include community planning that incorporates the objectives of the Greenway program (natural and cultural resource protection, economic development, the redevelopment of urban areas and commercial waterfronts, public access, regional planning, and heritage and environmental education), and technical assistance for planning projects that encourages communities to work with their neighbors on issues that span municipal boundaries. Finally, it works with local communities to establish and maintain a coordinated network of trails and recreational sites along the Hudson River. One of the main purposes of the trail network is to promote the Hudson River area as a single tourist, historic, and cultural destination.

Similar to Saratoga PLAN in that it assists communities with planning objectives that seek to mitigate political fragmentation, it nevertheless diverges from that organization in that, with much of the entire Hudson River basin as its scope, the organization does not concentrate its resources on one particular community or county. Because of this, its undertakings have advanced regional cooperation without threatening to heighten stratification within the Capital Region. Indeed, even though the Greenway has existed for almost two decades, Saratoga County, for example, has only recently become involved with the group and has a very limited relationship with the Greenway.
Through the Hudson River Valley Greenway Act of 1991, New York state government created the agency to promote voluntary regional cooperation among the 242 communities in the 13 counties that lie within the much of the Hudson River basin extending from Saratoga County south to Manhattan.

Because it is county-based, even communities not along the riverfront are eligible for assistance John Dennehey, senior planner of the agency explains:

What we do which is really significant is that there are tons of organizations that focus along the communities along the Hudson, but we focus on the counties along the Hudson. So in Albany County for example, I’m working with Berne, which is way out in the western part of the county; no remote connection to the Hudson. But our feeling is that what happens in Berne, what happens in Westerlo connects very much with what happens in the city of Albany because that’s our agricultural land. It’s that idea of looking at kind of the whole picture (John Dennehey, personal interview, 09/11/08).

In all, the most significant outcome of the agency has been the attested expansion of regional cooperation. Dennehey explains:

Once each of these communities passes these resolutions and they become Greenway communities, we start working with them. We start looking for opportunities to help them work with their neighbors, so it’s on a much more regional basis. And not even just the communities next door to each other, the communities like on the opposite ends of the Hudson River. The communities in Albany County will be doing things that parallel with what’s going on in Westchester County, and a lot of times we get dialogues going, and one of the things we’d like to do eventually is to address some of these issues of regional concern, like affordable housing, and things like that, but in the near term we have been able to address this issue of public access to the Hudson River and to these resources. (John Dennehey, personal interview, 09/11/08).

Regional cooperation mandates a continuous dialogue between the various parties and interests, including the agency itself. Dialogue and communication between the agency and the various communities within the Hudson Valley is therefore essential. Relationships between the agency and the communities are fostered in different ways but are typically initiated by the agency itself. John Dennehey, however, notes that once the
municipalities are introduced to the agency and learn what opportunities, grants, and assistance are available to them, because the services it offers are voluntary,

we can’t go in unless we’re invited. But once we come in, 90 percent of the time we’re the ones who say, you know you should really look at what everybody else is doing. Whenever we go in, we always try to say look beyond your borders because your neighbors are doing something similar and you can probably save money and resources. The only time where the opposite has happened, it actually happened with Saratoga County and Washington County where the Board of Supervisors approached us because they said so much great stuff has come out of the Greenway. They said they really wanted to be part of our initiatives (John Dennehey, personal interview, 09/11/08).

Dennehey explained that it was his hope that the Greenway’s services and assistance helped shepherd reforms in municipal planning. Again he notes:

Traditionally everybody looked at themselves in a bubble. You know the curse of border, where everything you don’t like you put at the border of the community. You put industrial, you put adult businesses, everything right at the border because you just want them out of the way, and traditionally that was sort of the plan of planning because you don’t care. It was your neighbor that has to look at it. But we’ve seen this change a lot as communities are looking at, what’s the connection, how can we work with our neighbor to ensure that when people come this area, they’re coming to the region.

An additional service of the Greenway is to assist in long-term planning and to provide an outside assessment of future growth initiatives or plans. Dennehey explains:

For example, say Hyde Park {a city in the mid-Hudson Valley} came to us and said, we want to build this massive, massive center of entertainment and we want to do this huge development and these condominums. We can step in and say, okay this is a bad idea because you’ve got Poughkeepsie next door. Focus on Poughkeepsie and your benefit is going to be that people are going to come to the area and want something a little bit more rural, they’ll want to come to Hyde Park because you have FDR’s home, you have some great carriage trails that people can walk on, you’re next to the Hudson River. We help them see the bigger picture (John Dennehey, personal interview, 09/11/08).

Again, because what the agency prescribes is voluntary, the essential role of the Greenway is to provide planning recommendation and assistance to the municipalities that need or desire it. The agency also works to help communities coordinate with other
state agencies. Inter-coordination between municipalities and state agencies may foster a greater sense of the value of long-range planning. At the least it might provide an additional avenue for which municipalities receive opinions and assessments in regards to their development goals. Dennehey explains:

We want to act as the mediator. For example, this community I was working with in Rockland County—Nyack, we were doing some waterfront work, and I said, you know I could go in and give my Greenway perspective on things, but I said this is how the Department of State looks at it and this is how the Department of Environmental Conservation looks at it, and this how Scenic Hudson {a non-profit regional planning organization} looks at it. These are some different factors you have to consider. So we’re able to bring a lot of those issues to the table…Being a state agency gives us a huge step up, a foot in the door, because even if we go into communities and they say, oh, you’re the state, yuck, the fact that we are with the state means that we can go to meetings and bring the full weight of the DEC {Department of Environmental Conservation}, Department of State, all of these other organizations. And if there’s an issue, we can make sure there’s coordination. If someone has an issue with the Department of Transportation, we can bring them to the right person (John Dennehey, personal interview, 09/11/08).

Finally, one of the Greenway’s programs that demonstrates perhaps the best potential for continued and expanded inter-municipal cooperation and coordination is the Greenway Compact Communities initiative. The program achieves inter-municipal coordination by offering some specific carrots—meaning that if communities adopt certain planning policies, they will be compensated and financially rewarded by the state. Fifty-six communities throughout the 13-county Greenway area have become Compact Communities. Dennehey explains how the process works with the particular example of Dutchess County.

One of the things we do is that we have our Greenway Compact Communities which in short is basically this idea of moving things to the next level of regionalization, so in Greenway communities in Dutchess County, we worked with Dutchess County government to develop a comprehensive plan for the entire county. And what we do is we have this compact program where communities pass into local law their support {for} conformity, and being in accordance with
the county comprehensive plan. So what that does is that everyone in the county is on the same page. We even give them a little bit more money in funding. That goes a huge way with all of the other state agencies, and this shows that what you’re doing in your community is based on what the county wants, based on a larger regional mission, based on what the *Greenway* wants because we give our stamp of approval on all of the compact county plans (John Dennehey, personal interview, 09/11/08).

Developed in 2000, Dutchess was actually the first county to adopt the *Greenway*’s Compact Communities Program. In addition, since 2000 29 of the 30 municipalities in the county have adopted the Compact, while more than half have undertaken Greenway-related revisions of comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances (New York State Local Government Hearings). The county compacts are important in part because they give extra weight and assistance to the communities when they encounter developers and growth interests. For example, a developer had sued the Dutchess County town of Milan in regards to its comprehensive plan because they believed it was being singled out unfairly by the town. However, because the town was a compact community, meaning their comprehensive plan was in conformity with the county’s plan and therefore the *Greenway*’s regional initiatives, the *Greenway* was able to have the New York Attorney General’s office step in and represent the community and the county in the lawsuit. “{That’s} gigantic in terms of regional coordination, and really encouraging people to buy into this idea” (John Dennehey, personal interview, 09/11/08).

Indemnity against lawsuits has been a very important part of the program. Indeed, the indemnity provision, which originally included a sunset clause, has been extended several times. The most recent extension came in 2007, when Senator Steve M. Saland and Assemblyman Marcus J. Molinaro sponsored legislation extending the provision. Molinaro (R, I, C - Red Hook) noted:
Communities across the Hudson River Valley joined the Greenway because they believe in creating their own community's identity while developing a regional blueprint for balanced land use. The indemnification clause, which I was proud to co-sponsor in 2007, of the original Greenway legislation, was included to ensure protections for communities willing to engage in this historic regional planning effort (Hudson River Valley Greenway, 2008).

Another key component of the Compact Program involves the streamlining of regulatory provisions when a specific project aligns with the requirements of the Greenway’s planning guidelines. This is important because the arduous regulatory environment in New York State is sometimes blamed for retarding innovative development projects in the state (Rocco Ferraro, personal interview, 04/13/2009). Such Greenway planning guidelines include cluster zoning that creates more efficient street networks and better pedestrian access while also preserving open space. Other guidelines supported by the Greenway include historic preservation ordinances, transfer of development rights, conservation easements, and designation of critical environmental districts.

The Greenway and its partners hope that the Compact Communities program will dampen the effects of political fragmentation, including irrational street and road networks that exacerbate urban sprawl and traffic congestion. In addition, it is hoped that enhanced city-county coordination will also promote pedestrian access and housing subdivisions that are better integrated both within and between communities—another step that dampens sprawl, congestion, and uneven development. The overall goal is to achieve consistent strategies and laws across municipal lines, including but not limited to, zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations.

According to Paul Bray, Associate Counsel of the Commissioner's Policy Office at the State DEC and founder of the Albany Roundtable, the Compact Communities
program provides a real framework for regional coordination and governance. He states in a *Times-Union* article (2004: B1) that the program “offers incentives for state financial assistance, expedited development and indemnity for municipalities that reach an approvable compact. It's voluntary and should be tried.”

In addition, Robert W. Elliott, executive director of the New York Planning Federation, in another *Times-Union* article (2006: B1) argues that in the absence of a regional government and the authority it possesses, the Greenway has a number of important tools at its helm. He explains:

> Providing a combination of sound planning principles, grants, technical assistance, and training to communities has helped in a number of regions. With the carrot of grants to complete comprehensive plans and related projects, local communities are adopting sound planning principles or criteria to guide them, including taking a more regional approach. This is happening in 10 counties in the Hudson Valley.

Elliot also lauded the Compact Communities program as creating a single, unified vision for the region and the subsequent planning in accordance with the compact (Elliott, 2006).

**The Greenway and Regional Stratification**

Besides being granted the authority by the state to offer financial and other carrots to communities that seek to improve inter-municipal and regional coordination, because the group works throughout the entire region, its resources span across numerous cities and counties. This helps guard against the consolidation of resources by one community or county as is somewhat visible in regards to the projects that have been promoted by Saratoga PLAN. Indeed, Saratoga PLAN has assisted in directing funds to Saratoga County alone, whereas funds from the Greenway span numerous counties and cities.
Thus, the work of the Greenway probably does not contribute to regional stratification in any significant manner.

One of the only ways in which Greenway programs may maintain regional stratification is that if the communities that opt for Greenway assistance are ones with considerable resources at their disposal. For example, communities that solicit the Greenway could be those that have the existing resources to consider environmental and planning attributes as a way to strengthen their economic bases. Poorer communities, on the other hand, grappling with school finances, old and decaying infrastructure, and maintaining fire and law enforcement services, may see the Greenway’s objectives as a luxury. Subsequently, they might be more likely to bypass the agency’s assistance. Be this as it may, in so far as planning assistance might be appropriated by wealthier communities, the grants and the technical and legal assistance they receive is far less than, for example, the $30 million in funds that has been allocated for the Old Saratoga on the Hudson initiative in Saratoga County alone. Indeed, the most important characteristic of the Greenway is that it enables a greater sharing of technical assistance and state grants to any municipality in the thirteen-county area, and because of this its programs seek to mitigate regional fragmentation and stratification.

The final organization I will be documenting is ECOS, or the Environmental Clearing House. This group is quite different than, for example, the Greenway and Saratoga PLAN because it does not operate specific planning programs. Instead it is largely an educational body that reaches out to a wide array of people, including everyone from school-age children, to ordinary community residents, to local government leaders and planners. It is similar to the Greenway in some important regards, however,
because akin to that organization, ECOS works across county lines with numerous partners and seeks greater inter-municipal coordination. Nonetheless, because ECOS is foremost an educational body, it is fairly difficult to determine whether its activities have promoted either inter-municipal cooperation or the moderation of regional stratification. In light of this, I will focus on documenting some of the regional-oriented activities in which the organization has engaged, followed by a discussion on the benefits and pitfalls of its membership-based organizational structure.

ECOS: Environmental Clearing House

ECOS is a community-based, non-profit 501-c3 membership-based organization located in the Schenectady County community of Niskayuna. A product of the new environmental movement that arose in the 1960s, ECOS was founded in 1972 in Schenectady by the Junior League, a national women’s volunteer organization. It is a small organization with only one full-time employee, yet the educational and outreach programs it offers impact thousands of people, while its inter-organizational activities assist in network building and collaborative community-based projects. Its main focus is promoting environmental education and awareness.

In addition to providing environmental programs for schools in the area, the organization sponsors conferences and workshops for residents and leaders in the region surrounding smart growth. For example, the organization was the lead sponsor in the 2007 conference “Sustainable Development II: Strategies for Growth in the Capital Region” which brought together local and state elected officials, regional planners, academics, and eleven other organizations for a dialogue on how to best plan for future growth in the metropolitan area. The purpose of the conference was essentially to
educate local planning, zoning, and elected officials on policies and methods for reducing sprawl and carbon-footprints while maintaining urban vitality and rural farmlands and forests. In 2008 the organization also sponsored a smaller conference in the suburban town of Colonie that brought together similar parties, albeit at truncated scale.

The education of local officials also occurs in other venues. In a law passed in 2007, New York State requires a minimum number of credit hours of training each year for local planning and zoning officials, and the ECOS-sponsored workshops assist them in meeting those requirements. The response to the conferences has been positive resulting in calls for ongoing meetings and events. With only one staff person, however, collaborative work is required, and therefore the organization works closely other groups including the League of Women Voters and the Capital District Regional Planning Commission (CDRPC). The CDRPC is a regional planning group whose board consists of five members of each of the four large counties in the metropolitan area. At least 51 percent of the board members must be made up of locally-elected or appointed public officials.

Similar to Saratoga PLAN, for example, relationship building with local governments and officials begins with the organization and therefore outreach is the responsibility of ECOS. Its outreach has been largely effective, and executive director Patrick Clear, represents ECOS on several committees including the, “Schenectady County Water-Quality Coordinating Committee. Each county has one, they’re mandated by the state, so ECOS has a representative on those types of committees, and growth and sprawl and development are issues that those committees address” (Patrick Clear, personal interview, 02/04/09).
Beyond forming relationships with government officials, relationship-building with other organizations is critical for the success of the organization. “That’s part of how we exist” (Patrick Clear, personal interview). ECOS networks and shares information with about 40 other organizations in the Capital Region. Patrick Clear explains:

We’re kind of an umbrella organization for environmental activities in the Capital District, and because of that we have a lot of overlapping interest in membership. The League of Women Voters, for example, I’m on the environmental committee for Schenectady County’s League of Women Voters. The environmental committee met Monday this week. Of the six people that were there, two were former board members of ECOS, one was a current board member, and everybody there was a current member of the organization. Schenectady County also has an environmental advisory council, a lot of counties in the state do, some counties have opted out of it, but I’m also on one of the committees for that (Patrick Clear, personal interview, 02/04/09).

Other Organizational Activities

Because ECOS is a 501-c3, it is permitted to spend up to 20 percent of its budget to lobby for specific policies. Nonetheless, because it is a membership-based organization whose members do not always share the same views, ECOS is quite selective in regards to the laws for which it advocates. In addition to many smaller projects, it has pushed for the expansion of the state’s environmental protection fund. The fund provides money for a wide array of projects including open space protection, recycling programs, and clean water and air programs. ECOS also pushed for a law that would have allowed each county to use a portion of the real estate or property sales tax to fund open space protection. The policy is fairly straightforward. For example, when homeowners sell their property, the county would be allowed to add two percent to the home resale tax to be allocated for funding open space acquisition. The policy has been implemented primarily in the counties within Long Island and in Saratoga County (Patrick Clear, personal interview, 02/04/09).
ECOS also assists communities and other agencies with their own open space protection programs. For example, the organization, essentially through providing information, assists communities in small open space projects. In regards to other organizations, ECOS has sent letters of support to foundations and funders when groups are seeking funds to purchase land. In 2008, for example, ECOS wrote letters of support for four grant applications for the Mohawk-Hudson Land Conservancy to acquire properties and preserve open space.

Still, the biggest barrier as it applies to long term environmental and land use planning is political fragmentation and New York State’s system of home rule. Again Patrick Clear explains:

The conferences we’ve had, there’s a lot of interest, everybody’s on the same page of what the community needs, of water supply, roads, clean air, places to put their garbage. But in New York State we run into an immediate roadblock with home rule. Everybody in the room is on the same page about what’s good for their community, but as soon as they get back to their community, it’s what’s best for me. My vote is right here. And there’s so many municipalities from the village, to the town, cities, hamlets, and counties, and there’s so many administrative bodies within a county. It is very difficult for them to get together. Each one wants to focus on their niche. The Town of Princetown {a rural community west of Albany} is an example. It’s very small, very rural. They want a rural lifestyle. They want their ten-acre lot, nice big houses (Patrick Clear, personal interview, 02/04/09).

Saratoga County’s new Green Infrastructure Plan, the Old Saratoga on the Hudson, and the Greenway Compact Communities program offered by the Hudson River Valley Greenway are all new frameworks and programs designed to encourage inter-municipal coordination and planning, and they are arguably more effective than purchasing parcels of land in a piecemeal and fragmented fashion. Nevertheless, Patrick Clear argues for the salience of land preservation, even if it comes within a piecemeal fashion.
Every little bit helps, but there’s a bigger picture here. Fragmentation {of open space parcels} isn’t always bad because it does preserve pieces, and there’s always the possibility of acquiring that in between piece. A lot of that is happening up in the Adirondack Park. The paper mills bought huge tracts of land up there, tens of thousands of acres. The timber industry is fading away and the paper industry is fading away. They’re {the Nature Conservancy and the Open Space Institute} buying up those properties and reselling them to the state. So all of these fragmented pieces are starting to come together (Patrick Clear, personal interview, 02/04/09).

Again, despite its philosophical goals that translate into practical activities which promote smart growth practices and regional cooperation, because it does not operate its own planning programs (a la Saratoga PLAN and Hudson River Valley Greenway) but focuses on the sponsorship of conferences and training and educational programs, it is quite difficult to measure the tangible effect of its programs on either inter-municipal cooperation or regional integration. Because of this, the more useful information we might attain from the assessment of ECOS is how its organizational structure acts as both a boon and drawback for ongoing advocacy.

The main benefit of its membership-based organizational structure is that ECOS is neither subject to the ideological whims of political leaders nor beholden to state and local budget cuts. For example, as a way to offset the substantial recession-induced budget deficit, in 2008 Governor Paterson of New York proposed to eliminate the Hudson River Valley Greenway altogether (Harding, 2008). Even though the agency was spared, the threat brought considerable stress to both the people directly employed by the agency as well as with those with whom the agency partners.

Although the organization’s existence does not rest upon public funding, its organizational structure does impede its work in important ways. For example, most of its funding comes from its largely middle class membership base in Schenectady County.
Operating out of the affluent suburb of Niskayuna—akin to Saratoga PLAN based in upscale Saratoga Springs—its activities may be biased or at least reflect upper middle class interests. This, however, is difficult to determine as its inception in the struggling city of Schenectady, along with a number of members who still reside in the city, probably keeps interests balanced. Indeed, executive director Patrick Clear pointed to a number of particularly urban concerns on which the organization has focused in the past, including the disproportionate presence of garbage incinerators in low income urban neighborhoods and the unhealthy living environments (lead paint) of many urban children.

On the other hand, more visible (and perhaps more important) effects of its membership-based structure are the limitations placed on its advocacy arm. Because ECOS is based in Schenectady County it has, for example, encountered roadblocks with regard to certain actions of General Electric (GE). Although the company has dramatically reduced its presence in the area over the last several decades, it still has relatively large operations in Schenectady, the suburban neighboring town of Niskayuna, and in other communities in the region. Because of this, ECOS has had a difficult time approaching any topic that might be critical of GE. In particular, the organization has not been able to address the company’s role in the PCB contamination of the Hudson River. “Local officials don’t want to offend the big cash cow company in town” (Patrick Clear, personal interview, 02/04/09). Complicating matters further, many of ECOS’ due-paying members are current or former employees of GE. In light of this, despite its salience to local environmental and planning issues, ECOS has largely been forced to sidestep the issue.
This component has consequences in that the dredging of polychlorinated biphenyls or PCB-contaminated materials out of the Hudson River has been one of the most important issues facing the Capital Region since the early 1990s. The nearly $1 billion cleanup effort is part of a federal Superfund site which GE had consistently fought in the courts before ultimately losing. It has subsequently been ordered to contribute hundreds of millions of dollars to the initial clean-up effort (Barrett, 2005).

According to Diane Metz, community planner at Saratoga PLAN, the Hudson River dredging has proven to be a divisive undertaking that has undermined efforts at regional cooperation (Diane Metz, personal interview, 09/25/08). Indeed, PCB’s, used as electrical and industrial lubricants for decades across numerous industries, are highly toxic, and exposure to them drastically heightens cancer risk. Because of this, the water in the Hudson River has not been potable for years. This has led to contentious politicking particularly in Saratoga County in regards to the need for more reliable water sources. For ECOS, the metropolitan area’s premier environmental education body, to be largely absent from the discussion surrounding such a major issue of regional concern presents a clear limitation of the group’s organizational structure.

The Impact of State and Federal Government

The last two questions in this chapter surround (1) how and the extent to which public funding impacts the operations of the various groups, and (2) how state and federal funding to these organizations might impact the regional opportunity structure, or the stratified nature of the region. The first question is important because each group receives either funding or guidance from state or federal bodies, and therefore, these groups can only continue their work as long as sufficient government funding persists. In addition,
the second question matters because funding from higher levels of government assist in the programs that these groups already offer. If the programs are, by design, promoting or not promoting stratification, for example, then state or federal funding only advances or reinforces the initial program’s objectives further.

Despite their different statuses, Saratoga PLAN and the Hudson River Valley Greenway both rely on federal support for their initiatives. For example, Saratoga PLAN has received federal support through the Federal Land Trust program in which the organization secures federal tax credits for land conserved in land trusts. This has impacted the land trust arm of the organization enormously. The organization has also attracted federal support and resources from the American Battlefield Protection Program, an arm of the National Park Service, for their involvement with the Battlefields of Saratoga preservation-planning program and the inter-municipal Old Saratoga on the Hudson project. Through inter-municipal cooperation, this project, outlined earlier in this chapter, seeks to capitalize on the natural and historic amenities in the region to promote economic development, while also preserving open space and redeveloping older neighborhoods and districts in communities along the Hudson River.

The Hudson River Valley Greenway also relies on support from the National Park Service through their National Heritage Areas program. The program identifies areas of national significance and provides resources to preserve such places. There are 40 such designated areas throughout the country, and in 1996 the Hudson River Valley joined the list. “We’re focused on telling the story of the Hudson River Valley” (John Dennehey, personal interview, 09/11/08). Due to stipulations with the Department of Interior, the agency, however, did not receive any program funding until 2002. John Dennehey, senior
planner with the Greenway, noted that until recently the program has simply focused on heritage resources and history but increasingly the agency is, “fusing that {heritage resources/history} with the community identity and planning in so much as looking at agricultural landscapes as historic and part of our heritage and part of our identity. So we’re really trying to bring more heritage planning and preservation planning into focus” (John Dennehey, personal interview, 09/11/08).

As in the work of Saratoga PLAN, preserving and maintaining the Saratoga Battlefield has been part of the Greenway’s work. There is, however, only a limited amount of federal funding, and the Greenway has to compete with 40 other heritage areas for funding. “We all kind of draw out of that pot, and so as there are more heritage areas, there’s less for everybody else” (John Dennehey, personal interview, 09/11/08). Still, the Hudson Valley National Heritage Area is the only one of such divisions backed by a state entity (the Greenway), and so it has become a successful model on which a number of other designated areas have drawn for guidance.

Nevertheless, because federal funding is unstable, the Greenway would like to broaden its resource base to become more self-sufficient. Dennehey explains, “I think as we do more and more tie-ins with the state-side of planning and community development and natural resource protection, I think that’s going to allow us to be more self-sufficient, so we’ll be less impacted by federal funding {shifts} in the future” (John Dennehey, personal interview, 09/11/08).

State resources are very important for all of the organizations and agencies. Saratoga PLAN relies on numerous programs from the state. One program is the New York Main Street Revitalization Program. Recognizing that preserving open space in land
trusts creates barriers for development in outer areas, Saratoga PLAN has in recent years also shifted its energies to assisting already built-up communities and neighborhoods reinvest in their existing properties and under-used districts. The organization is also increasingly conscious of the claims that land preservation increases property values, which subsequently create new obstructions for affordable housing. The Main Street Revitalization Program has helped to address some of these concerns. As Diane Metz explains:

Part of what we do to balance this out {open space protection and the need for new development and affordable housing} is community planning which includes revitalization of downtowns. We’re involved with a Main Street grant with the Village of Corinth, and we’ve also been involved with the Village of Schuylerville, as sort of economic redevelopment planning. So protecting land is not just going against development per se, it’s {promoting} well-placed development (Diane Metz, personal interview, 09/26/08).

Other state programs assist the efforts of Saratoga PLAN. Beyond the new state entity, the Old Saratoga on the Hudson, the organization receives state grants for planning and land protection. Because of this the organization has substantial contact with the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, DEC, and the Department of State. Other interaction with the state comes through a New York State grant program administered through the Land Trust Alliance, a national organization. This entity provides conservation grants for planning and land preservation. (Diane Metz, personal interview, 09/26/08).

In the context of regional stratification, state and federal funding to these groups may have some consequences. Federal funding from the National Park Service, for example, to both the Greenway and Saratoga PLAN, as well as grants from the Federal Land Trust to Saratoga PLAN, may help the groups separate themselves to a degree from
contentious local politics and the heated debates at the state capitol. At the other end, federal funding can also be used as leverage to acquire greater local and state funding. For example, the fact that both groups have been able to attract competitive grants at the national level most likely enhances their reputations and images throughout the Capital Region, which subsequently attracts local interest and funds.

On the other hand, these additional sources of capital may also buttress stratification. The state initiative, Old Saratoga on the Hudson, might represent such an example. The initiative, for example, has received $30 million in funding, and because these funds are being directed mainly to Saratoga County, the state funds have disproportionately assisted an already-wealthy county over and above other counties. Conversely, even though the Greenway also receives state and federal funding, because its constituency rests across hundreds of communities within 13 counties, money and resources are spread throughout the entire region, not concentrated in one county. Therefore, the additional funds mainly augment the existing programs and support the existing organizational pursuits of each group. Indeed, Saratoga PLAN, with or without state or federal funding concentrates its resources on Saratoga County. Additional funds from higher levels of government simply provide more resources for Saratoga PLAN to subsequently direct to Saratoga County.

In comparison to Saratoga PLAN, state funding for the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission probably has fewer implications for metropolitan stratification. Similar to the Greenway, in that both are state agencies, the state-level funding helps the Commission avoid parochial political battles and has probably helped to moderate some of the divisive effects of political fragmentation. For instance, before its inception
political entanglements between parties that argued that the Pine Bush must be preserved—notably Save the Pine Bush—and those who objected to development restrictions—private developers—were very common. Save the Pine Bush, for example, filed numerous lawsuits over many years to halt and delay various development projects. The Commission’s presence, however, has fostered a greater sense of collaboration between the various interests and the different municipalities within its study area. Although disagreements still exist—the latest involving a developer from North Dakota proposing to build a hotel on a small parcel of the Pine Bush in the city of Albany—defined and consistent procedures now exist for dealing with such matters.

As a public benefit corporation the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission is impacted by changes at the state level and is heavily reliant on state funding through the environmental protection fund. Because of the latest downturn in the economy, New York, like the majority of states, is facing a substantial budget shortfall in the $billions. This has affected nearly every state agency (including the Greenway which Governor Paterson threatened to eliminate). Indeed, in 2009 state funding to the Commission was cut by 30 percent. This affected the agency in a number of important ways. For example, programs for schools and the general public were scaled back. In addition, “on the ground” habitat work will probably have to be cut. (Chris Hawver, personal interview, 02/25/09).

ECOS, despite it being a private, non-profit organization, has been affected by the actions of the various levels of government. ECOS has received state grants in the past, but because of state budget cuts, the group is not anticipating any state grants for 2009. Federal policies have also been consequential. This has been most visible in relation to
the conferences the agency organizes and the difficulty that has arisen at times for the organization to attract speakers. For example, when ECOS held a symposium on global warming, the Bush Administration prohibited scientists from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to come and speak. This was due to the Administration insisting that human-induced global warming was not a real phenomenon, but an ongoing study.

In addition to these restrictions, because ECOS has a 501-c3 organizational status it is limited in its ability to lobby public officials. No more than 20 percent of its budget can be directed towards lobbying. In the end, however, because it is a membership-based non-profit, it is not subject to the same swings in state or federal budget cycles that the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission and the Hudson River Valley Greenway endure. Finally, as it pertains to regional stratification, because ECOS engages in educational programs with little if any way of measuring the impact on regional stratification, any additional government support to the organization would also probably be moot as it concerns regional stratification. Ultimately, it is mainly the programs administered by Saratoga PLAN and the Hudson River Valley Greenway that impact regional stratification, and funding from higher levels of government support their respective processes.

Conclusion

It is important to note that many of the obstacles to a more egalitarian regional opportunity structure cannot be overcome by the activities of these disparate groups. Moreover, these groups are all operating within the context of a highly-stratified region, and many of the entrenched interests have long proceeded the inceptions of the agencies.
Furthermore, certain organizational policies are even reflective of the region’s stratified context. For example, Saratoga County’s Green Infrastructure Plan has proceeded in part by the county’s strong fiscal environment which has enabled it to focus on land preservation in addition to attracting development. Indeed, in a poorer region, land preservation would more likely be seen as a distraction.

Despite continual funding shifts and cost pressures, the organizations and agencies have been able to accomplish numerous objectives as well as begin new initiatives aimed at strengthening regional collaboration and inter-municipal cooperation on land use and economic development policies. Although none of the initiatives focuses on major governance issues such as revenue-sharing, required density levels, or an urban growth boundary, initiatives like the Greenway’s Compact Communities program are small but significant steps towards beginning to address development and zoning coherence on an inter-municipal scale. Similarly, the Old Saratoga on the Hudson involves major stakeholders and actions between numerous communities in two counties. These factors, along with Saratoga County’s new inter-municipal, Green Infrastructure Plan, illustrate a shift in the metropolitan area to policies that purposively incorporate some level of regionalism that had not been the norm in the past. Still, fragmentation and stratification have not been dampened to a very large degree in the metropolitan area, and some of the policies of Saratoga PLAN may indirectly maintain stratification.

Countering political fragmentation and stratification is therefore an elusive goal, but it is important to realize that there have been steps to ameliorate these problems. Because of its extensive geographic scope and its backing by the state, of the four groups outlined in the chapter, the Hudson River Valley Greenway appears to be the most
effective body as it relates to moderating both political fragmentation and regional stratification. This suggests a couple of important points. First, and quite intuitive, bodies that work for regionalism must actually be *regional*. This is hardly a novel idea, but an important point to make once more nonetheless because it illustrates that any organization that calls itself “regional” must actually go out into communities and form relationships and partnerships with stakeholders across wide political and geographic spaces. Second, regionalism has a better chance of gaining momentum if it is backed by some of type of state or public agency. This is important because as the case with the Greenway illustrates, legal authorities and financial incentives backed by the state can lead to real reforms in inter-municipal planning and coordination. Finally, state agencies like the Greenway, because of the broader interests and constituencies they serve, are also more likely to achieve truly regional objectives and not simply boost parochial goals. Private groups, conversely, are more susceptible to local stakeholders interests because they receive substantial monetary resources from private individuals in specific communities (ECOS and Saratoga PLAN).

Although the programs the Greenway offers do not come anywhere close to what could be accomplished with a formal regional government possessing real land use powers, the Greenway’s programs at least represent a step that may evolve into a larger, more governance-based relationship among different communities in the region. Scholars have insomuch contended that regional cooperation is best to begin in a fairly modest way until broader relationships between municipalities can be strengthened (Benjamin and Nathan, 2001).
Without ignoring their weaknesses, scholars have argued that important benefits exist within these “bottom-up,” voluntary structures of regionalism. Feiock (2009), for example, argues that the voluntary structures, by avoiding a hierarchical or top-down governance model, preserves the autonomy of self-governing municipalities and bodies in a way that reduces political conflicts around relinquishing existing authorities. Voluntary agreements, moreover, are generally premised on the consent of each member, and therefore the consensual nature of arriving at decisions strengthens the search for “mutually advantageous resolution of {inter-jurisdictional} problems” (Feiock, 2009; p. 361). Voluntary policies and recommendations in regards to suburban land use laws also diminish the likelihood of partisanship politicking. Programs the Greenway offers, for example, are not directly linked with partisan politics, and therefore advisors within these agencies are able to remain “above the fray,” with initiatives that are more likely to be interpreted by local political leaders as politically neutral and objective (Rocco Ferraro, personal interview, 4/13/2009).

However, voluntary regionalist institutions and private groups in particular, also have drawbacks. Perhaps their most salient deficiency is that these collaborative groups and agencies reflect the political and economic interests of the agencies themselves and therefore obstacles and complications linger surrounding negotiations and resolutions. (Feiock, 2009). For instance, ECOS is a membership-based organization, and many of its members have ties to GE. Because of this the organization’s hands are tied surrounding any type of policy that may impact the company in a negative manner. Meanwhile, GE is still one of the leading employers in the Capital Region, yet this agency can say or do little when approaching the major topic of, for example, PCB’s in the Hudson River. In
addition, although it might sound contradictory in that the organization’s main focus is land preservation, Saratoga PLAN also has direct ties to the development community. Indeed, the spouse of director Alane Ball-Chinian is himself a developer! The organization also receives substantial funding from other growth interests such as Stewarts Stores (Saratoga PLAN, 2008), a regional chain of convenience stores that benefits from continual urban expansion and particularly sprawled growth patterns. These are simply two examples of the drawbacks of relying on community-based, non-profit groups for the work on inter-municipal cooperation.

Because community-based groups like ECOS cannot actually make public policy, their role has consisted largely of educating local and state lawmakers and lobbying for policies that align with the organizations’ objectives. Thus, their role differs somewhat from that of the Greenway, a public agency. While one of the purposes of the Greenway is to educate localities on the benefits of regional cooperation, because of its inception as a state agency, it has additional avenues to promote regionalism—an assertion ECOS and Saratoga PLAN cannot make.

Even though the tide seems to be turning in regards to favorable public policy and the work of non-profit groups in the Capital Region toward regionalism, what might actually conspire is unknown at this point. For instance, elusive factors in regards to this end are the potential impacts of environmental and economic shifts. Continual budget strains among both state and local bodies, for example, could lead to a greater willingness among local actors to form regional service-sharing agreements. In fact, in New Jersey numerous towns and villages are grappling with such proposals at an increasing rate (Kocieniewski, 2009). Moreover, wild swings in the price of oil and other necessary
commodities may also encourage municipalities to engage in additional long term, comprehensive growth management that better coordinates development within and between communities. For example, increases in gasoline prices—an inevitable condition because of its finite nature—should encourage broader and more regional-oriented transportation and infrastructure planning that includes other options besides auto-oriented schemes.

What has been clear, however, is the involvement of civil society groups and government agencies surrounding environmental, land use, and regional-oriented policies. What complicates the picture is that while some groups are both moderating fragmentation and stratification (the Greenway), others are moderating fragmentation but maintaining stratification (Saratoga PLAN). In addition one group is moderating fragmentation but really having no effect on stratification (Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission). What does one take from this? Beyond summarizing the main findings of the project and approaching them through various theoretical frameworks, the final chapter will examine what might be accomplished if we take the politically-integrating and fiscally-moderating aspects apparent within the four groups and combine them to formulate some policy proposals.
CHAPTER X: CONCLUSION

This study sought to examine and offer explanations for several questions related to urban development and regional cooperation. Why has development and growth proceeded in such an uneven fashion throughout the Capital Region over the last several decades? Why have economic and social disparities between the various communities intensified? What can be done to moderate both political fragmentation and regional stratification? Why is regional coordination such an elusive project? These are the central questions approached in this study. While not discounting the importance of national politics and global economic factors, in this study I focused on the local institutional factors that relate to metropolitan political fragmentation and regional hierarchies.

Indeed, local structures and institutions always filter national policies and global economic forces. The institutions within this analysis included local governments (which are seen as politically fragmenting institutions) and institutions or organizations that take a regional approach to decision-making surrounding the issues of urban growth and land use. Local structures as characterized by Lewis (1996) include the, “formal and informal organizations, structures, rules, conventions, and standards of operating practices that structure the relationship between individuals in various units of the polity and the economy” (p. 24). The manner in which these organizational arrangements are structured largely defines or demarcates the options and choices that are available for communities to pursue. Lewis explains:

First, institutional arrangement serves as a perceptual filter for residents, developers, and politicians, as it shapes the way “our city (or town)”—its politics, history, and the impacts of growth upon it—are understood. Second municipal boundaries also function, almost by definition as a geographic organizer of interests. Third, the municipal system offers rules for decision-making, as it sets regulatory authority over any given property, and provides access points and veto
opportunities for interested parties (p. 31).

Building upon Lewis’ framework, I argue that beyond a community’s institutional framework or organization, inter-community- and stratified regional dynamics are also salient factors that influence the trajectory of development and growth. Lewis (1996) examines the effect of fragmentation on development within a community, but not on how inter-municipal factors and unequal resources between communities/jurisdictions impact growth outcomes. Orfield (2002) includes resource levels of communities in his analysis but only in regards to how fragmentation impacts broad indicators of community wellbeing, including fiscal inequity. Furthermore, neither Orfield nor Lewis examine how fragmentation impacts the ability of communities to utilize or capitalize on their existing resources. This is related to the ability of communities to implement successful, comprehensive development plans. The capability of communities to utilize existing resources and the way in which inter-municipal relations impact development outcomes are left out of the analyses of other urbanists (Rusk, 2003; Bischoff, 2008; Hamilton, Miller, and Paytas, 2004; Baldassare, 1992).

For example, these studies do not pay much attention to how development decisions enacted in community A, for example, have direct or indirect consequences on the decision-making processes of growth actors in community B. Indeed, this dynamic proceeds in both proactive and reactive manners, and thus we cannot examine a community’s growth coalition in isolation from growth coalitions in neighboring communities, and we cannot fully understand public reactions to development without placing those reactions in the context of the region as whole. The first part of this study sheds light on the relationship between political fragmentation and the ability for
communities to implement a coherent development vision and capitalize on human resources and community assets. Indeed, political structures have an indirect effect but shape where investment occurs. Overall, this component of the study focused both on how institutional structures (political fragmentation along municipal lines) and regional dynamics (inter-community processes/relations) impacted growth coalitions and community responses to growth.

The second component of the study examined how both local, non-profit organizations and state agencies have responded to fragmented governance and regional stratification. I examined local environmental and land use groups and agencies in that prior academic research has largely ignored how and why these interests are attempting to promote inter-municipal cooperation and integration. Three of the four groups worked with land conservation and preservation, and the fourth focused on general environmental issues at the local level. The core critical analyses surrounded whether these actors were truly moderating regional stratification and political fragmentation or whether their work was simply maintaining such attributes. The findings suggest that state agencies have a greater capacity to influence regional planning and land preservation than private organizations. Moreover, the work of private organizations (which rely on private donors and operate under the auspices of private, boards of directors) may consolidate resources in particular areas—undermining one of the key principles of regionalism.

This study relied on archival and qualitative interview data. The archival data included minutes from meetings, organizational newsletters, pamphlets and websites, and hundreds of newspaper articles with dates ranging from the 1970s to the present. Much of the archival data were collected from the M.E. Grenander Department of Special
Collections at the University at Albany. Furthermore, the *Times-Union* of Albany and the *Saratogian* of Saratoga Springs were the main sources of newspaper data. The materials were chosen based on their relevance to the research questions. I also conducted structured and semi-structured interviews with 24 participants over a 16-month period between September 2008 and January 2010. Based on purposive sampling drawn from newspaper coverage, membership lists, and websites, I conducted interviews with municipal planning officials and leaders from local non-profit organizations in the Capital Region. I chose these participants because of their central involvement with local land use and development issues. In addition, I interviewed further participants based on snowball-sample methods. In essence, the initial officials and stakeholders directed me to additional research participants. Overall, the qualitative data augmented the archival data and assisted in the process of triangulation to strengthen research validity.

I chose to examine Saratoga Springs and Troy because they are positioned on the opposite end of the continuum concerning both wealth and how political structures have shaped the respective communities. One of the largest cities geographically in upstate New York, Saratoga Springs has benefitted more than most from the state’s local municipal structures. Possessing an expansive area with large tracts of open space, the city has exploited its spatial-political attributes to subsidize downtown development and guard against “undesirable” development. These political structures have also assisted the community’s efforts in implementing a coherent and comprehensive development vision. In contrast, Troy’s development has been undermined by the state’s local, municipal structures. At a mere 11 square miles, the city has little to no jurisdiction over developable open space but instead essentially declining urban neighborhoods and an
exhausted industrial riverfront. This has handicapped development efforts, in particular, a coherent, long-term development plan. Wilton and North Greenbush were chosen because they lie adjacent to Saratoga Springs and Troy, respectively, and they have had very different experiences surrounding governance and development. Finally the analysis of Saratoga County was included to shed additional light on the importance of local political fragmentation and the regional opportunity structure (ROS) on development.

I chose the four groups based on their activities concerning land use and preservation issues as well as their organizational structure and reach. The four groups had programs and policies that dealt with either community planning, land preservation, environmental sustainability, or such that encompassed all three. The Hudson River Valley Greenway and ECOS operated throughout the region, while Saratoga PLAN and the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission had a far more local constituent base. The groups were also a mix between private, non-profit organizations, and public, state agencies.

Organizing Development in the Capital Region:

Downtown Development

A number of major themes emerged throughout this study. In this section I situate these major themes into existing conceptual frameworks while also detailing the explanatory limitations of such frameworks and why issues related to political fragmentation and stratified regional dynamics must be included in any full analysis of development. I begin with downtown development. Perhaps not surprising given the increased attention urban leaders have placed on revitalizing older districts in recent
years, downtown development and redevelopment emerged as major themes in both Saratoga Springs and Troy. Public choice theory is a framework that explains development through a consumer preference schema in which residents select the communities that are best able to meet their preferences. Therefore, this framework would argue that both cities undertook downtown development projects as a reaction to consumer preferences for downtown living and consumption. Saratoga Springs, meanwhile, was better able to accomplish this project because it offered consumers better utility: more attractive properties and physical surroundings, better services, and lower taxes. While Saratoga Springs has been more successful in this regard than Troy, the framework leaves many important elements out of the equation.

Public choice theory, for example, neglects key historical and institutional factors including political fragmentation. In regards to the former, it fails to acknowledge the role of anti-city policies from the 1940s until the present time, including redlining, racial segregation, and policies of such agencies as the Federal Housing Administration. Concerning political fragmentation, it also fails to consider how fragmentation impacts the availability of cities to attract outside resources and utilize existing resources. Until the 1980s, downtown life in Saratoga Springs was near non-existent. Although a number of factors came together, according to interviews with key informants, what essentially galvanized the downtown growth coalition was the large expansion of retail outside of the city limits. Indeed in the 1970s, Wilton was becoming a major retail center and threat to downtown merchants in Saratoga Springs. Thus, even though the city began to take proactive steps, including enacting a new program that would enhance building exteriors, the political consensus that emerged among growth interests in the city only coalesced in
reaction to inter-municipal factors, notably inter-municipal competition for retail development.

Table 10-1: Theoretical Frameworks of Local Governance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Concept of Government</th>
<th>Concept of Business</th>
<th>Concept of Residents</th>
<th>Concept of the Physical City</th>
<th>Concept of Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Choice</td>
<td>Distortionary to markets and preferences</td>
<td>Through free-markets, reflects public’s dispositions/preferences</td>
<td>Autonomous, pursues free choices with perfect information</td>
<td>Reflects the preferences of consumers and producers</td>
<td>Pluralist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth Machine</td>
<td>Tends to be aligned with rent seekers</td>
<td>Rent-seeking, at odds with public’s dispositions/preferences</td>
<td>Limited by and opposed to rent seekers, growth interests</td>
<td>Almost always reflects power of rent-seekers</td>
<td>Elite-centered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regime</td>
<td>Forms coalitions with private sector to achieve governance</td>
<td>Inter-dependent with government and residents</td>
<td>Inter-dependent with government and business</td>
<td>Reflects interest group competition</td>
<td>Pluralist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neo-Marxist</td>
<td>Controlled by financial capital</td>
<td>Controls and organizes the marketplace</td>
<td>Subservient to financial capital</td>
<td>Reflects the movement of financial capital</td>
<td>Elite-centered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Second, regional dynamics played a large role in that by the 1980s it was clear to many leaders in Saratoga Springs that the city needed to change course on development policy if it desired to preserve its unique status as a upscale tourist center in the region. Conventional development policies since the 1960s were beginning to blur the lines between the upscale image Saratoga Springs needed to cultivate and the humdrum developments in the surrounding, suburban towns. Therefore, in order to maintain differentiation, a renewed focus on downtown gentrification preceded a novel plan to protect the city’s entranceways and undeveloped parcels in the outer district.

The entire downtown project in Saratoga Springs was boosted by factors related to political fragmentation. The large spatial-political territory of Saratoga Springs engendered a broad and balanced tax base, which the city strategically used to subsidize
downtown redevelopment. With more resources, political consensus was eventually easier to attain in that Saratoga Springs could pursue preservation in outer areas while also accommodating substantial new development in the inner district because such dense commercial and residential development was viable given the city’s broad land- and tax base.

Downtown development in Troy is in some ways related to the story in Saratoga Springs, but in other ways, the two diverge in important respects. Like Saratoga Springs, Troy was faced with a deteriorating downtown by the 1970s and 1980s. With most of its traditional industries shuttered, Troy had to find new ways to promote development. Like Saratoga Springs, Troy was also competing with (and largely losing out to) retail development in new suburban areas. Troy, however, had fewer options than Saratoga Springs. For example, Saratoga Springs could have decided to develop new shopping centers in the outer district to compete with Wilton, but such a policy would clash with its emerging New Urbanist development vision.

Institutional factors as they were, unlike Saratoga Springs, Troy had no outer district it could preserve for tourist and cultural activities or to develop for retail outlets. It also had to grapple with more divergent political constituencies, a delicate balance the city has yet to achieve. To make matters worse, although Troy possessed a unique asset with the presence of RPI, because of political fragmentation, the city had no remaining developable land on which to accommodate RPI’s new business ventures that required large parcels of land. Mirroring the fragmented nature of the Capital Region, RPI’s new ventures also scattered throughout the metropolitan area. With few other viable options, the downtown became a major focus. But without any new industries to replace what had
left, Troy’s weak tax base and high property taxes simply could not support much
downtown redevelopment.

Complicating matters more, downtown redevelopment and business expansion
had to be balanced with the objectives of the public housing and historic preservationist
communities. But political consensus was made even more elusive by the fact that Troy,
with its limited resources, could not reconcile or appease the various interests very well.
Finally, Troy’s downtown would also now have to compete with Saratoga Springs’s
central district. Indeed, people desiring certain aspects of city living but not some the
stereotypically negative aspects of urban life in Troy (mediocre schools, high taxes,
crime) see Saratoga Springs much more favorably than Troy. The overall situation has
led to the inability of Troy to implement the kind of comprehensive development strategy
that has Saratoga Springs has benefited from since the late 1990s.

Public choice theory is also limited by its lack of a nuanced analysis of the public.
The theory simply sees consumers as having perfect information, and with this
knowledge, consumers choose goods and services that best match their preferences. The
framework does not consider how structural processes shape information or perceptions.
Political fragmentation, by splintering or dividing the population between declining cities
and stable or growing suburbs, in effect polarizes the public’s perceptions. For example,
legitimately or not, an impression exists in the Capital Region that Troy is unsafe, dirty,
crime-ridden, and disorienting. Moreover, suburbanites tend to see themselves as
different than city-dwellers. Therefore, even when new and unique businesses offering
desirable goods or services manage to open in Troy, their customer bases are artificially
restricted. In addition, even if the business climate and desirability of cities like Troy

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actually improve in real terms, because of the cultural inertia, old perceptions can linger and depress development.

The neo-Marxist model markedly differs from the public choice model. To review, this model contends that rather than the public, business or capital, by controlling the generation of wealth and investment, largely holds the upper hand at the bargaining table. This essentially makes the interests of the public subservient to the interests of capital. Unlike capital which is able to flow freely from place to place, cities are fixed spatially or graphically, meaning that they must attend to the financial concerns of firms and investors or risk threats of capital flight and subsequent decline. This typically means keeping taxes and social expenditures minimal in order to fashion a good “business climate.” In comparison to public choice theory, the neo-Marxist model better explains development in the Capital Region but still comes up short in a number of ways.

For example, this model would assume that both Saratoga Springs and Troy would be forced to reduce taxes and regulations in order to secure downtown development. This, however, was only partially observable. While Saratoga Springs initially attracted development by offering tax abatements to developers, the essential project of the city was to accentuate and situate the city within its local and regional context. Indeed, development was fundamentally organized around capitalizing on the city’s unique history. Instead of simply offering tax abatements, the primary impetus for downtown redevelopment surrounded major updates in the city’s infrastructure and actually enacting new regulations and stipulations that concerned historic preservation, parking requirements, and building design for new construction.
The situation was largely the same in Troy. For example, reducing city taxes was simply not possible in Troy given its already hobbled tax base. Instead, similar to Saratoga Springs, Troy mortgaged its downtown redevelopment plans on the city’s unique local and regional context. This essentially surrounded Troy’s historic connection to the Hudson River. Thus, development policy was centered around the riverfront, not reduced taxes or regulations. Akin to Saratoga Springs, this also required new public infrastructure. Understood as clashing with the city’s historic riverfront, Troy is currently dismantling its modernist City Hall building and has plans to realign streets to accommodate planned housing and retail projects. Overall, instead of being held hostage to the market, both cities are essentially buttressing their “cultural capital,” with Saratoga Springs finding much more success.

Business and Retail Development

In addition to land development and redevelopment, all of the municipalities I studied focused on business development, and in fact the two are intrinsically tied. Once more, political fragmentation assisted business development in some communities, while in others, notably Troy, fragmentation worked to undermine it, albeit indirectly. Regional hierarchical dynamics have also impacted business development, particularly in North Greenbush and Wilton. Existing theories explain important aspects of business development but still fall short overall. Therefore, I begin with growth machine and regime theory as they relate to business development, while subsequently filling in the gaps that this theory cannot explain.

In Troy, a small but determined group of downtown business owners had been seeking to establish a business improvement district or BID for some time. Yet the
process of establishing a BID there has been elusive and cumbersome in comparison to
the process Saratoga Springs undertook in 1978. The growth machine framework
contends that growth actors – developers, realtors, financiers, and other interests in the
private sphere that seek to benefit from growth—align with politicians to support policies
and projects that maximize “rents” or the exchange- or property values of land.

Underlying the growth machine framework is an assumption that private sector
interests will be relatively united, and such organization facilitates their influence on city
officials. To the chagrin of the BID advocates in Troy, however, downtown business
owners were not united. One might think political fragmentation, by creating a smaller
and more homogenous polity, would assist in political consensus, but in Troy the
opposite has happened. Hemmed in by growing suburbs and unable to reorient its
economy best suited to its high-tech assets, Troy has not been able to attract many new
residents or businesses. This has led to a relatively closed political structure in the city in
which old families and allegiances dominate the city’s political life. Indeed, politics in
the city surround decades-old allegiances imbued with a personalistic style of
governance.

The personalistic style of governance has impacted business development in an
indirect but negative way. Certain merchants who oppose a downtown BID, for instance,
assail it for no other reason than by the simple fact that other merchants, who are old
political or family rivals, support it. Such processes reflect aspects of the dominant
machine politics of a by-gone era in urban history that have managed to survive in Troy,
a city that lacks a dynamic and pluralistic political environment.
The growth machine framework better applies to communities like Saratoga Springs and Wilton. In Saratoga Springs, the private sector sought to partner with local government officials to enhance rents, particularly in the downtown district. But how were such relationships forged between public and private interests? Much of the answer lies in the work of civil society and non-profit groups. In regards to downtown renewal or gentrification, the Saratoga Springs Historic Preservation Foundation lobbied elected officials to save the historic buildings that would be the foundation for the districts’ reemergence as a center for both upscale national chain stores and locally owned small businesses and boutiques. Much of the renewed interest in downtown business development, nonetheless, was a product of inter-municipal processes, particularly a reaction to the growing threat of business growth in neighboring jurisdictions that competed with the city.

Perhaps even to a larger extent than Saratoga Springs, Wilton’s business and retail growth has been rapid from the 1980s onward. Wilton, more so than the other communities, possesses what Stone (1989) would refer to as a governing “regime.” Stone argues that because government in the American context is relatively weak, especially at the local level, public officials must collaborate with the private sector to achieve governance. Longtime town supervisor, Roy McDonald, was particularly engaged in business- and economic development in the town, and such efforts paid off handsomely. But the economic success of Wilton goes far beyond the efforts of one person or political office.

Regional dynamics played a large role. Lying in the Saratoga County growth corridor with ample open space on which to build, Wilton amassed not only numerous
retail developments, but also giant distribution centers for Target and Home Depot that serviced some of them. Fragmentation also played a role. Indeed, leaders in Wilton saw an opportunity to attract retail stores and other projects that were rejected by leaders and residents in Saratoga Springs. In essence, with fragmented governance, growth interests rebuffed by one community could simply go across municipal lines to set up their operations in another community. Fragmentation, therefore, allowed for more flexibility for growth interests which leaders like McDonald and the town’s growth coalition tapped into.

Stone argues that in order for local officials to effectively govern and retain their offices, they must forge strong partnerships with the private sector. The findings from this study also suggest that effective leadership and governing rests on high levels of consensus among residents, business, and public officials. More than in any other community in this study, Wilton possessed a high degree of political consensus. I think this has resulted from a number of factors related to regional dynamics and political fragmentation that have fostered a high level of political homogeneity in the town.

First, unlike Troy in which significant numbers of residents resided in the city by necessity and not by choice, Wilton has grown by attracting new individuals and families who actually chose to live in the town. Certain individuals, therefore, have selected to live in Wilton, notably middle class people who lean conservative on political issues. Demographic homogeneity tends to lead to political homogeneity. The strong local economy, a product of the town’s leadership being able to leverage the town’s assets related to a favorable regional context and a large geographic-spatial scope, has resulted
in attractive tax and service levels for residents and business. This has kept constituents satisfied and less likely to challenge both elected officials and development interests.

Although similar to Wilton in many regards, North Greenbush could not be considered as having a regime, and development has proceeded in a far different fashion than in Wilton. Despite the fact that the two communities share many of the same attributes including general demographic similarities, relatively low town taxes and good services, a suburban location, and considerable amounts of undeveloped area, North Greenbush has experienced much more resistance to development and much more political dissention than Wilton. Neither regime nor growth machine theory can explain the difference. The same is true for public choice theory. Instead, only when we take into account political fragmentation and regional hierarchical dynamics, does the variance make sense.

Unlike Wilton which has consolidated big-box detail development in one corridor in which much of the infrastructure was built and funded by Saratoga Springs, much of the big-box retail development near North Greenbush’s residential neighborhoods actually occurred in East Greenbush. In effect, the retail district is divided between the two towns. Therefore, because of political fragmentation, residents must deal with many of the negative aspects of development including greater traffic, noise, and loss of open space without receiving all of the financial benefits of an expanded tax base. Indeed, North- and East Greenbush have been involved in ongoing border disputes that concern which municipality actually has jurisdiction over the pieces of real estate on which major retail development has occurred.
Perhaps more interesting, however, are regional hierarchical dynamics. Wilton lies in the heart of Saratoga County, the fastest growing county in the state in which substantial development is proceeding throughout the entire county, including in adjacent Saratoga Springs. North Greenbush, in contrast, lies next to Troy, Rensselaer city, and Albany, all struggling cities that developers generally shun because of their unfavorable investment contexts. Yet, those cities’ populations still require retail and business services. Because of its location directly south of Troy and east of not only Rensselaer but downtown Albany, North Greenbush has become the preferred site for new development in the entire county. Overall, development in Rensselaer County has been much more uneven than in Saratoga County. Real or perceived, residents in North Greenbush feel as if their community is being singled-out as the retail and employment center of Rensselaer County. No such perception exists in Wilton as numerous communities in Saratoga County have witnessed substantial development.

Meanwhile, akin to the middle class community of Wilton, residents in North Greenbush are politically active, yet because of its different regional context, the political consensus that exists in Wilton is nowhere to be found in North Greenbush. This has impacted development in substantial ways including the rejection of a proposed and highly visible high-tech project, as well as delayed retail and housing projects.

High-Tech Development

The existing theories provide some insight into high-tech development, but without accounting for political fragmentation, it is impossible to understand the uneven nature of high tech growth and development in the Capital Region. High-tech development faced a tumultuous path in the Capital Region during the 1990s and 2000s.
New York State leaders made no secret of their desire to secure a major tech firm for more than two decades. The neo-Marxist model would assume that political leaders would not hesitate to offer generous subsidies to capital, especially firms that promise an influx of high-skill, high-paying jobs. Certainly, state and local economic development officials were eager to offer a project site and generous subsidies to a potential firm. Nonetheless, local residents and many local officials did not share the enthusiasm of state officials and local technocrats. Indeed, in the 1990s community opposition in North Greenbush forced the majority of the town’s elected officials to reject any further involvement with a potential company. This was seen as a major blow to both the state.

But why was North Greenbush even in the running for such a project? In regards to the availability of human capital, home to RPI, Troy would (in theory) be best suited for high tech development. Indeed, most cities cannot lay claim to a world-class science and engineering college. Yet, because fragmentation has resulted in Troy being a geographically land-locked city of a mere eleven square miles, it does not have the necessary parcels of land and open space to accommodate high tech development. The city’s only option would be to clear substantial tracts of old residential neighborhoods or exhausted riverfront industrial buildings. Such plans, however, would surely be cost prohibitive and politically calamitous.

Indeed, why do the expensive and politically toxic work of urban renewal when hundreds of acres of open space are available just outside of city limits of Troy? This is, of course, what RPI decided to do in the 1980s when it developed the Rensselaer Technology Park, and it was this site that was in the running for a semiconductor plant in the 1990s. But residents and leaders of North Greenbush, fearing what the plant might
mean for the town’s rural character, rejected the tech park as a potential site for a large semiconductor plant. Although it is impossible to make concrete projections, it is likely that this decision significantly altered RPI’s relationship with high-tech manufacturers. Because of fragmented jurisdictional control, it was also a decision over which Troy, the home of RPI, had no control. Therefore, beyond the city’s inherently poorer resource base which was not favorable for development, political fragmentation also deflected the ability for the city to utilize its existing resources, limited as they were.

Another chance for a semiconductor plant arrived several years later in Saratoga County. Although Saratoga County’s shepherding of the Luther Forest/AMD project supports the neo-Marxist notion that firms locate in areas in which they can extract generous public subsidies and other goods, high-development in the county can only be understood while accounting for the effects of the regional opportunity structure. Although they possess fewer authorities than cities, counties have considerable powers over taxation and services. Because Saratoga County is also completely independent from the three other major counties in the region, it also possesses its own structure of government. This was important in that the county’s governance structure facilitated organization and communication between the different stakeholders in the county.

Organization and communication were vital in that it was a lack of public dialogue and understanding that contributed to the rejection of a similar plant in North Greenbush. In contrast, the board of supervisors form of government in Saratoga County provided strong links between localities and the county in that each town supervisor was also on the county board. Therefore, local concerns were more readily adopted into the project proposal, including a requirement to preserve open space. Overall, county
officials played the vital role in that they acted as the negotiator or liaison between local residents and local officials who would have to be convinced of the project’s viability and state officials who had access to levers in the state budget and thus public subsidies.

These findings suggest that while capital is powerful, local institutional and political factors can make or break a project. If capital is to succeed, it likely must recognize and exploit the unique, vertical political linkages present in localities. The AMD project in Saratoga County should also not be divorced from general development in the county. Indeed, the same political factors that facilitated AMD’s project have also assisted in leveraging other firms. Political consensus, partly the product of its form of government but also related to its demographic homogeneity, have helped county officials “speak with one voice” to investors. In addition, political fragmentation has separated Saratoga County from the other counties in the region which contain most of the regions’ poor residents, deteriorating neighborhoods, and abandoned industrial sites. Therefore, the county has more resources to encourage development.

Open Space

Open space has also been a major issue within the Capital Region, particularly within Saratoga County. Open space is related to the regional opportunity structure because the acquisition of open space necessitates substantial financial resources in addition to regulatory power. Therefore, from this standpoint, it is not surprising that Saratoga County has led the way with land preservation in the Capital Region. Another key reason may be that Saratoga is the fastest growing county in the state and this has galvanized open space activists. None of the existing theories, however, specifically
explain why communities would seek to preserve land, but growth machine theory and regime theory can be brought into this discussion.

Some of the existing literature on environmental conservation brings into light the issue of “greenwashing” (Lee, 2009; Ramus and Montiel, 2004). The idea behind this rests on the premise that growth elites use the promise of environmental conservation to extract public support for development projects or consumer products. In regards to our concerns, an example might be when a developer seeks to garner public support for a project by promising to preserve 30 acres of open space in a 100-acre housing or commercial development. With the exception of a project or two this was not particularly present in Saratoga County. Rather, open space was framed as a way to preserve the history, identity, character, and thus the quality of life of the county. Lee (2009) refers to this as a “territorial ideology.” Although it is false to claim that advocates of open space were not genuinely interested in cultural and environmental concerns, interwoven into this narrative was an overt defense of property values. In essence, clear-cutting Saratoga County would be disastrous for the local economy. Furthermore, similar to how mainstream developers will develop land to intensify exchange values, it has been argued by open space advocates that preserving land, particularly near upscale residential areas, will accomplish the same goal. Some academic studies support this assessment (Anderson and West, 2006)

Political fragmentation and inter-municipal processes, however, must be brought into the discussion. Saratoga Springs, for example, advanced open space preservation to both protect the character of the city from overdevelopment within its boundaries but also from encroaching development in neighboring communities. Indeed, with no authority
over development in Wilton, for example, Saratoga Springs sought to develop a greenbelt around the city as a way to protect and maintain its unique identity apart from the more suburban towns that abutted the city.

Fragmentation also made it easier for groups like the Open Space Project (Saratoga PLAN) to pursue preservation. Because of local control, the main political “access point” for the Open Space Project was the city council of Saratoga Springs. This is all the more prescient given the defeat of an open space referendum in neighboring Wilton in which residents were more likely than their Saratoga Springs’ counterparts to emphasize property rights over public goods. Therefore, fragmentation in relatively affluent, growing communities (in contrast to political fragmentation around Troy) made each respective municipality more politically homogeneous which assisted in consensus, either for or against open space preservation.

The examination of open space also assists in our understanding of governance and how coalitions are strengthened. Regime theory argues that elected officials must pursue partnerships with business or the private sector to secure some form of governing latitude. Moreover, what signifies a true regime is the ability for such a body to achieve dominance in city affairs. The case of Saratoga Springs presents a varying portrait in this regard. From the 1960s until the 1990s, Saratoga Springs was governed by what could ostensibly be considered a regime: a dominant Republican Party partnering with the banking and real estate sectors. By the 1990s, however, this regime began to fracture over the issue of over-development and sprawl.

By the late 1990s enough residents perceived that “growth as usual” would not guarantee the city’s continuing advancement. Indeed, such circumstances could even
undermine its privileged status. It was during this period that the Democrats and open space interests amassed influence within the city. In fact, their influence was enough to convince the public to tax themselves in order for the city to acquire and preserve open space. Not to be out-maneuvered, by the mid-2000s, the Republicans regained their influence by essentially co-opting the open space issue from the Democrats. While still the pro-development party, the Republicans successfully retook control of the city by courting the open space constituency. Therefore, these findings suggest the importance or necessity for dominant interests in communities to transmit fluid or evolving appeals, even if they do not necessarily hold such views. If urban regimes want to survive, they must develop and successfully communicate positions that are both favorable and plausible to a changing electorate. The “pro-development” Republican Party convinced enough residents of their interest in open space by pursuing the open space referendum that taxed property owners in order to amass funds to accumulate open space.

Open Space is intrinsically tied to political fragmentation in additional ways. Open space advocates like Saratoga PLAN and ECOS contend that open space works best, especially in regards for the protection of wildlife and ecosystems, when it is amassed in large, continuous tracts. For example, 100 acres of open space in one, unified tract, is preferable to two, disconnected 50-acre tracts. Therefore, groups including Saratoga PLAN deemed it necessary to begin to work inter-municipally. Indeed, ecosystems and forests do not naturally conform to “artificial” municipal lines. County-wide work was accomplished when the group merged with the Land Trust of Saratoga County. A project that the organization heavily touts is the Saratoga County Green Infrastructure Plan that sought to coordinate open spaces and trails between
municipalities. The organization essentially educates specific communities in the county on the importance of connected open space and coordinated trails and parklands. Similarly, their Community Partnership Program assists small communities that lack planning staff in drafting comprehensive plans that align with the comprehensive plans of neighboring communities.

Thus, much of Saratoga PLAN’s work surrounded community and political integration, integrating disparate communities into county-wide policies and goals. Because of the importance of continuous land tracts, open space preservation can only be successful when fragmented municipalities join to cooperate on planning and conservation. If the various municipalities in Saratoga County can all begin to agree on fundamental aspects surrounding development and preservation, then these policies will in theory somewhat negate or neutralize the most problematic consequences of political fragmentation. Nonetheless, because Saratoga PLAN is primarily focused on Saratoga County, the organization lacks efforts in regional community integration.

New Regionalism

To review, new regionalism brings attention to many of the problems fostered by the fragmentation of political authority in American metropolitan areas. It seeks a new focus on coordinated central city and suburban development with the intent of reducing income and tax base disparities. It also represents a holistic approach to long term planning that involves the physical, social, and economic health of the entire metropolitan region. Encompassing many of the recent trends in urban planning that are identified by buzz words such as “livable communities” and “smart growth,” these concepts seek to
integrate equity, environmental, and economic concerns into the physical plans and spatial designs of communities and regions.

Wheeler (2002), Foster (1997), Orfield (2002) and Drier, Mollenkopf and Swanstrom (2005) all point to the significant potential of non-governmental organizations of civil society for advancing the objectives of new regionalism. Orfield (2002) and Weir, Wolman, and Swanstrom (2005) have examined the work of faith-based groups in regards to regional planning and equity strategies, particularly the Gamaliel Foundation. Meanwhile, Gainsborough (2003) and Kanter (2000) have studied how and whether the business community can play a powerful role in regional cooperation.

In this study I examined both non-governmental organizations (Saratoga PLAN, ECOS) and government agencies (Hudson River Valley Greenway, Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission) that are involved in regional planning issues. I studied these interests because the literature has ignored them even though major scholars have suggested that they be analyzed. The findings here suggest that non-governmental organizations have major limitations as it involves regional planning. As the examination of Saratoga PLAN detailed, if an organization’s constituency is too narrow, actual regional planning cannot be achieved, and resources may even become more concentrated in one particular jurisdiction. In addition, non-governmental organizations are not technically responsible to any particular constituency. This becomes problematic especially when public money is used to assist a private organization’s goals and programs. Overall, a level of inquiry into the respective organizations ought to be the norm in order to determine whether public money is actually contributing to the public good or to private gain. For instance, are the organization’s activities simply supporting...
the objectives of the organization’s board of directors, or do they also contribute to social
goals?

Building upon this assessment, even when the state is involved as in the Albany
Pine Bush Preserve Commission, the lack of geographic scope made the agency more
similar to Saratoga PLAN than the other state agency, the Hudson River Valley
Greenway. Nonetheless, an asset that the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission
possessed that was not present at Saratoga PLAN was the legal backing and influence of
the state. Indeed, developers and public officials took the Commission’s
recommendations over land use within the project boundaries very seriously.
Recommendations from Saratoga PLAN have less weight behind them.

Overall, the agency most likely to have an impact on regional planning was the
Hudson River Valley Greenway. It had the backing of the state, including the ability to
offer communities legal protections concerning their comprehensive plans, as well as
financial carrots to carry out community plans that advanced sustainability and inter-
municipal coordination. Furthermore, its geographic scope included the entire Capital
Region and Hudson River Valley area. Therefore, it represented an agency with truly a
regional reach.

Policy

Using specific measures, political fragmentation is increasing in the Capital
Region. One factor that has made fragmented governance worse, in the opinion of Troy
officials, is the proliferation of special districts like that of Water District 14 in North
Greenbush. Special districts compound the problem of municipal fragmentation in that
they further fragment the political authority over geographic space by creating additional
authority- and taxing layers, including sewer and water districts, library districts, health care districts, and economic development districts.

Many districts are created to provide services to recently built-up areas. Subsequently, they are seen by some, including officials in Troy, as facilitating urban sprawl in that they provide services to outlying areas that would otherwise be without them. Rensselaer County alone has 136 special districts which contributes to tax inequities as well as overlapping services. This would occur, for example, if one area of a town is within a special water- or sewer district initially before the town itself offered water and sewer services. However, if the town subsequently decides two years later to build its own infrastructure, redundant and uneven services can ensue. In all, special districts impact the ROS by creating more stratified political and economic landscapes. Therefore, states or localities, if they are serious about moderating fragmentation and uneven development, should develop disincentives for new special districts. These might include tax penalties on developers involved with special districts or service reductions for these units.

Numerous officials would like to see the creation of revenue-sharing policies and programs. Revenue-sharing would dampen fiscal and development polarization both between different municipalities and within municipalities that have numerous special districts. The prospects for revenue-sharing, however, do not look promising, and local leaders believe it comes down to the issue of power. Substantial political power within the state of New York and within the Capital Region resides in the suburban areas. “State leaders live there. State leaders don’t live in Troy. There’s a lack of knowledge of urban issues and the cause and effect of certain policies. {State leaders} don’t understand how
things are inter-related, including the effects of special districts” (Tim Mattice, personal interview, 02/23/09). Therefore, suburban leaders and constituents will be loath to agree to anything that might threaten their fiscal balance sheets, including revenue-sharing, especially at a time of economic fragility.

Nevertheless, as one of the case studies illustrates, a strategic way to frame revenue-sharing and other regional-oriented policies would be to explain to suburban leaders and residents leaders how uneven development outcomes—illustrated by over-development, congestion, noise pollution, and loss of open space in their communities, and, in turn, under-development and deteriorating infrastructure in the central cities—could be partially ameliorated by regionalist policies that would seek to balance growth and development. By explaining the consequences and framing the issue in this manner, suburbanites might be less likely to see regionalism as infringing on their pocketbooks and properties. In fact, it would largely shift the discourse to preservation— the preservation of the quality of life in their communities that are seen to be slipping away. Overall, explaining and framing political fragmentation in this manner emphasizes the potential “win-win” processes of regionalist policies and the “lose-lose” processes that would continue with the status quo of fragmentation.

Framing the situation along these lines would probably be not enough to convince residents and town officials to cede some of their autonomy and funds. Therefore, there might be a role for the state or the federal government to become involved in correcting or ameliorating the problems exacerbated by political fragmentation and growing economic stratification. Indeed, this is what one Saratoga County official recommended. Such a proposition, however, would also encounter numerous roadblocks. For example,
there is little appetite at the moment for greater federal involvement in local affairs. Despite the super-majorities they hold in the U.S. Congress and their control of the Executive Branch, the Democrats at this time face numerous pressures surrounding healthcare, unemployment, foreign affairs, environmental policy, and job creation. Adding redundant funding for inner city areas at this time would probably not be seen as politically advantageous. For instance, Democrats have become a majority party in part because of significant inroads in moderate, suburban America. No longer a party simply of labor, immigrants, and urban machine bosses, shifting additional funding to urban areas could alienate this important new constituency for the Democratic Party.

New York State is a similar story. Although more urban than the United States as a whole, the majority of the electorate in the state is still either suburban or rural. Once more, the Democratic Party has made inroads only through greater support in suburban areas around New York City as in Westchester and Rockland Counties and in similar districts that abut the larger cities upstate. Therefore, talk of the redistribution of resources could potentially spell problems for the Democrats.

A more politically feasible policy might be an expansion of the Hudson River Valley Greenway’s Compact Communities program. The program provides municipalities with extra funding and indemnity from lawsuits by developers if they adopt comprehensive plans that meet certain “smart growth” standards while also complementing those of the county in which they lie. The latter is particularly important in regards to the development of coherent street grids, pedestrian ways, and open space.

Only now possible in communities within the Greenway program area, a “Compact Community” program could be initiated statewide through an existing agency
like the Department of Environmental Conservation or another body. This would provide local officials with lucrative “carrots” to reform their comprehensive plans in ways that would neutralize or at least dampen many of the negative outcomes of political fragmentation. Such state involvement also might diffuse concerns or anxieties among municipal officials in regards to questions over the proper authorities and conditions of inter-municipal coordination. For example, with the state acting as an advisor, communities that had sought to work with their neighbors but did not follow through due to concerns over another community gaining unfair advantages, could now request reassurances from state agencies. These procedures could ensure uniform and universal requirements for all communities wishing to participate.

Other programs similar to those administered by private agencies could also be advanced with greater reach and results at the state level. For example, Saratoga PLAN’s Community Partners Program assists smaller communities that lack trained planning staff in technical aspects of community planning. Its primary mission is to assist participating communities with long-term planning to ensure that their plans and policies complement and are coordinated with those of neighboring communities. Providing technical assistance along these lines may go a long way in counteracting the negative outgrowths of political fragmentation. Furthermore, state agencies might also provide for greater oversight and accountability than private agencies which are not subject to public scrutiny.

Other programs could be introduced to reinvest in existing neighborhoods, moderating the need to create new infrastructure that in many cases does not align with the planning goals of neighboring communities. This is the path in which Saratoga
Springs has proceeded since the late 1990s. Policy makers in the city have steered substantial development, including mid-rise residential condominiums and office buildings, into downtown and adjacent districts. The city’s policies reflect many of the tenets of New Urbanism, a movement which seeks to bring traditional town design to either new greenfields development or in the redevelopment of existing sites. In Saratoga Springs, the New Urbanist developments have mainly arisen on former parking lots and other underutilized sites in and adjacent to the city’s downtown.

Similarly, the town of Malta, foreseeing the added population and commercial activity related to tech giant, AMD’s arrival, has rezoned much of the town’s commercial plats for mixed-use, medium to high-density development. Officials believe that developing Malta in this way will restrain sprawl and moderate the loss of open space. The plans include hundreds of residential units over retail stores with minimum setbacks from the road—a thoroughly New Urbanist formula (Hong and Vielkind, 2008).

New York State could encourage more communities to adopt New Urbanist plans by expanding the Main Street Revitalization Program. At this time funds for the program are quite limited, and thus many communities are probably not able to undergo the investments that are necessary for older, existing neighborhoods to remain viable for new residents and businesses. This is a problem if the state is truly concerned about urban disinvestment and de-concentration. Nonetheless, the program is a step in the right direction. Created in 2004 and seeing continued support from Governor Paterson, the $20 million program is administered by the Housing Trust Fund Corp. and the Division of Housing and Community Renewal (New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal, 2010).
New York State could also adopt “smart growth” policies similar to those recently enacted in neighboring Massachusetts. In 2005, Governor Romney and the state legislature approved legislation that reimburses communities for any increased education expenses sustained when families move into new, middle-income housing constructed in designated “smart growth” districts. The law complements a 2004 zoning law change that, with financial carrots, incentivizes communities to build new housing units adjacent to transit stations and town centers. The goal is to direct growth in areas in which development can proceed in an environmentally sustainable fashion (Associated Press State & Local Wire, 2005).

Limitations and Future Research

This project and the case study approach have a number of limitations. First, I only examined communities and organizations in one region within one state. The analysis of political fragmentation, therefore, cannot be generalized to include areas throughout the United States, much less international cases. Rather, the findings better apply to places with similar local governmental units and structures. This would include places in the Northeast and Midwest rather than newer areas of settlement in the West. Because state laws impact the powers of local government as well as environmental and land use issues, what applies in Saratoga County, NY, would not necessarily apply in Berkshire County, Massachusetts, for example. State government and various land use regulations also impact organizations. Saratoga PLAN and ECOS, for example, operate within the context of New York State laws and regulations. Similar organizations that operate in Connecticut or Minnesota, for example, would experience variant processes of governance.
In light of these limitations, this project could be expanded to include a broader analysis of environmental and land use organizations. I only examined four groups, all of which undertook work related to community planning and land use issues. It would be both feasible and empirically interesting to conduct a larger survey of land conservation and planning organizations to discover their role in addressing problems of sprawl and political fragmentation. This study could broaden the analysis to groups in other states and regions in that New York state, for example, has different regulations over land use and planning than Vermont. Just the analysis of state funding for the four groups made this apparent.

It might also be particularly interesting to compare coastal and inland groups, and the different ways in which they define and frame their objectives. For instance, both Saratoga PLAN and the Hudson River Valley Greenway frame their undertakings around “heritage,” or protecting and enhancing the unique history of the Hudson River region. Do coastal groups along the northern Atlantic, for example, follow similar lines or develop their own, unique narratives and strategies? Narratives in these places, for example, may include more references to protecting traditional industries like fishing compared to frames developed in the Hudson Valley. This is important in that prior research (Lee, 2009) suggests that the ideological framing of conservation strongly affects community support for local environmental policies.

Findings from this study should also point researchers to examine the parochial nature of open space and land conservation groups. Researchers should be particularly cognizant of the inward-looking nature of many of these groups and how and why this develops. For example, further research could examine the diverging paths of particular
groups. Saratoga PLAN, though still largely parochial, began as an agency that only operated in Saratoga Springs. Eventually, however, the group expanded to include all of Saratoga County, and today it has partnered with similar organizations in neighboring Washington County. Researchers ought to examine the reasons why some groups select to expand (Saratoga PLAN), while others limit their reach to a fairly narrow constituency (Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission).

This research also pointed to the centrality of private donations to open space and conservation groups. Additional studies could examine more closely how private donors exert influence on the policies that these groups pursue, including relationships with landowners. When these groups attain public funds from various levels of government, does this change the equation, or does this simply give private interests who operate these organizations more latitude to pursue their own goals?

The success of Saratoga PLAN in influencing development policy in Saratoga Springs is particularly noteworthy, specifically the way in which open space preservation was used to strategically steer undesirable development away from the city’s entrances from major highways. Additional research should examine how open space preservation has been used in other cities and communities to alter development patterns. This research suggests that open space groups did not pursue these projects simply for the intrinsic value of open space. Rather, open space was a way to protect the character, culture, and economic values of the city. On the other hand, although groups used open space to protect financial investments, to label the project as simple greenwashing would be an inappropriate caricature of the movement.
Another future avenue of research might be to analyze the role of BIDs or business improvement districts in urban redevelopment. My research only entailed a brief overview of the work that small business owners in Troy are attempting in regards to establishing a BID. However, dozens of BIDs exist in the Capital Region—including a few in Albany—and their existence appears to have ramifications in the places in which they operate. One of the consequences includes the further privatization of public services. Questions in this area might surround how public officials perceive BIDs. Because many BIDs work on beautification efforts and street and sidewalk cleaning, do their activities call into question the capacity for the public sector to provide these services? Do public officials believe that BIDs result in, or rather are the result of the weakening public sphere?

Despite the further research that is necessary to more adequately answer the preceding questions, findings from this study suggest that not only BIDS, but larger economic development projects, face hurdles not only in cities that already have prohibitively high local taxes, but also when leaders lack political cohesion. Troy’s pursuit of a downtown BID was particularly imperiled by the latter component. Local business owners held personal grudges over and petty grievances towards other merchants. Both longstanding allegiances with some parties and equally charged feuds with other interests, imperiled the project in Troy. Other times absentee landlords sparred with local property owners in regards to capturing increased “rents.” Conversely, strong “social capital” in Saratoga Springs greased the wheels of community development. Social capital can be defined as norms of social trust and reciprocity that facilitate social activities (Putnam, 1993). Findings from this study support previous work on the effects
of social capital on community development (Sharp et al, 2002; Flora et al, 1997). These studies, however, overwhelmingly focused on rural communities, whereas this study adds an urban and suburban dimension to this work. More important, it also illustrates how jurisdictional fragmentation within the context of a resource-poor community can exacerbate public dissention.

An additional question emerges from the political matters in North Greenbush. For example, residents in the Defreestville section of the town became so disenchanted with both local political parties, that people from DANA, the local neighborhood association, formed the Greenbush Party. This raises the question: how often does this occur in other communities? What factors or conditions are necessary for new local parties to emerge and compete in elections, and when are these new parties successful? Are these parties mainly focused on issues surrounding development or are there other concerns in which new parties become involved?

In addition to concerns over retail and housing development, North Greenbush also fought high-tech development, specifically a potential semiconductor-chip factory which could have been extremely beneficial economically. In contrast, Saratoga County leaders were able to convince lawmakers and the public on the virtues of semiconductor-related development and were successful in their massive project. High tech development, of course, has not been limited to upstate New York. Therefore, future research might analyze community reactions to high-tech development in other regions in the United States or in other countries. Substantial research on NIMBY’ism has been undertaken in regards to heavy industrial sites, big box retail stores, affordable housing projects, power plants, and landfills, and even sports stadiums, but researchers have not
examined and compared the characteristics of communities that welcome large high-tech projects versus those that oppose them. Additional questions might surround the type or level of community offsets or benefits that have to be extracted in order for voters or officials to approve major plants. Others might surround media depictions of the projects or the ways in which higher education institutions are involved with high tech development. Indeed, Saratoga County officials were successful in their endeavors to some degree because nanotechnology had become an accepted growth area at the University at Albany in the years prior to AMD’s arrival.

In spite of the further work that would need to be done to address the preceding questions, this study illustrates that fragmented political authority has a powerful impact on development outcomes. Decisions by a handful of people in one, small jurisdiction like North Greenbush or Malta can have powerful ramifications that impact everyone in the region. Because of this researchers should not ignore growth politics in small communities, in suburban areas, and sub-areas within political jurisdictions. To do so would be neglectful since it is in these locations in which most of the development is occurring. Indeed, elected officials in North Greenbush voted to oppose a chip fabrication plant in the RPI technology park on the grounds that it would spoil the bucolic ambience of the town and lead it to becoming the employment center of Rensselaer County. In contrast, if state law had permitted Troy to annex its hinterlands, it is conceivable that residents and elected officials in more urbanized Troy would have possessed more favorable views toward a semiconductor plant. With a broader constituent base, elected officials in Troy could have also been in a better position to challenge the slow-growth, suburban interests that killed the project in North Greenbush. Overall, without the
political fragmentation that left Troy on the sidelines without any jurisdiction over the RPI technology park, the outcome could have been far different.

On a somewhat different note but related to the AMD plant is the issue of physical infrastructure. New York State and local governments provided roughly $1.2 billion in subsidies to AMD. This figure is compellingly close to the figure that is necessary to update and stabilize the region’s storm-water and sewer systems. Without such updates, significant quantities of pollutants continue to be discharged into local streams and rivers on a regular basis. A future research report could examine the scope of these infrastructure shortfalls on a state or national basis. This could include a national survey of local governments, namely public works administrators, or data compilation through other methods.

While future research is needed, findings from this study underline serious issues related to governance and infrastructure. Although upgrading the condition of physical infrastructure including water and sewer lines is imperative for public safety, public health, and standard of living reasons, it is also central to economic development. For example, having modern grids, water-, and sewer lines is vital for maintaining efficiencies. Yet, because of their inconspicuous nature, they are often ignored by political leaders who would rather focus on high profile projects like new office parks and university buildings. Such projects are not only “sexier” but their visibility signals to constituents that political leaders are bringing money into their districts. This short term mentality poses significant risks.

Concerning infrastructure, a growing number of communities in the United States have shifted their urban policies to planned compression or contraction. Youngstown, OH
is one such community and others, notably those that lie within the traditional “rust belt,” have followed Youngstown’s lead. The policy essentially entails the withdrawal of public services, including road maintenance, water, and utilities from certain, underdeveloped and deteriorating neighborhoods in order to redirect scarce funds to districts that have a better chance of remaining viable. Residents in such districts are compensated and paid to relocate to adjacent neighborhoods. City officials in these cities, in turn, believe that better services can subsequently be offered to the remaining neighborhoods at equivalent or lower tax assessments.

A more mild type of planned contraction is now in place in Troy. It is particularly relevant given the frequent water- and sewer line breaks in central Troy. Although the city is not abandoning neighborhoods, it has instituted the process of de-densification in certain neighborhoods. The city is demolishing abandoned or deteriorating row houses (which are relatively tightly-packed) and replacing them with new houses on larger lots. City officials hope this policy will attract more middle-income households into the city. In essence, with renewed emphasis on downtown development, while simultaneously working on de-densification in some of the outlying neighborhoods, Troy is attempting to look more like Saratoga Springs. The question is ‘will this policy be successful, especially given the poor state of Troy’s public schools?’ Indeed, more research needs to be done on cities that are attempting planned contraction and de-densification. Are these policies successful? What do residents think about the plans? Are services actually improving in said communities, and are tax rates becoming more competitive with suburban jurisdictions? How does planned contraction impact local public school boundaries? These are all questions worth examining.
One last issue emerges that merits further research and analysis especially for those concerned with heightening economic stratification within metropolitan areas. A new trend has emerged in which census-designated areas are incorporating in order to gain further control over taxation, services, and development. What makes the trend more intriguing is that many of these new cities are in effect, private entities, in so far as they contract out most or all city services to private corporations. One such entity is Sandy Springs, Georgia, which lies just to the north of Atlanta. Increasingly weary of watching their property taxes support low income and African American enclaves in wider Fulton County, the residents of Sandy Springs voted to form their own city in 2005. By choosing to secede, their community’s revenues would not be redistributed throughout Fulton County. Such moves were replicated in numerous other communities in the county, with the result that local political officials feared the deleterious effect on the county’s public transit system and public hospital (Klein, 2007). The growing move towards contracting out city services to private companies—including budget and accounting departments—should not be ignored in that this facilitates city incorporation. Indeed, building a complete city from the ground up would take years and create a number of particularly onerous and potentially ruinous circumstances.

Such trends should greatly concern urban planners, social scientists, and policy makers in that further incorporations facilitated by the privatization of government increase political fragmentation and compound economic stratification. Through these policies, the wealthy can increasingly remove themselves from public concerns, leaving working class and poor enclaves to increasingly weak and dysfunctional public institutions. One only has to look at New Orleans to see the full realization of this trend,
and Troy in some respects already reflects these circumstances with its economically segregated neighborhoods, weak tax base, and marginal public services. Restrictions limiting incorporation therefore ought to be enacted, which generally fall into the realm of state government. Although communities have a right to a certain amount of autonomy, when their own, private decisions have immense ramifications on regional concerns such as the viability of public transportation and public health, the constituents potentially affected by these decisions ought to also have a public voice in the matter.

Conclusion

Findings from this study and a growing awareness by policy makers suggest that political fragmentation cannot be ignored both in regards to its impact on public services as well as development. Hamilton, Miller, and Paytas (2004) are in part correct when they state that economic performance “determines the capacity to carry out the task of governing at the local level” (p. 170). Indeed, the comparative wealth of Saratoga Springs facilitates the civic efficacy of citizens and elected officials in that city. Yet the case of Troy, in particular, suggests that local political structures influence the capacity for communities to respond to shifting and dynamic economic trends which subsequently affect urban and economic development. Situated in the context of a highly dynamic, global economy, places like Troy with a governance structure unable to adapt to shifts in human capital and markets in a way that is necessary, are particularly susceptible to the tumultuous currents of an increasingly unfettered market.

Indeed, development in Troy has suffered not simply because the city lacks the purchasing power of middle and high income households, it also has been impeded by
dysfunctional local political structures and internal fragmentation which have undermined the city’s ability to utilize its existing resources including a historic downtown and an expansive riverfront. Local political structures in Troy have also hampered necessary economic restructuring in that the city has not been able to fully capitalize on one the city’s core assets, RPI. Instead, because of fragmentation, projects and investments related to the institution have largely gone to either neighboring communities or have been scattered throughout the entire region. Without having a core, new industry on which to build and significant new market-rate residential development, it has been nearly impossible for Troy to escape the disinvestment treadmill. On the other hand, local political structures have facilitated and undergirded efforts by leaders in Saratoga Springs to refashion their economy to better suit the new economy.

To be sure, Troy has many assets that could be exploited in the future. In addition to RPI and having access to the Hudson River unfettered by a major highway, Troy has an ample public water supply—a resource notably deficient in Saratoga Springs. Troy’s water supply is a boon for internal development, and the city fills it coffers by selling water to neighboring municipalities. Unfortunately, Troy has not been able to fully capitalize on these strategic resources.

In light of this discussion, this study should caution economic development officials and theorists in regards to the opportunities cities have to, in effect, reinvent themselves, especially through top-down approaches. Although places with important educational institutions like Pittsburgh have been relatively successful at transitioning into the neoliberal, service economy, many cities, particularly small cities that lack access to capital as well as open land or suitable brownfields on which to redevelop, might face
fairly prohibitive challenges. Furthermore, simply focusing on what other cities have
done to enhance their economic base—for example downtown redevelopment—ignores
the importance of stratified regional contexts. City B, for example, may seek to push
downtown gentrification like its successful neighbor, City A, without the full realization
that perhaps City A was successful in part because of political structures, historic
experiences, and indigenous qualities that might not be present in City B. As a result
redevelopment struggles or even fails.

Furthermore, this study should caution local officials in their quest for
development. As this case illustrates, even in places with similar characteristics, one
community (North Greenbush) may staunchly oppose development that is tolerated or
welcomed in the other (Wilton). The discrepancy, however, lies not in differences
internal to the community, but in inter-municipal processes or regional dynamics which
impact local perceptions. Because of this, if local officials desire to remain in office, they
increasingly need to be cognizant of regional issues and contexts.

Reforms that incorporate regional and inter-municipal planning will only grow
more important as metropolitan areas continue to expand outward. If not population, the
number households will continue to grow in the Capital Region and in the country as a
whole. This will necessitate either new development in greenfield sites or the
redevelopment of brownfields and/or existing urban or suburban neighborhoods. Such
trends, however, face numerous hurdles. As we have seen in the case of Troy, due to
unfavorable investment climates and limited developable parcels, urban areas that would
otherwise be ripe for new redevelopment are nevertheless shunned by developers and
investors. Suburban areas, however, are increasingly resisting the outward movement of
residential subdivisions and retail outlets. Residents here worry not only about quality of life constraints that may ensue following more development, they also fear that such changes may harm the values of their properties.

Therefore, because of urban undesirability and suburban resistance, where will new and necessary development proceed? I argue that such complications and obstacles will call for enhanced regional planning and authority. With heightening discontent in outlying suburban areas like North Greenbush, such conditions may belie the traditional suburban sentiment against regional compromises including revenue sharing and inter-municipal collaboration. In this emerging setting there will undoubtedly be a place for private organizations like Saratoga PLAN and public agencies like the Hudson River Valley Greenway to play an important role. Leaders, nonetheless, must be conscious of the limitations of such groups, particularly private, non-profit organizations.

If demographic change and disruptions in the availability of fossil fuels results in the renewal of interest in urban areas to the extent that inter-municipal tax and service disparities are sufficiently negated, regional planning focused on redirecting revenues may be less necessary and long-standing suburban resistance to regional governance may become less relevant. In the meantime novel approaches to enhancing coordination and planning between jurisdictions are needed, and local municipal leaders will have to increasingly consider and take into account the consequences of development plans on their neighbors and the region as a whole.
Appendix A: Political Alignment in the Capital Region

Albany/Albany County

Like the metropolitan area in general, politics and the political makeup of the Capital Region is quite diverse and varied. The Democratic Party is the strongest in and has long dominated politics in the City of Albany as well as in Albany County. Interestingly enough, the longest-standing political machine in the country was the Democratic machine in Albany which, beginning with political boss Dan O’Connell and with his hand-picked successor, Erastus Corning succeeding, ran the city from 1921 to 1983 (Rabrenovic, 1996). Though certainly not left unchallenged, the Democratic machine was able to sweep every city election for six decades. However, one of the machine’s most notable challenges came in 1961 when Presbyterian minister, turned activist, turned politician, Robert K. Hudnut, challenged the Corning Administration by forming a new political party, the Citizens United Reform Effort or CURE. The party was composed of Republicans, Independents, and Democrats disillusioned with what they saw as the machine’s neglect of small businesses, housing, and the city’s schools and infrastructure. Though Corning easily defeated Hudnut, the reform movement did have an impact on Albany politics as illustrated by the upset victory of Dan Burton, a Republican backed by CURE, over machine candidate Richard Conner for a congressional seat in the 1966 election (Grondahl, 2008).

The current mayor of Albany is Democrat Gerald D. Jennings. He is serving his fifth term. In 1993 in an surprising upset, Jennings defeated Harold Joyce who had the formal endorsement of the Democratic Party establishment. Prior to his election as
mayor, Jennings had been an administrator for Albany Public Schools and served on the city’s common council for thirteen years (City of Albany, 2008).

Although Jennings, like his machine predecessors, has been able to withstand electoral challenges during his tenure, his political opponents have used similar arguments against him that CURE’s candidates used against the long-standing political machine. During the election cycle in 2005, Jennings’ most significant challenger was long time civil rights and community activist, Alice Green, from the Green Party. Green contended that Jennings’ fixation on large scale projects like the over-budget downtown convention center left important neighborhood issues including safe, affordable housing, crime, and decaying infrastructure out of the city’s focus. Even with the prodding of well known consumer advocate, Ralph Nader (Nearing, 2005a), Jennings refused to debate Green, a move that could have boosted her publicity and subsequent candidacy. Though falling short of victory, Green secured nearly one quarter of the vote while spending only one tenth the amount of money as Jennings. Voters also replaced two Jennings’ backed, incumbent school board members and two common council members with candidates supported by the Working Families Party, a group that also aligned with Green’s candidacy (Nearing, 2005b).

For decades, political leaders in the city of Albany also dominated Albany County politics. With steady population increases, however, in the suburban towns of Colonie, Guilderland, and Bethlehem as well as a growing number of independents and registered Democrats in those areas (and a decline in Republican registration), city dominance over county politics has weakened. In 2006 and again in 2007 suburban-backed candidates won Albany County commissioner posts over their city-backed rivals (DeMare, 2007a).
Concerned that suburban control of county politics would disregard or slight issues of importance to the city, Mayor Jennings organized for the first time a special city of Albany committee in hopes of countering the burgeoning influence the party’s suburban wing. The new committee aimed to boost fundraising and voter turnout efforts in the city. Increasing voter turnout in the city was deemed of particular importance by Jennings in that city turnout has been in a perpetual decline for many years, while suburban turnout has been relatively strong (DeMare, 2007b).

Schenectady/Schenectady County

Schenectady, the second largest city in the metropolitan area, has a much different political history than Albany. Dominated by the heavy industry including the giant headquarters and plant facilities of General Electric and the American Locomotive Company in particular, unlike the machine politics of Albany, Schenectady had a decidedly working-class political structure. The thousands of blue collar, factory workers in the “Electric City” formed a strong labor movement during the early years of the twentieth century. Indeed, by 1912, the city claimed more than seventy craft unions. Socialist candidates for mayor and city council did particularly well in Schenectady, and the city also elected the first socialist member of the New York State Assembly (Rabrenovic, 1996).

The city’s socialist leaders, however, were more reform minded than radical, and therefore focused their attention both on maintaining stable and well-paying factory jobs and on quality of life issues in the city such as providing quality parks, schools, and public health programs. The socialist leaders of early Twentieth Century Schenectady in
many ways shared similar goals and viewpoints (improving education and housing) as many of today’s so-called progressive urban leaders (Rabrenovic, 1996).

Deindustrialization in Schenectady, however, weakened the working class, and in turn, the local socialist leadership. Since the 1950s Schenectady has had a mix of Republican and Democratic leadership. The current mayor of Schenectady is Democrat Brian Stratton. Stratton was elected in 2003 and reelected again in 2007. Stratton’s father, the late Samuel S. Stratton, served as the city’s mayor from 1956 to 1958 before being elected as a U.S. Congressman who served his district in New York for nearly thirty years. Stratton has been credited with improving the dismal fiscal picture the city faced when he entered office (U.S. Mayor, 2005).

Schenectady, and specifically its downtown, has been aided by the substantial investments of Schenectady County’s economic development arm, Metroplex. Schenectady Metroplex Development Authority, as it is formally known, is funded through a half-cent county sales tax with its revenues subsequently redistributed to fund revitalization projects. Although some Metroplex funds have gone to other communities in the county, the main beneficiary has been Schenectady. Much of the funds have gone to either rehabilitate properties in downtown Schenectady or to clearing land and constructing new developments. Recent projects of significance include the construction of a new hotel, multiplex cinema, the new headquarters of MVP Health Plan, and substantial renovations and additions to the historic Proctors Theater (Schenectady Metroplex Development Authority, 2008).

The partisan composition of Schenectady County is largely even with a slight registration advantage among Democrats: 32,828 versus 27,530 for the Republicans.
Democratic registration is concentrated in the central city of Schenectady, while Republicans and Independents are more numerous in the wealthier suburban areas of the county including the towns of Niskayuna and Glenville.

**Troy/Rensselaer County**

Republicans have dominated politics for much of recent history in Rensselaer County. Despite having a very narrow registration advantage: 26,179 versus 25,683 for the Democrats (Voter Contact Services, 2008), Republicans have been able to control the position of Chairman of the Board of Supervisors since its inception in 1970. The position is the equivalent of the County Executive in neighboring Albany County. Partisan competition in recent years, like that of suburban Albany County and Saratoga Springs, has largely surrounded issues over development, and specifically whether development is proceeding at a pace and in such manners that are compatible with what constituents see as appropriate.

Republicans have also done well in the city of Troy, the largest population center in the county and the third largest city in the metropolitan area. In 2003 the year that Republican Harry J. Tutunjian won the Mayors office, seven of the nine city council seats also went to Republican candidates (O’Brien, 2003). Politics in Troy and Rensselaer County are significantly influenced by Republican State Senator Joseph Bruno. Before his retirement in the summer of 2008, he had been in the New York State Senate since 1976 and the President, or majority leader of the Senate since 1995. Bruno has been a significant force in bringing state and federal dollars to both the Rensselaer County and to the Capital Region as a whole.
The diverse partisan map of the Capital Region further complicates an already politically fragmented region and makes regional collaboration over land use and development policy even more illusive. Furthermore, even in cases in which a political party holds power in both cities and suburbs, as is illustrated by the local Democratic Party which now holds influence in both Albany as well as in suburban Albany County, disagreements and divisions still exist, underpinned by diverging interests between urban and suburban Democrats and their control over the party. The divisions among the public sector and different local governments, however, only make the role of private and non-formal organizations more important.
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