12-2017

Revitalizing the Forgotten Heart of a Small City: An Exploratory Case Study of Competing Perceptions, Experiences, and Interests in Downtown Development

Samuel L. Frye

Follow this and additional works at: https://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd

 Part of the Public Administration Commons, and the Urban Studies and Planning Commons

REVITALIZING THE FORGOTTEN HEART OF A SMALL CITY: AN EXPLORATORY

CASE STUDY OF COMPETING PERCEPTIONS, EXPERIENCES, AND INTERESTS

IN DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Samuel L. Frye

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

December 2017

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of Sociology

We hereby approve the dissertation of

Samuel L. Frye

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

_____ _____
                                  Melanie Hildebrandt, Ph.D.
                                  Associate Professor of Sociology, Advisor

_____ _____
                                  J. Beth Mabry, Ph.D.
                                  Professor of Sociology

_____ _____
                                  Valerie Gunter, Ph.D.
                                  Associate Professor of Sociology

ACCEPTED

_____ _____
Randy L. Martin, Ph.D.
Dean
School of Graduate Studies and Research

Title: Revitalizing the Forgotten Heart of a Small City: An Exploratory Case Study of Competing Perceptions, Experiences, and Interests in Downtown Development

Author: Samuel L. Frye

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Melanie Hildebrandt

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. J. Beth Mabry
                                            Dr. Valerie Gunter

Decades of population loss have weakened the tax bases of American cities across the Northeast and Midwest. Unable to repair deteriorating infrastructure and provide basic services, local governments have attempted to revitalize their downtowns, which in many cities contain few residents. A robust housing market is key to revitalization efforts because the presence of residents creates demand for shops and restaurants. However, commercial developers have been reluctant to build downtown housing, fearing that limited access to jobs and services would discourage people from living there. Ample research is available on downtown revitalization in large cities like Seattle, Los Angeles, and New York, but the literature generally neglects smaller urban areas, which have different challenges and opportunities. This qualitative case study explores how resident and institutional housing market actors collectively revitalize the downtown of a small, post-industrial, and economically distressed city. Analysis of archival records, documentation, observations, and interviews reveals tensions around local development challenges, competition between revitalization drivers, access to development incentives, and narratives of space. Policies that foster civic leadership, encourage multiple revitalization drivers, limit cultural change, and encourage transparency in lending may help cities balance economic development needs with social equity goals.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Downtown is an area with a ton of potential. I consider it to be the heart of

the city…. the forgotten heart of the city…. it's important for a community

to have that place that people are proud of. - Rail City resident

In 2010, Rail City was facing a $13.2 million operating deficit within the next five

years if it continued its financial course ("Municipalities Financial Recovery Act

Recovery Plan", 2012). The budget deficit was not due to mismanagement of funds,

however. Rail City was already frugal with its residents' tax dollars; in fact, many roads

in the city are repaved only once every ten years. The source of Rail City's financial

woes was structural: like many small, post-industrial cities, population loss, beginning in

the 1930s, has weakened Rail City's tax base. Further, rising costs for services, wage

and benefit increases, and a high percentage of tax-empty property including schools,

libraries, hospitals, and churches have compounded its revenue issues ("Municipalities

Financial Recovery Act Recovery Plan", 2012).

To correct its financial course, city leaders reluctantly applied for relief under its

state economic recovery program, from which no city has escaped since the program

began in 1987. The purpose of this program is to help municipalities increase revenue

and decrease expenses. The State Department of Community and Economic

Development declared Rail City a distressed municipality on May 3, 2012. Rail City's

entry into the program meant that it was eligible for a $250,000 grant, which city leaders

used to purchase a downtown housing and investment study. The purpose of this study

was to find ways to "improve the economic health of downtown [Rail City] by revitalizing

and increasing its residential capacity" ("Ahead of the Curve: [Rail City] Housing Strategy & Downtown Investment Plan", 2014).

The plan's authors envisioned housing as a means of economic development, promoting a diversity of housing types and price points. The authors proposed targeting niche markets: young professionals under the age of 35 with college degrees and "empty-nesters," a name given to those over 55 who are looking to downsize their homes now that their children have left home (M. Samuels, personal communication April 9, 2014). According to Mayer, Danis, & Greenberg (2003), young professionals and empty nesters are good matches for downtown living because they are typically less concerned with school quality, prefer low-maintenance housing, and often have the disposable incomes to spend on services and amenities. Developers and city officials often use the attractiveness of center city living to these groups as a means of revitalizing areas that were abandoned or are deteriorating since deindustrialization began in the 1950s (Gottdiener & Hutchison, 2011). Targeting these childless demographics is one way that municipalities can increase tax revenue without also increasing school and government service costs (Mayer, Danis, & Greenberg, 2002).

However, the housing and investment plan revealed challenges for increasing residential capacity downtown. Many downtown buildings were originally designed as commercial spaces, making them expensive to renovate into apartments or condominiums. Further, local banks were unwilling to lend money to developers because Rail City is an "untested market." Banks did not believe that the current income base in the downtown area would support the kind of higher-end development the housing and investment plan proposed. However, banks hinted that they may be willing

to loosen their purse strings if Rail City were to experience some development success downtown. However, success would depend on risk-tolerant individuals or groups to test the market by creatively closing this financing gap.

A small group of housing entrepreneurs have tenaciously, if not creatively, managed to leverage economic incentives and their own labor to light the redevelopment spark in downtown Rail City. These entrepreneurs have renovated existing structures into higher-end apartments and retail space that cater to the young professional and empty nester. However, there is great variation in approaches to, and success in, providing downtown housing. What's more, housing is not the only way that cities have revitalized their downtowns. Some cities have made their downtowns more pedestrian friendly, preserved or restored historic buildings, improved transportation options (Robertson, 2001), or encouraged entertainment and leisure spending (Greenblatt, 2009). The problem is that city governments often adopt one or more strategies without fully understanding how they might be adapted to local conditions such as physical size, economic diversity, political structure, and financing opportunities (Burayidi, 2001; Faulk, 2006; Mayer, Danis, & Greenberg, 2002). This begs the question: Which strategy is best suited for a small, post-industrial, and economically distressed city?

Background Context

Rail City's financial situation is not unique. Decades of population loss have weakened the tax bases of American cities across the Northeast and Midwest (Daniels, 2001; Ding & Bingham, 2000). Unable to repair deteriorating infrastructure and provide basic services, local governments have attempted, with varying degrees of success, to

3

revitalize their downtowns, which in many cities contain few residents. A robust housing market is key to revitalization efforts because the presence of residents creates demand for shops and restaurants (Faulk, 2006; Filion, Hoernig, Bunting, & Sands, 2004; Krumholz & Star, 1996; Mallach, 2012; Robertson, 1995). However, private developers have been reluctant to build downtown housing, fearing that limited access to jobs and services would discourage people from living there (Morgan, England, & Pelissero, 2007).

While it is true that downtowns are no longer as significant as they were in the early decades of the 20th century (Kleniewski, 2006) when they were considered "coveted places in which to live" (Nelson & Young, 2008, p. 1), downtowns do however contain significant—though often underutilized—assets (Mallach, 2012). For example, downtown areas in central cities often contain a majority of the metropolitan region's civic institutions such as hospitals, schools, places of worship, and libraries (Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, 2012). Further, downtowns continue to serve as community gathering places (Robertson, 1999) due to their rich histories, compact and "walkable" design, and in some locations, parks and riverfronts (Mallach, 2012). These assets contribute to a downtown's "sense of place" (Faulk, 2006, p. 625) and enhance its ability to draw new populations and spur economic activity (Daniels et al., 1995, as cited in Sen & Bell, 2001; Mallach, 2012).

Problem Statement

Ample research is available on downtown revitalization strategies and outcomes in large cities like Seattle, Los Angeles, and New York (Burayidi, 2001). These cities are well known to tourists or to anyone who has ever watched a movie. However, the

literature generally neglects smaller urban areas (Robertson, 1999), which is disappointing given that a majority of the U.S. population lives in cities with fewer than 100,000 residents (Burayidi, 2001). These small cities have different challenges and opportunities which set them apart from larger urban areas (Robertson, 2001). For example, although the downtowns in small urban areas are closely linked to residential areas, making downtown services easily accessible by foot, they tend to be less diverse in their range of economic activities, and lack large redevelopment projects such as sports stadiums, indoor shopping centers, and convention centers which are prominent in larger cities (Haque, 2001; Robertson, 2001). In addition, the retail structure in small cities is dominated by small businesses; regional and national corporate chains are less interested in locating in small cities due to limited market demand (Robertson, 2001).

No matter the size of the city, scholars and practitioners agree that inner-city revitalization typically begins with the adaptive reuse of buildings and constructing new buildings on vacant land in established neighborhoods (Fairlcoth, Kaiser, & Steinmann, 2009). In fact, Robertson (2001) found that over two-thirds of small cities in his study identified downtown housing as an ongoing strategy. Although housing has become a common component of downtown revitalization in recent years, Faulk (2006) argues that the role of housing in small city downtown revitalization is understudied.

Housing provision in capitalist economies is subject to the market principles of supply and demand, but the collective decision-making of individuals in many public and private associations and organizations determines the type and location of housing (Kleniewski, 2006; Knox & McCarthy, 2005). Thus, developing a model to help us understand the residential development process is difficult because these individual and

institutional actors have unique motivations and resources. Moreover, actors operate within different market conditions, political environments, and cultural spaces (Chapin, 1965; Kleniewski, 2006; Knox & McCarthy, 2005). The connections between and the interactions among these actors constitute the framework not just for housing, but city building more broadly (Knox & McCarthy, 2005).

Several scholars (DeGiovanni, 1983; Jun, 2013; Ulusoy, 1998; Wei & Knox, 2013) have developed and tested quantitative measurements of neighborhood decline and revival, though each author implicitly or explicitly concedes that qualitative fieldwork is needed to explain this complex and disordered process. The few qualitative case studies that are available describe successful revitalization attempts in various cities, much like the literature on larger urban areas. However, the small city literature is primarily practitioner-based, and thus lacks analysis of why one revitalization attempt succeeded while another attempt failed (Robertson, 2001).

Study Purpose

Given that scholarly knowledge of the role of housing in small city downtown revitalization is disappointingly limited, and that housing provision is a complex, disordered process unsatisfactorily explained by quantitative models, I designed a qualitative case study in which I explored how resident and institutional housing market actors collectively revitalize the downtown of a small, post-industrial, and economically distressed city.

To bring some intellectual heft to our understanding of small city revitalization, I used Temkin and Rohe's (1996) model of neighborhood change—which incorporates three different urban sociological theories—to show what quantitative work could not:

First, changing national and social conditions that are experienced as liabilities in some cities can be leveraged into assets in other cities; second, while important, housing is only part of the story. Multiple industries position themselves as major revitalization drivers in the new post-industrial economy; finally, through this positioning, different groups create narratives of space which have the potential to exclude residents from the space. Revitalization thus is a complex and disordered process in which the tensions surrounding competing perceptions, experiences, and interests are resolved or ignored. To explain these tensions, I created this study in which I answer the following research questions:

1. What are the social and economic challenges for downtown revitalization in a small city?

2. How do institutional housing market actors perceive and respond to these challenges?

3. How do downtown residents perceive and experience the effects of revitalization?

Study Significance

This study is significant for both scholars and practitioners. I bring a multi-disciplinary, scholarly approach to the understanding of revitalization. Further, I have conducted this study over 24 months, which has enabled me to explore the complex linkages between actors, an exploration missing from the available quantitative work on neighborhood change.

I hope this study will provide city leaders and residents with information needed to evaluate the strategies and outcomes of revitalization. Revitalization of the

downtown, and the overall city in general, are important to the future economic health of Rail City. Effectively building residential capacity will strengthen the tax base and help the city maintain and improve services and infrastructure. Finally, although the case study approach is limited in the extent to which its results can be generalized to other places and times, the results will inform future comparative case studies and survey research in small cities.

Chapter Summary and Outline of Following Chapters

A majority of the U. S. population lives in small cities. Many of these cities are struggling financially after decades of population loss, leaving the residents who remain to contend with deteriorating infrastructure and limited services. In this chapter, I described three research questions which, when answered, will show that revitalization is not the planned outcome of actors working together to create a shared vision of downtown. Rather, revitalization is a complex and disordered process during which the tensions surrounding competing perceptions, experiences, and interests are resolved or ignored.

In the chapters that follow, I will describe the theories I use to frame this study (Chapter 2), the overall research design and methods I used to collect data (Chapter 3), an analysis of the study's major findings (Chapter 4), a synthesis of these findings as they relate to relevant literature (Chapter 5), and finally, the conclusions and recommendations I have drawn from my analysis (Chapter 6).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

To revitalize a community or neighborhood means making the physical,

economic, and social changes necessary to ensure its future economic viability (Downs,

1981). These changes typically involve improving physical conditions, falling crime

rates, and rising property values, all of which serve to increase the confidence of

investors and property owners (Downs, 1981). For the purposes of this study, I situated

revitalization within the broader context of neighborhood change. In this chapter, I will

describe the major theoretical perspectives on neighborhood change and explain how I

used a synthesized framework of these theories to collect and analyze data.

Theories of Neighborhood Change

The urban sociology literature identifies three major theoretical perspectives on

neighborhood change, each which explain some aspect of urban decline, growth, or

development (Keating & Smith, 1996; Kleniewski, 2006; London & Palen, 1984;

Schwirian, 1983; Temkin & Rohe, 1996). Although each of these theories is useful for

explaining downtown revitalization, they have their weaknesses when used in isolation.

In this research, I used a synthesized framework of neighborhood change incorporating

each of these theories to explain the competing perceptions, experiences, and interests

in downtown revitalization.

Urban Ecology

Urban ecology is the earliest of these theoretical perspectives and dominated

urban research between the 1940s and the 1970s, not just in sociology, but also in

geography, economics, and political science (Feagin, 1998). Drawing on the philosophy of Herbert Spencer, Robert Park and Ernest Burgess of the University of Chicago conceptualized cities as living organisms composed of interrelated parts. According to this perspective, neighborhood change is the outcome of natural regularities in land-use patterns and population distributions (Feagin, 1998; Keating & Smith, 1996; Kleniewski, 2006). For example, the invasion/succession perspective suggests that as new residents enter the city in search of employment, higher-income groups continue to move outward. In addition, in 1939, Homer Hoyt provided one of the earliest studies of the filtering model in which he showed that the growing incomes and the desire for new homes among high-income groups triggered their move into newly built suburbs. The older housing units would then become available to lower-income groups (Gibb, 2003; Keating & Smith, 1996). Similarly, the neighborhood life-cycle model suggests that many areas of a city move through five stages: development, transition, downgrading, thinning out, and renewal (Schwirian, 1983).

The different strands of the ecological approach suggest, in general, that social and economic forces such as the employment base of the neighborhood, demographic pressures on the housing market, and the age and original quality of the housing stock have a greater impact on urban form than cultural values or individual agency (Taub, Taylor, & Dunham, 1984).

Scholars working from a critical perspective challenged urban ecology in the 1970s (Feagin, 1998). They saw urban ecology as overly deterministic and claimed that it omits discussions of capital investment decisions, inequalities in power and resources, and class conflict (Feagin, 1998 Temkin & Rohe, 1996). Further, ecological approaches

fail to incorporate the capacity of neighborhood residents to shape the neighborhood (Somerville, van Beckhoven, & van Kampen, 2009). Knox and McCarthy (2005) write that although powerful actors shape consumer preferences and behavior, citizens can also affect the development process through "pro-growth, no-growth, or slow-growth politics" (p. 284). Further, ecological approaches also overlook shared cultural factors such as social prestige and ethnic prejudices (Kleniewski, 2006).

Subcultural

In the 1930s, the subcultural approach came into fashion among urban sociology scholars who criticized the ecological approach for relying too heavily on competition to explain urban patterns and for its inability to distinguish between the biotic and social levels of social organization (Alihan, 1938, as cited in Kleniewski, 2006). The subcultural perspective suggests that noneconomic factors, such as social networks, neighborhood reputations, and neighborhood attachments affect neighborhood stability over time (Temkin & Rohe, 1996). The basic premise of the subcultural approach is that no ecological phenomenon can be fully understood before explaining how cultural values influence individual behavior (London & Palen, 1984). However, the limitation of the subcultural approach is that it may not fully recognize the steps needed to stabilize urban neighborhoods, overemphasizing "sense of place," while neglecting the local political economy (Temkin & Rohe, 1996).

Political Economy

The political economy approach, popularized by Logon and Molotch (1987), suggests that elites use urban areas as "growth machines" to accumulate capital. According to Logan and Molotch (1987), municipal decisions are made to benefit key

11

players in the real estate industry who stand to gain financially. Cities are thus part of the political, economic, and social arrangements, rather than the product of natural processes and consequently shaped by the decision-making of powerful actors who control resources (Kleinewski, 2006).

Like the limitations of the ecological approach, the political economy perspective presumes that actors outside of the neighborhood, rather than the actions of its residents, determine a neighborhood's fate (Temkin & Rohe, 1996). For example, in a study of the relationship between crime and neighborhood deterioration, Taub, Taylor, and Dunhan (1984) found that while the investment decisions of corporate actors such as banks, universities, insurance companies, and manufacturing firms influence the trajectory of neighborhood change, the actions of individual homeowners and renters acting in their own self-interest also contribute to overall patterns of housing market decline. Ultimately, organizational and individual decisions can mediate the connection between ecological circumstances and the path of neighborhood change (Taub, Taylor, & Dunham, 1984). However, urban analysis within the political economy perspective has tended to focus on structural factors while ignoring the role individual agency plays in shaping neighborhood change (Gottdiener & Feagin, 1988; Somerville, van Beckhoven, & van Kempen, 2009).

Sociospatial: A Synthesized Approach to Urban Sociology

In the 1980s, urban sociology went through a theoretical paradigm shift, with scholars attempting to describe the "complex interplay between relatively autonomous processes of politics and culture in addition to economic considerations" (Gottdiener & Feagin, 1988, p. 173). Gottdiener and Hutchison (2011) argue that the sociospatial

perspective does not emphasize a principle cause of urban change, but instead takes an integrated view of change as the combined outcome of economic, political, and cultural factors. The multi-dimensional approach to urban analysis gained momentum among urban geographers in the 1970s and 1980s to unite the structuralist approach's emphasis on macro-level social, economic, and political structures with the humanistic approach's emphasis on individual agency (Knox & McCarthy, 2005). The sociospatial approach is thus multidisciplinary, encompassing geography, urban planning, political economy, and sociology (Gottdiener and Hutchinson, 2011).

The sociospatial approach keeps sight of the individual actor and the links between the macro- and micro-levels of human experience by emphasizing physical space and how it can be manipulated to affect urban life (Kleniewski, 2006). The role of space is a central theme within this perspective. Human beings are affected not only by investments in markets and political advertising, but we also occupy homes and neighborhoods. At times, the exchange-use decisions of corporate actors come into conflict with the use-value concerns of many American renters and homeowners (Feagin, 1998). Further, the sociospatial suggests that physical space is socially produced, accounting for people's understanding of space and the ways in which local cultures differ in the symbolic meanings they attach to space (Gottdiener and Hutchison, 2011). For example, Gottdiener and Hutchison (2011) write that when a city converts a vacant lot into a basketball court, the type of activity and interactions of groups will change (p. 19).

Conceptual Framework

Temkin & Rohe (1996) created a "holistic theoretical framework" (p. 164) of neighborhood change which, like Gottdiener and Hutchison's (2011) sociospatial approach, incorporates the three major theories of neighborhood change found in the urban sociology literature. Like ecological models, Temkin and Rohe (1996) believe that metropolitan-level change affects neighborhood stability; however, they don't believe that actors are powerless in the face of change. In fact, and like subcultural models, the authors contend that the ways in which residents interact, which neighborhood services and amenities they use, and how attached they feel to their neighborhood also affects neighborhood stability. Lastly, like political economy models, Temkin and Rohe (1996) recognize the importance of political and financial institutional actors whose decisions affect neighborhoods. However, unlike Logan and Molotch's (1987) view that urban growth continues no matter the cost, Temkin and Rohe (1996) believe that residents have the capacity to influence change.

Temkin and Rohe (1996) suggest that, in the short term, metropolitan-level changes affect individual neighborhoods only slightly. How institutional actors perceive these changes may lead them to respond in ways that exacerbate, slow, or even halt change. And like institutional actors, residents may also respond in ways that affect the rate and scope of change. Ultimately, Temkin and Rohe's model suggests that institutional and resident actors' responses together have lasting effects on neighborhood stability.

Gottdiener and Hutchison's (2011) sociospatial approach enriched my understanding and use of Temkin and Rohe's (1996) framework in three ways. First, I

incorporated the idea of class factions as it relates to the competing interests of different groups who have attempted to revitalize downtown. Second, I focused on the role of real estate investment and government incentives, which Gottdiener and Hutchison (2011) argue are the leading drivers of urban development. Thus, I modified Temkin and Rohe's (1996) framework to include a group of housing entrepreneurs who have renovated buildings in the research site. Finally, I incorporated the use of space into my analysis, explaining how different groups attempt to claim ownership of space through their personal narratives. I also modified the framework by describing how actors' responses are shaped not just by their perceptions of neighborhood change, but also by the stake they have in the outcomes of change (i.e. their interests) and how they experience change (see Figure 1). Using this modified framework, I derived sensitizing concepts which informed my data collection methods (see Table 1).

Figure 1
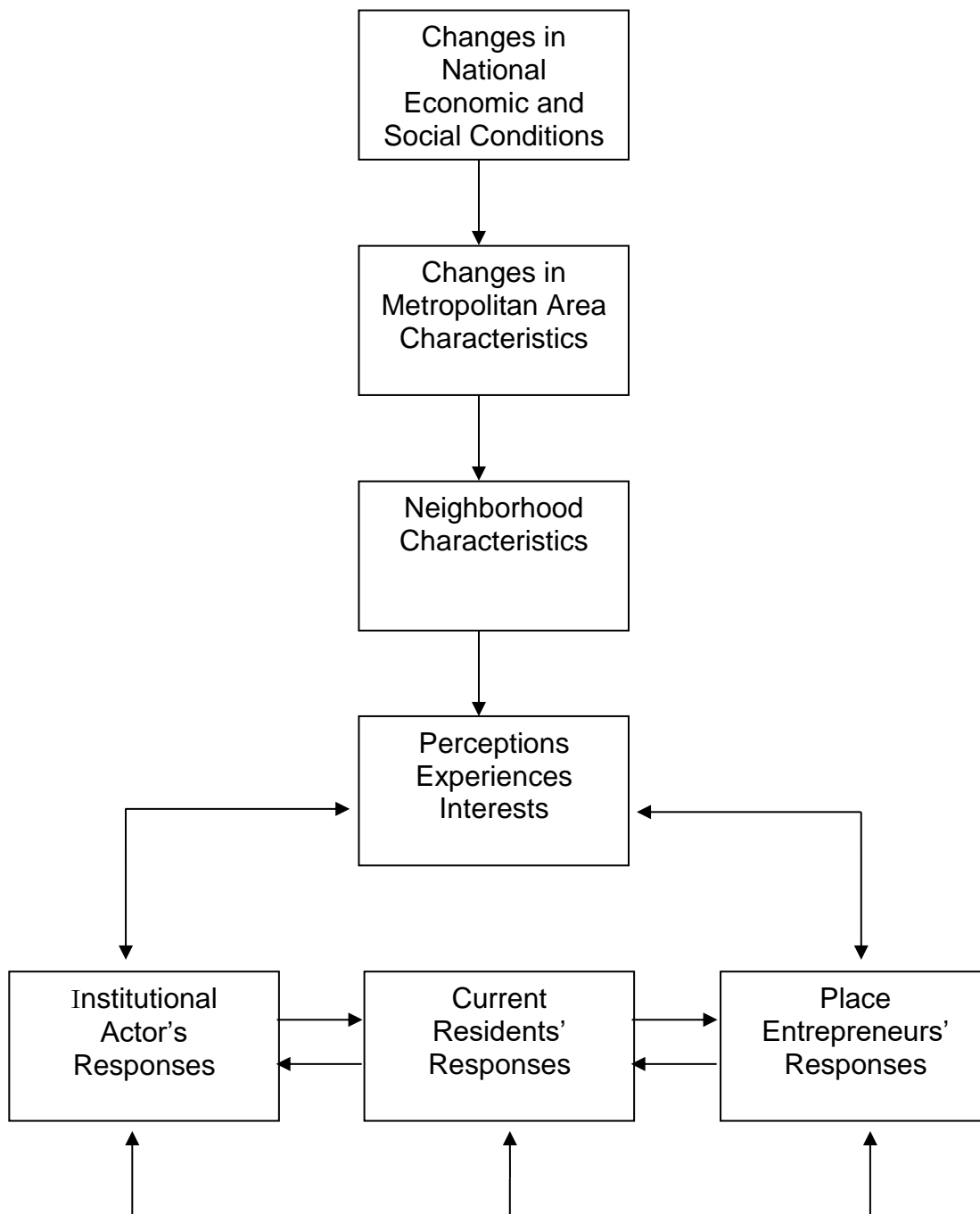
Figure 1. Conceptual framework of neighborhood change. Adapted from "Neighborhood

Change and Urban Policy," by K. Temkin and W. Rohe, 1996, *Journal of Planning*

Education and Research, 15, p. 165.

Table 1

Sensitizing Concepts Derived from Urban Sociological Theories

Theoretical Perspective	Sensitizing Concept	Data Collection Method
Urban ecology	Employment base	Archival records/Documentation
	Demographic flows in and out of the city	Archival records/Documentation
	Per-capita income	Archival records/Documentation
	Housing market demand	Archival records/Documentation
	Age/quality of housing stock	Archival records/Documentation
	Home ownership rates	Archival records/Documentation Archival records/Documentation
	Levels of education	Archival records/Documentation
Subcultural	Social prestige	Interviews/Observations
	Social networks	Archival records/Documentation
	Patterns of social interaction	Archival records/Documentation Archival records/Documentation
	Neighborhood reputations	Archival records/Documentation
	Neighborhood attachment	Archival records/Documentation
	Attitudes toward urban living	Archival records/Documentation

	Use of local civic, cultural, and religious facilities	Observations/Interviews
Political economy	Property values	Archival records/Documentation
	Tax base	Archival records/Documentation
	Incentives for revitalization	Archival records/Documentation
	Transportation access	Documentation/Observations
	Cost of renovation	Interviews/Documentation
	Return on investment of renovation	Interviews
Sociospatial	Interaction of economic, political, and cultural factors	Archival records/Documentation/Interviews/Observations
	Symbolic meanings attached to space	Interviews/Documentation
	Physical changes to space	Observations
	Social changes to space	Observations

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described the theoretical perspectives that serve as the foundation of this study. I also described the conceptual framework I used to apply these theories to the specific context of neighborhood change in the downtown of a

small city. In the next chapter, I will describe the research paradigm driving this study, its overall research design, my positionality as researcher, the methods I used to collect data, how I recruited interview participants, and how I analyzed the data, which I will discuss at length in Chapters 4 and 5. I will conclude Chapter 4 with a discussion of how I addressed ethical concerns.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Study Purpose

The purpose of this case study was to explore how resident and institutional

housing market actors revitalize the downtown of a small, post-industrial, and

economically distressed city. I adapted Temkin and Rohe's (1996) synthesized model of

neighborhood change to test whether revitalization is the planned outcome of actors

working together to create a shared vision of downtown or a complex and disordered

process during which the tensions surrounding competing perceptions, experiences,

and interests are resolved or ignored. The research questions answered in this inquiry

include:

1. What are the social and economic challenges for downtown revitalization in a
   small city?

2. How do institutional housing market actors perceive and respond to these
   challenges?

3. How do downtown residents perceive and experience the effects of
   revitalization?

Research Paradigm

In this study, I documented the ways in which housing market actors perceive,

experience, and respond to neighborhood change over time. I designed this study

around two assumptions within the interpretive paradigm, the overall goal of which is to

understand a situation or context rather than to discover universal rules or laws (Willis,

2007). First, I assume that participants in my study created meaning through their

experiences with neighborhood change; and second, that they negotiated meaning over time through interaction with one another (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative inquiry is itself a process of meaning making; through my analysis, I made meaning of my participants acting upon meaning as they experienced and responded to neighborhood change (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014). Qualitative fieldwork best answered the research questions because quantitative models were unable to document the complex, interactive process of neighborhood change as it is experienced over time.

Research Design and Rationale

I designed this project as a case study, which is broadly defined as an in-depth examination of a specific phenomenon (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991; Merriam, as cited in Willis, 2007). The case study was an appropriate choice for three reasons. First, this method allowed me to observe complex interaction over time as the actors understood it themselves. Second, I did not desire to manipulate participant behavior, which is difficult to do in a case study (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg; Yin, 2014). Finally, a case study design fits within the interpretive paradigm, which claims that much of what we know about human behavior is best understand as lived experiences (Willis, 2007); in this case, the lived experience of neighborhood change.

I collected data over 24 months using four different methods. First, I used archival records including census data to obtain demographic information about the neighborhoods under study. Second, I reviewed pertinent documentation including housing and comprehensive plans and minutes from city council meetings to understand the case more fully. Third, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with resident and institutional actors to uncover perceptions, experiences, and interests

in revitalization. Lastly, I conducted unobtrusive observations to document physical and social changes to the neighborhoods under study. Throughout this study, I also incorporate my own experiences as a long-term resident of Rail City. I chose to end the study after 24 months because I exhausted all potential interview participants, I witnessed a considerable amount of change, and my observations and interviews were no longer yielding new data (Monette, Sullivan, & DeJong, 2005; Warner & Karner, 2010; Yin, 2014).

Research Site

Rail City served as the single case in this study because recent events in the city met all necessary conditions needed to test the conceptual framework of neighborhood change: 1) the city has undergone changes in metropolitan area characteristics 2) the neighborhood under study has undergone changes in its physical and social characteristics 3) local government is actively pursuing downtown revitalization 4) being a city resident and a member of the Rail City Planning Commission gave me access to local government and residents. This last condition is important because as Yin (2014) argues, having a firm grasp of the issues being studied is a desirable attribute of the case study researcher.

Research Positionality

Although having a firm grasp of the issues being studied is important, as a researcher I occupy a set of social positions which influences how I perceive and understand the issues (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014). I was born, raised, and until August 2017, owned a home in Rail City, so I embrace the much-needed revitalization of downtown. I am also a member of a local government board responsible for

reviewing and making recommendations on proposals that affect the development of

the city. My work on this board helped me conceive of the idea for this study and gave

me privileged access to information about revitalization and access to research

participants.

Although I embrace revitalization, as an urban sociology scholar I am concerned

that revitalization will only benefit those with the deepest pockets or the loudest voices.

In the tradition of Fainstein's (2010) "just city" approach to planning, I recognize that

there are often tensions between economic development and social equity goals. I hope

this study will help ensure that these two goals are balanced and that disadvantaged

groups—the poor, minorities, people with disabilities, and the aged—are included in

planning processes.

Finally, as a planning commissioner I am concerned about aesthetic appeal. The

planning literature on small towns is dominated by discussions of economic

development, yet little attention is given to the role of design in urban revitalization (Sen

and Bell, 2001). Design is one of three planning tools that, if improperly used, can

increase crime, pollute air and water, strand residents without personal vehicles,

particularly the poor and elderly, and bankrupt municipalities (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and

Speck, 2000). I hope this study reminds cities planning revitalization strategies to keep

social equity and design in mind.

Participant Selection

I selected participants using a "purposeful section" method (Maxwell, 2005, p.

85); in other words, I purposively selected participants who had experienced or had an

interest in downtown revitalization. I used this selection approach to delimit the areas of

Rail City to include two census block groups that approximately cover the area generally agreed upon by residents as downtown. Census block groups are clusters of blocks within census tracts with populations between 600 and 3,000 (U. S. Census Bureau, 2014). These two census block groups also contain the sites of two buildings that entrepreneurs have renovated and are also the targets for new construction (see Appendix A for map of research site).

I began the study with a background review of documents, including the downtown housing and investment plan and the city's comprehensive plan, and an interview with the city's planning director to identify other institutional actors. The planning director has served as a key informant throughout this study; he gave me access to pertinent documents and helped me make connections with potential participants (Warner & Karner, 2010). I have used my relationship with him to gain access to the entrepreneurs in the city, as well as developers, community development corporation personnel, and other members of city government.

I also asked local businesses and community organizations (such as clubs and churches) to post a flier, in which I explained the purpose of my study, and requested study participants interested in sharing their perceptions and experiences of neighborhood change. After a year of data collection with only one resident interview, who was "snowball sampled," a selection method by which sampled participants direct the researcher to other participants with whom they routinely interact (Monette, Sullivan, & DeJong, 2005, p. 147), I decided to use the US Postal Service's Every Door Direct mail to send letters to approximately 1,140 residents who live in the two census block

groups. Seventeen residents participated, to each of whom I offered $20 compensation (see Appendix B for sample letter).

Data Collection

Archival Records

I used the US Census Bureau's FactFinder feature to document 2010 demographic information (i.e. income, age, race) about the neighborhoods under study. In addition, I used maps to locate city and neighborhood boundaries and resources. Finally, I used survey data from a recent downtown market analysis to help me identify key actors in revitalization efforts as well as identify other potential participants.

Documentation

I began data collection with a review of the city's comprehensive plan, the "[Rail City] Housing Strategy and Downtown Investment Plan," and minutes from various public meetings, including city council and the planning commission. I also regularly read the local city newspaper, the Rail City News, to stay abreast of neighborhood events. These documents provided background and context for the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008) and provided opportunities to corroborate other pieces of data (Yin, 2014). Because these documents were created with purposes other than this case study, I made sure to identify their objectives to reduce bias in my analysis (Yin, 2014).

Unobtrusive Observations & Experiences

Approximately every six months throughout this study—in different locations downtown and at different times of the day—I observed the ways in which people used downtown space and any physical changes made to that space. I also used my own

observations and experiences as a long-term resident of Rail City. I used field notes to document these observations and experiences.

In-depth, Semi-structured Interviews

I interviewed forty-one participants to better understand the revitalization process and the participants' decision making in this process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008) (see Appendix C for interview questions). I conducted interviews with place entrepreneurs, residents, city government officials, local business owners, community development corporation personnel, and land developers. I recorded the interviews, which I later transcribed. I stored all interview data on an external hard drive which I kept in a locked safe when not in use. I will permanently delete all interview data from the hard drive after five years. In Tables 2 and 3, I identify, by pseudonym, the institutional actors and residents I interviewed.

Table 2

Institutional Actors Interviewed

Pseudonym	Industry
Chloe	Property Development
Isaac	Tourism
Sandy	Historic Preservation
Kyle	Banking
Melvin	Economic Development
Paul	Municipal Government (elected)
Stanley	Municipal Government (community development employee)
Tammy	Municipal government (community development volunteer)

Wendy	Higher Education		

Table 3

Resident Actors Interviewed

Pseudonym	Sex	Occupation	Housing Type
Magnus/ Maddie	M/F (married couple)	Retired military	Market
Mitch	M	Truck driver	Market
Wilma	F	Housekeeper	Market
Kate	F	Unemployed (disabled)	Market
Hank	M	Unemployed	Subsidized
Fred	M	Unemployed (disabled)	Subsidized
Ben	M	Retired police officer	Subsidized
Wyclef	M	Unemployed (disabled)	Subsidized
Yale	M	Retired teacher	Subsidized
Martin	M	Unemployed (disabled)	Subsidized
Megan	F	Unemployed	Subsidized
Clyde	M	Grocery store clerk	Subsidized
Paula	F	Unemployed	Subsidized
Pike	M	Itinerant laborer	Subsidized
Tyler	M	Retired parking attendant	Subsidized
Harriet	F	Retired homemaker	Subsidized
Lisa	F	Grocery store clerk	Subsidized

Validity

Member Checks

To avoid misinterpreting the meaning of what participants said, I gave each participant a copy of the interview transcript which I encouraged them to read and contact me if they wanted to make changes. I also asked my key informant to review my major findings to verify the accuracy of my reporting of local government processes.

Triangulation

One benefit of case study research is that it allows the researcher to compile overlapping measures of the same phenomena (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991). I used four data collection methods to document downtown revitalization, which allowed me to corroborate what some of my participants said during their interviews.

Chain of evidence

To increase the reliability of information in this case study, such that a replication of the study would produce similar findings and conclusions, I maintained a chain of evidence, which includes interview records, notes on personal communications, analytic memos written during observations and document reviews, and tables illustrating my coding schemes. This chain of evidence will enable an external observer to trace the steps in either direction between research questions and conclusion (Yin, 2014).

Data Analysis

I analyzed data using an abductive approach, which employs both inductive and deductive coding of data (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). I began by deriving sensitizing concepts from Temkin and Rohe's (1996) synthesized model of neighborhood change which I used to deductively organize my data into three conceptual "bins," each of which

aligns with an urban sociological theory. This deductive "binning" is a pattern matching technique, in which patterns found in empirical data are compared to patterns predicted by the theoretical framework (Yin, 2009). I then used inductive coding to create themes based on unexpected findings. Further inductive coding of data within each bin revealed four themes: location liabilities; revitalization drivers; gatekeepers of development; and narratives of space (see Appendix D for a description of coding procedures and analysis).

I also wrote analytic memos throughout the data collection and data analysis phases to reflect on my data and help reduce bias in my analysis.

Ethical Considerations

This study posed little potential for harm to research subjects. However, there was potential for psychological trauma to residents, particularly when interviewing them about their interactions with other neighbors. I informed participants that they may choose not to respond to questions they find sensitive or stop the interview all together at any point they begin to feel uncomfortable. I ensured participants confidentiality by changing names and addresses and fictionalizing descriptions. Further, before interviewing participants, I explained the purpose of the study as asked for their written consent (see Appendix E for informed consent form).

The major ethical concern in this study was my position on the [Rail City] Planning Commission. I asked the city's director of planning and community development, and chair of the planning commission, for permission to remain on the commission while I conducted my study, as well for his support (see Appendix F for letter). He gave his permission and we both agreed that I would recuse myself from any

decisions that may impact participants in my study (see Appendix G for letter of support).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described the research paradigm driving this study, its overall research design, my positionality as research, and the methods I used to collect data, how I recruited interview participants, how I analyzed the data, and how I addressed ethical concerns. In the following chapter, I will present the major findings of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, I present findings from my analysis of 38 in-depth interviews I

conducted with institutional and resident actors, and my own observations and

experiences as a long-time resident of Rail City. I used Temkin and Rohe's (1996)

synthesized model of neighborhood change to deductively organize my data into three

conceptual "bins," each of which aligns with an urban sociological theory. Urban

ecology, political economy, and subcultural theories provide different perspectives on

neighborhood change. Further inductive coding of data within each bin revealed four

themes which I will present in the following order: location liabilities; revitalization

drivers; gatekeepers of development; and narratives of space.

My findings suggest that revitalization is not the planned outcome of actors

working together to create a shared vision of downtown. Rather, revitalization is a

complex and disordered process during which tensions surrounding competing

perceptions, experiences, and interests are resolved or ignored.

Location Liabilities

To revitalize a community or neighborhood means making the physical,

economic, and social changes necessary to ensure its future economic viability (Downs,

1981). These changes typically involve improving physical conditions, falling crime

rates, and rising property values, all of which increase the confidence of investors and

property owners (Downs, 1981). However, the rate and scope of change needed in a

community or neighborhood depends on its existing "locational, physical, and social characteristics" (Temkin & Rohe, 1996, p. 166).

To gather information about the neighborhood's existing characteristics, and ultimately Rail City's future economic viability, I interviewed nine institutional actors who work in different employment sectors including community development, tourism, banking, historic preservation, higher education, city government, and property development. I will describe how, from an economic perspective, Rail City's current locational, physical, and social characteristics are liabilities for downtown development. These liabilities, identified by interviewees, include an aging, unskilled workforce, a physically small and poorly designed downtown, burdensome renovation costs, limited retail options, and negative perceptions of downtown space.

The Aged and Unskilled: An Unattractive Demographic

My interviews with institutional actors revealed that Rail City's demographic profile presents a major barrier for economic development. According to Melvin, an employee of the metropolitan area's community development corporation, whose work involves attracting industry to the region through workforce development, Rail City's demographic profile is unattractive to outside industries, unless the industry is looking for workers with a high school diploma who are willing to accept a wage of $9.50 an hour:

> [If industries] only [require] a high school diploma, they can find their workforce in [Rail City]. If that workforce can pass the drug test. Housing appreciation, we're flat lined. That's a growth indicator that we're not taking off as a community. Our population is going like this [makes level motion with arm], the age of our

population is going like this [makes inclining motion with arm], and this isn't good…demographically, this area is somewhat challenged in terms of how an outside consultant would [perceive the area].

However, even when an industry specifically looks for a low-skilled workforce, Rail City's isolated location away from international air travel poses a challenge. Melvin described the time he met with a consultancy firm to discuss the possibility of opening a production plant in Rail City that would make pasta for an Italy-based company. Rail City was competing for this plant with a town in upstate New York. However, after the company's owners came to Rail City to visit some potential sites for their new plant, they took the deal off the table because the company's owners did not like Rail City's transportation options. The nearest international airport to Rail City is a two-and-a-half-hour drive. The town in upstate New York eventually won the contract because it has access to five international airports within an hour-and-a-half drive.

Although not mentioned during my interview with Melvin, resident incomes are also a barrier for downtown development. Many downtown residents live in subsidized housing and survive on low to moderate fixed incomes. These residents do not have the disposable income to support downtown businesses. Melvin discussed this issue during a city council meeting I attended on April 9, 2014. This meeting's agenda included a presentation on the status of Rail City's Housing Strategy and Downtown Investment Plan (HSDIP), which was paid for with a grant from the state's department of community and economic development. The goals of the plan are to: 1) increase residential downtown capacity 2) rehabilitate old buildings 3) create new transportation and parking options.

The authors of the plan envision housing as a development tool to promote a diversity of housing types and price points, specifically targeting young professionals and empty-nesters. However, during the city council meeting, Melvin pointed out that the current income base in the downtown area does not support the kind of higher-end development the housing and investment plan proposes. The plan also revealed financing gaps: According to the plan's authors, representatives from several local banks revealed in closed-door meetings that they were unwilling to lend money because Rail City is an "untested market." However, banks hinted that they may be willing to loosen their purse strings as Rail City experiences some development success downtown. The problem is that, according to the plan's authors, development success depends on risk-tolerant individuals or groups to test the market and find creative ways to close the financing gap.

Renovation Woes

Most of Rail City's large and established developers have been unsuccessful or unwilling to close this financing gap for three reasons. First, many buildings located downtown were not originally intended for housing, but were built as commercial spaces. Second, the investment needed to renovate these buildings cannot, at least initially, be recovered by the rents the current market will allow owners to charge. One resident, Cynthia, who owns property near downtown that she hopes to renovate, mentioned these barriers during the interview when we discussed the current housing situation downtown:

I was on the [housing] study team that looked at bringing more housing to the downtown and I think that is a key element to revitalizing the downtown. We

34

identified a lot of potential sites. There are a couple of issues and one is that the

buildings were not originally developed for housing, they were developed for

commercial spaces and so the building typology is not really suited for housing

always, and that's a little bit of a problem.

Third, and in addition to the incompatible use of space, many downtown buildings are

not accessible to people with disabilities and would be expensive to make the

accommodations the Federal government requires. The only developer who responded

to my request for an interview discussed some of these barriers. According to Chloe:

A landlord is not going to give people free rent and most of these buildings need

a lot of requirements to make them ADA compliant. I think the city could be a

little…we could work with the city to be a little softer on some of the requirements

to transform them.

Sometimes simple misunderstandings create further barriers. For example, it was

clear in this interview that Chloe identified the city as the cause of the barrier,

when in fact, the Federal government has set forth accessibility regulations, not

city government.

Regardless of the source of these regulations, they challenge the goals of

Rail City's housing and investment plan because many of the empty nesters it

hopes to draw to the city will eventually have accessibility needs. However,

Cynthia, who was part of the housing and investment study team, explained that:

The study identified a funding gap and that's typically where the government

would step in and provide incentives to developers to redevelop the buildings,

and that's where we feel that if the city and the [community development

corporation] could advocate for local developers and help us package the

finances, then some things could move forward.

Cynthia believes that some of the "bigger players"—developers, the community

development corporation, and city government—are part of the problem:

I think with the bigger players, there's a lack of creativity on their part, a lack of

vision, and there's a lack of experience in downtown redevelopment.…I also see

a lack of willingness on the city's part and the [community development

corporation's] part to engage the right people, at the right time, in the right way.

Although not mentioned by Cynthia as a "bigger player," Rail City College, a branch

campus of larger "Big 10" school, figures prominently in downtown redevelopment. In

fact, the college began renovating downtown buildings into classroom and

administrative spaces several years before downtown revitalization became a collective

goal for Rail City.

Challenge by Design

In addition to demographics and renovation costs, the compact size of downtown

relative to the rest of the city, and the design of its roadways, pose challenges for

economic development. According to Melvin, community development professional:

 [Rail City's] biggest challenge is that there are no large tracks of developable

property for industrial growth.…What you're seeing in downtown is more the

adaptive reuse of existing buildings to the extent that those buildings can be

reused and/or the selective demolition of properties for new construction.

Two additional design challenges function as barriers for economic development in that

they discourage residents, workers, and visitors from patronizing downtown businesses.

The first challenge is the two-lane expressway that runs parallel to the two main thoroughfares in downtown. This expressway allows motorists to bypass downtown. As a long-term resident of Rail City, I have used this expressway countless times, and while I have never used it to intentionally bypass downtown, the effect is the same.

The second design challenge is that the two main streets that run through downtown, Howard and McKinney, are both one-way streets. Stanley, city government planning professional, explained how the expressway could be removed with few negative consequences:

> My best evidence that [the expressway] isn't needed is one of the biggest events in downtown all year, every year is the Labor Day Car Show. They just shut down the expressway and park their cars in the middle of it. And then thousands of people from all over [the region] come into downtown to see that car show, and it still functions even though that expressway's gone....You figure out different ways to get around downtown, but all that expressway really does is enable people, like me, who drive fast when they got lots of wide pavement, to speed through downtown, and it kills street life.

Planning and economic development professionals are not the only people concerned about the size and design of downtown. A retired resident I interviewed, Tyler, echoed these sentiments:

> One of the problems [Rail City] has, it's too damn hard to get downtown. They got at least one one-way street that ought to be changed to two-way. Putting that silly expressway is one of the biggest mistakes they ever made. They built it to bypass downtown. That's exactly what it does.

Like Stanley, Lisa, a resident with toddler, is concerned about the speed of motorists: "Cars fly through here like they own it, and it can get kind of crazy. I'm always worried about taking [my daughter] out and making sure she's holding my hand."

Retail Options: You Can Get Your Hair Cut, But Forget About Fresh Food

While canvassing the downtown area looking for potential research participants, I counted at least five different places I could have my hair professionally cut, yet there is no place to buy food, other than in restaurants or in convenience stores. For a few hours each Thursday and Saturday throughout the growing season, a farmer's market opens downtown that sells an assortment of fruits, vegetables, and baked goods, as well a few hot items, such as soups and coffee. However, few of the 17 residents I interviewed said they patronize the farmer's market, mostly due to the cost of its produce. One resident, Martin, described his relationship with the market this way:

> Once in a while I'll go down to the flea market or go down to the [farmer's] market that they have downtown, but that's pretty expensive too. I can get three tomatoes at the grocery store cheaper than what they're selling home-grown down here.

Martin is bound to a wheel chair and, without a vehicle, will either use his motorized scooter to travel to the closest grocery store—a two-mile jaunt up a busy four-lane highway—or he will take the bus.

When I asked residents about their perceptions of and experiences with downtown amenities such as parks, shops, and restaurants, nearly every resident mentioned a new restaurant that opened recently. Residents characterized the restaurant as expensive, particularly for the quantity of food the restaurant serves. One

resident, Lisa, a single mother who works in a grocery store, described downtown businesses in these terms: "Too many people I see just struggling.…The businesses that come in there are a little bit higher end, and the people who live in this area don't have that kind of money."

Most of the residents who live in low-income or subsidized housing commented that they would like to see a grocery store or a dollar store where they could purchase affordable goods. Although there is a convenience store located in McAlister Square, one the of the low-income apartment buildings, the limited food items the store offers are expensive. Pike, who lives in McAlister, talked about its prices: "[The owners] jack it up real high. A little jar of mayonnaise: $5. That's why they call them convenience stores because it's convenient." Clyde, another resident of McAlister, who used the $20 I gave him for participating in this study to pay his rent, agreed that he would like to see a grocery store downtown:

> That right there would be great. We do have [a grocery store], all the way over here on Maple Avenue. I get my backpack and I walk. I don't want to pay a dollar fifty for bus fare when it's right there, so I get some exercise. I load up my backpack and I have to drive all the way here and then I have to go back and do it all over again. It's a pain. I could take the bus but I don't want to wait for thirty minutes to an hour. I just want to get the shopping done.

Negative Perceptions: The Real and The Illusory

I asked all participants in my sample to describe their perceptions of downtown because the ways in which people perceive space affects the degree to which they use it. In addition to mentioning an overall lack of affordable amenities, like shops and

restaurants, residents shared their opinions on the quality of downtown infrastructure, including the condition of streets, roads, and greenspace. Downtown residents in my sample described downtown infrastructure in mostly negative terms, using words like "dull," "dry," "boring," "empty," and "broken."

One resident, Magnus, described the appearance of downtown from the perspective of a motorist entering downtown by one of Rail City's major thoroughfares, 10th Avenue:

The appearance of downtown [Rail City] is not the greatest if you're just coming in from out of town and you're coming downtown. When you come across the [10th Avenue] Bridge, you start looking off to the left-hand side and it's just not the greatest looking thing. The sidewalks are nasty, dirty, there's weeds growing up, there's buildings that are half torn down, there's construction on some properties that just don't look the cleanliest.

As a resident, I can understand how out-of-town motorists might not realize they were entering downtown: when you come to the end of 10th Avenue, motorists must abruptly turn right to enter downtown; and as they turn, motorists see a large, unattractive, and somewhat imposing utility company building, which one resident, Tyler, described this way:

One of the other things that's wrong, like that [utility] building and a couple of other buildings. They look like fucking prisons. There's nothing appealing about them at all. The ground floor and sometimes the second floor is just solid masonry. It has no appeal. None whatsoever.

Several residents also described downtown as a "ghost town" because on weekends the streets are empty unless there is a parade or concert. Many residents also feel that the university is taking over and, unless you are a college student or a senior citizen, there is nothing to do downtown. Martin, a resident, would like to see change that caters to the people who live downtown. For example, many residents described how there is nothing to occupy young kids and teenagers. One resident, Paula, who also described downtown as a "ghost town," explained how she thinks this affects kids: "All these kids who are in the county prison, it's because they're going out stealing because there's nothing for them to do, or they're on drugs, or they're out selling pills to make money. There are no jobs for any of them."

Crime—and illegal drug activity in particular—seem to be a concern for downtown residents who use words and phrases like "horrendous" and "drug central" to describe downtown. In fact, seven out of the 17 residents I interviewed brought up the issue of drugs during their interviews. Most residents did not identify any particular drug, though when sharing his overall perceptions of downtown, Magnus, who recently returned to the area after retiring from the armed forces, alluded to a harder drug than marijuana: "There's a lot of [subsidized housing] in this area right here, people who come from [big cities].…when I grew up here, you could buy pot, you could smoke pot, well when I came back, drugs in this town has just gotten worse." Harriet, a retired woman, described how Rail City's drug problem restricts her mobility: "It seems like we're having a big problem with drugs. I think a lot of people now, especially at nighttime, even myself, I wouldn't walk at nighttime."

However, the perceiver's social location (e.g. race, class, gender, disability) likely shapes perceptions. I have often walked downtown, sometimes after 10 pm, and as an able-bodied white man I have never felt uneasy, nor have I ever seen what I would characterize as suspicious activity. Further, these perceptions do not always reflect reality. Nearly every institutional actor I have spoken with explained that people believe that crime is more prevalent than data supports. When I asked Wallace, an official from Rail City College, about these perceptions, he responded:

> Well, there's no truth to that, our criminal justice folks have done studies of that. You are more likely to have something stolen from you and have something bad happen to you on this campus than you are if you're downtown.

Perceptions can be powerful, however. Isaac, an institutional actor whose office is located downtown, recognizes that these perceptions are misplaced, yet they still affect his behavior. Isaac explained this behavior when he works late, sometimes as late as 11 o'clock at night:

> I don't want to give you a poor image of myself. I think it's more perception than it is reality, I mean I don't feel unsafe at night, as a man, but if I'm parked in the parking garage sometimes I've gone over and moved my car down in front of the building.

Even though Isaac recognizes that his perceptions do not match reality, he nonetheless allows his subordinates to conclude their workday at 4:30 pm so it is still daylight when they leave work during the winter months.

Both resident and institutional actors hold these perceptions, which may be rooted in more general perceptions of larger urban centers that contain larger

42

populations of demographics stereotypically associated with crime and drug activity, such as minorities and the poor.

Revitalization Drivers

In the above section, I described Rail City's current locational, physical, and social characteristics that shape the rate and scope of change in downtown. Institutional and resident actors then perceive these characteristics which may prompt them to take action that speeds up, slows down, or even stops change (Temkin and Rohe, 1996). These actors respond not just according to the ways in which they perceive these characteristics, but also according to their experiences with downtown space, and the interests they have in development. Actors' responses, however, are not independent; the interplay of resident and institutional actors' responses will determine the nature of long-term neighborhood change (Temkin and Rohe, 1996).

Despite Rail City's locational liabilities, which include an aging, unskilled workforce, a physically small and poorly designed downtown, burdensome renovation costs, limited retail options, and negative perceptions of downtown, revitalization has moved forward. Three major groups are driving downtown revitalization. These groups include the education and medical industries ("Ed's and Med's"), small businesses and the arts community, and individual and small group housing entrepreneurs. I will describe the competing views around which of these groups is driving—and has the potential to drive—economic growth.

"Med's" and "Ed's" versus "BEAM"

Two of the major drivers of the new economy in Rail City, as in other post-industrial cities, are the education and medical industries. Stanley, planning professional

for city government, explained during the interview that the healthcare industry is booming nationwide as the large cohort of aging baby boomers have increasing medical needs. Therefore, it is likely that healthcare will continue to dominate Rail City's economic growth. Another reason, which helps explain the presence of the education sector, is that downtowns often contain large civic institutions like hospitals, libraries, churches, and universities, which are difficult and expensive assets to move. Melvin, economic development professional, explained that:

> In order for any downtown revitalization effort to be successful, there must be at least one, two, or three major drivers that are going to push the issues…. And we are fortunate enough to have the railroad, [which] is still a major economic engine for this community. The other two major economic drivers, above and beyond what the railroad is providing are [the college] and [the hospital].

The problem with these industries is that they are typically tax-exempt which does not provide struggling municipalities with any new money to repair deteriorating infrastructure and provide services.

Rail City's hospital, which was recently bought out by a large university hospital system, continues to expand its presence downtown. The hospital has bought properties in the surrounding residential neighborhoods only to be razed and replaced with parking lots to accommodate its growing staff. Some residents commented on the medical industry's expanding presence. During the interview, Clyde recalled that it wasn't always this way in Rail City:

> I've noticed that this town is going from a railroad town to a hospital town. Everything around here now is hospitals, nurses, doctors…. Growing up here as

44

a kid, it wasn't nearly anywhere close to where it is now as far as being a

doctoring, nursing town.

Like the medical industry, the education sector's presence downtown continues to

expand. Rail City College's main suburban campus is located a little more than two

miles from downtown, but in some majors, students can complete all their classes in

new downtown classrooms. One university official, Wallace, spoke of the university's

intention to continue expanding downtown. He reported that Rail City College envisions

downtown to be like the downtown where the college's main campus is located, at least

in terms of presence. Wallace spoke of this presence downtown:

> And you'll notice other things we do, all those flowers on the poles. We put those
>
> up. Our maintenance guys do it. We want to be part of beautification. We have
>
> our [logo] down there on front of our buildings. We want to say, this is us, we're
>
> here. And certainly, I think having the college presence down there gives you
>
> couple of the key things I mentioned. Foot traffic, bodies, people who are going
>
> to live, work, and play there.

Wallace was enthusiastic about the role the university can play in revitalizing

downtown:

> The other thing is, it takes new blood, a new thinking and that's what our
>
> students and our graduates bring. And our entrepreneurship majors bring…. I
>
> think that's what held the community back for so long. People were just dazed
>
> and confused, waiting for something to happen, waiting for the next train to
>
> come, literally waiting for its rebirth. You have to get over that.

The expansion of the university is driven, in part, by the lack of space on its suburban campus. Wallace discussed this issue, which he encountered when he arrived at his current post:

> Living here for several years and then eventually ending up in this post, we had a great need for space, which is still our biggest challenge. I inherited a 7-year-old promise to the communication program to have state of the art labs. We don't have any place on campus to build them out. We don't have the money to build those out…. And so, I'm very frustrated [because] we're doing all these great things and we're cramped, we don't have space, and it's my biggest need.

Despite the college's expansion, the downtown continues to be dominated by the small business and arts community. Some of the business owners don't see the college as having much of an impact. For example, small business owner, Milton, pointed out that while he and his wife have observed students downtown, the students don't appear to patronize many of the downtown businesses. He and other business owners I spoke with typically see students leave right after their classes are over.

Further, some business owners think that neither the college nor the community development corporation does anything to support downtown small businesses. And in some cases, business owners see the community development corporation as being antagonistic. For example, Milton recalled a time when one of the region's established developers offered another business owner what Milton referred to as an "insulting" offer for his building, property which, according to Milton, the developer would sell to the college for significant profit. Milton characterized developers' motives this way: "There's some people who want to buy downtown cheap, in my opinion. They're doing nothing to

help [downtown]." I spoke to three additional business owners who echoed these sentiments. However, one owner refused to sign my consent form and to be recorded, and the other two business owners asked to be withdrawn from the study after reading their transcripts, one of whom was worried that his identity would be exposed.

This perceived lack of support may be due, however, to the perceived lack of pride that some small businesses take in their work. For example, during my interview with housing entrepreneur, Cynthia, she discussed some of the negative perceptions of downtown:

> Some of the businesses are, how do I put it, they don't make a good first impression, either in their image, you know, their storefront image is not good, or let's just be honest, sometimes their customer service isn't good.

Tyler, a downtown resident, also referenced the importance of image when he talked about a downtown pharmacy: "[The] drug store over here. [It] looks like a drug store in a small mountain town in Virginia from the outside. It does not look like a drug store in the downtown of a city." I went on to ask Tyler if he thought that the image of place is important, to which he replied: "Oh yeah. If downtown looks crappy, people aren't going to come."

My observations of downtown confirmed what interview respondents have said. When I began this study, I went into nearly every business downtown to ask if I could hang up my flier asking for participation in this study. While I cannot comment on the quality any of these businesses' customer service because I did not purchase anything, I can report that business owners were generally friendly and most allowed me to post

my flier. However, in several shops I observed dirty floors, water-damaged ceilings, and generally cluttered entrances.

Not all business owners, however, experience conflict with the college or hospital. For example, Hannah, who works in the arts, welcomes the college's presence, but she doesn't think the medical industry has played much of a role in downtown revitalization. According to Hannah:

[Melvin] [who runs the community development corporation] will say "Med's" and "Ed's", but the "Med's" have really not done anything except occupy space. They haven't been out there, but [the college] is out there and they've made a difference. And then they're bringing people in and students and just more positive traffic [downtown].

Several business owners have commented that "Med's" and "Ed's" should be re-conceptualized as "BEAM" to include small businesses ("B") and the arts ("A). According to Hannah: "I think the arts community has kept [downtown] alive and vital with spirit and heart and I think without all the arts [downtown] would be a tough sell."

There also seems to be differences in opinion about not just who is driving revitalization, but what is to become of Rail City's identity. Sandy, whose work involves architectural preservation, believes the future identity of the city is going to be a cultural district:

I think the "Ed's" and "Med's" are indeed a driving financial force and they will help develop the population, but I think the future needs to be embedded in something more distinctive and I think that's why downtown [Rail City] as a

cultural district would really work.… the arts community has been holding this

downtown together for years.

Like Sandy, one resident I interviewed, Mitch, spoke of the need for something

distinctive downtown to draw people:

If somebody wants to put another doctor's office downtown, that type of stuff is

what's going to keep killing downtown. It's not going to bring downtown how it

used to be. It's just going to turn into a business venue.… Give [people], besides

spending money, give people a reason to go [downtown].

Place Entrepreneurs Take a Risk

The third major group driving revitalization in downtown is individual and small-

group housing entrepreneurs. Mele (1996) defines these "place entrepreneurs" as a

group of producers of urban space who, together with the real estate industry,

speculators, and developers, restructure the built environment through investment or

disinvestment. I interviewed four place entrepreneurs who have renovated or plan to

renovate downtown buildings into apartments or retail space. Despite the financing gap

identified in the HSDIP, three of these four entrepreneurs have begun to realize their

vision for making downtown a place for young professionals. This group of

entrepreneurs is more positive about the future of downtown than most residents I

interviewed. One entrepreneur, Cynthia, owns a building she hopes to convert into

mixed residential and office space, said this:

I've always thought the downtown was full of potential. Of course, I'm in a field

where I'm constantly envisioning how things could look and so a lot of times I

don't see the run-down nature of [downtown]. I see the potential. I see what it

could be.

Another place entrepreneur, Ian, articulated his vision, which is in opposition to

the vision proposed by Wallace from Rail City College. Ian said:

I think it's necessary for a community to have a vibrant downtown…. I don't see

the future of downtown [Rail City] being in student housing where I think

sometimes people are thinking that with [the college]. I think it's going to be more

urban professionals or baby boomers who want to downsize and just want an

apartment.

Ian's vision has been made possible, in part, by low-interest loans provided by the local

community development corporation. According to Stanley, planning professional, there

are tax programs available to help developers and entrepreneurs, most of which are not

handled by the city, but by the local economic development corporation:

LERTA is a program we have for downtown where if you put an investment in

downtown, we aren't going to tax those investments at all the first year. And then

20% the third year, 40% the fourth year, 60%, 80%, you get the idea. Five years

in, you're taxing at the full rate. It makes a big deal for a cash strapped business.

Three of the four place entrepreneurs have received various loans and grants. George

is a man in his thirties whose family owns a local business. George bought a building

downtown, formerly Valley Plastics Company, and has renovated the building into

apartments. George received some economic support to make up the financing gap.

According to George: "On the [Plastics Building] I had a façade loan and an enterprise

loan through the [community development corporation]." George also helped close

financing gap by doing some of the labor himself. George has also provided free labor to two other entrepreneurs, Ian and Henry, who have collaborated on a building they converted into retail space. George hopes to collaborate with Ian and Henry on future projects.

Economic support has also come in the form of discounts on goods and services from local architects, suppliers, and contractors. I witnessed this first-hand interviewing George. During the interview, I temporarily paused the voice recorder so George could answer a phone call from a tow truck driver. (George punctured his tire on the drive to his work site.) When the tow truck driver arrived, he recognized George, and after some discussion about George's work, the tow truck driver offered his services at no charge. Place Entrepreneur, Henry, also brought up this type of support during the interview:

> We've had some local business folks come up and say, "I think what you're doing is great, and I want to help you out" .... we've received a lot of free assistance from people…. I think that people want to see us succeed with this project, which is nice. The [community development corporation] has been great, checking on us, seeing if we need anything, taking care of the parking spaces for the contractors we've had in there so far and our dumpster. And the city, I mean they've been wonderful to work with as far as pulling permits and the code review process. You hear these stories about how there's so much red tape but the people who are in charge of administering these programs have been really accommodating to us.

Pats on the Back for the Local Celebrity

I asked all place entrepreneurs not just about the economic support they have

received for their projects, but also about the encouragement and gratitude the

community in general has given them. George, Ian, and Henry all described numerous

instances where, while working at their site, members of the community would approach

them to thank them for the work they're doing. According to Henry:

> It's good to see that the community is rallying a little bit. Even the mayor of [Rail
>
> City] has approached us a number of times, can't stop thanking us enough and
>
> he just gave us a letter of support for a project application that we submitted [to
>
> the community development corporation].

The recognition of George's work has turned him into a bit of a celebrity. He has

been featured in both broadcast and print news for the work he has done on the

Plastics building and for his efforts in revitalizing downtown. George described

himself this way during the interview:

> I've always been a vocal kid in [Rail City], ever since I was a little kid and I knew
>
> a lot of people, but no one's ever going to just give something to you. But, if you
>
> do something, the community is there to support you in every single way.

<div align="center">

Development Gatekeepers

</div>

Not all place entrepreneurs have experienced the level of economic and social

support that George, Henry, and Ian have received, which is due, in part, to the way that

development money is channeled into the city. City government has outsourced most of

its incentives programs to the community development corporation which administers

these programs. The city's elected officials, whose members overwhelmingly identify as

Republican, are laissez-faire about development. During the city council meeting I attended where the HSDIP was discussed, one city councilman reminded the audience that as a government entity the city cannot start a project; that is up to the private market. However, the government can and does provide incentives for development projects, though in Rail City this is done through the local community development corporation. Stanley, planning professional for the city, explained these incentives during the interview:

> A lot of these [programs] are handled by the [community development corporation]. Economic development in [the] county is handled by the [community development corporation], they're your one-stop shop, it's a type of municipal cooperation we do in [the] county and we do it better than anybody else does…. so it's not always apparent what the city does. And what does city [government] do to help revitalization downtown, not much technically speaking.

Controlling the Purse Strings

Not every place entrepreneur has been successful in accessing these loans and grants. Cynthia, the entrepreneur I introduced earlier, conducted her own market research which revealed ample demand for higher-end apartments downtown. The problem is that local banks would not lend to her until she also secured a commercial tenant, the rationale being that commercial tenants are more stable than residential tenants. During the interview, Cynthia discussed her application to the community development corporation:

> I was at the forefront, but my financing process was stopped, and I don't exactly understand why. All of a sudden, it's like the [community development

corporation] turned on me. I don't understand what happened. After the [community development corporation] turned on me, I started asking other [businesses], and so many people said to me, "We had that happen too."

I asked Melvin, employee of the community development corporation, about the influence his organization has in allocating grants and loans and how the process works. According to Melvin:

We don't deny anybody access to capital. Sometimes it takes a while for them to access our capital. Now with regard to the tax credits and grants, those are beyond our control. We will file the application for anybody that wants access to the tax credits, enterprise zone tax credits or historic building tax credits, but the final decision on the issuance of those tax credits are basically made in [the state capital], and they do have solid criteria to determine winners and losers. Sometimes [the state] will come back to us and say, "You filed four tax credit applications, here's our ratings. What do you think your priorities are?"

It appears that the community development corporation has some say in who is given access to grants and loans. I asked Melvin to clarify how his priorities might determine the "winners and losers," to which he replied: "We are asked for some input alright, but the state typically has a pretty solid ranking system that, at end of the day, they make the final decision on the programs they control."

The Good New Boys

Historically, a small group of developers has owned most downtown properties. Many of these developers are aging and some have passed their work onto their adult children. It appears that ownership is being transferred to another small group of

54

entrepreneurs, all white men in the thirties and forties with deep roots in Rail City. My findings show that a female entrepreneur has been denied access to capital. And although she has been in Rail City for 25 years, she is not native to the area. Cynthia is not sure, or at least she did not want to say during the interview, why she was denied the loan, but she was clear about her qualifications: "I have excellent credit, I have a great reputation, I have a great idea, it's been proven, and so it's like, how come I can't get the money?" Cynthia wanted to make sure though that I don't characterize her as a victim and that I make it known that she doesn't blame the community development corporation. In fact, Cynthia has stayed active in revitalization, serving as the chair of a newly formed and growing downtown business group.

The idea of being "local" surfaced frequently during my interviews with institutional actors. During our discussion about the criteria used to rate applicants applying for low-interest loans and grants, community development professional, Melvin, brought up a group of investors to which his company denied funding. This group does not seem to fit the Rail City entrepreneurial demographic profile—local White men with local bank financing. According to Melvin:

> There's a group of Indian investors from Chicago that have taken the
> [barbershop] building…. Well, the group that we met with from Chicago, we're not
> participating in it. We looked at it and we would be willing to participate in it,
> however, they're not bringing any bank financing to the table, at least any local
> bank financing, and their business plan was a little bit weak…. So, they're kind of
> doing it themselves and hopefully they'll be successful, hopefully they present a
> good product.

George, the entrepreneur who has become a bit of a local celebrity, also alluded to the importance of being "local." During the interview, I asked George why he thinks he's received the support that he has, to which he replied:

> I'm a hometown kid who knows [the community] and has other relationship with [the community] before this, but this is the first thing where I'm actually doing something that [the community] can jump in and help be a part of, they're all supporting me.

Narratives of Space

Structural change to a metropolitan area, and ultimately a neighborhood, does not, as Temkin and Rohe (1996) write, "cascade upon a featureless isotropic urban landscape devoid of symbolic meaning and sentimental attachment" (p. 166). Social characteristics like how attached residents are to their neighborhoods, the degree to which residents interact with one another, and the use of local commercial and cultural facilities, are important dimensions of neighborhood change. Temkin and Rohe (1996) refer to these characteristics as the "social fabric" of a neighborhood (p. 166). My interviews reveal attempts by actors to claim ownership of downtown space through narrative. In these narratives, actors present not just a vision for downtown, but also reference the kinds of people who they believe detract from or enhance downtown's appeal.

The Undesirables: Skateboarding Kids, Scooter Seniors, and the Poor

During my observations of downtown, I have seen teenagers re-purpose a downtown plaza into their own private skate park. As a long-term resident, I have also observed many elderly and disabled residents who live in one of several subsidized

apartment buildings cruising downtown on their motorized scooters. During the interview with place entrepreneur, George, we discussed some potential uses of this downtown plaza. George said:

> All I've ever seen there is young kids coming off the hill and skateboarding, and loitering, and they're tough, hard-ass kids, they scare me a little bit when I'm down there…. and like man, I wish there wasn't so many people on scooters flying around here. It kind of ruins the big city flavor.

However, one institutional actor, Sandy, who works in architectural preservation, suggested that these kids have adapted the space for their own because of the way that the plaza was designed. Sandy discussed how the plaza was constructed in its current oval shape because it was originally designed to be an ice rink, but nobody would pay for the Zamboni:

> These very expensive benches that were built in an oval like that because in the winter they were supposed to be surrounding the ice rink, it makes a lot of sense as a skateboarding park, which of course is how it's being used because nobody will build these poor guys a skateboarding park. They just can't understand, they act like there's some lost generation, it's called new kind of recreation. And we're not servicing their needs. And shame on us.

However, Sandy was less welcoming to the seniors who ride motorized scooters: "That's always an interesting group, the scooter people, to me they're a lot more dangerous than the skateboarders. I mean, the way they're, rolling down those sidewalks."

What some institutional actors fail to recognize is that these scooters provide mobility to residents with disabilities, mobility which they otherwise wouldn't have. One resident, Martin, fondly recalled how, using his scooter, he and his now deceased dog would travel to the grocery store:

> He'd sit on my lap until we got to a sidewalk and then he'd walk along then or walk in front of me. I'd make sure that he wouldn't book to the highway. He'd stay mostly up against the fence because whenever we're going down the cars are always behind me coming behind us. He didn't have to worry about it and jumping up on the sidewalk. We did the same thing coming back.

During the interview, Martin also discussed how, on the bus ride home, he gets off at the transit center, which is farther from his apartment. Although this is an inconvenience for him, he doesn't ask the bus driver to stop in the street so that he "doesn't have listen to people grumble and growl about the fact that [he] stopped the bus in the middle of the town.

Some residents also talked unfavorably about who they perceived to be low-income neighbors, particularly those in McAllister Square, the subsidized apartment building for very low-income residents. One resident, Tyler, who lives in one of the subsidized apartment buildings for seniors on fixed incomes, doesn't think it's a good idea to have such a concentration of people with low-incomes downtown for two reasons. The first reason is that these folks do not have much disposable income to spend in downtown shops and restaurants. The second reason is that mixing low-income folks with wealthier ones does not work, because, from Tyler's perspective, "You're not going to get rich people moving in beside somebody who makes $20,000 a

year." According to Tyler, most people in his building "kind of look down on the people that live in [McAllister Square]. They seem to be seen as a lower class of people."

The college's representative I interviewed and other supporters have also attempted to claim ownership of downtown space through narrative. During my interview with Wallace, we discussed the mix of uses and people invigorating downtown:

> We have a hotel coming in, we have some more housing coming in downtown, we need to have a place for students and doctors and nurses who work at the hospital, to have a vibrant place to live. We need to have more young people [downtown] and young families, that's what's going to transform [downtown]. Because it's not just going to be the high-rise public housing…. And then as we get foot traffic we need people living [downtown] too, and nothing against [public housing], and nothing against the elderly, [but] we need young people walking the streets, [so] that businesses can thrive.

These narratives often fail to account for the daily struggles for people on low-incomes. A few weeks before I began interviewing residents at McAllister Square, a transformer blew, leaving some downtown buildings without power for a few days. At the time, I lived 10 blocks from downtown; close enough that, on a quiet night, when the wind was just right, I could hear trains running through the center of downtown. I heard the transformer blow, but I didn't find out what happened until I read it in the news the next day. I asked one resident of McAllister Square if the power loss affected McAllister's residents. According to Clyde, the residents were without power for three days, during which time:

Most residents here, they were outside. I was helping the church deliver meals to these rooms. It was dark. The hallways were dark. If you didn't have a flashlight and you were maybe a little elderly, and having a hard time getting around, this was not the place at the time to be. A lot of these people were pretty much trapped. The elevators weren't working. Some of these people are in chairs. They can't get out. I was knocking and giving out meals with the church. Right before I went to work because I saw these God's people doing the right thing, so I helped them out. It was a crazy three days.

Most institutional actors—and even some residents—characterized the scooter seniors and skateboarding kids as a detraction from downtown revitalization. On the other hand, many institutional actors have embraced the HSDIP's recommendation to target the young professional. When I discussed with housing entrepreneur, George, what he thinks downtown is missing today, he said, "I think there needs to be good, quality young professional people [downtown]. George believes that this group would help sustain downtown businesses. George's housing collaborator, Ian, echoed this sentiment:

I remember ten years ago I was walking down to [a restaurant] and we were all wearing suits, and [a passerby] said, "This is great to see, I've never seen business men walking in downtown [Rail City]." And it's true, I mean you don't see that, I just think that is something that I 'd want to see.

Wallace, from Rail City College, discussed an expansion idea which would require the college to control access to a downtown pedestrian bridge that has been vandalized in the past. When I asked Wallace what control would look like, and whether the bridge

would be off limits to the community, he replied: "It'd be for community, but there would be certain hours it would be locked, yes."

During the interview with Wallace, I also asked him what ordinary people who, for example, don't have the money to sponsor a downtown building, can do to help revitalize downtown. Wallace replied:

Volunteer their time. Come down and help pick up weeds, come shopping, when we get some more places. Be a voice of support. Talk about the future, not the past. Remember the past, and be proud of it, but look forward, life goes forward, not back.

Identity Crisis: Nostalgia or Vision of the Future

Each group in my sample, whether institutional actor, place entrepreneur, or resident, made references to what Rail City used to be and what it has the potential to become. For example, some residents fondly recall a time of "hustle and bustle" downtown. Magnus, who recently returned to the city, said:

We left in 1982 when downtown [Rail City] was the thriving area, where it was a hustle and a bustle area, where there's no empty store fronts, it was busy downtown. But when I came back two years ago, it's a different town. Completely different area than what I grew up with.

These narratives often conflict depending on the interests the person has in downtown development. Place entrepreneurs are the most optimistic group, whose positive outlook is rooted both in turning a profit and in their desire to revitalize their hometown. Henry discussed some of his motivations:

I think anybody that gets involved in that kind of stuff it's more, you feel like you're giving back. I could write a check and donate my money to somebody, or I could try to do something like this that would be cool and just hope I don't lose money. It's fun, you learn a lot…. With our building when we did our demo, we started taking pieces down, we found a Nixon for President poster and we found a ruler from the early 1900s…. For me, my family's always been in this area, my grandfathers worked on the railroad.

Henry's housing collaborator, George, also spoke of, not just his, but the community's desire for a re-invigorated downtown:

I think people who are from [Rail City] truly want to go [downtown]. Even if it's just for shopping, or for a night out, or go to eat…. Growing up back in '85, '86, '87, downtown was a place where you could have a night out and I think people desperately want to have that back.

However, only one participant I interviewed offered concrete suggestions for embracing Rail City's railroad history. During my interview with Stanley, planning professional for the city, we discussed how Rail City is missing assets that typically serve as focal points in other cities, like riverfronts. However, what Rail City does have, according to Stanley, is: "[a] railroad. And in a way, the railroad is more interesting than a river because the railroad's always working." The railroad has quite a fan base. On my way to work in the morning I would often take the 10th Avenue Bridge, which passes over railroad tracks. On the narrow sidewalks running parallel to this busy four-lane thoroughfare, I often saw these rail enthusiasts photographing passing trains. Stanley doesn't think the city has

done enough to welcome and encourage rail enthusiasts, however. Stanley again brought up the idea that the downtown expressway is overbuilt, and offered a solution:

> That's where you want a walking trail with benches and trees so that people can sit there and watch the railroad, because the railroad's interesting…. You can literally see the produce of a nation sitting in [Rail City]. And every morning for a while as I was coming to work, the 8 o'clock train took tractors that Peoria, Illinois plant of John Deere made for export to get in a ship in New York City bound for Europe. So, every morning at 8 o'clock, [a] couple million dollars [worth] of brand new John Deere tractors roll through [Rail City]. You're literally seeing America make money here.

Narratives also vary depending on the actor's social location. For example, while most of the residents who live in subsidized housing rarely frequent the weekly farmer's market, one resident, Maddie, who lives in one of the new market-rate apartment buildings, envisions an expanded farmer's market:

> Have some of the businesses to compliment the open areas near the market, like a company that has natural organic foods, like a little grocery store that has bottled beverages that are trendy with alcohol and then they sponsor food trucks, so people go and they purchase their beverage, they go through the store, they go sample the food trucks, but it's largely little babies in strollers and young couples and just a good mix of people.

The vision for Rail City's future is also shaped by the degree to which actors are dependent on place. Most residents I interviewed who live in subsidized housing do not own personal vehicles. And while the local bus system is adequate from their

63

perspectives, they are more dependent on downtown, which explains why their vision is a bit more practical than some institutional actors. For example, these residents would like to see more stores that sell affordable goods. They are also less likely to claim ownership of space through their narratives, even though they use downtown more frequently than other actors.

However, while poor residents are dependent on place, they are not necessarily attached to it, which became clear during the interviews when I asked residents to describe the neighborhood or community activities they participate in and the relationships they have with their neighbors. Most residents reported that they do not regularly attend downtown events like parades, concerts, and street markets. For example, Lisa said:

> They do have summer events… and I know they do parades and stuff, but other than that there's not too much to do downtown ever, short of if you're catching a bus and the buses are always late. Most of the time if I actually see people downtown, it's because they're catching a bus. Maybe the post office, but that's about it. There's not too many events going on [downtown].

From another resident, Tyler's, point of view, who returned to Rail City after having lived in a much larger city, the events held in Rail City are inferior: "I've been to some [events] occasionally, but it's like, compared to what I'm accustomed to back [home], some of this stuff is just almost nothing." I asked Tyler to expand on this, two which he replied:

> [Events] seem like they're not exciting enough to even, to really attract people from this area…. The people from here that were born here, they think they're

pretty good, which is a little disappointing. There's a lot of people that live in [Rail City] who just don't know enough about the rest of the world.

The residents I interviewed also reported that, other than spending time with a few friends, they generally keep to themselves. For instance, Clyde, who lives in McAllister Square, described the social atmosphere in his building this way: "I don't have any enemies here. I have friends. I do have acquaintances…. I would like to say that I just try to stay out of everybody's way. I try to be quiet, keep to myself." I asked Clyde to explain why he keeps to himself, to which he replied: "I hate to say this but it's like a circus [in McAllister Square]. It is a circus. There are all kinds standing out here at night. You'll see all kinds of stuff." Another resident in the building, Martin, confirmed Clyde's observation when he talked about some of the building's tenants who hang out in the lobby:

> I only talk to about three people in the building because most the people here are younger than me or spend all their time in their apartment and don't want to be bothered with anybody or they're what we call lobby lizards, just hang out in the lobby or out on the sidewalk.

I asked Martin to talk more about these "lobby lizards" which he described this way:

> [Lobby lizards] hang out in the lobby all day long. The police car goes by. They're chasing it down the street and wondering where it's going. Ambulance or fire truck they all run around with scanners and as soon as a fire breaks out they're down there with everybody else rubber necking.

The design of a building can also either encourage or discourage interactions between neighbors. For example, Magnus and Maddie, a retired military couple who live in one

of George's new apartment buildings, said the lobby in their building is not open to the public. In fact, Maddie went on: "To come to visit us, you have to be in touch with us so we can come down let you in, there's no buzzer…." to which Magnus added, "That's the way we wanted it, that's the way [George], I guess his tenants collaborated, we wanted it to be secure."

Downtown residents who have access to a car, while generally appreciative of the retail options available downtown, are not dependent on downtown establishments, and in many cases, do not even use them. In fact, most institutional actors, who either work downtown or otherwise have a stake in downtown, do not patronize establishments, nor do they regularly travel downtown. During my interviews, I asked each participant not currently living downtown if he or she would ever consider living downtown, the most frequent response to which was, "no."

Some participants identified a lack of space for their kids or pets, while others said there is no reason to live downtown because navigating around the county by car is easy. Following this line of questioning I would ask participants what, if any, changes might be made downtown that would make it a more appealing place to live. Kyle, who works downtown in the banking industry, but whose private home is located in the surrounding township, said this: "To make it appealing for me to live downtown, I think in my stage of life, in what we [currently] have downtown, it really isn't something that I would seriously consider. It just doesn't seem to be fit for me." However, a few participants said they might consider living downtown once their children have moved out of their home.

I concluded every interview by asking participants how confident they are in the future success of downtown. While the institutional actors were generally positive, residents, overall, were either ambivalent or explicitly pessimistic about the city coming back. For example, Harriet said:

> I believe that different entrepreneurs, they're trying to improve and try to bring [Rail City] back. From what I understand during the railroad days, [Rail City] was really the place to be. You'd always see people. There was always something going on. I really don't believe it's going to get back to that because a lot of the people have left the area.

Another resident, Lisa, also presented her prediction: "I think [downtown] will remain steady, but as far as it become booming again, I don't think it will." Only one resident, Mitch, explicitly put the onus of change on community leadership: "I think whoever has the reigns, like whoever is driving the wagon of downtown, if it's somebody that wants to see [downtown] be successful, I think it could be done." When I asked Mitch whether he thought that as a resident he had the power to "drive the wagon of downtown", he responded:

> Just a lot of people like me need to speak up. A lot of people, they don't really speak up because they don't think that anybody is going to listen to them. Honestly, it's like bowling. If you knock down one pin the rest of them are going to fall. Basically, my point to that is, if there's a bunch of us, they can't ignore everybody. The more people that speak up, the better.

Chapter Summary

My findings reveal that, despite challenges for development, which include an aging, unskilled workforce, a physically small and poorly designed downtown, burdensome renovation costs, limited retail options, and negative perceptions of downtown, revitalization has moved forward in Rail City, driven by the education and medical industries, the small business and arts communities, and housing entrepreneurs. However, in pursuing their own interests, each group promotes a different, and in many ways, contradictory vision for downtown. These visions are supported by a community development corporation that controls access to development incentives. Through this process, the gatekeepers promote development that is initiated and sustained by people with deep roots in the area. Finally, residents, who don't appear to have a strong social fabric, nor are politically organized, experience change that, while doesn't necessarily harm them, does not help them either. In the end, I find that two types of space are created and maintained simultaneously: abstract space, which institutional actors promote, because they don't live there, and because they are creating a vision that they hope will attract outsiders; and social space, one in which predominately residents live out their daily lives.

In the following chapter, I will return to the literature to discuss how there are class factions between revitalization drivers, and how, in spite of these factions, their interactions spur future development; how housing entrepreneurs function as a rentier class (rather than a monolithic real estate industry); how local government is less important as a gatekeeper of development; and finally, how downtown space has both an exchange value and a use value, the balance between which is needed to stabilize a

68

neighborhood. In the final chapter, I will discuss what these findings mean for small

cities and propose recommendations for evaluating revitalization strategies and

outcomes.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS

Study Purpose

The purpose of this case study was to explore how individual and institutional housing market actors revitalize the downtown of a small, post-industrial, and economically distressed city. I used Temkin and Rohe's (1996) synthesized model of neighborhood change to test whether revitalization is the planned outcome of actors working together to create a shared vision of downtown or a complex and disordered process during which the tensions surrounding competing perceptions, experiences, and interests are resolved or ignored. Understanding these tensions is important because much is at stake in revitalization. Investors can lose money, entrepreneurs can be excluded from development opportunities, residents can be displaced from their neighborhoods, and outsiders can change the culture and identity of a place.

I now return to a discussion of my research questions as they relate to the three urban sociological theories of neighborhood change. The research questions answered in this inquiry include:

1. What are the social and economic challenges for downtown revitalization in a small city?

2. How do institutional housing market actors perceive and respond to these challenges?

3. How do downtown residents perceive and experience the effects of revitalization?

Social and Economic Challenges for Development in a Small City

Changing national social and economic trends affect all cities, large and small. However, these trends have not always been favorable for cities. Since the 1970s, the federal government has gradually decreased its aid to cities. In fact, Morgan, England, & Pelissero (2007) suggest that cities have entered a period of "fend for yourself federalism" (p. 4). Population loss compounds revenue shortfalls, particularly in Midwestern and Northeastern cities. Deindustrialization of the workforce has hit these areas hard, with many cities having lost over one-third of their factory jobs (Rusk, 2003). Cities are then left with an aging population and a workforce lacking the necessary skills to make it in the post-industrial information economy.

Rail City's decline began in the 1930s, when the diesel locomotive replaced steam. Fewer workers were needed and many moved on in search of employment opportunities. A smaller workforce means a smaller tax base, and so Rail City has had to make due with less. In fact, Rail City must still attempt to maintain an infrastructure originally built to accommodate a city with double the population it has today. This means that roads, sidewalks, and trees are maintained less often, which doesn't help to attract new residents. It's a vicious cycle.

Economic and social trends, at first blush, don't appear to be getting any better for Rail City. Total population growth is projected to remain flat through 2030 and the 20-64 age cohort—residents of productive working age—is projected to lose population, while the 65 and over cohort is projected to increase in number (Positively [Rail City], 2013). In fact, Rail City is already above the national average in population of residents over the age of 65 at 15.6 percent (U. S. average: 13%) (Mallach, 2012). These trends

would suggest a compounding of Rail City's financial difficulties as it continues to lose people of working age.

On the contrary, my findings suggest that despite national trends, and Rail City's location-specific challenges, which include an aging, unskilled workforce, burdensome renovation costs, a physically small and poorly designed downtown, limited retail options, and negative perceptions of downtown space, the revitalization spark has been lit. Although changing national economic and social trends have shaped Rail City, the fate of the city—and all cities—is within its hands (Temkin and Rohe, 1996). For example, Rail City has many characteristics that are liabilities for revitalization. Yet, as Temkin and Rohe (1996) argue, the way that cities respond to changing economic and social conditions depends on their locational, physical, and social characteristics. Rail City leaders and entrepreneurs have successfully leveraged downtown's locational, physical, and social liabilities into assets.

City entrepreneurs, working on the advice of an expensive downtown housing and investment study, have begun to re-purpose downtown as space for young professionals and empty nesters. The current young professional demographic is small relative to the size of the 65 and older demographic. Further, Rail City has a lower than average share of population between the ages of 25 and 34 with a BA/BS degree at 23.8 percent (U. S. average: 27.5%) (Mallach, 2012). Moreover, presumably due to growth in the medical and education sectors of the local economy, the number of households making over $75,000 a year is projected to increase (Positively [Rail City] 2013); and it is generally thought that rising incomes will help create demand for the higher-end apartments and retail spaces entrepreneurs have built.

That fact that Rail City was financially distressed is by all accounts a liability, but distress has also provided city government with an opportunity to purchase a housing study (the HSDIP) to find out if there is indeed an emerging market for higher-end apartment and retail space. The housing study's team met with landowners, developers, small business owners, housing advocates, bankers, community and faith-based organizations, realtors, and educational and medical institutions, and surveyed 26,000 local employees ([Rail City] Housing Strategy and Downtown Investment Plan, 2014; S. Lawson, personal communication, August 14, 2014).

The team determined that there is an emerging housing market for "high-end" residential living options to accommodate Rail City's next generation of residents who want to live close to some of the metropolitan area's largest employers—the hospital, the rail road, the college, a local convenience store chain, and the school district—which collectively employ approximately 7,380 workers (M. Samuels, personal communication, August 16, 2014).

The survey of housing preferences asked whether stakeholders would consider relocating downtown and what factors impacted their decision. The number of people considered "eligible" to live downtown (i.e. people making over $40,000) calculates to 28,493. Focusing on the under 34 and over 55 age cohorts the number reduced to 8, 046. Including only those willing to live in apartment or condominiums further reduced the number to 2,211. Finally, including the approximately 151 people moving in and out of the metropolitan region in any given year the number of people willing to live in apartments or condos downtown calculates to 506 (M. Samuels, personal communication, April 9, 2014). While this demand may not be great enough to revitalize

urban neighborhoods in larger cities, it has proven to be large enough to light the development spark in Rail City's small downtown.

Urban Ecology

Ecological models explain neighborhood change as the outcome of natural regularities in land-use patterns and population distributions (Feagin, 1990; Keating & Smith, 1996; Kleniewski, 2006). The different strands of the ecological approach suggest, in general, that social and economic forces such as the employment base of the neighborhood, demographic pressures on the housing market, and the age and original quality of the housing stock have a greater impact on urban form than cultural values or individual agency (Taub, Taylor, & Dunham, 1984). In this way, ecological models are useful for describing the changing national social and economic trends that affect all cities.

However, my findings strengthen the criticism that urban ecology models explain social organization as adaptation to the social environment, rather than competition over scarce resources leading to conflict (Gottdiener and Hutchison, 2011). These forces have shaped, but have not determined, downtown Rail City's economic fate. Despite lacking the space to accommodate industrial growth, the medical industry thrives due to Rail City's aging population. And because of the aging and degraded downtown housing stock—twenty to 40 percent of existing homes show signs of peeling paint, poor roof or chimney conditions, cracks in façades or foundations, and missing or dilapidated windows and railings (Positively [Rail City])—housing entrepreneurs have responded to the need for new housing options.

Another criticism of ecological models is that they omit discussions of capital investment decisions, inequalities in power and resources, and class conflict (Feagin, 1990; Temkin & Rohe, 1996). These discussions, which I will initiate later in the chapter, are needed to fully understand neighborhood change in downtown Rail City. Mele (1996) writes that capital investment in a neighborhood is important, but potential housing profit hangs on place entrepreneurs being able to create the social and cultural conditions needed to attract new residents with disposable incomes. In Mele's (1996) words, place entrepreneurs must "reinvent place" (p. 5). These residents, who are typically young, childless professionals and older couples whose children have grown, are drawn to central cities because they offer denser social experiences and cultural opportunities (Greenblatt, 2009; Mayer, Danis, & Greenberg, 2002; Myers & Gearin, 2010). These groups also favor housing that is tailored to their childless lifestyles. Further, people in smaller, childless households often look for convenience and in many cases, are willing to pay for it (Danielsen, Lang, & Fulton, 1999). Nelson and Young (2008) found that those who live in downtowns are more likely to be white, have higher incomes, be single, and be more automobile dependent than other demographics (p. 6).

Although Rail City's place entrepreneurs have successfully leveraged downtown Rail City's location liabilities into assets, longer-term success will depend on their ability to change the neighborhood's social and cultural characteristics. My findings suggest further change is ahead in Rail City. For example, the HSDIP proposed narrowing the downtown expressway to one-lane and installing traffic-calming measures like a bike path and trees. In addition to new retail spaces, several new businesses have opened or re-located downtown to accommodate the needs (and wants) of residents with

disposable incomes, like a coffee shop selling exotic blends and a boutique selling homemade soaps and lotions. Finally, the local community development corporation has initiated a new social media project to highlight how these "urban pioneers" are revitalizing downtown, a space which the community development corporation's new leadership is referring to as the "first frontier."

Responding to Development Challenges

Although urban ecology models adequately describe changing social and economic conditions, downtown actors perceive these changing conditions and local characteristics, and then respond, as Temkin and Rohe (1996) suggest. However, I argue that actors' development interests color their perceptions, interests for which urban ecology models fail to account, but which political economy models are useful for explaining.

In downtown Rail City, revitalization is the outcome of multiple industries pursuing their interests. For example, although the Rail City College employs just 600 people (M. Samuels, personal communication, August 16, 2014), most of whom work on the suburban campus a few miles from downtown, the college's expanding presence is widely felt. While it's clear that Rail City College's spokespersons are invested in creating a revitalized and vibrant downtown, my findings suggest that revitalization is a means to another end for them; that is, the college does not have any more space to expand its suburban campus, which is necessary for its economic survival. However, many small business owners perceive expansion as a threat. The small business owners I spoke with don't feel supported and feel like they are being squeezed out by

the college. Further, place entrepreneurs do not envision student housing as a driver of downtown revitalization.

Political Economy

Like ecological models, political economy models situate cities within their political, economic, and social arrangements. However, political economy models go further by considering the decision-making of powerful actors who control resources, which ultimately shapes cities (Kleniewski, 2006). In their sociospatial approach, Gottdiener and Hutchison (2011) identify the interests of real estate developers and local government intervention as powerful actors who drive change. However, my findings reveal the presence of additional drivers of change in Rail City all competing for space, economic incentives, and community support.

My findings further reveal that major drivers of downtown revitalization in Rail City—the education and medical industries, the small business and arts communities, and place entrepreneurs—are development adversaries, reminiscent of the class factions into which David Harvey (1976) believes the capitalist and working classes split as they struggle for advantage. In Rail City, factions within the capitalist class include the large corporate developers who are not only disinterested in downtown development, but who also have little experience with it; bankers reluctant to lend money; the education and medical industries who need space to expand; and the community development corporation which has the power to shape development in the way it allocates economic development incentives.

Some factions of small business owners and place entrepreneurs operate as the petty bourgeoisie (Marx & Engels, 1888/2015). Marx and Engels (1888/2015) believed

that the petty bourgeoise, although members of the lower-middle class, are like the bourgeoisie, or capitalists, in their political and economic ideologies. For example, place entrepreneurs in Rail City have bought into the HSDIP's recommendation to target the young professional and empty nester niche markets. Rail City place entrepreneurs envision downtown as a place filled with suit-cladded men luncheoning in bourgeois eating establishments. I also see these ideologies in the way that one entrepreneur described how some small business owners do not maintain their storefronts. As Harvey (1976) suggests, each faction wants something different from urban development. However, institutional actors do agree on one thing: to exclude the undesirables—skateboarding kids, scooter seniors, and low-income housing residents—whom they believe detract from, as one entrepreneur put it, downtown's "big city flavor."

Harvey (1976) also suggests that workers are split into factions separating blue-collar laborers from white-collar professionals. While an in-depth analysis of social class tensions is beyond the scope of this study, there is evidence of factions among residents, which I call housing factions. Residents in market rate housing and institutional actors spoke similarly about, from their perspectives, delinquent youth, dangerously mobile seniors and the disabled, and the poor, as though they are stains on the tapestry of downtown.

The scooter seniors and people with disabilities of any age, who are concentrated in three subsidized apartment buildings for people on fixed incomes, like the market rate housing residents and institutional actors, spoke about the low-income

residents in McAllister Square. From one resident's perspective, those residents look down on the people of McAllister Square, seeing them as a lower class of people.

This unintentional separation of residents likely prevents a strong social fabric from forming. Temkin and Rohe (1996) argue that neighborhoods with "dense social fabric" (p. 166) are more likely to resistant change that hurts them. Temkin and Rohe (1996) define the social fabric as the level of attachment felt by residents, the use of local facilities, and the patterns of social interaction within the neighborhood. Most residents I interviewed reported that they do not attend downtown events or city council meetings.

I've observed this lack of political participation firsthand at the city council meetings I've attended, which is consistent with the literature showing that socioeconomic, linguistic, or educational class barriers prevent all but a small portion of the community from engaging in local decision-making (Knapp, 2006). This lack of political integration is a problem because to which interest group's demands elected officials are responsive ultimately shapes urban policy (Hawkins, 2011).

Most residents also reported that they do not interact much with their neighbors, which I witnessed during my observations of downtown (at least public interactions). And targeting young professionals and empty nesters to the area means that future residents are unlikely to interact much with current residents either. For example, Lees (2008) cites several authors (Butler, 1997; Butler & Robinson, 2001; Butler with Robinson, 2003) who found that new middle-class residents engaged infrequently with low-income groups. In fact, these new middle-class residents often seek out people with similar cultural and political values. Further, once these new middle-class residents

assume ownership of space such as a new park, other residents often feel excluded (Mowen & Confer, 2003).

The lack of strong social fabric is problematic for the low-income residents because their interests align more with each other than with the institutional actors, but low-income residents unlikely to influence the revitalization process. While I have no evidence that institutional actors in Rail City intentionally promote exclusion narratives to separate downtown residents into factions, the effect is the same: a weakened social fabric.

Despite a weakened social fabric, the interplay between class factions' responses (i.e. institutional and resident actors) and interactions between these class factions, determine, as Temkin and Rohe (1996) suggest, the nature of long-term neighborhood change. As the institutional factions—the education and medical industries, the small business and arts communities, and place entrepreneurs—position themselves as revitalization drivers, there are unintended interactive effects. For example, the changes that housing entrepreneurs have made downtown have invigorated the business community. Several new businesses have opened or relocated downtown. Further, members of the downtown business community have formed a downtown business group, whose membership continues to grow. The group meets regularly to share knowledge and sponsor downtown events, like themed foot races and urban markets. Gottdiener and Hutchison (2011) point out that this type of "culture-led urban regeneration," which commodifies urban space by emphasizing urban consumption and entertainment, is common in the United States (pp. 172-173).

Like the political economy perspective suggests, the interactions between these factions are mediated by forces controlling development. The local community development corporation, a nonprofit organization doing work on behalf of the city, and other municipalities in the county, along with the real estate industry seem to be leading development, as Gottdiener and Hutchison (2011) posit in their sociospatial approach. However, Gottdiener and Hutchison do not incorporate Logan and Molotch's ideas of the "growth machine," in which Logan and Molotch suggest that growth continues at all costs. According to Logan and Molotch (1987), municipal decisions are made to benefit key players in the real estate industry who stand to gain financially. Gottdiener and Hutchison argue that Logan and Molotch (1987) focus on a class group that Marx called "rentiers," who share similar needs with city government (as cited in Gottdiener and Hutchison, 2011). However, Gottdiener and Hutchison (2011) don't believe a rentier class has ever existed in America. Instead, they argue that, in a free market, anyone with money can invest in property.

However, my findings suggest that Rail City place entrepreneurs are an emerging rentier class. Mele (1996) writes that "the postindustrial economy has provided new opportunities in the urban housing market for place entrepreneurs" (p. 5). These entrepreneurs act as speculators and invest in the undervalued commodity of low-income housing stock during structural shifts in the economy. However, older US cities often struggle with the entry of entrepreneurs whose values conflict with those of working-class residents, many of whom fear a loss of community. Three of the four place entrepreneurs in downtown Rail City, all White men in their 30s and 40s, have collaborated with each other, even taking on some of the labor themselves, a resource

81

referred to in the literature as "sweat equity" (Palen and London, 1984). One place

entrepreneur, George, talked about how the community has supported him because he

is a "hometown kid." The local community development corporation has approved low-

interest loans for this group over others, at least in part, because these men brought

"local" funding to the table, according to one of its representatives. Even if there is no

conscious bias in the way that loans and grants are allocated, there is an appreciation

for "local." In this way, an emerging rentier class is bolstered not through an economic

process, but through a cultural process. This process ensures the intergenerational

transfer of property ownership from a small group of commercial developers, who have

historically owned most properties downtown, to a new smaller group of entrepreneurs.

Place entrepreneurs (i.e. the real estate industry) and local government are not

the main drivers of change, however. They play a role, but not to the degree that

Gottdiener and Hutchison (2011) suggest in their sociospatial approach. Development

outcomes in Rail City are the result of institutional actors using exclusion narratives to

make claims to downtown space, and in some cases, even attempting to physically

control space, taking residents along for the ride. I don't see evidence of many

negotiations going on between groups such as developers, planners, politicians,

citizens groups, and religious organizations, of which Gottdiener and Hutchison (2011)

argue urban development is a product. Like Gottdiener and Hutchison (2011), Temkin

and Rohe (1996) criticize Logan and Molotch's overly deterministic "growth machine"

approach, arguing that neighborhoods can collectively shape their futures, but that they

do so in a complex economic and social environment.

During my tenure as a Rail City planning commissioner, I regularly saw

development proposals being subjected to reviews by planning officials and touted by

politicians. (The current city mayor, a man in his 30s with no prior public-sector

experience used downtown revitalization as one of his campaign platforms.) However,

to negotiate, the definition of which is "to confer with another to arrive at the settlement

of some matter" (Merriam-Webster, 2017), implies that affected groups are present to

confer with one another. I found no evidence of a collective shaping of downtown,

through which residents capitalize on a strong social fabric or political power.

Resident Perceptions and Experiences

Subcultural

Ecological approaches fail to incorporate the capacity of neighborhood residents

to shape the neighborhood (Somerville, van Beckhoven, & van Kampen, 2009). But, so

do political economy models, which presume that external political and financial

institutions determine a neighborhood's fate (Temkin & Rohe, 1996). Subcultural

models help explain what ecological and political economy models fail to: that cultural

values often influence individual behavior (London & Palen, 1984). However, the

subcultural approach is limited because it doesn't fully recognize the steps needed to

stabilize urban neighborhoods, overemphasizing "sense of place," while neglecting the

local political economy (Temkin & Rohe, 1996).

My findings suggest that, while both approaches have limitations when used in

isolation, as Temkin and Rohe (1996) suggest, a sense of place or space, and the way

that space is used, connects the concepts of power and culture, which supports the

sociospatial approach in which Gottdiener and Hutchison (2011) emphasize people's

understanding of space and the way that different groups attach meaning to the same space.

In Rail City, different groups attempt to claim ownership of space through their competing narratives. There are different types of spaces being used and being proposed. Most residents in Rail City see downtown as "social space," what Lefebvre (1991) refers to as the environment in which people live (p. 73). Most Rail City residents don't attempt to give downtown new identity, other than perhaps recognizing the history of the railroad and its imprint on Rail City. The way residents see social space is reminiscent of Marx's (1867) idea of the "use value" of a space (as cited in Harvey, 1973, pp. 153-194). For residents, downtown space is where their lived experiences play out. Space has use value; it is social. Low-income Rail City residents think of space in practical terms: they want to see restaurants they can afford to eat in, and stores where they can buy affordable goods. This is particularly true for residents for whom lack of a vehicle or personal mobility issues makes them place dependent.

Other groups see downtown in terms of abstract qualities like size, location, or profit potential. Lefebvre (1991) referred this as "abstract space" (p. 236). Institutional actors view downtown space in the abstract: they see it in terms of decorative college logos, hanging flowers, store fronts, young professionals rushing to work, and empty nesters leisurely enjoying their workfree and childfree afternoons at a downtown café or shopping in boutiques. Downtown for these groups is less a lived experience and more of an idea: an idea they commodify.

Because institutional actors see downtown space in the abstract, downtown has "exchange value," in that it is a commodity that can be exploited for profit (Marx, 1867,

as cited in Harvey,1973, pp. 153-194). For Rail City College, expanding downtown means room to grow, which means more students, and which ultimately means increased revenue from tuition. For small businesses, more people downtown also means increased revenue. Housing entrepreneurs also benefit from an increased exchange value, particularly when they buy low and sell high. These differences in use and exchange value support Gottdiener and Hutchison's (2011) claim that lifestyle differences play out in space.

Temkin and Rohe (1996) write that scholars working in a neo-Marxist framework see urban space as a contradiction between space as a commodity and space as a lived experience. Logan and Molotch (1987) conceptualize a neighborhood as stable when the exchange value and use value are balanced (as cited in Temkin and Rohe, 1996). When a neighborhood's exchange value is enhanced, space is changed, and the exchange usually favors the interest of capital. There is an interactive dynamic to these two perspectives. How space is used, and by whom, can alter the exchange value of a space. However, changes made to space to increase its exchange value alters the way that space is used, and by whom.

My findings suggest that despite recent changes downtown, a balance has been struck between use and exchange values, at least in the near-term. Rail City does not have the social characteristics which may, in larger cities, tip the scale. For example, the compact size of downtown means there is not much space in which change can take place. There are also fewer monied interests in Rail City than in larger cities. Further, Rail City is overwhelmingly a white, Christian, working-class city; cultural

factors, like race, religion, or sexuality do not serve as major divisions as they sometimes do in larger, more diverse cities.

This balance in effect allows downtown Rail City's multiple use values to coexist. I see these different uses of space coexisting because, while there are middle-class shops opening in downtown, low-income residents' wish for a dollar store came true; a dollar store recently opened just a few blocks from downtown. It is generally thought that the entry of educated and affluent classes into central cities displaces lower-income residents who can't afford the rising rents. This results in the overall demographic change in an area (Freeman & Braconi, 1990; Kleniewski, 2006). Keating and Smith (1996) define gentrification as "a pattern of change in the profile of a neighborhood's population, accompanied by an increase in housing values resulting from an influx of higher income owners into previously lower-income urban neighborhoods" (p. 29). I don't see signs of gentrification as it occurs in larger cities because public housing buildings are fixed assets unlikely to be moved. My findings also support Mallach's (2012) research in which he classified Rail City as "declining, but stable" (p. 56). According to Mallach (2012), significant population loss is strongly correlated with high levels of poverty and unemployment. Yet, despite significant population loss, Rail City has been able to stave off complete economic and social collapse.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I connected my findings in the previous chapter to the major urban sociological theories of neighborhood change, showing the strengths and weaknesses of each approach while discussing the role of space in urban research, which is a central component of the sociospatial approach. My discussions focused on

Rail City's successful attempts to leverage locational liabilities into assets; the

interactive effects of multiple revitalization drivers; the role of culture in revitalization; the

potential for bias in development opportunities; and the effects of exclusion narratives.

My findings suggest that while there is no single roadmap for revitalization, each of the

three urban sociology theories can be used to develop revitalization strategies and

evaluate revitalization outcomes.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I will begin this chapter with a discussion of what I have found to be true of revitalization in a small city based on my research findings. I will then offer a set of policy recommendations based on these conclusions, followed by a discussion of this study's limitations, and conclude by identifying opportunities for future research.

Revitalizing Downtowns in Small Cities

Location Liabilities

Despite the numerous barriers for development in downtown Rail City, revitalization has moved forward, which I believe is true for three reasons. First, timing is crucial; all the pieces of the revitalization puzzle have fit together in time for people in positions of power to notice and to act. For example, Rail City's distressed status made it eligible to receive a grant which city leaders used to purchase a downtown housing and investment study. This study used language that spoke to entrepreneurs who were positioned to initiate and complete development projects by securing low-interest loans and grants, as well as contributing their own labor.

Second, Rail City needed the right leadership to recognize the converging pieces and to help assemble them. Rail City has this in the form of professional planning staff, university leadership ambitious to grow the university, an engaged downtown business group, and a new full-time city mayor (thanks to a new form of government) who incorporated downtown revitalization into his campaign platform. Revitalization also needs community support, which was bolstered by the media's interest in revitalization

stories, and new leadership at the community development corporation who is prioritizing downtown revitalization.

Third, Rail City is not diverse—racially, religiously, or even socioeconomically—it is primarily a White, Christian, blue-collar city. Thus, historically there have not been major divisions around these demographics, which can slow down development as politicians respond to the sometimes vastly different and competing needs of various interest groups.

Revitalization Drivers

Housing, though important, is not the only revitalization driver in Rail City. Rail City has been able to leverage other assets, such as a growing university and medical complex, to accommodate an aging population. Rail City is also somewhat isolated geographically, making it an important urban area for people in the surrounding rural townships and counties seeking healthcare services or shopping.

The downtown business community also figures prominently in revitalization; they have planned and sponsored many cultural events—from themed pedestrian races to urban markets—to attract people to downtown. However, while this type of culture-led revitalization is common in American cities, it often fails to create a more inclusive environment in which low-income residents can thrive (Gottdiener & Hutchison, 2011).

Rail City's community development corporation controls access to low-interest loans and grants. And while they have a set of criteria they use to allocate those funds, such as how much money the applicant is bringing to the table, the impact of the project, and quality of the applicant's business plan, the community development corporation does set its own local priorities. A project's economic viability is not the only

determinant for success, but also the degree to which the project fits within the existing culture and narratives. For example, George, Ian, and Henry successfully accessed loans and grants to renovate buildings catering to the empty nester young professional markets.

Narratives of Space

Resident and institutional actors attempt to claim ownership of downtown space through their exclusion narratives. However, these narratives do not help Rail City forge a new identity; they only serve to exclude groups. For example, focusing on the young professionals and empty nesters establishes these groups as desirable, while current residents—teenagers, seniors, people with disabilities, and the poor—are undesirable. As such, I don't see the potential for any single identity, such as a college town or shopping destination. Identity requires something distinctive; downtowns across the country are shopping destinations, and one university town is not that distinct from the next. Perhaps Rail City should forge its new identity in what it does best: maintaining stability in the face of degrading economic and demographic conditions (Mallach, 2012).

Policy Recommendations

Each of the three urban sociological theories—urban ecology, subcultural, and political economy—suggest different neighborhood revitalization policies. However, focusing on just one is ineffective. For example, Temkin and Rohe (1996) argue that policies focusing exclusively on physical characteristics or on strengthening a community's political power are likely to fail. Therefore, I offer the following set of policy recommendations (drawn from all three urban sociological theories) fitted for small cities.

First, good leadership is essential, as are community awareness and support. However, leadership need not come in its typical form: the elected official or government bureaucrat. Residents are ultimately the people who know what they want in their neighborhoods—such as a dollar store rather than an expensive restaurant. One way for residents to serve in leadership capacities is to volunteer to sit on boards and commissions. Another way is to get involved in or start a neighborhood association, an organization which can serve as a conduit between residents and city government. This recommendation already exists in Rail City's current comprehensive plan.

Second, the presence of multiple groups driving revitalization is a good for two reasons. First, even in the face of competition there can be positive interactive effects. For example, although some small business owners felt alienated from downtown revitalization efforts, they do stand to benefit from the increased presence of potential shoppers living downtown. Second, if one group's strategy fails, others are will still be around to, as one resident put it, "drive the wagon." Although the medical industry provides jobs due to the large aging baby boomer population, future cohorts needing advanced medical care will be smaller in number.

Third, small cities should not focus too much on cultural change because it may not be compatible with all demographics. Culture change is often a thinly-veiled attempt to increase the value of space, which will ultimately change the way it is used. For example, renovating buildings into apartments that are marketed to a demographic will increase demand for shops and restaurants which then cater to that demographic.

Fourth, recognize bias in lending decisions, both explicit and implicit. Whichever entity controls access to low-interest loans and grants, residents should be made aware

of how the organization prioritizes development projects. Is it just about economic viability, or is it also the degree to which the project fits within the existing culture and narratives?

Finally, don't focus on identity; the identity will emerge as revitalization plays out over time. And keep in mind that a place's identity should ideally be rooted in something deeper and more distinctive than a demographic (e.g. young professionals and empty nester), or a healthcare or shopping destination.

Study Limitations

Robertson (2001) writes that the literature on downtown revitalization is often limited to the author's experience in a single city (p. 10). A major limitation of a single case study design is its inability to generalize findings to other populations, such as other neighborhoods or cities (Yin, 2014). Yet, as Yin (2014) suggests, having a firm grasp of the phenomena under study is a desired skill of a case study researcher. Researchers must understand the theoretical or policy issues because judgments are made during data collection and data analysis phases. Although this study is a story of revitalization in a single city, I have brought intellectual rigor to the small city literature.

While I am unable to generalize this research to other populations, other times, or even other cities, this work has set the stage for comparative case studies to be replicated in other small post-industrial cities, particularly those that are struggling financially. This study's methods can serve as a how-to guide for future researchers who want to document the competing perceptions, experiences, and interests of various stakeholders.

Finally, a synthesized theory of neighborhood change poses some difficulties for empirical investigation because it is impossible to predict the exact outcome of revitalization processes. Neighborhood change is a non-linear process from which it is difficult to disentangle the cause and effects of various social characteristics (Keating & Smith, 1996; Knox & McCarthy, 2005). To overcome this limitation, I conducted the study over a 24-month period in a place in which I have deep roots and knowledge.

Rail City's Future

It has been 27 months since I began this research project and much has changed in Rail City. Although there have not been any new residential housing projects, a new hotel has opened downtown. In addition to the hotel, several new businesses have also opened downtown.

City leadership has also changed. With the passing of the new home rule form of government, the city now has a new full-time mayor, who is determined to see downtown experience its long-awaited renaissance. City council has become slightly more diverse with the election of an African American woman (though the remaining members are all White men). The community development corporation also has new, younger leadership, who has created a new social media campaign to highlighting stories of downtown revitalization.

Further, the city's financial situation has improved with a stabilized budget and a projected surplus of $9.5 million for 2017. Further, the current fiscal situation has enabled the city to improve its bond credit rating with Standard and Poor's from an A minus negative outlook to an A rating with a stable outlook (State of the City Address, 2016).

However, as Rail City continues its renaissance, questions remain around the impact that new development will have in the long-term. Will Rail City continue to draw residents and shoppers? Will low-income residents be accommodated, or will downtown gentrify further? Will Rail City emerge from distressed status, which it hopes to do by the end of 2017? And finally, what is to become of Rail City's identity? Does it become a college town, continue to embrace and expand on its rail past, or does it become something else?

Directions for Future Research

Based on my findings and conclusions, I will now offer four directions for future research. First, a deeper understanding of the role of leadership and its capacity to leverage local assets is needed, particularly to explain why Rail City, and other cities like it, has remained stable in the face of economic and demographic decline. Mallach's (2012) strategies for change in small postindustrial cities is a good starting point. Leadership should also be studied within the context of a collaborative body which may help to alleviate some of the tensions among revitalization fractions. These drivers of revitalization may find that they have more in common than not, which would go a long way to creating a shared vision for revitalization and a practical way to pool resources.

Second, the role of place entrepreneurs in small cities warrants further investigation. This group may prove to be more influential in small cities experiencing similar renovation barriers. Rail City's entrepreneurs appear to be motivated not just by profit, but also by the desire to improve their hometowns, a goal which is likely unimportant to outside commercial developers.

Third, the role of gender bias in development decision-making is needed, as well as the intergenerational transfer of property ownership. Literature shows that when lenders assess borrowers, their decisions are often shaped by pre-existing cultural stereotypes about the borrowers' status (Harkness, 2016). It may also be useful to find out whether the appeal of downtown living can be expanded to include demographics other than young professionals and empty nesters (Fincher, 2004). For example, in Vancouver, Canadian planners are creating new building types which may appeal to a broader base of consumers. These building types include apartment towers over low- or mid-rise podium bases that contain townhouses (MacDonald, 2005). Myers and Gearin (2001) suggest that the ideal home may in fact be something in between the conventional suburban development and the traditional neighborhood.

Having said this, it may also be beneficial to determine whether some groups even want to live downtown, such as the poor. Subsidized housing is typically located in undesirable locations, but if the poor had a choice, would they choose to live in a more suburban location? Each urban theory provides different views on development, but perhaps a new model of development is in order, one which does not focus on housing, but focuses instead on making downtowns places to work and play. However, rather than making downtowns playgrounds for the middle-class, cities can and should encourage development that cuts across demographics, which would have broader political support. In Rail City, for example, have both expensive shops and dollar stores, which would benefit students and the poor.

Finally, as Temkin and Rohe (1996) argue, urban social policy must account for the social characteristics of neighborhoods, which current U.S. census data fail to

provide (Temkin and Rohe, 1996). I have offered some methodological approaches in

this study which could be expanded into a mixed-method design.

References

Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2008). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A roadmap from beginning to end*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Burayidi, M. A. (2001). Introduction: Downtowns and small city development. In M. Burayidi (Ed.), *Downtowns: Revitalizing the centers of small urban communities* (pp. 1-6). New York: Routledge.

Chapin, F. S. (1965). A model for simulating residential development. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners,* 31(2), 120-125.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Daniels, T. (2001). Smart growth: A new American approach to planning. *Planning Practice & Research,* 16, 271-279.

DeGiovanni, F. F. (1983). Patterns of change in housing market activity in revitalizing neighborhoods. *Journal of the American Planning Association,* 49(1), 22-39.

Ding, C., & Bingham, R. D. (2000). Beyond edge cities: Job decentralization & urban sprawl. *Urban Affairs Review,* 35, 837-855.

Downs, A. (1981). *Neighborhood and urban development*. Washington, D. C.: The Brookings Institution.

DSI Civic Financial Restructuring, Stevens & Lee Lawyers & Consultants, & FS & L Financials & Solutions. (2012). *Municipalities Financial Recovery Act Recovery Plan* [Rail City]. Retrieved from https://dced.pa.gov/local-government/act-47-financial-distress/.

Duany, A., Plater-Zyberk, E., & Speck, J. (2000). *Suburban nation: The rise of sprawl and the decline of the American dream.* New York: North Point Press.

Fainstein, S. (2010). *Just city.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Faircloth, S., Kaiser, B., & Steinmann, F. A. (2009). Residential adaptive: Reuse and in-fill development. *Economic Development Journal,* Spring, 40-47.

Faulk, D. (2006). The process and practice of downtown revitalization. *Review of Policy Research,* 23(2), 625-645.

Feagin, J. R. (1998). *The new urban paradigm: Critical perspectives on the city.* Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Filion, P., Hoernig, H., Bunting, T., & Sands, G. (2001). The successful few: Health downtowns of small metropolitan regions. *Journal of the American Planning Association,* 70(3), 328-343.

Fourth River Development LLC, Pfaffman & Associates, & Fourth Economy. (2014). *Ahead of the Curve: [Rail City] Housing Strategy & Downtown Investment Plan.* Pittsburgh, PA.

Freeman, L., & Braconi, F. (2004). Gentrification and displacement, *Journal of the American Planning Association,* 70(1), 40-52.

Feagin, J. R. (1998). *The new urban paradigm: Critical perspectives on the city.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Feagin, J.R., Orum, A.M., & Sjoberg, G. (1991). *A case for the case study.* Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

Fincher, R. (2004). Gender and life course in the narratives of Melbourne's high-rise housing developers. *Australian Geographical Studies,* 42(3), 325-338.

Gibb, K. (2003). Urban housing models. In T. O'Sullivan & K. Gibb (Eds.), *Housing economics and public policy* (pp. 22-37). Oxford: Blackwell Science Ltd.

Gottdiener, M., & Feagin, J. R. (1988). The paradigm shift in urban sociology. *Urban Affairs Review,* 24, 163-187.

Gottdiener, M., & Hutchison, R. (2011). *The new urban sociology*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Greenblatt, A. (2009). Downtown renaissance. CQ Researcher. (Eds.), *Urban issues* (pp. 241-262). Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Harkness, S. (2016). Discrimination in lending markets: Status and the intersections of gender and race. *Social Psychology Quarterly,* 79(1), 81-93.

Harvey, D. (1973). *Social justice and the city*. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press.

Harvey, D. (1976). Labor, capital, and class struggle around the built environment in advanced capitalist societies. *Politics and Society,* 6, 265-295.

Haque, A. (2001). Does size matter? Successful economic development strategies for small cities. In M. Burayidi (Ed.), *Downtowns: Revitalizing the centers of small urban communities* (pp. 275-288). New York: Routledge.

Hawkins, C. V. (2011). Smart growth policy choice: A resource dependency and local governance explanation. *The Policy Studies Journal,* 39(4), 679-707.

Jun, H. (2013). Determinants of neighborhood change: A multilevel analysis. *Urban Affairs Review,* 49(3), 319–352.

Keating, W. D., & Smith, J. (1996). Neighborhoods in transition. In W. Keating, N.

  Krumholz, & P. Star (Eds.), *Revitalizing urban neighborhoods* (pp. 24-38).

  Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.

Kleniewski, N. (2006). *Cities, change and conflict: A political economy of urban life*.

  Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.

Knox, P. L., & McCarthy, L. (2005). *Urbanization*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson

  Education, Inc.

Knaap, G. (1998): The determinants of residential property values: Implications for

  metropolitan planning, *Journal of Planning Literature*, 12(267), DOI:

  10.1177/088541229801200301.

Krumholz, N., & Star, P. (1996). Neighborhood revitalization: Future prospects. In W.

  Keating, N. Krumholz, & P. Star (Eds.), *Revitalizing urban neighborhoods* (pp.

  235-248). Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.

Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The production of space*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Lees, L. (2008). Gentrification and social mixing: Towards an inclusive urban

  renaissance. *Urban Studies,* 45(12), 2249-2470.

Logan, J., & Molotch, H. (1987). *Urban fortunes: The political economy of place*. Los

  Angeles: University of California Press.

Logan, J., & Molotch, H. (2005). The city as a growth machine. In J. Lin & C. Mele.

  (Eds.), *The urban sociology reader* (pp. 97-105). New York: Routledge.

London, B. & Palen, J. J. (1984). Introduction: Some theoretical and practical issues

  regarding inner-city revitalization. In J. Palen & B. London (Eds.), *Gentrification,*

displacement and neighborhood revitalization (pp. 4-26). Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.

MacDonald, E. (2005): Street-facing dwelling units and livability: The impacts of emerging building types in Vancouver's new high-rise density residential neighbourhoods, *Journal of Urban Design*, 10(1), 13-38.

Mallach, A., Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia. (2014). *Out of the shadow: Strategies for change in small postindustrial cities*. Retrieved from http://www.philadelphiafed.org/community-development/publications/special-reports/OutOfTheShadow.pdf.

Mallach, A., Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia. (2012). *In Philadelphia's shadow: Small cities in the third federal reserve district*. Retrieved from https://www.philadelphiafed.org/community-development/publications/special-reports/small-cities-in-third-federal-reserve-district.pdf.

Marx, K., & Engels, F. (2015). *The communist manifesto*. Millennium Publications. (Original work published 1888).

Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Mayer, H. J., Danis, C. M., & Greenberg, M. R. (2002). Smart growth in a small urban setting: The challenges of building an acceptable solution. *Local Environment,* 7, 349-362.

Mele, C. (1996). Globalization, culture, and neighborhood change: Reinventing the lower east side of New York. *Urban Affairs Review,* 32(3), DOI: 10.1177/107808749603200101.

Monette, D. R., Sullivan, T. J., & DeJong, C. R. (2005). *Applied social research: A tool for the human services.* Belmont, CA: Thomson Learning, Inc.

Morgan, D. R., England, R. E., & Pelissero, J. P. (2007). *Managing urban America.* Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Mowen, A. J., & Confer, J. J. (2003): The relationships between perceptions, distance, and socio-demographic characteristics upon public use of an urban park "in-fill", *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 21(3), 58-74.

Myers, D., & Gearin, E. (2001): Current preferences and future demand for denser residential environments, *Housing Policy Debate*, 12(4), 633-659.

Nelson, A. C., & Young, K. T. (2008). Limited role of downtowns in meeting metropolitan housing needs. *Journal of Urban Planning and Development,* 1-8.

Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development. (2012). *Municipalities Financial Recovery Act Recovery Plan: [Rail City]*. Retrieved from http://www.newpa.com/sites/default/files/uploads/Local_Gov/Act47/Municipalities FinancialRecoveryActPan[RailCity]pdf.

Robertson, K. (1999). Can small-city downtowns remain viable? A national study of development issues and strategies. *Journal of the American Planning Association,* 65(3), 270-283.

Robertson, K. (2001). Downtown development principles for small cities. In M. Burayidi (Ed.), *Downtowns: Revitalizing the centers of small urban communities* (pp. 9-22). New York: Routledge.

Rusk, D. (2003). *Cities without suburbs.* Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center

    Press.

Schwirian, K. P. (1983). Models of neighborhood change. *Annual Review of Sociology,*

    9, 83-102.

Sen, S., & Bell, M. J. (2001). Towards a typology of urban design problems and

    solutions for downtown revitalization. In M. Burayidi (Ed.), *Downtowns:*

    Revitalizing the centers of small urban communities (pp. 121-143). New York:

    Routledge.

Somerville, P., van Beckhoven, E., & van Kempen, R. (2009). The decline and rise of

    neighborhoods: The importance of neighborhood governance. *European Journal*

    of Housing Policy, 9(1), 25-44.

Taub, R. P., Taylor, D. G., & Dunham, J. D. (1984). *Paths of neighborhood change:*

    Race and crime in urban America. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Tavory, I., & Timmermans, S. (2014). *Abductive analysis: Theorizing qualitative*

    research. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Temkin, K., & Rohe, W. (1996). Neighborhood change and urban policy. *Journal of*

    Planning Education and Research, 15, 159-170.

Ulusoy, Z. (1998). Housing rehabilitation and its role in neighborhood change: A

    framework for evaluation. *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research,* 15(3),

    243–257.

Warner, C. A. B., & Karner, T.X. (2010). *Discovering qualitative methods: Field*

    research, interviews, and analysis. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Wei, F., & Knox, P. L. (2013). Neighborhood change in metropolitan America, 1990 to 2010. *Urban Affairs Review,* 50(4), 459-489.

Willis, J. W. (2007). *Foundations of qualitative research: Interpretive and critical approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Appendix A

Map of Research Site
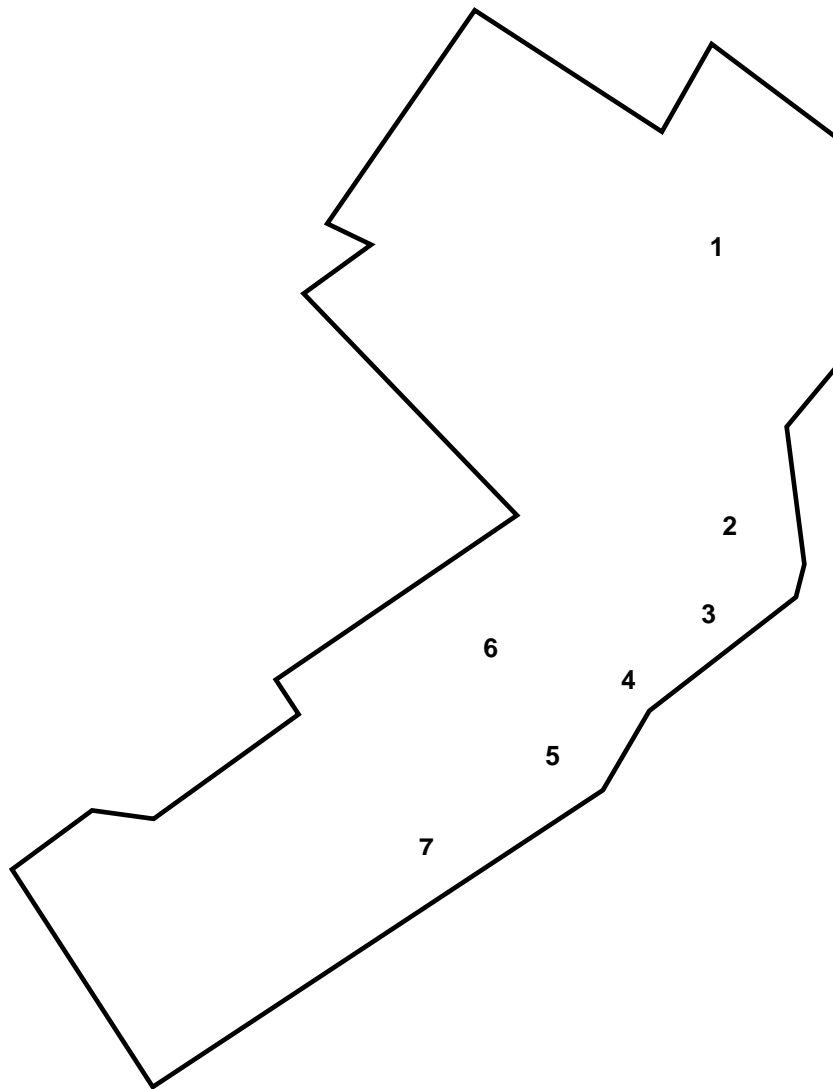
1. Rail City Hospital
2. New market rate housing
3. Subsidized housing (seniors/people with disabilities)
4. Subsidized housing (seniors/people with disabilities)
5. Subsidized housing (seniors/people with disabilities)
6. McAllister Square (Section 8 housing)
7. Rail City College (Downtown campus)

Appendix B

Letter to Residents
(*Printed on IUP letterhead*)

Dear Resident,

I am conducting a research study for my doctoral program in the Sociology Department at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. In this study, I explore how residents, real estate developers, local businesses, and city government collectively shape revitalization efforts in downtown [Rail City]. You have been identified as an eligible participant for this study because you live downtown or in the immediate vicinity.

If you choose to participate, I will personally interview you about your thoughts on and experiences with changes in downtown [Rail City]. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes in a mutually agreeable location. After the interview, I will provide you with a modest monetary compensation. You must be 18 years or older to participate, and only one interview will be conducted per household.

I will record your interview using a digital voice recorder, which I (or a professional transcriptionist) will then transcribe. I will maintain a file with your name, age, and copies of your interview transcripts, but your identity in all transcripts will be kept confidential by using a pseudonym. The information obtained in the study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings, but your name and other identifying information will not be included.

To set up an interview, or if you have any questions about the study, or your participation, please contact me at XXX-XXX-XXXX by Friday, June 10, 2016.

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Samuel L. Frye

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724-357-7730).

Appendix C

Interview Questions

<u>Place Entrepreneurs</u>:

1. Describe your perceptions of downtown before you pursued your project.
2. How would you characterize the quality of downtown infrastructure and amenities (parks, streets, sidewalks, shops, restaurants)?
3. Why did you choose this particular site to renovate?
4. Describe the physical changes you have made to the site.
5. What benefits do you expect to gain from these changes?
6. What support from local government have you received for your project?
7. How would you characterize the relationships that you have with neighborhood residents?
8. Describe your level of attachment to the downtown neighborhood/community.
9. How do you get information about neighborhood/community events in downtown?
10. What neighborhood or community activities do you participate in?
11. How confident are you in the future success of downtown?

<u>Established Residents</u>:

1. Describe the recent changes you have observed in downtown?
2. How do you feel about these changes?
3. In what ways have these changes impacted you?
4. How have you responded to these changes?
5. What have you done to speed up, slow, or stop the rate of change?
6. How would you characterize the quality of downtown infrastructure and amenities (parks, streets, sidewalks, shops, restaurants)?
7. How would you characterize the relationships that you have with your neighbors?
8. Describe your level of attachment to the downtown neighborhood/community.
9. How do you get information about neighborhood/community events in downtown?
10. What neighborhood or community activities do you participate in?
11. How confident are you in the future success of downtown?

<u>Potential Residents</u>:

1. Describe your perceptions of downtown. What sources have you based your perceptions on?
2. How would you characterize the quality of downtown infrastructure and amenities (parks, streets, sidewalks, shops, restaurants)?
3. What have you heard about recent changes in downtown?
4. Describe the recent changes you have observed in downtown?

5. How do you feel about these changes?
6. In what ways have these changes impacted you?
7. How have you responded to these changes?
8. What have you done to speed up, slow, or stop the rate of change in downtown?
9. How would you characterize the quality of downtown infrastructure and amenities (parks, streets, sidewalks, shops, restaurants)?
10. How often do you visit downtown and for what purposes?
11. How do you travel to and from downtown?
12. Would you ever be interested in living downtown? Why or why not?
13. What would you change about downtown in order to make it a place in which you might consider living?
14. How confident are you in the future success of downtown?

Local Businesses:

1. How would you characterize the quality of downtown infrastructure and amenities (parks, streets, sidewalks, shops, restaurants)?
2. Describe the recent changes you have observed in downtown?
3. How do you feel about these changes?
4. In what ways have these changes impacted your business?
5. How have you responded to these changes?
6. What have you done to speed up, slow, or stop the rate of change in downtown?
7. How do you travel to and from downtown?
8. Would you ever be interested in living downtown? Why or why not?
9. What would you change about downtown in order to make it a place in which you might consider living?
10. How confident are you in the future success of downtown?

Developers:

1. Describe your perceptions of downtown. What sources have you based your perceptions on?
2. How would you characterize the quality of downtown infrastructure and amenities (parks, streets, sidewalks, shops, restaurants)?
3. What have you heard about recent changes to downtown?
4. Describe the recent changes you have observed in downtown?
5. How do you feel about these changes?
6. In what ways have these changes impacted your organization?
7. What are the barriers to developing downtown housing?
8. What support would you need in order to develop downtown housing?
9. How do you assess demand for downtown housing?
10. How confident are you in the future success of downtown?

Local Government:

1. Describe your perceptions of downtown. What sources have you based your perceptions on?
2. How would you characterize the quality of downtown infrastructure and amenities (parks, streets, sidewalks, shops, restaurants)?
3. Describe the recent changes you have observed in downtown?
4. How do you feel about these changes?
5. In what ways have these changes impacted you?
6. What is being done to market downtown housing?
7. What has the city done to support downtown revitalization? What is the city currently doing to support downtown revitalization? What will the city do in the future to support downtown revitalization?
8. How confident are you in the future success of downtown?

Community Development Corporations:

1. Describe your perceptions of downtown. What sources have you based your perceptions on?
2. How would you characterize the quality of downtown infrastructure and amenities (parks, streets, sidewalks, shops, restaurants)?
3. What have you heard about recent changes in downtown?
4. Describe the recent changes you have observed in downtown?
5. How do you feel about these changes?
6. In what ways have these changes impacted the city in general?
7. What is being done to market downtown housing?
8. What has your organization done to support downtown revitalization? What is your organization currently doing to support downtown revitalization? What will your organization do in the future to support downtown revitalization?
9. How confident are you in the future success of downtown?

Appendix D

Coding and Analysis Procedures

The major urban sociological theories—urban ecology, political economy, and subcultural—provide different perspectives on the causes and consequences of neighborhood change. Once I had a sufficiently thorough understanding of these theories, I used the major tenets of each to develop sensitizing concepts around which I organized my data. For example, for urban ecology, I looked for anything related to macro and meso-level structural issues, including demographic changes and employment changes. These concepts for the most were drawn from archival records and documentation, but also from interviews when respondents discussed structural change, which occurred most often during interviews with institutional actors. For the political economy approach, I looked at anything that produced conflict, such as competition between groups. Lastly, for the subcultural approach, I looked at interaction between groups and feelings of attachment to the neighborhood. This is also where I incorporated the sociospatial approach's use of space, making note of attitudes towards space and observations of the way that space is used.

Approximately six months into the study, and after I concluded interviews with most institutional actors and small business owners, but had only interviewed one resident, I began to code my data. At this point, I began to note major themes including control of resources, competition between revitalization drivers, feelings of nostalgia, resistance to change, community support, exclusion narratives, issues of identity, and development challenges. However, the only theme from this initial round of coding that ended up as a major theme is gatekeepers of development.

Approximately 10 months later, I concluded interviewing residents, and for the next year slowing began polishing my themes. I finalized the major themes, aligning them with each urban sociological theory, as well as my conceptual framework—revitalization challenges and opportunities, political and economic interests in revitalization, and cultural perceptions and experiences of revitalization. Within the major themes I then created nine sub-themes. Over a few months of refinement, I collapsed, condensed, or moved sub-themes. I also renamed the sub-themes to better tell the story of revitalization in Rail City, and whenever possible, used the language of my participants.

For example, revitalization challenges and opportunities became location liabilities, in which I focused on demographics, renovation costs, design challenges, and negative perceptions. Political and economic interests in revitalization became revitalization drivers, in which I focused on competition between industries, as well as development gatekeepers, in which I focused on control of resources and transfer of the ownership of property. Finally, cultural perceptions and experiences of revitalization became narratives of space, with a focus on undesirable populations and an emerging identity crisis.

Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
(*Printed on IUP letterhead*)

You are invited to participate in this research study. The information provided in this form is intended to help you make an informed decision whether or not to participate. If you have any questions about any information that is discussed, please do not hesitate to ask.

You have been identified as an eligible participant for this study because you: 1) live and/or work in, or are rehabilitating property in downtown [Rail City]; 2) are a city planning official or member of city council; 3) are employed as a real estate developer or community development corporation official with an interest in downtown development.

The purpose of this study is to explore how the interests of and interactions among these participants shape revitalization in downtown [Rail City]. If you chose to participate in this study, I will personally interview you. Your interview will be recorded using a digital voice recorder and then transcribed by a professional transcriptionist or myself. The interview questions will gather information about your experiences with changes in downtown [Rail City]. Participation in this study will take approximately 90 minutes, with a possible follow-up interview. Although there are no direct benefits to participants, this study will provide city leaders and residents with information needed to develop and evaluate revitalization strategies. Revitalization of downtown and the overall city in general are important to the future economic health of [Rail City]. Effectively building residential capacity will strengthen the tax base and help the city maintain and improve vital services and infrastructure.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you can change your mind by notifying me that you wish to withdraw from the study. You can withdraw at any time and without penalty. If you withdraw from the study, all information pertaining to you will be destroyed.

If you choose to participate, your information will be kept confidential. I will maintain a file of your name, age, and copies of your interview transcripts. Your identity in all transcripts will be kept confidential by using a pseudonym. If a professional transcriptionist transcribes your interview, he/she will sign a confidentiality statement agreeing not to disclose your name or any information contained in the recording and agreeing not to maintain copies of the audio recordings or transcripts on his/her computer. The transcriptionist will also be made aware that he/she can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement.

The information obtained in the study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings, but your name and other identifying information will not be included.

This research is being conducted by myself, Samuel Frye, a doctoral student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, under the direction of Dr. Melanie Hildebrandt. I am also a resident of the [Rail City] and a member of the [Rail City] Planning Commission, which is a seven-member board responsible for reviewing and making recommendations on proposals that affect the development of the city. During my work as a planning commissioner, I will recuse myself from all decisions that may impact you as the participant. This study is not affiliated with or funded by [Rail City].

If you have any questions at any time, please do not hesitate to contact either myself or Dr. Hildebrandt by phone or email.

Samuel L. Frye   Dr. Melanie Hildebrandt, PhD
Doctoral Candidate   Dissertation Chair and Associate Professor
Sociology Department, IUP   Sociology Department, IUP
McElhaney Hall, Room 102   McElhaney Hall, Room 112 C
Indiana, PA 15705   Indiana, PA 15705
XXX-XXX-XXXX   XXX-XXX-XXXX
S.L.Frye@iup.edu   Melanie.H@iup.edu

If you agree to participate in this study, please sign the attached statement. By signing your name you are agreeing to take part in this research study. Your responses are confidential and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. I will provide you with an unsigned copy of this informed consent form to keep.

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724-357-7730).

INFORMED CONSENT FORM: SIGNATURE PAGE

I understand the information provided in the Informed Consent Form and I consent to participate in this research study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of the Informed Consent Form to keep in my possession.

NAME (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Phone number where you can be contacted: _____

Audio recording completed if unable to sign? Yes or No

****

I certify that I have read the Informed Consent Form to the above individual and provided a copy of the Informed Consent Form to the above individual for their review prior to signing this form. I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study. I have answered any questions that have been raised and have witnessed the above signature.

Researcher's signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F

Letter Requesting Institutional Support

January 18, 2015

Dear [Stanley],

I'm writing to ask permission for your participation in a qualitative research study for my doctoral dissertation, entitled *An Exploratory Case Study of the Interactions of Downtown Housing Market Actors in a Small Revitalizing City*. The purpose of this research is to explore how the interests of and interactions among housing market actors, to include residents, city government, local businesses, real estate developers, and community development corporations, collectively shape downtown revitalization. If you agree to participate, you will serve as key informant in this study by helping me make connections with potential participants identified above.

The Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects expects its investigators to maintain a clear set of roles between that of researcher and any other position that impinges on the study. Therefore, I also ask for your permission to retain my position on the [Rail City] Planning Commission. As we discussed, I will recuse myself from all voting that may impact any of the participants in the study.

The Institutional Review Board is also concerned with the welfare and consideration of the best interests of all subjects participating in research. All participants in this study will be informed of the purpose of the research, and will be asked to sign a consent form. Participants will be free to choose whether to participate, and will be made aware that even if they do agree to participate, they are free to withdraw at any time without fear of retribution. Further, I will disclose to all participants my role as a planning commissioner, and they will be informed that this study is not affiliated with or funded by the [Rail City].

Finally, I need to obtain institutional permission to use any data contained in *Downtown [Rail City]: A Survey of Housing Preferences* that is not available to the public. Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Samuel L. Frye

Appendix G

Letter Granting Institutional Support

Monday, January 19, 2015

Samuel L. Frye
Department of Sociology
McElhaney Hall, Room 102
441 North Walk
Indiana, Pennsylvania 15705

Dear Sam,

In response to your letter of January 18, 2015,
                                                                                        would
each be delighted to participate in the research for your doctoral dissertation, *An Exploratory Case Study of the Interactions of Downtown Housing Market Actors in a Small Revitalizing City*. You certainly may retain your position on the Planning Commission if you recuse yourself from voting that may impact the study's participants, as proposed in your letter. The disclosure measures, consent forms, and other limitations proposed in your letter are satisfactory to us if they are satisfactory to the faculty at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

As for your data request, any data created for   (our downtown housing plan),   (our comprehensive plan), or any of our other planning efforts will be at your disposal subject to only a few limitations. For instance, some of the pro formas for downtown buildings contain proprietary information that you may use only if you can keep this information from going public, and thus potentially being used against the building's owners in negotiations.

With that small caveat, however, we enthusiastically look forward to working with you on your dissertation – as we have always enjoyed working with you on the Planning Commission. Please have your faculty members contact us if they have any questions whatsoever.

Sincerely,