In this document, the practitioner profile is embedded within the researcher's analysis. The document begins with an introduction written by the researcher, moves to the edited profile (the practice story as told in the voice of the practitioner and edited by the researcher), and concludes with the researcher's analysis of the profile.

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Profile of a Community Planner's Experience
Facilitating a Community Design Process

I had the opportunity to work with a community-based planner, Laura Smith[1], on a project in Newville, LK, under the auspices of the Land Conservancy Group (LCG). This project consisted of LCG creating and implementing a community-design process to achieve the twin aims of meeting the needs of the community and building local capacity for stewardship of the park. The following profile, realized as the park goes into construction, and six months after both Laura and I left LCG, illustrates some of the major challenges community planners face in facilitating collaborative processes, as well as the challenges such planners face in mediating and reconciling the interests of the communities they work in, their employers, public agencies, and philanthropic foundations.

For over two years, Laura and I worked with the South Hill community in Newville's South Ward to redevelop Neighborhood Park, a 3.3 acre inner-block park adjacent to the South Avenue Elementary School. As the only public park in lower South Hill, it serves approximately 7,000 low-income African American residents, as well as serving as a playground for the children of South Avenue School. By the time Laura and I began working with the Neighborhood Park Committee, the school and the community

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[1] All names have been changed.

had all but turned their backs on a park that had, over the last twenty-plus years, degenerated to a haven for illicit activity ranging from prostitution and drug-dealing/using, to theft, assault, and dumping. All of the recreational equipment had long been removed, but strong community sentiment remained for the park.

By way of historical background, the Neighborhood Park Committee (NPC) had organized itself and been advocating for the redevelopment of the park for over six years. Based on LCG's previous record of creating six community playgrounds in Newville through participatory design processes, LCG had originally been approached by the NPC for assistance in acquiring funding for the redevelopment of the park. From 2002 through 2004, LCG (Laura and I, with assistance from the community) drafted and submitted public and private grant proposals, raising $1.5 million for the project.   Once funding agreements were in place (public funding was required to flow through the City of Newville) and access agreements between LCG and the City of Newville were in place, Laura and I implemented the 6-month participatory design process.

In the context of facilitating a community process, several partners and many more stakeholders were involved. The primary community organization was the NPC itself, which is mainly composed of eight committed community elders including its chair, the Reverend of a local parish, as well as the former principal of the South Avenue School. The school, which uses a tiny portion of the park adjacent to it as a playground, was another key stakeholder and participant in the process; the school served as the main venue for the design process, and LCG involved the children of the school in every aspect of the playground design. Various other community groups, including the PTA, a federally funded Weed and Seed group and the local Boys and Girls Club all participated

to varying degrees.   On the public side was the City of Newville, with various branches therein participating to varying degrees.   There was also the board of education, which, along with the City and the NPC, would be responsible for the maintenance of the park once renovated.   Public and private funders including the National Park Service, the LK Department of Environmental Protection and foundations were indirectly involved in the process, with LCG representing their interests. Finally, LCG itself was a stakeholder. The challenges Laura and I faced facilitating the design and pre-development process with the above participants are the subject of the following profile.

PROFILE

[SM: [2] I basically outlined three points that I think work. So the first one was just a background on the project, and most importantly; who the various stakeholders were; how they became involved; was it difficult getting them on board; how were some of those difficulties resolved if they were. Also, who was not included and why (if there was somebody specifically not included), and were there any power or cultural inequalities that needed to be dealt with between various stakeholders to bring certain stakeholders up to speed with what was going to be happening.

Then I was hoping you could tell me about any particularly difficult situations that arose during the process, and the need to mediate between various interests both on the city side, and the LCG side and with regards to the community – how did you go ahead and manage those difficult situations. Specifically, from the perspective of the

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[2] For clarity, I have indicated questions and comments by myself, the interviewer, in [SM:…].

mediator or facilitator, how did you actually approach specific persons or groups of stakeholders that were particularly frustrated or particularly uncomfortable with the process or how it was going. How do you really approach those in the situation itself—strategically—but also in the moment itself. How did you actually go ahead and defuse that situation; what techniques seemed to work during the process better than others. Part of that is also what such difficulties reveal about either the process itself or the dynamics of the group, or maybe even the viability of the project. How did approaches with different stakeholders at different times differ from each other; why did you choose different approaches, and how did they work differently? The last part being, what do you think worked best about the process, and what do you think worked least, and is there anything you feel you would handle differently looking back.]

That sounds good. Since you were working on the project also, you can be an informant in the interview as well. I'm actually looking over old log books and find they're useful for moments like this. [And also for times when you're getting bogged down in a project, to look back on] how we got to this stage. It's actually quite interesting to see what floats up.

I would characterize the stakeholders as roughly being what you've described as: LCG certainly, the City of Newville, the funders (to a degree) brought in by LCG (and LCG was probably representing them). And then obviously the community, which is a big umbrella to describe lots of smaller parts. Within that probably the Neighborhood Park Committee, and Rev. Johnson [Chair of the group], and then other people who were sort of the unidentified community: neighbors, parents—I suppose there was always that

Weed and Seed group tangentially involved and very complicated. And then the [South Avenue Elementary] school. With the school it was the kids and the teachers, and then the principle and also the board of education.

So it was a pretty complex set of players. [SM: They weren't exactly organized. Especially within the community there was some fluidity between those various groups of stakeholders] and that was an interesting thing. Even within the city, there were moments in the process (I'm thinking about the workshop when we brought the Project for Public Spaces in). In that January workshop there were suddenly people from the school at all levels, people from the neighborhood, political people and city people, sort of not wearing their hats, but coming together in a pretty unified way.

The history of the project and who was included is interesting for me because I came into it with one understanding and in the course of the project I developed another understanding that had more to do with the significance of the site in history and the relationship of LCG to the community. My first understanding was history blind – that LCG had found this park that needed renovation, and had gone on to champion the cause and had set it up as if nothing had been done before.

It was like, "Ok, here is this community group and they will be the stewards and there's this school group and they will be the site of our participatory design program." When we got into it (I don't know if you remember some of those early meetings) there was out and out resentment towards LCG. I was so surprised by that because I had had no warning, and I thought "Well, that just doesn't make any sense." So I thought: "Alright, let me just put that on the side and continue to work as if that's not there."

[SM: That's interesting because when I attended a couple of Committee meetings very early on when I first came to LCG (because our Director had said just go and show up), I didn't really know where I was going or what I was showing up to. I remember the first time I went (it was also the first time that Boti went), Rev. Johnson at the end of the meeting turned around and asked both of us who we were and what we were doing there.

I remember very specifically saying, "Well, I'm with LCG and I have been asked to see if there is any assistance or role that LCG would be able to play in helping you work on redeveloping this park." But [looking back] that definitely seemed very different than the way LCG had conceptualized it internally.]

You know, its kind of an open question: what would we have done differently—how would the outcome have been different? I don't know whether it would have been substantially different or not. But to get into the thick of a project like that and raising lots of money—it was not until we hired in the architects and they brought in their own experience from a community-driven participatory design process that had preceded LCG's involvement did I feel the full effect of the conflict we had been managing. Instead of it being, "Isn't this wonderful the community has been trying to get this done and now LCG has come in to do it," it was more like "LCG took our project and appropriated it, and we're not getting what we want out of it."

It wasn't until those meetings that that came full up in my face. Not that I was totally ignorant of it. But I've worked on community-initiated plans, I've worked from the grassroots, I've worked in other circumstances where people fight, fight, fight and then a developer comes in and says "Ok, fine, we're going to do it."

But there's that uncomfortable transition where people say "Well, we really wanted this to happen but, gee, now it's happening and there's this outside organization and how are we going to be part of it".

I had understood our role, our mandate—and you can tell me whether this is a facilitator's perspective or not—that as a community-based planner I think there is a lot of facilitation work that you have to do. Without having your current descriptions of what facilitation is, my understanding is that [it involves] taking the planning process or the development process and making it transparent, landing it in a neighborhood and involving people in the neighborhood in it. Giving them control over it—or sharing that control is perhaps a better way to describe it—that requires facilitation, it requires facilitation of the process of development itself.

[SM: There are a lot of interests, competing interests, involved] so you can't ever be perfect, no one entity is ever going to be satisfied a 100 percent. But what you try to do is meet most of the people's needs most of the time, and find a way to deal with the ones that aren't getting met.

I think that the architect actually was doing that [too] when he said "OK, the community really feels that certain things like a building for a community center are important, so let's figure out a way to enable them to go and build that."

I think that that's something we were doing, say[ing] "Yes, we are an outside developer, and we have your interests in mind, but we also have our own interests in mind, which are being responsive to funders and getting the project done on time and meeting a budget or whatever."

The problem, I felt—and I've sort of zipped from the beginning of your questions to the end—[was that] one of the things we ended up with at the end was LCG [the leadership] saying "Ok, now that you've finished the community process let's bring this budget down", without feeling the need to have that be a cooperative discussion with the community members who had participated in the design process.

One way to have handled that was to recognize that we're not going to build everything the neighborhood wants, and let's be clear with people about that. Let's make sure that everything we do is presented as a very substantial first step in the overall renovation of this park—and that a lot of what gets done by LCG is going to be good, and what's needed—but that we also set up the neighborhood to orchestrate the next step [SM: essentially seeing the park as an ongoing project and the community as an evolving partner].

For me, in working with this pretty broad group of people, [I] can try to get the various interests together. In the arc of the project, for me that was one of the main trajectories, coming in with one kind of understanding and then realizing that there was this whole history that had preceded us. There was a group of people in the neighborhood—that was very prominent in the leadership—who felt that this project was being appropriated, and so they perceived their role as "Let's keep the fire lit under LCG." That's what one person said to me: "My job is to keep the fire lit under LCG."

That's a very different paradigm from "This is a collaborative project and we're all working on it together." I think some of that rose from that history, and that if we had been able to come to terms with that history a little bit differently—whether it would have been [through] a facilitated process at the very beginning, or [just] some way of

talking about it, [something like] "Ok, this is where we've come from, here's where we are now, let's get ourselves together on one page before we proceed into what this thing is going to look like"—that might have helped.

[Right. Almost like a statement of objectives at the very beginning and laying ground-rules for the whole process. Establishing everybody's roles very clearly and openly, and maybe creating a better understanding of how LCG needed to function in order to be able to do this: what LCG's own needs as a stakeholder were versus those of the community and also versus those of the City. It was evident that the next time around the city was going to want to play a bigger role.]

[That reminds me of] my very first planning job—community development really—working a lot with a neighborhood group. It was a big NYC funded neighborhood renovation project, and I remember having meetings with the people who were in the neighborhood, the group that we had hired who would be the housing managers, and our architect. Every now and then we would kind of stop and say "Gee, do you think we need to go talk to HPD (the NYC housing agency who was funding), do you think we need to bring HPD in on this decision?"

The housing manager—who had done this kind of work for ever and ever—would look at me and say "Oh no, you don't want to invite that camel in under the tent, you don't want to let that camel get its nose in under the tent."

And so part of not bringing the city along ([that is] City Hall the city), is that the city is also very divided. That's the interesting thing, that you can sort of say, okay, it's the city. But then there's the City Council vs. Engineering, the Mayor's Office vs. Neighborhood Parks and Recreation, and they all have their role. In Newville I'm just

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beginning to figure it out. It's a very complicated place, with a lot of dysfunction, a *lot* of dysfunction. So a general strategy is to just get a project running, and just get moving as fast as you can, and you tell them what you're doing and you hope they don't get in your way.

[SM: It's hard to deal with because you're almost afraid of their participation], but facilitators tend to assume that everybody's going to play nice and fair. It isn't that way. You know what we went through with the water department with Lincoln (Elementary School Playground), where you're wondering: "What does this guy want?"—meaning graft—or "Are we expected to pay him for the permitting approval?" That's a very corrupt reality. There's also the challenge of bureaucrats exercising power over their jurisdiction and they need to have control over thing. They can make a review process quite slow and painful like the year-long process to get the pass-through agreement done [an agreement between LCG and the City channeling Federal and State funding through the City to LCG].

[There was a] full year of negotiation and renegotiation and reintroduction of new clauses and, "Oh, by the way, you should probably have so and so."

So the sense at LCG, and not unwarranted in a lot of ways, is "Don't slow down to let the city get on board with you, just keep them informed. [Allow them to participate] to the extent that you can let lower people come in on the meetings, or to the extent that you can create opportunities for the show boats (City Council President and the Mayor) to come in and back the project. But other than that don't slow down and don't let them in is sort of the strategy.

Now it can blow up in your face; where you get going and going and going, and they say, "We're not going to pay you or approve your permits (or whatever it is that they do)."

[Is there a particular moment that you can remember…] Well, I kind of wonder whether it's blowing up in their face a little bit right now, in terms of not being able to get paid. [Actually, I learned that they got their first requisition funded.] Oh, they did? Well that's fantastic. Now the thing that is going to come is going to be on the maintenance, upkeep, security and programming end of the park. They've got to come up with some kind of negotiated agreement between the school district and the city and the police department to take care of the thing, otherwise it's pretty jeopardized I think.

[SM: Each stakeholder had their own agenda in the process and the interesting thing is that so did we as we were involved in the process. It's different than the way traditional [or pure] mediation/facilitation works where somebody is specifically brought in who has no relationship to the project, and has no supposed vested interest in the result except for creating as much consensus to create as viable a result as possible.]

I think there are certainly tactics for facilitation that I as a community based planner deploy. But I also think that I am working in an active role with a vested interest. For a community-based planner and the kind of position I am in it's actually on two levels, and that was the other thing I wanted to talk about—the sort of paradigm conflict of the work with LCG.

On one hand there's a traditional real estate development approach, which when you're doing development work is certainly useful and one you need to follow I think. And then there's another more community-based approach which is, in addition to trying

to get the development done, you're also acting as a change agent. You have an empowerment agenda as well. People in neighborhoods that are underserved get to decide what the neighborhood improvement should be. They get to voice their own ideas. They get to participate in its transformation.

At the same time that we were doing that [facilitating the design process] I was in this leadership development program for community-based practitioners (with APA). I was taking a lot from there and using it. One of the things I had written down from there was that "Hope is goodness in a tight place." There's a lot that you do when you're in this kind of situation that is about hope. You're trying to do the right thing but you don't have a lot of lee way to do it in.

Let's go back to the question about the conflicts, [and] let's just talk about the neighborhood and the school side of the actors. There was the South Avenue Elementary School. Now in that system, there is the Principal and the teachers, and there's the kids, and everybody has their own interests there. [In the neighborhood] there's the NPC, there's Rev. Johnson their leader, who is very charismatic, very powerful, and carries a lot of his own dynamic. And then there are other people from around the neighborhood, and then from the greater Newville area.

One thing that we talked a lot about in this [leadership] group is the concept of group formation, and groups going through phases of 'forming', 'storming' and 'norming.' It helped me to understand what was going on with Neighborhood Park. It's that when groups come together there's a real diversity of agendas and needs and power relations within them. So it's forming. The first phase is figuring out what you want to do, what your priorities are. The second phase is 'storming', where the conflicts come

up. And we went through a lot of those conflicts with them, *a lot* of them. That was a lot of what was going on in the community. I think you noticed I tried to do this sometimes, just to listen, just to allow people the opportunity to voice that.

One of the things people had to voice was their distrust of me, of us. The other thing that does come up is, well, what it's like for people to have someone from outside their neighborhood, from another race, from a whole other socioeconomic background, coming and working with them. They're aware that there is a lack of equality right away and that whether I like it or not, I can be a stand in, without me having to say a word, for all of their other experiences of racism.

That's something—having worked in Harlem and the Bronx and Newville—I've gotten used to. It can be very hard. I think you commented on it once. I think I said I tend to use myself as a lightening rod every once in a while where I just sort of say, "Ok, let's have it out, just say what you are afraid of here." And a lot of times it comes directed in the form of anger. Now I don't know if I want to keep inviting that for the rest of my life. It is exhausting, and you commented on that. But there's a need to be aware of the fact that I'm not value neutral. Even if my intentions are the best I'm still not value neutral. I come from history, and in a point in history.

[SM: One of the other inequalities that goes along with those that you described is your ability, even though you're not value neutral, and even though you were trying to conceive of a process that was truly viable and empowering for everybody involved, was that you could walk away. Even though the community in a sense could walk away, the consequences would have been far more personally and individually felt from the community end than from our end, or for that matter than from the city's side of things.]

Exactly. It parallels doesn't it? And that's sort of what people said about LCG: "You guys aren't going to be here when it's done."

For me, on a personal level, I experienced that in a really strong way when there was a community [park] 'clean-up' [day] and I had [said] something like "Maybe I'll bring my kids."

The principal of the school said to me "Don't do that." And I was sort of surprised, because she was being very, very strong. And I looked at her with a puzzled look in my face, and she said "Your children will not have had any experience of being in a space like this where they know not to pick up crack vials, so don't bring them."

It still makes me very, very sad when I think about it. [It's like] "Ok, right, I have the option not to go there. I have the option not to bring my children there and my children don't know not to pick up crack vials because they've never been in a place where they've seen one—and these people live with it every day."

I don't know what to do with that. You can't say "I am only going to work in situations where the power is equal" because we bring resources, organizationally, personally. But how do you even things out, I'm not quite sure. I think one thing I just try to do is listen and give people many, many, many opportunities to voice their concerns. I don't know if that's professional training or if it's just that this is what I know I can do.

[SM: There seem to be very specific and sophisticated ways in which you were able, past the listening, to re-engage. If the listening provided sort of an outlet for the conflict, there seemed to be a way you were able to re-collect the process, even after a significant amount of tension had been expressed. There was a way in which you were

able to re-gather and keep the process moving forward. I remember that specifically in relation to the community, but also with the City (although the city had its own inertia and was following its own disorganized process), and within LCG too, in keeping the process moving at times when there was significant doubt or skepticism as to how to move ahead.]

[There was that time when the community was shown the first working sketches of the design]. That was very interesting and that was probably one of the really hard times in the project—where you just sort of felt that you got kicked in the head. That was also one of the times that it became clear to me that not only was there struggle to be managed in the context of the neighborhood and the project with the city, but there was also struggle to be managed within the organization that was asking us to do the work, within LCG.

I have really come to understand that as a paradigm conflict between a more traditional real estate development perspective and a community development or community-based development perspective. One of the things that a traditional real estate approach would do is say "We're coming up against community opposition so what we need to do is load the next meeting with supporters." So what happened coming out was interesting because one of the places that [our director] went to immediately was [to say] "Who can we get to say that they like the project [design], and let's get them into the next meeting."

At first I was just shocked, abhorred by that. And then I thought "No, wait a second, that is how it is done in traditional real estate development work. That is the method. And so this isn't somebody being a bad person or anything. This is just

somebody picking up the tools that they know." My approach was let's go back to the people in the neighborhood and have the conversations that we need [to have] to understand better what peoples objections are, and try to respond to those objections.

I don't remember everything that happened in that time, but I do remember it was very intense and that there were a lot of one-on-one discussions. I do remember, and I think you were doing this too, going back to the [community] leadership and saying "Ok, what just happened there." The other thing was going to the architects and saying "It seems that you have a problem with this project." And so this was one of the times [that] in the course of the project it became clear to me that there was more history than I had given creed to. That was the point when I said "Ok, I've got to pay attention to the history here."

At the same time there was [a reaction on LCG's side of] "Well, we're just going to start cutting the budget now" [though it wasn't really cutting the budget, but paring down the design to meet the budget]. At the time I felt that I was getting stretched too thin between the way you need to work to do a community based project like this and the direction that the organization I work for is taking.

I had to say "Ok, I'm a seasoned practitioner at this point and so is this a fight that I want to be engaged in or will I be more effective somewhere else in some other context." At that moment I had to make a decision and I happen to have two little kids who really needed more of me, so it pushed me over. But it was one of the things I did evaluate. How much power is the person in this position—whether it was me or you or anyone—how much power is the person who is running this program and is responsible for bringing these projects into being going to have to organize the work in such a way

that you don't have this level of conflict. I decided at that moment that it wasn't enough.
If I didn't have two five year olds, I probably would have gone for it. I am not trained in
facilitation and conflict mediation, although I certainly try and keep up on some of it. I
don't know if a facilitator really needs that kind of power.

[SM: Some of the things that you described are certainly things that we have
explored during the semester; the fact that the facilitator sometimes needs to become a
lightning rod to help get some of the feelings out, some of the anger and frustration out.
It seems that (being outsiders) was a limitation for us in some ways, but it also allowed
us, and you specifically, to play more of that role.]

[So there were two different processes that you were trying to manage at the same
time. One was this inner conflict between the interests of various folks within that group
of stakeholders and then also between that group and the whole process as being
managed by LCG. That is another important tool, realizing when things need to happen,
realizing when it's time for a break, and then approaching people one-on-one, helping to
get their own frustrations out and also helping you to understand more about their
interests and where they're coming from, and what they're really concerned about rather
than just how they're positioning themselves during the whole process.]

That's true at the level of facilitating conflict between the neighborhood group
and the school, or within the neighborhood group. God, there were times when we would
get calls from particular leaders in the community going off in different directions, and
that happened. That is definitely where it's useful to be from the outside, to not have a
vested interest, to be neutral, and to be able to look at what everyone is saying and get
them to clarify.

[I would say:] "Ok, we can't have any basketball. Well what is it about basketball?"

"Oh, well it's…" And then we all learned all that stuff about competition games—who knew? I didn't know that that went on; that if you have a basketball court that you're going to have competition games and you're going to have people betting. And if you have people betting then you're going to have criminal element and all that stuff.

[Again I would say]: "Ok fine, so the problem is criminal element. Now, let's go back to this basketball thing. Who really needs basketball?"

[And the response was]: "Well, you know, the little kids really want the basketball."

"So what if there's a junior basketball court? Then the little kids can play basketball and the big kids can't."

That was one of those times where by listening, by clarifying, by bringing other parties in—if it's just the old folks sitting around talking about it, you're not going to have basketball. And with kids, not only do you have to create the opportunity for them to give their voice, but you also have to teach them what it's all about so that they understand what the process is that they're being included in. That's when you get involved in education.

I don't know whether it's part of facilitation, but I think education was a really, really important part of the project. Not just with the little kids. Some of the most successful things that we did were when people came in and showed design ideas. One of the things that really moved us out of that storming moment where there was nothing

but conflict and no sign of resolution anywhere on the horizon—where it seemed like we were taking many, many big steps backwards—one of the things that really helped was people coming in and showing pictures of what nice park designs look like in lots of places in the world.

One of the things you were talking about was about after the moments of conflict and expression that I was able to pick things up and move them along. It reminds me of 'Assurance Game Theory' [from the leadership workshop]—the philosophy of establishing small victories. So you establish a track record, you market the gains, you trumpet the successes. You don't keep things moving like a bulldozer, to say there is no opportunity here for anyone to object, but you do keep things moving.

That has come with practice. You bounce back and forth between slowing things down enough—or slowing things down so much that you get bogged down and nothing moves and people get frustrated but everybody has a chance to talk a lot—to the other side which is like following the wrong path for the sake of keeping to a scope of work— which is just keeping it moving for the sake of keeping it moving. I think that I do try and move back and forth between those.

Definitions of community development—that's another thing. The old definition of community development was kind of along the lines of doing nice things for poor people in poor neighborhoods. A more community-based approach is "integrating strategies to improve the quality of life within a geographic area" [quoted from workshop material]. [The community-based definition] takes away some of the do-gooding. It's a way of approaching things. When you take that approach—with all of the conflict and

the history—LCG coming in the way that we did could have really gutted the very fragile neighborhood leadership that existed.

So one of the things that I also put some effort into was building local strength. Hiring a local community facilitator was a big part of that: bringing in two local facilitators to build capacity within the neighborhood group, people who were independent from LCG with strong ties and even stronger credibility in the neighborhood and the city's park movement—to build up local strength. And doing that in a way that was as hands off as I could possibly be; "Ok, here's the resources, here's the people. I'm going to put them together and then step back and see what happens."

[SM: So it's almost trying to share the responsibility for facilitating, to almost pass on some of it to other people that may be more trusted by the community, and that in itself helped to defuse some of the tension and conflict. The idea that LCG isn't really monopolizing the process, [that] there are opportunities for people to join not just the [design] process itself, but even the facilitative aspects].

I've found this thing I was looking for. [Reading from workshop notes] Phases of organizational development, phases of organizational collaboration. Forming: relying on a central leader (that's a characteristic), conflict, pulling in different directions." Then I wrote: "Need to facilitate rather than be a central leader." Most groups don't get past this. I happened to be in this leadership development program while we were in the intense phases of the process. Everybody had the opportunity to talk about what they were in the middle of so I was using the opportunity to tell them about the situation with Neighborhood Park.

What they were saying was [that] "This is a storming phase, and you have to see it as a phase. You have to understand that rather than step in as if you're going to become the central leader what you need to do is facilitate leadership development. Look for ways to get people who don't talk to each other to talk to each other, create those opportunities."

Norming is the next stage where there is agreement on a direction. Performing would be the final phase where there's "creative thinking and problem solving."

By the end I was describing it and one of the coaches of this program said to me "It sounds like you have just completed the storming and you're into norming and perhaps even performing."

I think that there was a quality of that. In terms of skills, it was helpful to have that knowledge. To step back and be a student of the situation. To say, "Ok, this is a phase of organizational development, it has to go through this phase, and I can support this phase in certain ways in order to bring it to the next one."

[SM: It really brings out the fact that processes have their own momentum, although there is probably a strong temptation many times to want to limit or control that momentum. But at a certain point there's really just a need to let it follow its own course and maybe just guide it away from complete disaster; recognizing that a great deal of what's happening is actually very necessary. What's probably not necessary is the complete disaster].

That's the other thing—and it's perhaps different than pure facilitation—that we were developers. We were bringing money, we were bringing resources, we were going to be putting something in the ground. And we had a very clear interest in all of that.

So, while we were trying to do this kind of value-neutral thing of community collaboration and all that, we were pretty heavy hitters in that neighborhood. You have to handle your power wisely.   Part of that is knowing that you have it.

Who didn't get included? That's an interesting question. Well, there were lots of other opportunities. Now that I think of it, we actually made a pretty clear and deliberate choice to have the NPC not only be the project partners, or the community partners, but to be what we would refer to as the Community. They were the people who organized the meetings. They were the people we had the meetings with. They were really the people we conducted the outreach through. They were our main contact—not our only one—but clearly the one that had the prime role.

I remember there was a point in the project when we were questioning if we really wanted to be working with these people, [asking] "Are they really going to be able to deliver? Are they going to be there on the other side of the handshake." We even thought about who else—[the] Weed and Seed [Committee], the Boys and Girls Club—it could have been anybody.   We could have said the City Council is going to be our community representative.   We didn't. We actually pursued a very grassroots strategy. That was interesting. It's not always done that way. Sometimes people come in with their own leader who isn't even part of the community, or isn't a really strong one or [isn't] particularly involved in that given moment.

[SM: Thinking back and reflecting on what we've been talking about, one thing we could have done differently would have been bringing people together early on in a facilitated process to understand where everybody was coming from and what the objectives were.] That would have been really helpful, and I think that the time that we

could have done it was when we were waiting for the approval to proceed with work. That would have been exactly the right thing to do at that time, to say "Ok, we're being held up on the process here but while we're waiting we can get ourselves organized for the community work to come."

The reason I didn't do that was that it became more clear to me that, in spite of how much LCG likes to work through a community process, there's a limit to how much time and money and resources—time probably—they want to see spent. And I realized [that] pretty quickly. You couldn't even use the word organizing in the discussions (with LCG leadership). There was just no hearing that kind of approach. Yes, that is exactly what should have been done, and if LCG couldn't do it, we could have asked somebody else to do it. Have the State University or the Philanthropic Foundation or somebody [conduct] a workshop. There are lots of people around who could have done it and that would have been exactly the right thing to do.

[SM: In terms of whether similar processes would have been useful at other points], there's certainly good sense in regrouping as the objectives change, or as you accomplish one thing: "Ok, it's funded, so now lets move ahead. Ok, now it's design. Ok, now it's getting into the ground." The things you want to accomplish change too. Right now it's going to go into construction—has anyone spent anytime figuring out local hiring? Has any one figured out how to leverage the community development, economic development, workforce participation aspect to it? It's going to be complete in the spring—at what point and who is going to come together to figure out how to run programs?

The work can go on and on, and I think it is useful to regroup, to bring people back together. Also, the nature of the community organization will need to change. We left them in a very nascent stage in a way. They had had a grant application in and they were just about getting ready to get 501C3 [tax-exempt status].   Are they going to continue or will they die back? It's useful to keep those things alive, and LCG is really reluctant to embrace that. They don't want to get involved in all that—they don't want to spend the time with that. There is a way of doing it without having to do it all yourself but also making sure it gets done.

[SM: What was I thinking about all the accomplishments and obstacles? I hadn't actually spent so much time breaking apart our roles and how those may have changed and what kinds of conflicts we may have been dealing with internally as well.   It's particularly interesting to think about how a planning practitioner can work for an organization like LCG and play a dual function. How effective can that be and what are the limitations of working in that way for a planner who is really interested in community development. What do some of the limits of the process reveal about where a practitioner may be better suited. So, I guess some of the same questions that you were alluding to earlier, that you were asking yourself at a certain point: am I more strategically effective here in this type of process within these given parameters than I am in perhaps a more grassroots situation? Or even in a more centralized process where there is enough autonomy to be able to make decisions to confer more responsibility on a community].

That is the question. You're going into the practice with a pretty good idea of what the issues are. It took me a few years to even figure that out. You'll find brick walls of your own to hit, but you don't have to hit the same ones I did. It's very helpful

to talk about it. It was intense. You wonder what gets left behind. There was a project that I worked on in the Bronx years ago and I just found out that two of the young people who were in high-school at the time and started working on the community design stuff with us (just came out of the local school) –one of them is running for city council and the other is working for the city parks foundation right now. It's very inspiring. So the other thing is that you get to leave stuff in place that you don't always see for a while.

ANALYSIS

It is clear that Laura's role was not that of a traditional mediator, although there were dynamics in the project/process that required mediation between various interests. Instead, Laura was playing dual roles as a facilitator and as Program Manager. On the one hand, Laura was employed by LCG to execute projects such as the redevelopment of Neighborhood Park. On the other, and in order to do so, she was clearly facilitating a community design process with many stakeholders and partners. As such Laura was neither a fully vested participant, at least not in the sense that the community was (she is not from the South Hill neighborhood), nor was she a neutral and objective facilitator/mediator. Rather, she straddled both roles, which created tension and presented both challenges and opportunities during the process. Much of what is most revealing about the experience relates to the community facilitation aspect of the project, and to the conflicts of interest created by the duality of Laura's role as project director and community advocate/facilitator.

Overcoming distrust: knowing the context and your partners

As an outsider to the community, Laura and I, and LCG, faced a substantial amount of distrust from both the NPC and the community as a whole. Clearly there was a complex history behind this distrust that was grounded in race, socioeconomics, political and individual dis/empowerment. Among the biggest challenges Laura faced throughout the project was overcoming this distrust. One of the central lessons we learn from her story is that having a comprehensive understanding of the history of a particular community and project is key to situating oneself to overcome such distrust and to building an effective partnership. The gulf between LCG's conceptualization of the project and the community's deeply rooted histories contributed to an imperfect knowledge of the history of the park and the NPC's efforts to resurrect it. This incomplete awareness of the historical context within which LCG was acting resulted in moments of significant tension and distrust throughout the process.

The lack of complete historical context is illustrative of another essential facet of facilitation; knowing your partners. In this case knowing the partners meant understanding the political context, the expectations of your various partners and one's own team. Regarding the political context it was necessary to know how to work with and engage the City of Newville in order to keep the process moving while keeping the City in the loop. Knowing the partners, specifically the NPC and the greater community, meant understanding their history, background, interests, positions, expectations and goals. Knowing one's team meant having a clear understanding of LCG's own expectations and obligations, and knowing the limits of how LCG would be able to

function. As Laura's story reveals, a facilitator in such a position needs to be intimately aware of these various dynamics in order to effectively mediate between various interests to create a fair and sustainable outcome.

Laura suggests that one way of ensuring this contextual understanding is to engage in a facilitated event early on in the process. Such an event would be facilitated by someone completely external to the process and would focus on creating an environment in which participants/constituents/partners feel comfortable sharing difficult histories, backgrounds, hopes, aspirations, expectations, and goals. This would help to define the context and bring everybody up to speed as to who and what is really at the table. Furthermore, the sharing process itself would help validate the histories and positions of the participants, reassuring them that their histories will be adequately and justly taken into account throughout the process. This event could also serve as an opportunity to establish key criteria and ground-rules for the ensuing planning process while at the same time building respect among partners and ensuring a high degree of clarity in expectations. The concept is reminiscent of the purpose and function of 'search conferences' and would be a useful tool to help build the kind of trust necessary to execute a complex process such as this one.

Facilitation skills: group dynamics and managing the process

The story reveals other important tools in helping to build and maintain essential trust between unequal partners throughout the process. Throughout the story, Laura stressed the importance of inviting and creating opportunities for participants (namely the NPC and the community) to voice their concerns with the process and the design. We

learn from Laura's experience that creating such opportunities is essential, as is recognizing when they need to occur, and, perhaps most importantly, *that* they need to occur.

This understanding of internal group dynamics (within the community in this case) emerges in Laura's story as one of the most critical skills a facilitator must possess. This was particularly challenging in her situation because of the dual role she was playing. That is, Laura faced pressure from both the community and LCG to keep the process moving forward. Yet the 'storming' moments, which often felt like steps backwards, were essential for the community to coalesce as a unit and ensure the viability of the final design.

Such 'storming' moments occurred even prior to the actual design process and continued throughout. From our understanding of conflict management/resolution we accept that the facilitator needs to listen genuinely and actively to participants' concerns in order to find ways to accommodate those needs wherever possible. Laura's experience adds to our understanding by suggesting that to effectively manage such tension the facilitator needs to act as a lightning rod; that is, to become the object of the anger and frustration. This is another place in which Laura's roles were particularly hard to distinguish. On one hand, much of the frustration and anger arose towards LCG itself, and therefore was directly and legitimately aimed at Laura as LCG's accessible representative. On the other hand, Laura was also acting as the facilitator of the process and was allowing herself to be the outlet of the frustration. What is perhaps most interesting here is the extent to which a planner in this situation can advocate effectively

for the needs of the community while also representing an organization that has needs external to those of the community.

Laura notes that she is always moving between keeping a process moving forward and slowing it down enough to create opportunities for participants to express their concerns. Recognizing when to slow a process down is essential and is perhaps a skill learned intuitively through practice. As Laura's story portrays, a facilitator can slow a process down to dig deeper, revealing the true interests behind the positions participants appear to be committed to. Laura related one particular instance when it was particularly helpful to really slow the process down. That occurred when certain participants reacted negatively to the inclusion of a basketball court in one of the preliminary park designs. Others, however, were completely opposed to the exclusion of basketball. It took slowing the process down in order to actually reveal the interests behind both positions. By doing so Laura was able to facilitate reaching consensus on how to provide basketball for younger children while preventing the criminality associated with full scale basketball.

In particularly contentious situations Laura also found that approaching people one-on-one helped her to better understand individual concerns and how to deal with them. Sometimes slowing things down meant approaching people individually at a break or at the end of a meeting and asking them to express what was really on their minds. It was particularly helpful to approach community leaders in this way, and to meet with them individually in order to gain a better sense of what was happening within the NPC and the community as a whole. In a one-on-one situation it was oftentimes easier to gauge the particular issues and concerns than in a heated moment in a large meeting, and

participants seemed more willing to speak candidly. Sometimes, letting the moment pass and approaching a person individually later also helped the participant move beyond some of the emotional component of the tension, allowing them to reevaluate the situation.

Ensuring a sustainable outcome: empowerment and capacity building

Yet another strategy that Laura used to help build trust and create a more viable process was helping to build the capacity of the NPC, both as a participant and future steward. This is partly what Laura refers to as empowerment, whereby LCG assisted the community group in developing its own capacity to participate in the process and to become an effective steward upon completion. She did so in several ways including allocating responsibility for community outreach/organizing, hiring a community liaison, and helping to connect the NPC with other local resources.

Specifically, the process was structured so that the NPC was largely responsible for much of the outreach necessary to attract community participation in the process. Further, Laura successfully convinced LCG to dedicate funding to a hire a particularly trusted and well respected community leader, the former principal of the South Avenue School, to act as a community liaison. During part of the process this person acted as a liaison between the community and LCG, helping both LCG and the community to better translate needs and expectations. The liaison also assisted the NPC in achieving tax-exempt 501C3 status in order to qualify for public and private funding to fund administrative needs and programming upon completion.

Moreover, Laura was able to help connect the NPC with other expertise and resources in Newville. In particular, Laura connected the community with a well respected and experienced local developer/activist. The purpose was to give the NPC as much support as possible throughout each stage of the process in order to help them to build their own capacity. What was unique about this particular situation was that Laura chose someone who was very experienced in this kind of community development work in Newville and was sometimes openly skeptical of LCG. This person was therefore well positioned to provide the kind of support that Laura and I could not provide as representatives of LCG. This strategy, as counterintuitive as it may perhaps at first appear, proved to be quite useful in getting the NPC to extend their horizon beyond the immediate design process to truly consider their own capacity in stewarding the park upon completion.

Despite the obvious challenges presented in her story, Laura was able use various strategies and techniques available to planners and facilitators in order to facilitate a community design process that concluded with a design that was warmly received by the community while meeting the fiscal constraints of the project. The design process itself was successful as the major participants were satisfied with the final park design given the fiscal constraints. Whether the outcome is sustainable remains to be seen as the park is completed and the community begins to use the park again. In addition to complementing some of the techniques covered throughout the course, Laura's experience is particularly instructive in revealing the complexity of participatory planning processes, some limitations, and many challenges in dealing with power and inequality.

One of the major themes in her story, and that has been an open question throughout the course, has been the question of 'neutrality'. As mentioned above, Laura was neither neutral nor a fully vested participant. Though early on in the process being an 'outsider' limited trust building, it later proved to be a valuable quality in retaining a certain amount of neutrality and objectivity in facilitating the process. By not being an insider, Laura was able to focus on making the process work for all of the partners. At the same time, Laura clearly did have a vested interest in the process and the outcome, both because of her own values as a community-based planner and because of her professional responsibilities as an employee of LCG. Clearly Laura found herself mediating between the needs of LCG and the funders (to remain within budget and schedule) while safeguarding the needs and desires of the community. As Laura reveals, planners in such a position face the trying task of balancing the needs of real people with the equally real financial constraints of a project.

The dynamics are even more complicated by very obvious power inequalities. As Laura says, you cannot chose to work only in situations where power is equal. In fact, more often than not, it seems that community development work of this kind is most needed where power relations are not equal, because planners do bring expertise, capacity and resources. Learning to grapple with the dynamics of power inequality is an essential skill that prospective planners aspiring to create and implement participatory planning processes need to acquire. Lessons we can gain from Laura's story include not only practical techniques we can use to work within such dynamics, but also some of the personal characteristics that are necessary to persevere in such work, such as the personal strength to be a lighting rod in situations of racial and socio-economic tension.

Laura's story also speaks to the challenges planners face in choosing where and within what institutional structures to conduct their work. Working for non-profit organizations such as LCG presents tremendous opportunities to engage in meaningful work that allows a planner to be, as Laura puts it, a 'change agent'. At the same time, there are very real limits to the financial and political risks that such organizations are willing or able to incur in order to execute particular projects. These challenges are compounded by the limitations of working within inert, highly centralized, and opaque political and bureaucratic structures such as Newville's political machine. Working in such an institutional environment inevitably creates internal conflicts for planners. As Laura's story illustrates, planners are often torn by their allegiance to communities, truly collaborative processes and their professional responsibilities to their employers, funders and public administrations. In such a context, collaborative planners cannot, and should not, hope to be value neutral. Planners, like all practitioners, come with their own histories and backgrounds which propel them to the work they do. They will, however, need to realize that collaborative processes involving facilitation and mediation are not always, or even generally, able to meet all the needs of all stakeholders. The goal is to assist and facilitate the development of consensus around plans that meet as many of those needs for as many parties as possible.