COMMUNITY—
AN EXPERIENCE-BASED CRITIQUE OF THE CONCEPT

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Graduate Faculty of The University of Akron

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Maria Veronica Elias
August, 2008
COMMUNITY—

AN EXPERIENCE-BASED CRITIQUE OF THE CONCEPT

Maria Veronica Elias

Dissertation

Approved:      Accepted:

______________________________  ______________________________
Advisor      Department Chair
Ralph P. Hummel    Sonia Alemagno

______________________________  ______________________________
Co-Advisor      Dean of the College
Camilla Stivers    Ronald F. Levant

______________________________  ______________________________
Committee Member      Dean of the Graduate School
Sonia Alemagno    George R. Newkome

______________________________  ______________________________
Committee Member      Date
Greg Plagens

______________________________
Committee Member
Kathy Feltey
ABSTRACT

Are social science definitions of community adequate? Or do community members have anything to say about that? Mary Parker Follett – the relevant work is her *The new state*, 1918 — suggests that understanding community is a key to resolving the problem of political participation.

Taking the reader through a conscious protocol of asking people about their idea of community, the author seeks to show that the so called "subjects" do have something to say to experts in concept formulation. The case of the community concept is used to challenge a basic assumption of social science, the fallacy that all social experience can be reduced by a methodological individualism.

The Public Administration literature at large looks at “community” from the outside in, in a static way as if it were an object, an immutable entity. My interest lies in the lived process of participating in community as a foundation for democratic politics. This seems to require searching out the meanings that people attach to “community” when they use it to describe their experiences of living with one another in a way that shapes their civic engagement experiences.

The research question guiding this study is: *What does community mean to the people who live in one?* It presents a seldom visited epistemological approach, that of

My motivation leads my investigation; that is, my own experience of political un-freedom in Argentina is the trigger that has led me to inquire into the nature of the relationship between community and democracy. This dissertation seeks to make a case for “practice illuminating theory” (Hummel 1998) along with the plausibility of broadening the dialogue about community from the ground up.

A substantive contribution of this dissertation to the understanding of community is the discovery that “community as a process” – far from being an abstraction – constitutes an everyday practice in neighborhood group dynamics, the political community that the ancient Greeks praised as true democratic governance.
DEDICATION

A mis padres, Ana Maria Duah y Jorge Cesar Elias,

a mi abuela, Maria Tamer,

y a mis hermanas, Maria Amalia y Maria Laura
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply indebted to my professors and mentors Ralph P. Hummel and Camilla Stivers for genuinely caring and trusting my project. They have been great moral and academic supports throughout my doctoral studies and particularly during the dissertation phase. They continuously triggered my thoughts and pursued me further to “let the thing show itself” in my inquiry, by letting the meaning emerge from within people’s stories. Always my guardian angels, Professors Hummel and Stivers have prompted me to think critically at every turn and to question the status quo in the field of Public Administration and in social sciences in general. Both of them, along with Professor Larry Keller from Cleveland State University, sparked my passion for the field of Public Administration early on in my career and showed trust in my work and supported my academic endeavors. In Mary Parker Follett’s terms, they have been to me the source for deep intellectual and dialogical intercourse and for integration of ideas. I am deeply thankful to them.

I am also truly grateful to the neighbors of the Highland Square neighborhood of Akron, Ohio, who joyfully participated in this research and shared their neighborhood group stories with me. As “informants” these neighbors opened to me their inner worlds of lived experiences as members of different neighborhood improvement groups. Not only they shared with me their valuable time and stories, but also they invited me to
observe their public meetings and be part of their activities. Their stories triggered my thinking and feelings towards recognizing the amazing value and the humanizing power of being part of a larger endeavor that involves “others,” such as neighborhood improvement associations.

Finally, the continuous love and support of my parents Jorge Cesar Elias and Ana Maria Duah, my grandmother Maria Tamer, and my sisters Maria Amalia and Maria Laura, made this project possible and worthwhile. To them, I dedicate this work from the bottom of my heart.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

| LIST OF TABLES .................................................................................................................. xii |
| LIST OF FIGURES ............................................................................................................. xiii |
| CHAPTER                                                                                                                                 |
| I. INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................................. 1 |
| 1. The Research Question: Searching for Meaning ...................................................... 1 |
| a. How do people experience community? ................................................................. 1  |
| b. A process of concept creation from the ground up .............................................. 4  |
| c. A question of substance and a question of approach ........................................... 6  |
| 2. Theoretical Framework: Community as the experiential process of practical politics (neighborliness) in the Administrative State............................. 10 |
| 3. Importance of Study ................................................................................................. 17 |
| 4. The Project at Hand................................................................................................. 19 |
| II. LITERATURE REVIEW ................................................................................................ 22 |
| 1. Governing the administrative state: Representation vs. participation .............. 23 |
| a. Life in the *polis* and the emancipation of the human being......................... 24 |
| b. Representation vs. self-governance: The federalists-anti-federalists debate and its implications in the American administrative state.............. 29 |
| c. The democratic wish in the American administrative state: A wrestling paradox between active citizenship and bureaucratic control... 35 |
| d. “Solutions” to the problems created by representative government..... 37 |
2. Different approaches to the study of community: Static versus dynamic ..........44
   a. Community as an object: One and others ........................................44
   b. Community as a process: Self-and-through-others .............................48
3. On the ontology of process theory ..........................................................58

III. METHODOLOGY .........................................................................................60
1. The problem: methodological individualism vs. the group experience.......61
2. Transcending methodological individualism ............................................64
   b. Getting There – Epistemology of how we know ..................................67
   c. Discovering .........................................................................................68
   d. From substance to method and back to life itself – esse est percipi .........71
   e. Aiming at synthesis .............................................................................72
   f. The logic of inquiry .............................................................................77
   g. On the neighborhood associations and the people interviewed ..........78
   h. Protocol used .......................................................................................80
   i. Interpretative explication: from “fused” ideas to “clear” themes ..........84
   j. Some difficulties of using this protocol .............................................87
   k. A note on the numbers ........................................................................92
   l. Standards of validation ........................................................................93

IV. DATA INTERPRETATION .............................................................................96
1. Bringing clarity to fused perceptions: from the people’s narratives to clusters of meaning and themes .................................................................99
2. Lower interpretive stage—the neighbors and their power-knowledge (practical) .........................................................................................105
a. Reaching in—reaching out: group as neighborhood leader — pulling people together ................................................................. 111

b. Empowering of the whole—working together and accomplishing what would be impossible by oneself alone ........................................ 114

c. Practical politics: “a give and take” .............................................. 116

d. Learning/knowing as a whole: new — group—knowledge means power ......................................................................................... 118

e. Finding freedom in/through the group: the whole as more than the sum of its parts—person becomes a human being in being-with-others ...... 121

f. Uniqueness within diversity: ownership and shared pride of the place and its people ........................................................................ 124

g. The larger good: pursued noble cause of the group ..................... 126

h. Personal changes through the group and interpersonal benefits: friendships, bonding ............................................................. 127

3. Composite summary: the neighborhood group as life itself .............. 129

V. META INTERPRETATION ......................................................................................... 132

1. Higher interpretive stage—Rejoinder: the neighbors vis-à-vis Mary Parker Follett .............................................................................. 134

   a. The neighbors’ ideas regarding community ................................. 134

   b. Follett’s characterization of community ...................................... 135

   c. Combined propositions of community (Follett and the neighbors) … 136

2. A ground up making of (the concept of) community: Practice illuminating theory ........................................................................ 138

   a. Creative thinking—empowering of the whole .............................. 138

   b. Unifying activity—knowing as a whole ...................................... 146

   c. Practical politics—a give and take .............................................. 152

   d. Neighborliness—uniqueness within diversity .............................. 161
e. Common good—*Leitmotif* of the group ........................................168

f. Freeing the Self through the whole—personal changes
   through the group ...........................................................................171

3. Community: An experience-based concept. Practice illuminating theory.....178

VI. CONCLUSIONS. DID PRACTICE ILLUMINATE THEORY? ...................... 183

BIBLIOGRAPHY ..................................................................................209

APPENDICES ..........................................................................................219

APPENDIX A. HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL .............................................220

APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE .............................................222

APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTIONS .............................................224

APPENDIX D. FROM RAW NARRATIVES TO THEMES AN:
   EXAMPLE ..........................................................................................314
### LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1. The interview interpretation process</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1. Themes per person</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1. The neighbors’ ideas of community vs. Follett’s characterization of community as a process</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I:

INTRODUCTION

« Connaître, ce n'est point démontrer, ni expliquer. C'est accéder à la vision. »
Antoine de Saint-Exupéry - *Pilote de guerre*

1. The Research Question: Searching for Meaning

This dissertation studies people’s meanings of community involvement processes. It does so by exploring people’s experiences in neighborhood groups that aim at improving their lives as a whole. It seeks to answer the following research question: *What is the experience of people involved in neighborhood improvement groups?* Or, in other words, *what does community mean to people who live in one?* In this learning process I will attempt to enlighten this inquiry by directly approaching people in selected neighborhood groups and asking them how they experience being part of neighborhood improvement projects.

   a) How do people experience community?

   Answering this question would ordinarily call for a prohibitively extensive survey.
But the aim of this study is to trace the origins of the very idea of community. It does not engage in a mapping of opinion on the distribution of variants of the community concept, but proceeds to reinstate a necessary step prior to conceptualization, a step usually neglected in the study of social phenomena. And that is to see what people have to say about a phenomenon – in this case, community— that might be valuable for further investigation to researchers and theorists (Chapter II surveys the kinds of theory).

The underlying assumption is that participants in social phenomena have something to express that might be of value to theorists.

Even more specifically: This dissertation is a piece of the larger puzzle. A prior step in every inquiry into social phenomena is an examination of its conceptualization. The conventional research move is to operationalize the concept. But where does the concept come from? To this the conventional social science answer is: ideas, intuition, insight, experience. Such cryptic references as to the origins of the most important tool of social science – the concept – is made inadequate in view of the growth of alternate social science methods like phenomenology, ethnomethodology, ethnography, symbolic interactionism, hermeneutics, and other interpretive tools.

Concerns about the pre-conceptual sources have intensified. It is no longer shocking to hear someone suggest that if you wish to see the meaning of an act, you might simply ask the man (or woman) acting. In epistemology, where concern for meaning has persisted, philosophers like Edmund Husserl and Immanuel Kant’s commentator Werner Pluhar strongly recommend treating “objects” of study as real people who participate in constructing reality, have validity standards just sufficient for their projects, and have
something to say about their life and work. (*Cf.*, Husserl 1970 [1937]: 125; Pluhar 1987: xlviii)

Still, allowing for the necessity of clearing up the logic of often vague and fused ideas guiding ordinary life, the investigation of where the concept comes from tends to be neglected. In contrast this dissertation asks people to voice what they might have to say about their own experience. Ordinary folk might even have something to say to the kind of community theorist who defines community as a process.

This is a question not of distribution or socio-economic status or age or political attitude, but a question of whether participants in a phenomenon have something to add — contributively or critically — to a definition of a phenomenon that may be outlined *theoretically* but is, after all, *experienced practically*.

In this sense the question is not one of how many or who or how populations differ, but about the “what” expressed in Immanuel Kant’s saying that “Thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind.” (*Kant* 1781/1787: A 51-52, B75-76)

In short, the aim is to show *what* may originate not in theorists but among people living lives that may inform theory. Methodologically this becomes an occasion where practice illuminates theory. (*Hummel* 1998)¹

Again this is not a question about the distribution of a concept but about its formation. The approach assumes that concept formation must come before measurement: the “What” before the “How Many.”

¹ “Practice Illuminating Theory,” *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, Vol. 20, 2, 150-158
b) A process of concept creation from the ground up

Social theorists have defined community only from the outside in. My intent is to redefine community from the inside out. People’s meanings of neighborhood membership in group undertaking improvement practices are the core aspects that guide the essence of this research process. In this sense, this study aims at explicating whether the ideas of the important “community process” thinker, Mary Parker Follett, are reflected in people’s engagement experiences. Specifically, through an active listening process eliciting story telling, I reflect on whether the Follett’s community process theory has salience out in the real world.

Beginning with a dynamic and always changing setting of deliberation, Follett suggests that community as a process requires: a) creative thinking; b) a dynamic unity; c) the common good as the group ideal; and d) practical politics. This process view is further elaborated by Daniel Kemmis and Alasdair McIntyre. Kemmis provides an unavoidable initial dimension of community by emphasizing the importance of place in the construction of our neighborliness. To Kemmis this is what connects us and separates us in practical politics.

Moreover, McIntyre reminds us of the role of civic virtues. These must be plausible within collaborative practices which have the capability of connecting us with others in meaningful and long lasting relationships. Like Follett and Kemmis, McIntyre argues that trust is an essential aspect of these practices that brings us together with others to create the common good. The larger aim is understood – under this viewpoint – as more than the sum of the parts of our individual contributions, as a “whole” that makes sense in the context of the process of integration of the many for the well-being of all.
There is a dimension without which community formation is not possible: the physical place and its meaning for the people who inhabit it. Any community must have a place in which – those who consider themselves its members – may come together to work as a whole. This is the only preconception with which this study begins. Apart from this, the study leaves open the definition of community to the citizens themselves. My goal is to let the people open up their worlds of experiences to the researcher and to the field of Public Administration through their stories of group engagement. Therefore the methodology of this study focuses on interviewing people from neighborhood organizations and letting them express what their experiences of working with others on improvement projects mean to them.

The justification for choosing this particular methodological approach finds its roots in the ontological and epistemology dimensions which aim at giving meaning to a rather vacuous concept when analyzed under the traditional social science lens. It calls for a substantial change in ontology and epistemology which aim at changing the center of attention from the researcher-object viewpoint (a panoptical stand) to the meanings that people attach to their experiences in neighborhood groups. If politics is the process by which people deal with issues common to them, the latter constitutes a dimension of political engagement in-action, usually ignored or underestimated as allegedly lacking “validity” and thus scientific “status”— both credibility and value altogether.

People’s experiences of practical politics constitute the blocks upon which one may build theories that explain community as a process. Therefore, people are not only crucial for answering the research question at hand, but also for giving sense to an important but ignored dimension in social sciences: that of the inherent dynamics of the
*polis* as expressed by those who experience those practices every day. That is, the active neighbors who get together in deliberation are the ones who posses the true practical knowledge and deliberating for the goodwill of all. Therefore it seems to make perfect sense to bring them to the fore by means of their stories so that we may shed light into the obscure and misunderstood dimensions of active citizenship.

A phenomenological research approach seems to be the most coherent way to start gaining an understanding on the meanings that people attach to neighborhood group involvement projects. The purpose is to discover whether those experiences, expressed in the narratives of people’s story-telling, relates in any way with what the main process theorists define as the process of building community. In short, this project seeks the essence of what the neighborhood group members have to say about their experiences of getting together for the good of the community they live in. It aims at getting people’s realities revealed to the researcher and probably to themselves because asking people what their experiences mean TO THEM has seldom been done before. A purpose of this phenomenological research of meaning is to discover whether people’s interpretations of group involvement match those of the community process theorists. In other words, it aims at making intelligible people’s practices of community involvement towards a more profound dialog in the field of Public Administration.

c) A question of substance and a question of approach

This study attempts to give a clear account of the logic of inquiry and the methodological approach that will channel the different phases of the investigation. This point seems crucial in order to understand where the researcher is going with the selected theoretical approach. In other words, the researcher follows the path that the people’s
narratives will set forward as –and after—the interviews take place. The research question at hand, therefore, makes sense solely in the context of the meanings that the people attach to their experiences of community process. In this study the researcher’s main role is that of a listener and discoverer of hidden realities; a task that she carries out by means of a phenomenological-interpretive logic of inquiry. These new worlds would have never come up to light in the research and academic universe until and unless people told the researcher their experiences of collaborative practices. The lifeworlds of ordinary people are usually ignored in the media consumer-laden society; they may be left obscured in the background of public display, where “unimportant” life happens. No matter how hidden (or stripped out) those worlds may be, there is something fundamental that keeps the world from collapsing its human plausibility: people’s energy, when united in work for the benefit of all. In such settings, the quiet day-by-day contribution to keeping the world going can on occasion—when there is doubt by word and plausibility—become mightier and revealed as the source of all human endeavors.

Shared worlds come into being through actual practices and lived experiences. Even when the practices we were personally involved with may have temporarily come to an end, we are able to get in touch with them (to some extent) through our memorial accounts, through deliberation or conversation, or through story-telling. Through people’s narratives we may be able to get some of the experiential elements back to life. When we, the people from the research bubble, come into contact with the palpable reality of the ordinary person, it may dawn on us that being-in-the-world literally means “to be in the world with others.” It follows that for the first time we recognize that, in order to prevent alienation, isolation and desolation from our own selves, means not to lose (or rather to
always re-feed) the deliberative force that makes us social beings. As a result we come to the realization that in order to revive the already “fading” importance given to collective practices in Public Administration and other social disciplines and to remind scientists where the essence of social sciences resides, we ought to open up ourselves to the unique knowledge that is born in the polis, that of deliberative practices, that of practical politics, which constitute the daily world.

This study aims at getting people to tell the researcher their experiences through a story-telling approach. The purpose is not necessarily to clarify the fused dimensions that we all have, but to come up with ideas that can then be ordered into themes, reflecting both the individual and the universal — groupness. There is a fallacy of thinking of people as a static and objectifiable mass that lacks any valid knowledge. Such a prototypical artificial construct leaves the researcher in the isolation of the subject from his/her context of lived experiences. The person is deprived of his/her world so that the scientist can replicate the method and get “the same” results. In contrast, the methodology here is not quantitative but tries to look at the meaning of community for people. An interview process is employed to maximize people’s story telling regarding their experiences in community involvement groups.

To that end one very diverse neighborhood within the city of Akron –the Highland Square— may serve best this purpose. The question is not how many people of different groups agree or disagree with a theorist’s description (i.e., not a question of distribution) but a question of exploring what the participants say makes for community before formulating any hypotheses. This research takes after Bertrand Russell’s remark that no
one has yet invented a rule for creating hypotheses.² Methodologically this is an example of focusing on where hypotheses come from. For example, in Public Administration, O’Sullivan and Rassel’s text³ cites insights, intuitions, experience, knowledge and opinions as shaping hypotheses but does not say how these sources produce these products. The thesis at hand is that Mary Parker Follett’s conception of community as a process has a counterpart in real life. This is the question of congruence of ideas and action: an axiom in the development of correspondence theory.

The narratives of the interview process are carefully and repeatedly listened to and explicated through phenomenological interpretation as a way to understand the main themes as they emerge in the story-telling process. They constitute the research guides, as the lighthouse illuminating the ships’ right path to the safe harbor. They reveal to the field of Public Administration the different “truths” which are unmistakably omnipresent in life. People’s stories of their experiences in group deliberation and practical politics constitute the multiple realities that form the polis. Without those, as Hannah Arendt suggests, no life would make sense (Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, University of Chicago Press 1958).

This research aims at reaching out to the people who are active in those neighborhood groups and ask them to share with this investigator their experiences of being part of neighborhood improvement projects. In this context, I next proceed to define the concept of “community as a process” introducing Follett’s definition—the theoretical framework—

---

with close scrutiny in light of common experience. The concept is to be real in order to avoid false allocations of the themes into non-realistic concepts thus creating empty concepts or concepts without content.

2. Theoretical Framework: Community as the experiential process of practical politics (neighborliness) in the Administrative State

The literature on community as a dynamic, always evolving, and unifying process finds its origin in Public Administration in the works of Mary Parker Follett, especially in her 1919 essay “Community Is a Process” (*Philosophical Review*, Vol. XXVIII) and in *The New State* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1920). Beginning from Freudian psychology, Follett connects community as a process and its parallel integrating of wishes that happens at the individual level. In her view, people get together to deliberate over issues and concerns that they share in common and the decisions upon which cannot be easily made on the basis of different singular opinions. Follett hence translates the process of integration that goes on at the scale of the person as individual into a collective process.

The richness of community as a process resides in leaving behind the mere individual interests that isolate us from others and putting the Grand interest of the group ahead of us, as a common goal. This can happen only in the actual practice of group processes at the neighborhood level where people may enter a room for discussion with multiple and confronting ideas concerning the same issue. However, they may be able to *integrate* the differences into a more encompassing, larger and better-for-all goal or solution, which can be reached only through deliberative practices. Follett believes that the community experiences the interweaving of particular takes, views, feelings, and needs regarding an
issue, and hence come to a more complex unity (which she calls “synthesis”) where our differences stand out and become integrated in a richer experience: coming to a decision that involves the group as a whole. This becomes intelligible in the unifying process of community integration, a learning process that Follett parallels to the most freeing and liberating experience of human existence.  

Taking up Follett’s integration at the neighborhood group level, Daniel Kemmis reminds us in his *Community and the Politics of Place* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1990) of the importance of “neighborliness” for our daily lives, which we usually fall short of seeing. This adds a spatial dimension to our everyday life experiences, even when we fail to collaborate on a daily basis in our neighborhoods. Kemmis points to the importance of “place” as a necessary conceptual aspect of neighborliness. Place not only brings people together in collaborative practices of the kind that matters to all the neighbors, but also and at the same time, separates people so that their differences can still be present.

Drawing on Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition* (University of Chicago Press, 1958) Kemmis refers to having a seat at the table as an essential metaphor that expresses both commonality and difference. This serves two purposes: it means bringing people together while preventing them from falling over each other thus losing their differences, becoming a mob, an amorphous mass, which Arendt – and she is not alone in this – considers tragic. On the one hand, a lack of community leaves isolated individuals, which contributes to despotic or totalitarian forms of government. On the other hand, not being different “enough” between individuals produces the mindless mass, a mob that blindly

---

4 This relates to what Martin Heidegger (1962) refers to as “being-with-others,” and to what Hubert Dreyfus (1991) calls “being-in-the-world”.
follows a leader. This could give rise to a charismatic form of government. In anarchy, the individual is overly dominant over the rest of what may have been the community; in mass politics, the individual virtually disappears into a faceless mass. An example of this dispute can be exemplified by the debate between representation and direct participation of the citizenry in the history of American public administration.

Kemmis refers to the construction of the public space, of the res, part of the “republic”, which we happen to overlook coincidentally as we ignore the “neighborliness” aspect of our social lives. The creation of the public thing (res) is what emerges from collaborative practices among neighbors. Usually, the need to face rather hostile or antagonistic conditions in a particular area (climatic, physical, social, cultural, economical or political) makes people reach out to each other and work together -- regardless of their differences -- to face situations which the individual could not face alone. Those forces go beyond the immediate control of the individual and it is only as a group, as people that get together in collaborative practices, that a group can overcome what is seemingly impossible to the single person.

In the case of Missoula, Montana, Kemmis illustrates the collaborative practices attached to a place to be the fountain for shared hopes and pride as a way to survive. In this context, place is what grounds people’s shared values and sets forth people’s shared notions of sociability. The place they all share may put a high toll on whomever dears living in it. However futile individual actions might be in isolation, they become meaningful practices when brought together as shared practices. Follett agrees on this point as she believes that the laissez-aller of the individual person fades away in a major goal setting process among all in benefit of all. What Bellah Et. Al. (1985) call the
substitution of the “first language of individualism” for the “second language of commitment,” which materializes in collaborative practices of people united in neighborliness, in the practices of inhabitation exemplifies this pint. Kemmis’s idea of neighborliness parallels Follett’s idea of integration because a process that involves “others” and a larger goal is creative.

Both Follett and Kemmis expose the inherent political condition of community as a process. Practical politics appears in both authors as the condition *sine qua non* for a fulfilled and meaningful life, for a life that makes sense solely as we engage with others in collaborative practices through the winning of trust (personal experience). People deliberating in a dynamic process that achieves the goals set forth by the group has more strength and acts as a mightier force than the individuals’ ideas in isolation. That is where the importance of the “process” perspective of community resides: in its potentiality for change and improvement of the life conditions for all. Practical politics are only plausible at the local level and that is also where the *status quo* can be changed. The strength and most meaningful and palpable incentives find their ground in people’s daily getting together to change a situation that they agree is worth improving.

Therein resides the importance of community engagement processes that address the neighbors’ most crucial needs, not as exceptional meetings “as needs arise”, but as a common, daily, weekly, practices that keep the neighborhood goals and spirit going. Only the group can evolve collective practices that are meaningful to them, to their place, to the neighborhood, as an inner process. The idea of neighborliness as the dynamics of

---

practical politics that Kemmis emphasizes finds its parallel in Follett’s idea of neighborhood group processes, as the starting point for practical politics, as the “cell.” The *polis* or political community at the neighborhood level would eventually grow into a bigger group formed by the different neighborhoods, and the city, up to the formation of the State, that is, the plausibility of direct democracy is in the practical politics of the neighborhood rather than solely at the ballot box. The dynamic essence of this proposition finds its homologue in Kemmis’s evolving citizenship that only “neighborliness” is able to trigger and evolve.

Community as a process, according to Follett, has no delimitation, no ends or conceptual boundaries because of its dynamic constitutive essence. There is no use in trying to put our arms around a community which is a process in continuous change. Community, seen in this way, finds its roots in practical politics, in the actual getting together and deliberating about the issues that compel the group all. Practical politics is essential for the fulfillment of our human capabilities and potentials because the lived experiences with others cannot be possibly replaced by any other type of activity as it is inherently collective, deliberative, and *creative*. The practices that go on at the neighborhood level have no parallel in life and work and it is utterly counterproductive to attempt to shut them up for the development of a true democracy.

The common practices in neighborhood processes are inherently political as they unite us through our neighborliness (physically and metaphorically speaking) while they allow our differences to emerge and ensure an ongoing deliberation. This *experiential* process of lived politics is fundamentally a learning process that people can engage in since an early age. Kemmis and Follett both emphasize this point: the evolving and
improving of our society can only be achieved by deliberating, in the actual learning to participate, to deliberate in the doing, by getting together and interacting – in the participating. Each person has a genuine take on any issue: the “what appears to me” of each person. In group deliberation, the differences among people around an issue that matters to all, is the basis for the construction of the public space. Politics shows itself as a constitutive force of collaborative practices and Follett finds it in the neighborhood groups as processes that build the state from the ground up—the foundations of what she calls The New State. Likewise, in Kemmis, the creation of the political becomes plausible—“real”—through his idea of “politics of place” and the shared practices grounded in a shared place.

Follett’s community as a process happens at the neighborhood level, where people who share a place also share interests regarding that place, the services provided in it for the well being of its inhabitants as well as a continuance in the improvement of a sound environment for the future generations. She suggests some attributes that characterize community as a process, namely, creative thinking, dynamic unity, the public interest above particular interests, and practical politics. While the neighborhood level constitutes for Follett the nutshell of possibilities of the wider democratic state through direct democracy (and probably the only way to achieve it), Kemmis’s idea of the neighborhood takes a similarly political taint: that of the place where practical politics happens, where “neighborliness” becomes “inhabitation.” In this sense, both authors talk about the neighborhood as the place for the wellspring of practical politics at the local level because relationships occur within and around a shared space – inescapably (the) “local.”
The place, therefore, acquires a unique dimension: that of having the conspicuous capability of bringing people with different life-styles together under common goals, cares and concerns while separating them and keeping their particular differences alive and present. Kemmis resembles Follett in that the basis for action is collaborative practices at the local, neighborhood, level. Both authors argue that the true (direct) democratic state is plausible in reality through neighborliness political practices that encourage deliberation and builds the public space. The *polis* -- which the ancient Greeks so fervently argued for-- Kemmis calls it the “politics of inhabitation” or “collaborative practices” while Follett talks about “community as a process.” She brings into the “process” discussion the core idea of “wholeness,” of the integrative process that emerges from initially opposing wills. This wholeness therefore signifies much more than the mere sum of the single parts, because it had been arrived at through a common deliberative process of integration.

Finally, collaborative practices are only plausible in a milieu of trust among its participants. Kemmis and McIntyre (Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*. University of Notre Dame Press, 2007) agree on that point, while they also argue for the importance of collaborative practices in the instilling of civic virtue among the people. In other words, people attain civic virtue through practices that involve what Kemmis calls “patterns of relationship”, that is, through experiences in processes of community-building. Furthermore, these authors argue that the place weaves practices among people that evolve over time building trust among the participants. Making sense of life itself can only be possible in the discursive and deliberating aspects of our daily-lives-with-others, what Follett calls our self-and-through-others.
3. Importance of Study

The importance of this study for the field of Public Administration is paramount. First, the neighborhood could—in light of Follett’s community as a process and Arendt’s “vita activa”—become the parallel to the Ancient Greek polis where people would get together in the public place on a daily basis to deliberate about the affairs of the “state.”

Getting to know each other and discuss the problems, concerns, goals and aspirations of the neighbors in consideration of their common place is a powerful and underestimated force. People join others in common efforts to improve things, activities and services that largely exceed the individual and signifies working with others for the benefit of the larger area, of the greater good. This is not an insignificant claim in times when people are considered incapable of getting along with others or work together and accomplish something for the benefit of the whole. The propaganda that aims at elevating individualism over the collective may find, in this research, different responses, lessons and reactions to what has been so far claimed as the “best way” of administering the public thing. The status quo may be put at temporary stake if the people believe in their joint creative power. As this research seeks to support, actual collaborative practices may show that people do get together to work for the larger good, and that there is a genuine care for others beside oneself—that, as Follett claimed, there is a One which is the process of interpenetration as opposed to the one who is the isolated individual. This research aims at showing that point through people’s voices, and in their own terms.

Second, the importance of this study cannot be underestimated in the field of Public Administration because the practice of administering the “public” is ultimately sustainable at the local level, more specifically at the neighborhood level, where lives are
lived and where public administration, coincidentally, comes in direct contact with the public\textsuperscript{6}. The neighborhood should constitute for public administration its dearest progenitor and forever kernel of care, because it is the neighborhood where public administration finds its most real presence, its \textit{raison d’ être}, its valid ground --and obligation—for care and improvement.

People relate better in terms of feelings to what they can sense, to what they can experience on a daily basis, which constitutes most people’s fundamental cause of preoccupation, happiness, fear, joy, and all other feelings. The reason for this is that people care about the place they inhabit, where their children play and go to school, where their families are taken cared of, the playground, the streets, safety, etc. All these aspects relate directly to public administration in all possible ways: through police and public safety, health care services, schools and education, libraries, local grocery stores, walkable areas, parks and recreation, zoning and planning, and many more. Therein lies the importance of neighborhood as the place where we all relate in one way or another. Some people may be more concerned about crime issues in the neighborhood, while other people would spend most of their time working to clean the streets or to enhance walking areas.

This study seeks to make a case for the neighborhood as the \textit{polis} or political community. A convening cell or force would thus be the neighborhood groups connected among each other and within the larger area and institutions outside the neighborhood. The importance of this nucleus is such that people may get together and deliberate on

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
issues common to all rather than waiting for the government as an external force to fix all problems (Cf., King & Stivers, Government Is Us, 1998).

This dissertation makes the claim that process theory makes plausible that people discover themselves through the group. In working for the benefit of the larger whole beyond oneself alone weaves people together in meaningful ways constituting the political community. This study may also inspire the reader to reconcile ourselves with others who may not think like us, but wherein the richness of the being in the world with others lies. People may hence consider having “real” neighbors to who relate on a daily basis and join to work for a greater good.

The citizens-government connection constitutes another piece of the richer theoretical framework. The interaction between people and government in the pursuits of neighborhood improvement projects is paramount to accomplish any project that may arise from the heart of neighborhood groups. In this sense it is necessary to make the connection between the neighborhood organizations and government and non-government officials. Therein lies another important aspect for the field of public administration that this study aims at discussing. The assumption here is that neighborhood groups—as independent as they may be—ought to relate to external agencies and work together to get projects accomplished. Networking may be just one more piece of the larger process of creating a community that is dynamic and evolving. In this vein this research seeks to further the elucidations on this point upon carefully listening to what the people actually involved in those processes have to say. That will be the focus of Chapters IV and V. Finally, this research seeks to broaden the dialogue on the importance of “community as a process” in the Administrative State.
4. The Project at Hand

In order to answer the abovementioned research question -- *What is the experience of people involved in neighborhood improvement groups?* -- the researcher will divide the task into several chapters.

Chapter II surveys the literature on the debate between representation and direct democracy, mainly discussing the main theorizing in reference to “static” and “dynamic” approaches to the conceptualization of community.

Chapter III opens up the debate on how we know what we know addressing thus not only the substantive matters at hand – the forming of the concept of community — but also the overarching logic of inquiry. Hence the methodological issues of this research project constitute the core of this chapter as a means to answer the research question at hand. It explores some taken-for-granted approaches in conducting social science research. It suggests a case for community process that exceeds the mere attempting to either prove or disprove one meaning of community or one method over another, but rather focuses on widening the substantive and methodological dialogue on community within social sciences, and specifically in the field of Public Administration. It makes a case for the “constitutive” dynamic of the political community.

The second half of this dissertation deals with the interpretive explication of people’s stories as they were gathered in the interview process. To help the reader follow through the line of thought and discussion, the author will proceed to break the major research question down into three sub-questions:

a) How do people involved in neighborhood improvement efforts describe their experience?
b) What major themes emerge from these descriptions?

c) How do these themes compare with Mary Parker Follett's theory of community process?

The first two questions will be answered specifically in Chapter IV, entitled “Data Interpretation” with direct reference to the main raw material (the interview transcriptions) placed in Appendix “D.”

Chapter V (“Meta-Interpretation”) will address the third question, in which the researcher attempts to validate the claim that practice has the plausibility to illuminate theoretical claims regarding community process. To this end, this chapter compares the themes that came up from the interviewees in Chapter IV with Mary Parker Follett’s community as a process, and reflecting in which ways the experiences of the people can contribute to that conceptualization. The comparison reveals similarities and differences that will be discussed.

A final chapter (Conclusions) will reflect on the significance that this research’s findings may have for “practice illuminating theory” in Public Administration. One significant implication relates to what my research findings imply for political theory, i.e., citizen participation in public administration.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

« It may be that this seeking will leave you dark, puzzled, uncertain; but better the unrest of judgment suspended than the dream-like peace of faith unfounded. »
Edgar A. Singer (In: Eduard C. Lindeman Social Discovery, 1925, xxviii)

In seeking to answer the research question of this dissertation (i.e., how do people experience community?) this chapter focuses on the major theoretical discussions on the issue of governance and the citizens. It thus brings to the fore the traditional debate of representative democracy versus direct democracy assessing their underlying assumptions regarding the role of the citizens and the role of the trained public officials in governing the democratic state.

This chapter begins with a discussion on the legacy of the debate on representation versus direct democracy for contemporary America and its implications for the understanding of active citizenship and community. The latter two theoretical constructs are traced back to their traditional usage in social sciences and examined in light of today’s assertions when studying community. The discussion aims at questioning the static understanding and usage of the concept of community. It seeks to involve the
reader in a fruitful dialogue with the larger social science academia. It hence commences
with questioning the taken-for-granted assumptions that theorists embrace when studying
community and citizen involvement in relation to governing the polis.

The ways in which social sciences usually research their “subjects” of investigation –
and any social phenomena generally speaking – are questioned in light of their
underlying assumptions regarding knowledge, power and concept formation. This chapter
hence discusses the concepts of active citizenship and community as treated in the public
administration literature. It emphasizes the debate on representation versus self-
governance and the implications that each approach to governance entails for knowledge,
power and concept formation. It aims at surveying the theoretical grounds in which these
theoretical constructs have evolved throughout the centuries and their implications for
social science research and for the practice of public administration.

1. Governing the administrative state: Representation vs. participation

The history of the American administrative state has been dominated by a debate and
actual governance practices reflected in a fluctuation of efforts and rhetoric in what
concerns power, knowledge and governance. “Who shall govern” was a question posed
as early as the debate in which the American founding fathers took a central part. The
debate between the federalists and the Antifederalists depicts the differences in
viewpoints that these men had in mind for who shall govern the state.

In the aftermath of the Founding period of the American state– and as part of the
republic’s organizational efforts -- the debate about whether representation or
participation was the way to conduct the business of governance went through ebbs and
flows. This fluctuation would dominate all aspects of life determining whether the lay
citizens should have a say in governance or if only the trained experts should pursue this task. Therefore, the tension between the two modalities of governing the state was at permanent uproar especially when there was a transition in government styles.

Before touching upon the details of this debate – at the core of the American administrative state—it seems necessary to examine the classical Greek and Roman understandings of democracy and the meaning attached to “republic.” Those concepts will also be discussed in light of modern times.

a. Life in the polis and the emancipation of the human being

One could start this discussion by asking if active citizenship does work in all situations, and what are the necessary conditions for its actual practice. Hannah Arendt (1958) would probably answer from an ontological viewpoint that when people get together in deliberation, the public space comes into being, that is, it gets constituted in the collective process. The public space is created in the process, rather than being a structure external and prior to the people and society.

Contrary to ideas of direct democracy and active citizenship, are those of the Federalists of the American Constitutional period. The Founding fathers, and especially the federalists, insinuated that direct involvement of the people in the matters of the state (i.e., the government) would be pernicious for the future of a free nation. This period—among other times-- was marked by an impetus for leaving the matters of the state in the hands of the “experts” rather than in the hands of the ordinary citizen. Part of their argument sustained that a representative system of government would be more efficient in a country of the large dimensions of America. While de Federalists were fervent opponents of government close to the people, the Anti-Federalists would rather favor a
closer connection between the government and the electorate. In this line of thought, they advocated that people ought to be part of the governing process at the local level, and that that would not be possible in a large republic of the kind that the federalists had in mind.

The idea of active citizenship, however, goes back to the classical Greek period. No doubt Aristotle was a major thinker and advocate of the *polis*, or engaged citizenship in the everyday affairs of the state, or the political community. Therein lies his conceptualization of citizenship as a form of *action*:

[…] the citizen whom we are seeking to define is a citizen in the strict sense, against whom no such exception can be taken, and his special characteristic is that he shares the administration of justice, and in offices. (Aristotle 1981, Sec. 1275a20)

Aristotle considered the *polis*, the city-state, to be the political unit *par excellence*. His subject in *Politics* “is neither the nature of the ‘city-state’ nor of the ‘city’ but of the society unified by constitutional government, and the closest notion we have to capture this is that of the state.” (Aristotle 1988: xix) In this respect, Aristotle believes that the very purpose of the state is the good life or happiness of the citizens, which coincidentally arises later on, in John Stuart Mill’s *Utilitarianism, Liberty, and Representative Government*.

In Aristotle’s viewpoint, the state is a natural institution and prior to the existence of the citizens, as it is created when several villages are united in a community that is large enough to be self-sufficient. He argued that this process happens in the bare needs of life, and that it continues in existence for the sake of the good life of the people. While the state is a creation of nature, “the man is by nature a political animal.” (Aristotle 1988: 3)
Communicational and argumentative skills are crucial in the constitution of the *polis*: “the man is the only animal who has the gift of speech” (3). This aspect is truly significant for the making of the political community because, as Aristotle reflects,

The power of speech is intended to set forth the expedient and inexpedient, and therefore likewise the just and unjust. And it is a characteristic of man that he alone has any sense of good and evil, of just and unjust, and the like, and the *association of living beings who have this sense makes a family and the state*. (Aristotle 1988: 3, emphasis added)

A citizen of the state is “he, who has the power to take part in the deliberative or judicial administration of any state” (Aristotle 1988: 53). The “state” takes a special meaning for Aristotle, that of a body of citizens who engage in joint efforts/works for the purposes of life: the *body politics*.

In *Utilitarianism* John Stuart Mill argues that the purpose of life is strictly utilitarian: to achieve the greatest happiness. This theory holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, and wrong as they tend to produce the opposite. The importance of engaging as a community in the building of the state resides, for Mill, in paying attention to everyone’s voice. He argues that no humanly possible offense denigrates the human being more than ignoring people’s desires and ideas:

It is a personal injustice to withhold from any one the ordinary privilege of having his voice reckoned in the disposal of affairs in which he has the same interest as other people. He should be legally entitled to be told what for, to have his consent asked and his opinion counted as its worth. (Mill 1910: 375)

Notwithstanding a great advocate for direct democracy, John Stuart Mill, did not fail to alert us of the maladies that any democratic system is prone to face (and that which we are still having trouble solving in our 21st century-America): the class difference and
unjust social situations that make a sector of the citizenry louder and more powerful than
the rest. In that spirit, Mill asserts:

There ought to be no pariahs in a full-grown and civilized nation, no person
disqualified, except through their own default. Everyone is degraded when other
people, without consulting him, take upon themselves unlimited power to regulate his
destiny. (Mill 1910: 376)

That is why Mill was peculiarly concerned with the education of the people as a
necessary enterprise for the attainment of a freer and more inclusive governance process:

Mill stood in the mainstream of the classical democratic theory informed by an
exceedingly ambitious purpose, the education of an entire people to the point where
their intellectual, emotional, and moral capacities have reached their full potential and
they are joined, freely and actively, in a genuine community. Beyond this magnificent
general purpose, classical democratic theory also embodies one great strategy for the
pursuit of this goal, the use of political activity and government for the purposes of
public education. Governance is to be a continued effort in mass education. (Cited in
Finley 1973:32)

And later Mill discusses the necessary conditions to acquire a full democratic life:

There is no difficulty in showing that the ideally best form of government is that in
which the sovereignty, or supreme controlling power in the last resort, is vested in the
entire aggregate of the community; every citizen not only having voice in the exercise
of that ultimate sovereignty, but being, at least occasionally, called on to take an
actual part in the government, by the personal discharge of some public function,
local or general. (From Mill’s Considerations on Representative Government; cited in
Green, P. 1993: 32)

It is clear that Mill compels the citizen to stand up for him/herself and speak up as the
only way to be heard and to get his/her needs and aspirations secured. That is why, for
Mill, the superiority of a nation depended upon two prerogatives and their applicability to
social life:

The first is, that the rights and interests of every or any person are only secure from
being disregarded when the person interested is himself able, and habitually disposed,
to stand up for them. The second is, that the general prosperity attains a greater
height, and is more widely diffused, in proportion to the amount and variety of the personal energies enlisted in promoting it. (Green, 1993: 32-33)

A case in point is Alexis De Tocqueville impressions of nineteenth century America. During a trip across the United States, he gained full admiration for what he considered the truly democratic spirit of the inhabitants of the young American republic. He reflected very positively on his many encounters with people from all social levels who were engaged in different forms of associations as a spontaneous way of relating with one another. Tocqueville emphatically argued that that kind of lived democracy was rear in the much older nations of Western Europe.

De Tocqueville’s notions of democracy found their exemplary ‘model’ in what he perceived as a unique impetus for freedom and a spirit for political engagement (in the form associations) of the American people, unknown to that date elsewhere in the Western world. Tocqueville emphasized the qualities of high intelligence and deep sense of patriotism of the American people in light of the “palpable” freedom of their institutions. In his eyes, that was the basis for the wide diffusion of ideas and the refined tastes and sentiments of the educated minds of the 19th-century America. He thus exalted the attributes of the American people and of their democratic institutional order rooted in people’s daily lives as follows:

In America, the principle of sovereignty of the people is neither barren nor concealed, as it is with some other nations; it is recognized by the customs and proclaimed by the laws; it spreads freely; and arrives without impediment at its most remote consequences. (Green 1993: 40)

---

1 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Published in two volumes in the years 1835 and 1940)
b. Representation vs. self-governance: The federalists-anti-federalists debate and its implications in the American administrative state

Two philosophical approaches to governance can be claimed to be the Leitmotif of most discussions both in politics and public administration in the history of the United States: “virtual” representation and “actual” representation. These two philosophies were at the center of disagreement and dispute between Federalists and Anti-Federalists during the American Constitutional Convention.

Under “virtual” representation, governors make decisions based on their own judgment on what they suppose is the best for the citizenry, that is, they govern on behalf of the people. Making decisions “in the best of their abilities,” the representatives, look at the populace and elaborate on what the latter would wish from mere “observation” or assumptions based on a general pattern of behavior. This is the view that the Federalists sustained.

The “actual” representative theory, on the other hand, is based on knowing exactly what the people being represented, desire. An “actual” representative is s/he who truly and genuinely knows what somebody is experiencing and feeling, understanding thus the nature of his/her demands. Representation, under this view, emphasizes the character of the representative as being fully aware of whom s/he represents, what their needs and desires are, etc. In other words, this approach views the representative not as someone “outside” the real worlds of those represented. On the contrary, s/he is supposed to know how to put her/himself in the people’s shoes, i.e.; learning how to be like the one s/he represents, so that one can govern in a truly democratic way –informed by the real needs
of the ones being represented; making decisions based on the actual people’s situations, desires and concrete expressions of the will and the purpose.

The Antifederalists believed in this type of representation (direct), which drastically separated them from the federalists’ philosophical approach to governing the republic (from afar and above). The Antifederalists argued that in a republic (“republic” understood in its original sense, as “the public thing;” from Latin: “res publica”) one could know both his/her neighbor as well as his/her representatives. They were therefore concerned that the public will might dissolve in the larger poll (of people, of needs, of identities) of the representative government system. They preferred the leadership of the state over the nation, because the state’s territory would be much easier to govern in a democratic, more direct citizen-oriented, government simply because of its more reachable geographic and demographic dimensions.

The Federalists, on the other hand, justified the representative system on the belief that the citizens did not want to get involved in the process of governance, but they were rather interested in results and efficiently. The tenet of this system of government was that, by keeping the people as far away as possible from the business of government would result into an efficient system based on the expertise of skilled and well-trained officials to deal with the cumbersome “business” of government.

This posture protects the rights to private property, life and happiness of the single (and only certain type of) individual, who was considered self-centered, and his actions, uniquely motivated by the pursuit of selfish aims. This stance further assumes that the person’s actions are oriented to satisfy his/her sole wishes rather than the “public thing” or public good, which a “real” democracy, from the ground-up, advocates. The
representative system thus rooted in classical liberalism, imminently favored a clear
division of society into distinct social strata defined by different socio-economic levels.
Since the initial days of the American republic, the emphasis was put on private interests,
which deepened the emerging class system that would persist and become stronger
throughout the development of the American administrative state until nowadays. (Cf.,
*The federalists and Antifederalists Papers*)

Classical liberalism became the conspicuous strategy for the development of the
nation, in which the purpose of the state was to ensure the protection of the private
interests and rights, while people were assumed to only care for “the pursuit of life,
liberty and property” of their own selves. In this framework, government’s actions and
decision-making powers are to be as limited as possible so the free forces of the market
can balance the demands of the customers (people) and the supply available in the most
“natural” manner. This became a salient aspect of American political life. A great
paradox in American history between the ‘natural’ thrust for association (which de Tocqueville astonishingly observed) versus the impetus for separation that the national
Constitution framed and which constituted the basis for governance and policy making.
This paradox has become unmistakably the *status quo* of nowadays America.

The philosophical framework that sustains the representative ideal of the State finds
its roots in the thinking of theorists such as Hobbes who fervently believed that the
citizens were vulnerable, miserable, poor and insufficient to take care of themselves, thus
needing the protection of the State in order to survive. (Cf.; Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan*,
1968 [1651]) In that context, people agreed to give up their powers to the monarch and,
in return, to receive protection, safety, peace and security. As a result, a social contract
between the state and the citizens was established, which constitutes now the basis for the emergence of representative government – the delegation of power theory – which refers to the delegation of sovereignty from the citizens to the government-experts.

In a representative system of government, as thus defined, the role of the private citizen is that of a mere number in the herd of the general electorate: a “voter,” a “count.” The understanding of the role of the government officials as the expert decision-makers, while the role of the citizen is limited to a passive voter, have become the terms in which “citizen participation” is defined nowadays. As a result, the individual inexorably surrenders his/her power to either the state or the market and relegates her/his potential for self-governance and for becoming a “free” citizen, an engaged political actor in the Aristotelian sense. To surrender oneself to any power that is above oneself means to surrender to social and political un-freedom.

The pitfalls of such makeup of nation are those that overwhelm and threaten the freedom of the citizens, their sovereignty and, consequently, that of the State. Citizenship is in that context a mere “status” as people only believe in their “right” to vote, “right” to protest, etc., rather than citizenship as the human nature to relate to others politically and discursively, which would make the individual an integral, fully-developed, human being. In this framework, the state appears as a mere instrument that guarantees the freedom of the market, and a tool for people to pursue their private interests. In a representative system of government, the state is not considered valuable in itself and therefore the citizens are as well underestimated and nullified from the political life.

Under representative government, on the one hand, the rights of the citizens are poorly (if anything at all) “represented,” that is, people’s views are not reflected in the
policymaking process and “service delivery.” Perhaps a small sector of the citizenry may be faithfully represented but, as the Federal Farmer\(^2\) and Jane Addams\(^3\) had predicted, representation is in this context polarized or divided. The extremes of the citizenry are usually represented because those are the citizens who happen to come in contact with government most often: either the maladroit (the person who violates the law), or the elitist groups, which always seek government to enrich their political and economical powers.

On the other hand, the common person, the average citizen whose life does not come in contact often with government may not be “faithfully” represented as an individual. In this context, the ordinary person’s needs and desires seem to be ignored the most bluntly today as it was in the 19\(^{th}\) century America. The ignoring of the person as individual becomes the most threatening risk of representative government. Large portions of the citizenry remain completely and officially silent and underrepresented. That is, their views and demands are not being listened or accounted for in the policy making processes. Not only the particular needs of the citizen are not represented, but also, the individual never develops fully as s/he would if she were to engage with others in continuous and evolving deliberation, in the practice of the actual participating for the good of one’s community. (Cf., Aristotle’s *The Politics*, Mill 1910, Arendt 1958)

The individual surrenders his/her innermost potentials of becoming an active doer within the community and a fully “developed” human being – in being with others – to


their representatives or dominant elite. Through representation, the person never becomes fully human because s/he misses out on a great part of joint practices and common services for the benefit of the larger whole, which are only possible through active engagement (Arendt 1958). Human nature develops along with civic virtue and the caring for others when the public good is set as the main purpose of the community. Representation truncates the possibilities for this continuous enrichment that solely the living community is able to create and re-create.

In a representative system, government usually fails to connect with the citizens and their needs, hopes, demands, joint activities and frustrations. It ironically excludes the “represented” in its purest sense, that is, the individuals as political actors. Ralph Hummel and Camilla Stivers (1998) put this clearly under the rubric “Representing Lived Knowledge” (1998:32) which alludes to the incompleteness of technical knowledge: that representatives cannot know “as the citizens” unless and until the citizens become actual government, because people’s direct experiences with life are unique and too complex in order to be left in the hands of a small group who does not know the citizen as a singularity. In short, some of the pitfalls of the representative system of government are:

American government is not a democracy of direct knowledge. […] Law giving aimed at “citizens” excludes us as individuals. […] Administration works not with individuals, but with cases. […] Representation produces alienation. […] (Hummel & Stivers 1998: 33-34)
c. The democratic wish in the American administrative state: A wrestling paradox between active citizenship and bureaucratic control

The history of governance in America is one characterized by a succession of periods where the rhetoric on governance was dominated by either an impetus for direct democracy or a push for representative democracy. At times participatory democracy was strongly advocated and attempted to be put into practice, while at most other times active citizenship became a practically truncated effort or a simply unrealistic wish (Nelson 1982). James Morone (1990) reminds us that democracy in the history of American government has rarely surpassed the stage of “wish” to become a lived reality. He goes on to show the efforts of different governments to either enhance or to silence the potentiality for democratic processes which would prompt the citizenry to become its living force.

According to Morone (1990) the democratic wish – that of people’s self-governance and control over the political process of the state— is a myth because we can never quite achieve it. The democratic wish refers to the process of governance personified in the actual citizen; that is, the people themselves being government. The self-governance utopia remains a living wish in American history under the presumption that the citizens have agreed with one another to recognize and work toward the enhancement of the public good as they define it. In this sense, Morone reminds us that the democratic wish involves the idea of “community” because it refers to people working together as a “whole.” In short, the dream refers to people’s actual self-organization and governance under the prerogative that no one but our own selves with others can translate our projects to decision-makers. However, the American bureaucratic history shows that any
attempt to transform that wish into a living reality has been continuously truncated. A tug of war between controlling and bureaucratizing government – impinging efficiency to government – on the one hand, and freeing and democratizing the citizens, on the other hand (Nelson 1982) has been the norm in the American Administrative State. Indeed, in the history of American public administration when government would prompt the citizens to become more involved in the affairs of the state, this would inexorably result in an effort on the exact opposite direction: an attempt that would drastically fail and would create a transition to purely efficient and effective governance, a more representative-oriented political status quo than the precedent period. In short, participatory politics in America has been the rule, though with momentums of high civic involvement. Therefore, one could depict the evolution of American governance as an ebb and flow in regards to democratization and empowering of the citizenry.

Nelson (1982) keenly analyzes the ironies of American bureaucratic history, such as that of “Revolution,” of “Jacksonian democracy,” of “Reform,” and of “Representation,” among others. Upon discussing each of them, he reflects:

At almost every critical turn in American bureaucratic history, the efforts of public officials and organized political groups to enhance popular control of government inadvertently planted the seeds of modern bureaucratic power. This is the grand irony […] : an apparently fortuitous incongruity between what one intends and what one actually achieves that is not fortuitous at all, but rather is caused by a ‘hidden relationship’ that experience reveals. (Nelson 1982: 749)

Nelson concludes that the greatest irony of all resides in that at every turn, the more efforts to promote democracy and to get people closer to government had resulted in the opposite effect: that of increasing the bureaucratic and controlling power of the state over the citizens:
the evolution of American bureaucracy has been marked by one ironic failure after another, the ‘grand irony’ of which is the repeated efforts to bring government under political branch control have enhanced the power of bureaucracy. In particular, […] clues to the nature of the ‘hidden relationship’ […] that causes this irony are to be found in historical sequence, the order in which things happened in the country’s political development. (Nelson 1982: 774)

However, the mere fact that democracy as a lived reality at the level of the engaged citizenry still remains a dream keeps us hopeful that it may some day turn into a reality. Under the images and the ideologies involved in that yearning, we cannot --nor ought to-- give up our efforts toward becoming an emancipated citizenry and thus free individuals. This sole longing re-creates the democratic wish and makes change plausible.

d. “Solutions” to the problems created by representative government

The problems created by representative government can be ameliorated according to the public administration literature in different and combined ways. Representation is still needed even in a framework of direct participation, but in combination with active citizenship (Cf., Follett 1919, 1924, 1926). Direct political action implies that the individual remains a human being participating at the neighborhood level and local arena without alienating her/himself from the collective; from the people s/he shares different aspects of life.

Direct participation of the individuals in local politics would impede the alienation of the individual that representative government alone brings about, and the person will find in him/herself a new, fullest, being: a political actor (Arendt 1958). Main aspects of this transition and breakdown of the representative government status quo are: an increased collaboration through democratic knowledge; negotiation through common
understanding among citizens and government officials, and the idea of community as a process (Follett 1919, 1926).

People can collaborate and come to learn and work together through political dialogue (Hummel & Stivers, 1998). Follett’s ideas of “circular response”, “difference” as a positive and creating force, and “integration” of ideas are crucial components of Follett’s community process. Creative thinking is another Follettian assertion from which everyone in the group process benefits. Along with the abovementioned aspects, creative thinking is another aspect of the dynamic interaction that creates a more democratic polity.

Jane Addams (1905) argues that bringing the citizens and government closer together demands that the policies reflect the average citizen so that her/his beliefs will be reflected in those policies. As early as 1905, Addams rejected the idea that citizens ought to turn government to the “experts” and argued that we ought to do the opposite if we want to improve service delivery: turn government to the people. She emphasized that the potential of the ordinary people was being belittled and ignored. Addams thought of that as a terrible mistake because she truly believed that the people hold the latent knowledge of contributing to what the city, state or country needs to do to serve the people’s needs better, more encompassing.

Mary Parker Follett’s The New State brings to the fore a self-governance impetus through the neighborhood centers and neighborhood groups. Associations are the prototype of self-governance while it constitutes a way to solve, or at least abate, the

---

maladies of representative government. According to Follett and other authors, such as Hannah Arendt, active citizenship can only be learnt in the doing, in the actual participating in the political. Follett’s idea of organized neighborhoods transcends the traditional conception of politics as a closed-system. She brings this to the very realities of the people. Neighborhood groups could become the center of people’s lives in a daily re-creation of the political experience of deliberation as people gather around a place. With time, Follett asserts, direct participatory democracy would drive the citizenry to “breath” politics, that is the true “political practice” that the ancient Greeks envisioned.

In fact, M.P. Follett advocates for integration of people’s ideas at the neighborhood level, through neighborhood group practices. In order to palliate the problems created by representative government, Follett suggests the embodiment of self-governance in the neighbors’ joint daily practices. She proposes this change by engaging the citizens in the task of forging a “neighborhood consciousness”. This can only be attained through deliberative processes that engage the people on a regular basis with genuine discussions. In these groups -- thus structured as process – people learn together to take responsibility for the fate of a shared place while networking with others across the different neighborhoods, the city, the state and the nation through a joint work, defining the important issues as a whole (the bureaucracy and the citizenry).

In fact, Follett (1926) suggests that we take the neighborhood groups up to the next level, that of representation from the ground up. Follett’s “representation” is of a different kind than the representative government defined in the traditional sense. It is founded in the practices of neighborliness that the citizens develop with their fellow neighbors. So,

---

the representative would be someone from within the neighborhood, who lives in it, who knows each person, everyone standing on different issues, and s/he who knows first-hand the nature of the problems and concerns of her/his fellow neighbors. Follett’s specific suggestion transcends the mere representation rhetoric. She praised a system of “council of neighborhoods” conformed by the representatives of each neighborhood. This council would meet regularly and discuss issues attaining the different neighborhoods, to integrate ideas into workable and plausible solutions, which would later be brought up the ladder to the state and national levels.⁶

Follett’s democratic citizenship refers to the conception of knowledge as intrinsic to the political experience of the group. Group knowledge is hence forged in the process of “integration” of ideas – a process that comes about through intense and enriching group deliberative practices. Follett emphasizes the political process rather than the outcomes of these active deliberation dynamics, because the object is to get people together and develop working mechanisms that are intrinsic to the neighborhood consciousness and vision of its participants.

Opposing the traditional paradigm of expert-knowledge, for Follett “truth” appears in “the creative process of deliberative discussion, of different points of views being brought and discussed; by everyone contributing something different” (Follett 1926: 364). The Follettian conceptions of knowledge and truth significantly oppose the “expert” knowledge paradigm that bureaucracies embrace and embody. In the latter, the experts

---

⁶ An example of similar neighborhood group organization dynamics could be found in Kathi & Copper’s empirical work with Los Angeles neighborhood councils. (Kathi & Cooper 2005)
are considered the only people capable and skilled to understanding and to vision
governance, that is, they hold the only accepted and legitimate type of knowledge for the
exercise of government, and thus reify such top-down construct of power-knowledge.

The Follettian “ideals” for true democratic governance may seem idealistic at first
sight. However, real cases, such as the Dudley Street case\textsuperscript{7} or the Los Angeles
Neighborhood Councils that Kathi and Cooper\textsuperscript{8}, show that Follett’s ideas constitute a
reality rather than simple ideals. Based on a deliberative process and joint work with
other fellow citizens, democratic governance has the potential of becoming real.

We find today in the Dudley Street case (Walljasper 1997) an example of the
attributes that Follett enunciated in her \textit{The new state} almost a century ago: that is,
neighborhood consciousness is omnipresent in the Dudley Street case, in the decisions
and the energy of its neighbors. It shows that, with a strong sense of neighborliness and a
strong leadership (understood in Follett’s sense), the power can really be in the hands of
the community. In this case, the community acted together in different stages with the
purpose to bring the neighborhood from a deplorable situation into a breathable and
highly livable space, a space of shared dreams and vision.

The Dudley St. case stands out as a true example of a successful self-governance
process that took a run-down and marginalized neighborhood and transformed it in a
lively and desirable area. This success story reflects the citizens’ efforts for integrating
different actors, needs and ideas while it also shows that, with the key people in the

March.

\textsuperscript{8} Kathi, P.C. & Cooper, T. (2005). Democratizing the Administrative State: Connecting
The situation and working in behalf of shared goals and wishes, great changes for the whole are possible. In this sense, Follett’s leader appears in the Dudley Neighborhood as the motivator for changing a blighted, detrimental and demoralizing neighborhood for its inhabitants. The Dudley St. leader fits well that profile as she is the spark among her fellow neighbors as they get together to deliberate about the needs and wants of the whole. The leader acts from within as the firepower of the group. In this sense, Follett argues that “no one can lead except from within” (1926: 229). The leader is the person who can best interpret the big picture of the neighborhood and properly enable the rest of the neighbors to become cognizant of all pros and cons. In the Dudley St. case the leader considers all the points of view and enhances the process that gets further re-created as people come together and join the common projects. Dudley St. also shows the ways in which Follett’s integration is possible in reality. Finally, the leader is the person who gives people confidence and helps them discover their uniqueness within diversity. Each person has an irreplaceable potential to improve the neighborhood in a joint, mightier, effort. The leader of the Dudley St. Initiative genuinely facilitated the self-governance process by sparking the passion in her fellow neighbors.

The Neighborhood Councils that Kathi and Cooper (2005) proposed is another successful example of lived democracy and self-governance at the local level. The neighborhood councils are structured from the bottom-up to address service delivery issues and work together from the block level defining the “neighborhoodness” and the extent of that definition for each group. The goal is to improve the service delivery through the input and deliberation of the members of the neighborhood, to produce “excellent” service delivery – as defined from the ground up –. It constitutes the
prototype of a collaborative effort based on co-production at the local level to make sure that people get the services – as they define them – delivered accordingly in an appropriate way. In this sense, the collaborative efforts involve not only the citizens but also city officials and professionals who work together with the neighbors in each council to come up with a plan in a collaborative manner.

This project is successful not only because it is a real example of active citizenship and self-governance from the bottom-up (opposing the top-down representative model) but also because it truly empowers the people to work together and transform a wish into reality. Hence, the people acquire real authority and responsibility over what happens in their neighborhoods, and make decisions that they can realize. The power that these councils attain is real because its members are legitimately chosen from a ground up organized polity that enhances a process under a common and integrated vision. This change happens not only at the grassroots level, but it also influences and determines greatly the decision-making process that goes on in the traditional bureaucracy.

In Follett’s neighborhood groups – as well as in the Dudley St. initiative project, and in the Neighborhood Councils of Los Angeles– the political deliberation processes (the collaborative dialogue) is what matters the most. The process makes the effort of working together worthwhile. Its dynamism creates the Greek polis through people’s experiences of collaboration and self-governance at the local level. These successful cases of real self-governance bring the Federalists’ skepticism about popular government into doubt. Active citizenship – as having a common share in the ruling as well as putting the common good before self-interest – is certainly possible, as the above case studies show.

9 Especially as reflected in Madison’s – Federalists – Paper no. 10
2. Different approaches to the study of community: Static versus dynamic

A major debate in social sciences has always been the one centered on order versus conflict, especially in the field of Sociology. Burrell and Morgan (1979) remind us that theories of inquiry in social sciences can be divided into those that emphasize regulation and stability and those that support dynamism and change. To choose between one and the other means to adopt an upfront and clear position regarding the study of any social phenomena. The choice to see community as a process or as an object means to adopt a certain quality as a researcher, that of an interpretivist or that of a positivist, that is, seeing change or seeing stability as the overriding aspects and potentialities of social phenomena. The meaning of reality is thus crucially different depending on whether social phenomena are viewed through the lenses of stability or through those of change.

a. Community as an object: One-and-others

Examples of static approaches to viewing and studying community are ample in social sciences. Max Weber’s idea of community\textsuperscript{10} responds to rationally organized action, an approach to community intrinsically stable. In this sense he differentiates the types of community in terms of the ways societies legitimate authority in real life, for example, biologically, psychologically, by appeal to tradition, with the legal-rational specifications. In his view, the legal-rational society floats on top of the traditional society, the way people “react so-habit.”\textsuperscript{11} However, what this framework leaves out the specificities and richness of what occurs in the constitutive level of activity, in the daily


practices of the people. On the one hand, there is the “bedrock” of unexamined values and norms. On the other, and over the former, there is this legal-rational analysis. The activity, the practices are left out. That is the reason why practices are important because a creative – constitutive – idea of community, a process idea of community, is meaningless without the actual practices. This process happens through shared, repeated patterns of activity that evolve over time.

The lens through which to see community has multiple connotations impacting our everyday lives and activities, as well as academic thinking and writing. This is due to the various viewpoints people attach to the thinking and studying of “community,” as well as the meaning of identifying oneself with a certain community. Furthermore, though academic activity is usually reduced to the theoretical disquisitions and elucidations, afar from real – living – community, one becomes perplexed before the multiple, and almost indisputable, meanings of this concept. As a result, the theorist awakens to the realization that there is not one and all-encompassing Truth (that of the theorectico-deductive approaches, with capital “T”) but many and different truths that we all possess as a result of our various experiences of life, those of community or of lack of community, as well as whatever meanings and significances people attach to these concepts.

Most writers treat the concept of community by attaching to it a static, almost immutable, character, just as if community were a synonym for a definable type of “object.” In this framework, the mainstream literature reduces the meaning of “community” to a substantial “thing”, that is, as a static entity. Some examples could be given when community is referred to as a geographical area (i.e.: the community of the South) delimited either by physical, cultural, or administrative “boundaries.” Another
definition of community that implies a static or even a predictable order or set of affairs relates to the community as defined by its “values” or by a certain “faith.” Likewise, very frequently people associate “community” with the idea of demographic units, such as “the African-American community” or “the Hispanic community.” This not only attaches to the concept of community a “tribal” connotation, but it also implies an *a priori*, all-encompassing and fixed meaning of much broader and dynamic social phenomena.

These multiple conceptualizations of “community” aim at getting our arms around a concept which, by its sole nature, could only be circumscribed to pre-defined and static categories by pinning it down to a series of attributes and characters. Hence, these abstract conceptualizations attempt to delimit the nature and essence of what appears to be an “entity” and define it as an indisputable matter, that is, as an ultimate Truth or the only “legitimate” reality.

Most noticeable in the Public Administration literature, community is referred to as one more element in the contracting out and bargaining processes. Community becomes a number, a unit, to be accounted for: it emerges as an additional factor in cost-benefit analyses and formulae.12

Community seen in this static way can be found in Max Weber’s idea of social relationships and communal arrangements. Weber defines “communal” relationship as based on subjective feelings of the people involved in the relationship. This idea is defined in terms of a rational association among people who arrive at an agreement based

---

on rational consent. What is dominant in Weber’s viewpoint of community is the association of the individual to others in terms of value-rational beliefs in one’s own obligation, or on a rational expectation that the other party will live up to a relationship. In that sense, this definition seems on the side of gains versus losses in relationships with others. The outcome seems here more important than the process. (Weber 1978, Vol. 1: 40-41)

Weber also addresses the non-conflictive character of an association when he asserts that communal relationships represent “the most radical antithesis to conflict.” (42) He also characterizes communal relationships as formed by the difference in types of participants, difference of authority and power: communal associations are made up of people, some of whom are weaker than others. This seems to happen through a natural selection process “of types” that would determine differing opportunities and survival among the participants. (Weber 1978: 42)

Finally Weber defines the “market” as another type of association or communal arrangement which is formed by exchanging parties and a social relationship of competition and a continual strive for self-interest and benefit in the framework of regulating transactions. The participants all agree on the rules of the market, even when they have not themselves made up the rules. Weber believes that this constitutes the “most important type of reciprocal determination of action in terms of pure self-interest.” (Weber 1978: 43)

On a similar vein, Ferdinand Tonnies’s viewpoint on community is static and mechanistic. He claims that the purest cases of associative relationships are either (a) rational free market exchange, which constitutes a compromise of opposing interests; (b)
the pure voluntary association based on self-interest; or (c) the voluntary association of individuals motivated by an adherence to a set of common absolute values. (Cited in Weber, 1998: Vol. 1: 41)

Weber argues that the term “political community” is to be understood in terms of a precisely delimited territory, a subordination-domination type of social interactions among the participants that aim at expanding the dominance over a territory. (Weber, 1998, Vol. 2: 901)

Finally, an archetypical example of community understood as a rationalistic, mechanic, overarching, authoritarian, and immutable entity, can be found in both the fields of political science and public administration. What follows neatly exemplifies a broadly used behavioralist approach to studying the human being and society. That is rooted in the idea of social contract among people — in diametrical opposition to Follett’s community as a democratic process:

Man, as a political animal, a fraction of the polis or self-governing city-state, had ended with Aristotle; with Alexander begins man as an individual. This individual needed to consider both the regulation of his own life and also his relations with other individuals who with him composed the “inhabited world;” to meet the former need there arose the philosophies of conduct, to meet the latter certain new ideas of human brotherhood. (Sabine 1951: 129)

b. Community as a process: Self-and-through-others

Mary Parker Follett (1919, 1926) speaks of community “as a process.” The following passage summarizes Follett’s “being” as constituted-in-the-process of “becoming”, as follows:

Our definition of individuality must now be ‘finding my place in the whole’: ‘my place’ gives you the individual, ‘the whole’ gives you society, but by connecting them, by saying ‘my place in the whole,’ we get a fruitful synthesis. [...] My place is not a definite portion of space and time… [it] is a matter of infinite relation, and of
infinite changing relation, so that it can never be captured. To know my place is not to
know my niche, not to know whether I am cog no. 3 or cog no. 4; it is to be alive at
every instant at every finger tip to every contact and to be conscious of those contacts.
(MPF *The New State* 1926: 65)

In the above passage, Follett emphasizes the “constitutiveness” of the process that
goes on in people’s joint practices as groups or associations. In contrast to the static way
of viewing community, this dissertation focuses on studying the lived experiences of the
people as they get together in collaborative practices. What is the *process* of being part of
a community? A more dynamic way of looking at community would lead us to a richer
learning experience and most accurate depiction of how life is lived in the real world: in a
dynamic way, as a process; rather than statically. This focuses on the idea of community
as a process or what Mary Parker Follett identified as “self-and-through-others” (Follett
1919 and 1926). Community seen through a process lens would allow the researcher to
enter into a zone of non-aprioristic delimitations structured by dynamism and change.
Follett’s idea of community is inherently dynamic– a process. In her own words,
community is always “self-and-through-others.”

We find the group idea not by mechanical aggregation, but by the subtle process of
the intermingling of all the different ideas of the group. A says something. Thereupon
a thought arises in B’s mind. It is B’s idea or A’s? Neither. It is a mingling of the two.
We find that A’s idea, after having been presented to B and returned to A, has
become slightly, or largely, different from what it was originally. In like manner it is
affected by C and so on. But in the same way B’s idea has been affected by all others,
and not only does A’s idea feel the modifying influence of each of the others, but A’s
ideas are affected by B’s relation to all the others, and A’s plus B’s are affected by all
the others individually and collectively, and so on and on until the common idea
springs into being. It is not a question of my idea being supplemented by yours, but
that there has been evolved a composite idea. In this sense, ‘I’ represents a whole

---

576-588.
rather than one of our separate selves. The course of action decided upon is what we all together want, and I see that it is better than what I had wanted alone.” (Follett 1926: 24)

The above passage describes community process formation in terms of a metaphor drawn from sports. Tennis is a game, but how it is played, while depending on what each of two players does, is not the simple addition of the motions of each to the motions of the other. The “math” is that of an interaction in which the total is more than the sum of its constitutive parts. The game may provide the rules, an organization may provide the court, but the game is not the play. In the playing together of two players we encounter things to do with a ball that no player could achieve by him or herself.14

In public life, including public administration similarly, people get together and engage with one another in a joint learning process to develop better services that improve the lives of the whole. This implies for Follett that community is an always evolving process rather than a finished “product” or static entity, the latter of which characterizes most mainstream Public Administration literature. The key aspects of community as a process can, therefore, be summarized as: creative thinking, unifying activity, common good, practical politics, and neighborliness:

Creative thinking

According to Follett (1919, 1926) creative thinking comes into being in the process of integration. In a group process its members “are reciprocally conditioning forces none of which acts as it would act if any one member were different or absent” (Follett 1926: 31). Community is a creative process because it is a process of integrating. Integration (the subtle process of intermingling the multiple ideas of the group members) is the core

14 This elucidation came about in a personal correspondence with Professor Hummel.
aspect of collective thinking because—through this process—the “group idea” arises.

Integration is creative because a new shared understanding emerges (Follett 1926: 24)

Follett’s tennis match metaphor illustrates magnificently the essence of what she refers to as the “group process:”

In a collective mind every part is bound up with every other part, every tendency is conditioned by every other tendency. The group process is like a game of tennis: A serves the ball to B. B returns the serve but his play is influenced largely by the way the ball has been served to him by his own method of return. A sends the ball back to B, but his return is made up of his own play plus the way in which the ball has been played to him by B plus his own original serve. Thus in the end does action and reaction become inextricably bound up together. (Follett 1926: 25)

In this line of thought, group process is “measured” by the group members’ ability to proceed from integration to integration. The psychic coherence of the group can be obtained only by the full contribution of every member. Follett, indeed, asserts

Life is not a pyramid. The individual always escapes. Yes, but because his sustenance is relation and he seeks forever new relations in the ceaseless interplay of the One and the Many by which both are constantly making each other. (Follett 1919: 582)

And she eloquently continues to explain her idea of community as “power-with,” rather than the traditionally accepted hierarchical order regulated by “power-over”:

The study of community as a process does away with hierarchy, for it makes us dwell in the qualitative rather than the quantitative. […] There is only self-and-through-others. (Follett 1919: 582)

Community as a process means a unifying activity, a dynamic unity.

Follett argues that the flow of lived experience does not abandon itself, but rolls itself into the new flow of lived experience endlessly, the qualities interpenetrating so that at every moment the whole is new. (Follett 1919)
Follett’s idea of self-and-through-others is paramount in the understanding of community as a process. We become human beings through the constant interacting with others, not by “hiding” from others. In other words, Follett enlightens our thinking by reminding us that we become stronger human beings when relating with others on a daily basis, rather than by isolating ourselves in individualistic practices. This point in Follett’s theorizing is fundamental to understand all other aspects of group process, such as “integration,” “interpenetration,” “circular response,” and “constructive conflict.” In preparing the reader for those crucial attributes of her theory, Follett elucidates:

The exposition of the self-and-others fallacy has transformed the idea of self-interest. Our interests are inextricably interwoven. The question is not what is best for me or for you, but for all of us. My interests are not less important to the world than yours and vice versa. The self-and-others fallacy has led directly to a conception which has wrought much harm among us, namely, the identification of “others” with “society” which leads the self outside society and brings us to one of the most harmful individualisms. (Follett 1926: 82)

And she sums this up by arguing for the importance of unity and synthesis: “We cannot transcend self by means of others, but only through the synthesis of the self and others.” (Follett 1926: 83)

In community improvement process, the group’s Leitmotif is the pursuit of the common good

To make the actual group association -the practice of community- happen, “the larger interest must be made personal before it can be made real.” We come together to create a common and genuine idea. (Follett 1926: 33-35)

The group process is practical politics par excellence and the fountain of freedom

The person discovers his/her true nature, gains his/her true freedom only through the group, that is, by means of practical politics. In this sense, Follett argues that:
The *laissez-aller* which people allow themselves when alone disappears when they meet. [...] We feel it there, an impalpable, substantial thing in our midst. It raises us to the nth power of action, it fires our minds and glows in our hearts and fulfills and actuates itself no less, but rather on this very account, because it has been generated only by our being together. (Follett 1926: 32)

**Neighborliness**

In his work *Community and the Politics of Place* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1990) Daniel Kemmis makes a case for the role of “place” in the construction of our *neighborliness*. The idea of “place” is useful for this research inquiry because it emphasizes the way that a geographic space – the place – can actually be a force that weaves people together instilling common practices that evolve over time. Kemmis adds to Follett’s generic idea of group process, the idea of “place,” therefore, amplifying the concept of neighborhood. Although in *The New State*, Follett emphasizes the importance of the neighborhoods, it seems that Kemmis is useful for strengthening the idea of neighborliness. When studying neighborhood improvement, Kemmis’s idea of place is essential to understand the dynamism inherent in its creative power. The building of ties with others plays a central role in our development as individuals and as communities. The absence of these connections with others on a daily basis would certainly deprive us from getting in touch with others in a virtuous political fashion, through the daily practice of rhetoric and civic virtue. To enlighten this thought, Kemmis refers to the example of the American frontier:

15 “Before they become citizens, these people are neighbors; this is a neighborly citizenship. [...] The word neighbor, in its Old English rendition, meant something like ‘near dweller.’ Neighbors are essentially people who find themselves attached to the same (or nearly adjoining) places. Because each of them is attached to the place, they are brought into relationship with each other.” (Kemmis, 1990: 116)
From Plymouth Rock onwards, Americans on the frontier had found themselves united with their neighbors in the face of an often hostile and precarious existence. Over the generations, the lessons of cooperation wove themselves into something that can only be called political education. People who had learned by repeated experience that they could count on each other, and in doing so accomplish difficult and important tasks together, were the people who eventually formed cooperatives to bring electricity to the most remote areas or to market wheat or beef out of those areas. (Kemmis, 1990: 71-72)

This process of neighborliness was translated into what Kemmis called “politics of cooperation,” that is, people developed fully as human beings by weaving into each other in the context of adverse geographical and climatic circumstances that the frontier families had to deal with on a daily basis. The sheer survival would have not been possible in a context of isolation and individualism, and that is how these families appear as icons of politics-in-action for the possibility of life itself. Kemmis alerts us of the implications for our community and its culture that the political processes of people getting together and forming a stronger One, a complete Being (the body politic), to face the contingencies of life instills.

The life process of community defined as a body politic is to be learned in practice, that is, in the daily experiences of relationships aimed at improving the life conditions of the whole. To illustrate this point, Kemmis quotes Bellah et al. from Habits of the Heart: For the democratic republicans (from Montesquieu to Jefferson)

[…] the virtuous citizen was one who understood that personal welfare is dependent on the general welfare and could be expected to act accordingly. Forming such character requires the context of practices in which the coincidence of personal concern and common welfare can be experienced.” (Bellah et al. p. 254; In Kemmis 1990: 72)

These practices of working together towards a common goal are crucial to our very lives because they can provide what almost nothing else is able to provide: the type of
experience that allows us to identify ourselves with others and build upon common
ground, that is, upon shared values: “The values are shared because they are objective;
they are, in fact, public values” (Kemmis 1990: 74-75). In this context, identity is formed
in relation and connection to a place and to the practices that such place grounds.

Relationships play a central role not only in the formation of identities over time, but
also, in the creation of civic virtues, defined as the necessary habits for people to relate to
one another in a truly public way. In this sense, Alasdair Mcintyre\textsuperscript{16} argues that “every
practice requires a certain kind of relationship between those who participate in it” (2007:
191). He is of the idea that the “political” – i.e., the acceptance of differences among
people through deliberation – instills civic virtue. Mcintyre describes how even our
simplest and most familiar practices gradually instill these civic virtues proper to the
political activities of deliberating and working with others towards a common goal:
“…we have to accept as necessary components of any practice with internal goods and
standards of excellence the virtues of justice, courage and honesty” (McIntyre 2007:
191). The “political” as defined by the practices that a common place grounds among
people becomes the real and concrete context of our daily neighborliness lives.

Accordingly, Kemmis argues:

[We ought to understand] how important to practices is the concrete, the specific, the
tangible. It is precisely that element of concreteness which gives to practices their
capacity to present values as something objective and therefore as something public.
(Kemmis 1990: 77)

In the context of the grounded practices that Kemmis offers, “values” adopt a unique
connotation emphasizing their concrete existence through our communal actions. Rather

than being something to which people often refer to as “up in the air” or as something intangible without being able to define, Kemmis shares many examples of how values are part of the grounded practices that a place instills among its inhabitants, like the practice of “barn-raising:”

The kinds of values which might form the basis for a genuinely public life, then, arise out of a context which is concrete in at least two ways. It is concrete in the actual things or events-- the barns, the barn dances—which the practices of cooperation produce. But it is also concrete in the actual, specific places within which those practices and that cooperation take place. […] When the effort to survive comes to rely upon shared and repeated practices like barn raising, survival itself is transformed; it becomes inhabitation. To inhabit a place is to dwell there in a practiced way, in a way which relies upon certain regular, trusted habits of behavior. (Kemmis 1990: 79)

Similarly, Bellah et al. (1985) suggest that no real public life is possible except among people who are truly engaged in the project of inhabiting a place, that is, involved in “practices of commitment”:

People growing up in communities of memory not only hear the stories that tell how the community came to be, what its hopes and fears are, and how its ideals are exemplified in outstanding men and women; they also participate in the practices – ritual, aesthetic, ethical- that define the community as a way of life. We call these “practices of commitment” for they define the patterns of loyalty and obligation that keep the community alive. (Bellah et al. 1985: 154)

Two aspects are indispensable elements of collaborative practices. First is trust, as one of the civic virtues essential to public life. Trust is built through collaborative practices, that is, the whole point of practice is that it is a process that builds trust if it is working right. In other words, practices are shared and repeated and they extend over time; that is how trust is built, created. Second, is the fact that civic virtues constitute the public life in one way: through practice. In other words, collaboration is an ongoing, self-
sustaining process. Like Mary Parker Follett, Kemmis is of the idea that more than mere “cooperation” among people defines the actual practice of politics:

The actual practice of finding solutions that people can live with usually reaches beyond compromise to something more like neighborliness—to finding within shared space the possibilities for a shared inhabitation. Such neighborliness is inconceivable without the building of trust, of some sense of justice, of reliability, of honesty. The practice of being neighbors draws together, therefore, the concepts of place, of inhabitation, and of the kinds of practices from which civic virtues evolve. (Kemmis 1990: 118)

Kemmis’s idea of neighborliness parallels Follett’s idea of integration because both are creative. He suggests that through these practices found within a shared space, the possibility for shared inhabitation is where the creative force of it resides. Kemmis’s fundamental contribution to the literature on active citizenship and collaborative practices resides in his view about place (e.g. neighborhood) as the vital aspect that grounds practices which weave people together. Those practices build trust among the participants that evolve over time. In this context, Kemmis asserts: "Citizenship is one of those practices which define its field of operation as it evolves.” (Kemmis 1990: 137)

As people practice civic virtue, as they work together on trying to improve their neighborhood, the process emerges. The practice itself—the process—defines the “product” or “outcome.” In other words, the process becomes the “outcome.” MacIntyre’s take on the issue at hand happens to be in a similar vein with Follett’s idea of process, of dynamic unity: “Practices never have a goal or goals fixed for all time but the goals themselves are transmuted by the history of the activity.” (MacIntyre 2007: 193-194)

17 The polis can thus be defined as “the place which a certain group of people recognize that they inhabit in common… Politics emerges as the set of practices which enables these people to dwell together in this place.” (Kemmis 1990: 122)
The always-changing nature of collaborative practices is reflected in Kemmis’s observation on the “politics of inhabitation” as follows: “If citizenship were to become a practice, then it too would shape its own possibilities as it developed.” (1990: 138)

Moreover, he suggests that this sort of politics depends not so much on procedures and bureaucracies and "more upon human virtues and patterns of relationship”:

A politics which finds its opportunity in its hardship, in its limitations, and more particularly in the limitations of its place, is a politics which captures the dual meaning of politics as the ‘art of the possible’ and at the same time recaptures the ancient meaning of politics as the project of inhabiting a polis. Such a politics depends less upon procedures and bureaucracies and more upon human virtues and patterns of relationship. (Kemmis 1990: 138)

3. On the ontology of process theory

Mary Parker Follett’s idea of process theory reflects in what she calls the “law of the situation” or the plausibility of human interaction. Process theory seeks to make an alternative to certainty possible by showing that when human interaction proceeds properly in the midst of deliberative exchanges, a basis for action appears. The underlying concern of process theory is “how to come to terms with the otherness with which our fellow human beings confront us” (McSwite, O.C. 1997: 272-273). In other words, process ontology is dialectical. It draws its vital energy from the continuous dissent and polarization that goes on among people and the resolution of opposites through the process of integration. (White 1990: 239)

The meaning that we allocate in our daily life is based on the experience of time as a process, as a flow. In this sense, what occurs at one certain moment is not as important as what occurs in the flow itself, in the process. What matters is the feeling that occurs
during the whole process, rather than in specific sections of it. Process theorist Sandra Rosenthal clarifies this point as follows:

What occurs in the present awareness is not the apprehension of a discrete datum in a moment of time, but rather the time-extended experiential ‘feel’ within the passing present of a readiness to respond to more than can ever be specified. (Rosenthal 2003: 12)

In this sense, process is the “constitutive-ness” of social activities, an experience that is experimental because it involves the unpredictable “happening,” the flow, the situation of human actions. In Rosenthal terms, “it involves an anticipation of a next experience to come, something for which we are waiting, an expectation set in motion by the temporal stretch of human activity.” (2003:12)

Process theory is based in people’s interactions within a shared world and is thus a-relating that is always re-defining itself according to its participants. This process can be best described in the idea of dynamic unity, that our interactions in the world are connected to others, as we constitute them in our intersubjective practices. Capturing the otherness within oneself is crucial to understand the idea of process. It refers to the opposite poles which are within us all, to the dichotomies that reside in us all and allow us to integrate with others in order to survive.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

«I frequently felt that I was revealing new horizons for the social sciences. Now I know that I was merely clearing away obstructions; the horizon itself is only becoming visible.»
Eduard C. Lindeman (Social Discovery, 1925, vii)

This section lays out the methodology appropriate\(^1\) to the question: “What is the members’ experience of community?” It is an innocent question, but we must remember that it has serious consequences for public administration and politics: among them that it has implications for the origins of politics and major models of political organizations such as the “New State” proposed by Mary Parker Follett. This section discusses the methodological approach chosen to answer this dissertation’s research question of what the practices inherent to living in community are. But how is this experience to be accessed and understood? This is usually a methodological issue, but when the inconvenience of conventional methods (specifically the problem of methodological individualist methods to access nonindividualist experiences) is considered, it becomes

---

an ontological and epistemological problem. This investigator has thus found that the most suitable logic of inquiry to vindicate the method appropriate to the research question is a phenomenological logic of inquiry by means of interpreting people’s experiences in neighborhood improvement practices.

1. The problem: methodological individualism vs. the group experience

In a number of forums where the research design was presented, the substantive aim of the research encountered methodological criticism. For example, critics opposed the idea of consulting non-scholarly “ordinary” people in the process of defining concepts of community. Surely, this was a job for experts!2

On the whole these critics were political scientists and policy analysts who saw the stability of traditional political science’s main tenets put at risk — that the ultimate origin of thought and behavior lies in the individual. It seemed to some critics that, if the individual is the unit of analysis, the researcher must immediately move on to seek out distribution of anything a member of a group might have to say. In this context, a comparison of the socio-economic status and the significance of other variables, were to take the measure of the man (and woman) who expressed any specific idea of what community is.

The present methodological approach makes different assumptions about how we know what we know, though it does not disagree that, once a “thing” is defined, it can be subjected to measurement. It does insist on observing a stage of experience that comes before we can engage in scientific measurement and the necessary concepts for such an

enterprise. Even before coming up with a concept its relevance or the relevance of its
collective experiences must be established. Admittedly it is possible to come up with an
arbitrary concept and pursue a rational protocol that asks nature to say Yes or No to
whether a corresponding reality supports use of that concept. But the question then
becomes: What about the aspects of the phenomenon not originally captured by the
concept?

A major problem the present research has faced is the permanent attempt of the
scientific community to reduce a group phenomenon into a unilateral event, by typically
asking to express the group phenomenon in individualistic terms. Given social science’s
favoring of the individual as the source of what can be asked and expressed, any
phenomenon that is not expressed through the individual as unit of analysis is not
accepted as “valid” in the scientific circles and thus discarded as insignificant, trivial and
unscientific.

The concept of community itself is a contested term and a contested process creating
a new state of being. However, in social sciences we rarely bother asking what the
meaning of a concept is and how a concept is constructed. The main question is how do
we know what the appropriate method to define a concept is? And who has a right to
describe a concept? The scientists? Or the people having the intersubjective experiences?
Traditionally, science has had the authority to define the subject of study, its nature, and
its limits.
However, a concept is something much more advanced than raw experience, namely the most economical statement about the essence of an act. In effect, Martin Heidegger’s definition of “concept” – originally offered by Immanuel Kant— is that the concept is one thing or one idea that captures many experiences. That is, a concept grasps many experiences in one term. Kant defined concept as the unity of a consciousness of what is similar in many different things; in what is different (Carnevale & Hummel 2007). We may synthesize Kant’ and Heidegger’s thinking on the nature of the concept, as follows:

Concept is the unified consciousness of what many different things have in common. Its source is that without which the thing cannot be thought. […] The power of the concept lies in the fact that it shows the unity of what is common to many things that are otherwise different. (Carnevale & Hummel 2007: 11)

This dissertation seeks meaning. The concept of community is sought in light of a democratic, collective, viewpoint that begins by asking questions and listening to the voices of the actors — group members — themselves. The reason, however, that we speak of community and distinguish this concept from the individual is that life happens in permanent relation to others, in the actual inter-subjective experiences. Moreover, such distinction is useful in, for example, reorganizing the way we address individuals (personally) and individuals in groups (possibly rhetorically).

To pursue the difference between individual and group as merely one of addition of individuals — so that the group becomes conceptualized as an aggregate of individuals – is to fail to ask what experiences beyond individualism are possible in a group. It turns out, however, that when people are asked about the specific term of community they do

---

3 I am indebted to Professor Hummel’s very valuable lectures on Epistemology in Public Affairs in his Spring 2006 graduate class.
distinguish between experiences they can have each by him or herself and experiences of that specialized group we call a community.

In short, methodological individualism – if applied to the group phenomenon called community – will leave out of consideration all those self-reports that do not have the individual as the unit of analysis. The quintessential question before any meaningful study of social phenomena remains as follows: does meaningful social science research study measures or meanings? While this dissertation aims at the latter it also calls for a mutual appreciation of different languages and logics of inquiry in social sciences. Researching “meaning” – rather than measures — calls for a different path to operationalize and elaborate on the issue at hand, namely that of synthesis, of bringing back together the reality of intersubjective experiences of the people. This lies in diametric opposition to the traditional social science research that seeks to explain and predict social events by dissecting and generalizing complex social processes.

This is the main reason why this project was started: to recover the full meaning of experiences that transcends the individual, specifically the group experience, which Mary Parker Follett calls communities -- “community as a process.”

This dissertation is thus an act of heresy against science of experts on behalf of people’s voices.

2. Transcending methodological individualism

My suspicion of the existing concept of community seemed to be confirmed upon review of the literature on that contested term. Namely, the reasons why the author of this research decided to challenge the prevailing wisdom – community as a static, immutable, entity – were clearly twofold. Methodologically this research attempts to transcend the
that applies physical science protocols to the study of social phenomena: yet to abandon rules of objective procedure would have its counterpart in natural science if a nuclear physicist were to ask an atom for what it’s like to be an atom.

Substantially this research aims at opening up the dialogue of community by taking its departure from the people’s experiences of being part of neighborhood group’s dynamics. Its greater aim is to open up the possibilities to create a richer and more grounded conceptualization of “community” from the ground up, than ungrounded expertise alone could provide.

This research asks two questions crucial for the study of social science phenomena, namely the unavoidable ontological and epistemological quandaries: a) what is that I am studying? and b) how do I get to it? It aims at setting forth the pre-scientific stage that every social science study ought to have in order not to loose touch with what is real, with the “object” of study and more so when it comes to social processes. Hence my research question – **What is community?** – is an ontological question because it asks for the essence of the concept being studied, for its intrinsic meaning. That question is closely followed by the epistemology of phenomenological inquiry: **How do people live (experience) community?** This research seeks to transit and discover both avenues: inquire about the “thing” – community — and inquire about its lived essence – people’s experiences, how they live community.

---

4 What Borges & Bioy Casares would call *esse est percipi* (From Latin: “being is to be perceived.”) In: De Certau, M. 1988:178. This thought may parallel Heidegger’s *Dasein* (being-with-others), Dreyfus’s “being-in-the-world,” or Follett’s “a self-and-through-others” (or ‘I am constituted,’ ‘I exist,’ as I interact with others)
What? – The ontological question of what “is.”

My personal judgment led me to reflect on the best way to answer an ontological question – What is community? [The answer could not be found in physical location but in meaning: What does “community” mean to people?] My hunch seemed reasonable: What could possibly offer a clearer answer to an ontological question -- What is the thing under study? — than going straight to the source of the problem, that is, studying actual groups? So the main task consisted of going out to the field and interviewing people from actual neighborhood groups within the city of Akron and asking members about their experiences of community process.

A mere hunch was confirmed by the more experienced researchers and philosophers who had started to inquire on the issue of meaning since the times of the Ancient Greeks. I soon realized that I was not alone in this empirical endeavor. As political philosopher, Mary Parker Follett brought up this point back in her The New State, first published in the year 1918. In effect, M.P. Follett questioned the narrow approach that social scientists undertook when attempting to find solutions to social prolegomena: “There is no ‘society’ thought of vaguely as the mass of people we see around us. I am always in relation not to ‘society’ but to some concrete group.” (Mary Parker Follett, The New State, Longmans, Green & Co., 1926:20). In the same vein she tirelessly encouraged scholars to get back to, and observe, the concrete level where social phenomena take place, that is, the actual groups:

Early psychology was based on the study of the individual; early sociology was based on the study of society. But there is no such thing as the ‘individual’, there is no such thing as ‘society’; there is only the group and the group-unit—the social individual. Social psychology must begin with an intensive study of the group, of the selective process which goes on within it, the differentiated reactions, the likeness and unlikeness, and the spiritual energy which unites them. (MPF 1926: 21)
And, she continues asking “how can any of these things be discussed abstractly? Must we not first study men in association?” (1926: 22). In this sense, Follett reminds us of the practical nature of both the substance of her works (democracy) and the approach to study it (empirical). She thus points to the practical roots of this normative endeavor by asserting that democracy must be learned in the doing, in its exercise which she pointedly refers as to learning how to live with other human beings: “No one can give us democracy, we must learn democracy.” (1926: 22)

On the one end of the conceptual spectrum --as Follett reminds us-- community is more than simply the aggregate of its members. On the other end of the array there is the total subordination of the individual to society, or what Follett calls “crowd psychology.” In opposition to crowd psychology, Follett sustained “group psychology” (1926: 23) as the focus of study of associations and groups as processes. Follett’s “community as a process” -- the process of growing interpenetration among people—demands that we study the group as a whole; that is, the whole as more than simply the sum of its parts. This is the focus undertaken in this research to which we turn next.

b. Getting There – Epistemology of How we know.

In fact, this dissertation is a case in point of Follett’s approach drawn from asking questions of actual groups of people and from observing actual group meetings. It does not begin by hypothesizing or putting forward even a single proposition. It does not test validities or demand replicability. And yet --as Ralph Hummel has said—“This approach is the precondition of all these. It is the beginning of science, the preconceptual eliciting of science’s subject matter.” The predominant social science research tradition espouses

---

5 Personal correspondence with Professor Hummel, February 2008.
the scientific method proper of physics. While diligently focused on mimicking the analytical process of dissecting reality in order to study its parts, social scientists often forget to ask the essential question of what it is that they are studying, to begin with. Therefore this scientific approach makes conscious a silent protocol that scientists use but seldom openly discuss and, when forced to do so, cannot agree on. (Cf. Brecht, A. 1959 Political Theory)

Before science can be done, we must know what to get scientific about. Ignoring the essence of what constitutes “the social” —our “object” of study—may inexorably lead the researcher to unforeseen pernicious consequences, including mistaking words for the things themselves, and ultimately to what Pierre Bourdieu calls “scholastic fallacy” (Bourdieu,1998:132):

[…] the most serious epistemological mistake in the human sciences, namely, that which consists in putting a ‘scholar inside the machine,’ in picturing all social agents in the image of the scientist […] or, more precisely, to place the models that the scientist must construct to account for practices into the consciousness of agents, to operate as if the constructions that the scientist must produce to understand and account for practices were the main determinants, the actual cause of practices. (Bourdieu,1998:133)

This dissertation does actually have a purpose though it claims no *a priori* object.
The purpose is discovery.

c. Discovering

What might a human being say when asked questions aiming to discover the meanings involved in working with others in the way that M.P. Follett enunciated?

Rather than asking the experts, the method to answer this question is to "ask the Man who

---

owns one," as did a famous advertising in the 1950s. Discovery may lead the researcher to help clarify the “essence” of what we are inquiring about, the concept —community.

Although questions are asked of individuals, the focus here is not on the individual as unit of analysis or even the group, but the single new idea that might confirm, correct, or amplify the theoretical concept—Follett’s community as a process. The investigation is in pursuit of the single idea that adds something to what was said before by the main theorists who referred to community, citizenship and the polis as processes rather than end-products (Cf. Follett 1919, 1926; Arendt 1958; Kemmis 1990). If the idea is good, it does not matter if it comes from only one person out of 20 or what its distribution is or what status group the carrier belongs to. The fact that the whole idea-eliciting project will, in all likelihood, not be replicable and that people will be able to disagree on interpretations does not take away from the utility of asking. If only one person has an interesting idea, this idea is not made automatically better by having three of 25 or a hundred.

This dissertation seeks to make a case for the ideas of ordinary people as they may amplify and bring life back to an otherwise dead-before-start and often taken-for-granted concept, in this case, that of community. The “idea” of the person inquired is the first of any possible units of analysis, though it would be more appropriate to speak of concept formation (which rings true), preconceptual explorations whose validation and vindication cannot begin without first forming the concept. Here speaks the phenomenon itself. It speaks through the people who identify themselves as being part of a group process. Without that first bringing aboard of a thought in community about community, there can be no analysis, no measure of depth with which community is held close, no
distribution, no SES (a measurement of socio economical status), etc. I go -- as Edmund Husserl demanded -- "back to the things themselves," where things mean states of affairs, matters of interest as these are experienced by the people themselves. In effect pedagogy researcher Max van Manen\textsuperscript{7} asserts that

In our efforts to make sense of our lived experiences with theories and hypothesizing frameworks we are forgetting that it is living human beings who bring schemata and frameworks into being and not the reverse. (van Manen, 1990: 45)

In \textit{Introduction to Phenomenological Research} (trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom, Indiana University Press, 1994) Martin Heidegger attempts to bring clarity to the opaque realm of problems. He asserts “For illumination of the ‘problem’ itself in its structure, we see ourselves led back to a closer consideration of what a \textit{question} is” (§10: “Clarification of problems” pp. 53-59). Heidegger is of a mind that there are two kinds of questions: questions that lead to answers, and questions that lead to more questions. The latter connotation is the basic philosophical assumption and aim underlying this dissertation. In his own words, “The tendency of the answer can go towards acquiring answers in the sense of \textit{valid propositions}” (Heidegger 1994: 55); or towards

[...] bringing themselves, via the answering, into a specific \textit{basic relation to the entity interrogated}. [...] This entails that the entity (the existence \textit{[Dasein]}) \textit{doing the questioning} fundamentally co-determines the being of the entity interrogated, and vice versa. The \textit{answer disappears} in this peculiar sense, it never gets hold of itself, in contrast to the first case where it sets itself down as it were in “objective structures.” (Heidegger 1994: 56)

M. van Manen reflects on Heidegger’s writings and puts forward that the purpose of phenomenological reflection is to attempt “to grasp the essential meaning of something” (van Manen 1990:77).

d. From substance to method and back to life itself— *esse est percipi* \(^8\)

Capturing community as a process is to mirror life; in contrast to dissecting the reality of community in terms of traditional social science that seeks objective analysis. As mentioned above, the first requires *synthesis* (“putting things together”) while the second requires *analysis* (“taking things apart”). \(^9\) While a definition delimits or describes the meaning of a concept or term offering us a finished understanding of a thing, a concept usually connotes many possible assertions or meanings of a thing. The first one aims at settling the issue for good; the second one aims at its eternal attempting-to-make-sense. The latter is where I see Mary Parker Follett’s idea of “community as a process” fit, that is, in the arena of the contested experiences of group process, deliberation, not being able to close up an issue, change and integration, and dynamic and practical politics. That is indeed the logic of inquiry guiding this investigation.

To bring people’s experiences of community together to light is the aim of this dissertation. The data sought are the experiences of community as a whole, as more than the mere sum of its parts, more than the individuals’ single experiences added-up together. This constructive process means to me an attempt to bring back to life what culture and traditional science have dissected and paralyzed for centuries by attempting to

\(^8\) “Being is to be perceived”; Borges, J.L. & Bioy Casares, A. *Esse est percipi* Cited in Michel De Certau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1988, page 178.

\(^9\) Correspondence with Professor Hummel, Spring 2006.
rip its essence out. To put the alleged “puzzle of life” back together through people’s meanings of reality is the goal at hand.

The sought-out synthesis would be plausible only in the fertile soils of people’s daily lives, experiences that they are able to recall and retell through their stories.

Community as a process reflects itself primarily in the group’s deliberative experiences which aim at constructing a place that embraces people, while at the same time, prevents them from falling onto each other, from collapsing singularities and differences into an amorphous generality.

While most authors (Max Weber, Ferdinand Tönnies, Barber, Putman) discuss community from an overwhelmingly static viewpoint – paying attention to the results and outcomes of citizen participation, community organizing or voting patterns — M.P. Follett does the opposite: she begins by asking every person that she would meet in the streets about his or her experiences of working with others on projects that mattered to them. The method of inquiry she encourages to pursue is that which begins with the empirical “evidence,” namely, the essence of what people bring to life through narratives, to conclude that the essence of community is its dynamic nature, its reliance on processes rather than on outcomes, and its versatility as the conditions, and the people affecting it, change.

e. Aiming at synthesis

The methodology of this dissertation guides the essence of the research question and of the research process altogether. The “unifying” approach of synthesis constitutes its very method. Unlike the traditional way of doing social “science” research –that which begins with aprioristic definitions of the object being studied-- synthesis emerges in
people’s narratives as form of examples, where the richness of the meaning resides. In this context, “community” –or group process-- becomes a meaningful experience.

Science requires things; it requires that practitioners use “data” or concepts that cannot be unclear or fused (Kant, Heidegger, and Schutz). In contrast, the person living a life gets all the concepts fused, mingled and connected, all at once. As Werner S. Pluhar discusses in his introduction to Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* (Indianapolis/ Cambridge 1987)

[...] thought is distinct while sensation is confused, though both can be clear (rather than obscure). An idea is clear if we can (without doubt) distinguish it from all other ideas, though we may not know by what characteristic we do so. An idea is distinct if it is clear in all its parts (characteristics) and their combination, so that it can be distinguished from all other ideas explicitly, by abstraction (from the sensible detail) and definition. (Kant 1987: xlviii)

In this line of thought, the purpose is to discover, to gain clarity and intelligibility, to make a case for community as a process, rather than to prove or explain a concept, or to make up the definition of community. “Meaning” is indispensable to gain intelligibility to social reality problems like the one at hand, and that can only be accomplished through people’s ideas—what the meaning of community is for each person in his/her own terms but always in the context of others. Hence this study aims at bringing community to life, to its genuine narratives and dynamics. Although the researcher observed group meetings and interviewed many individuals, this investigation seeks to find the one single idea or two that may correct, support or amplify the existing concepts of community.

The higher step for scientific measurement ought to be the discovery of the meaning that the affairs have for the people engaged in them. Phenomenology says indeed that each person has his/her own take on the events. Through this study I want to make sure
that their voices are heard, because what can make a study of “community” more
grounded and more real—truer—than by studying an actual group?

A social science research that begins with the discovery of the “what” can only
then—as a posterior step-- combine the measurement and the definition. From the
beginning of this type of inquiry we must avoid premature foreclosing of definitions, the
scientific method trap of detachment from reality. This dissertation seeks synthesis rather
than analysis. It is written to oppose the tradition of tearing apart the wholeness and
fullness of life in order to “explain” reality “for once and all” and to finally adapt the
event of community to a pre-defined mold following certain categories of analysis
designed ahead of time, following the mere “cookie-cutter” logic of inquiry.

In this sense, Max van Manen explains the meaning and importance of
“phenomenology” for the study of social science events, emphasizing that

Phenomenology must describe what is given to us in immediate experience without
being obstructed by pre-conceptions and theoretical notions. […] Existential
phenomenology … aims at describing how phenomena present themselves in lived
experience, in human existence. Thus, for Heidegger […] phenomenology is
ontology– a study of the modes of “being in the world” of human being. (van Manen
1990:184)

Phenomenology demands that we re-learn to look at the world as we experience it
first hand and that we be fully aware of the events as they come into being. In other
words,

[…] phenomenology does not produce empirical or theoretical observations or
accounts. Instead, it offers accounts of experienced space, time, body, and human
relations as we live them. (van Manen, 1990:184)
In one of his articles, psychology researcher Richard Hycner\(^{10}\) discusses some procedures that can be followed in phenomenologically analyzing interview data and, in effect, reminds us that

[...] unlike other methodologies, phenomenology cannot be reduced to a ‘cookbook’ set of instructions. It is more an approach, an attitude, an investigative posture with a certain set of goals. (Hycner, 1985: 279)

Methodologically (and following the philosophers who define community as a “process”) this research began by visiting neighborhood associations in Akron, Ohio, where there were neighborhood improvement processes in place and functioning, where people were engaged in some sort of communal effort to improve some aspect of their neighborhood. The main question asked to them was what they had to say about their experiences of getting together as a group: *What do people say about the process by which they try to improve their community?* The researcher’s main goal was to document community process from a phenomenological viewpoint, that is, from the experiences of the people when they came together as One to improve the life conditions of the whole.

The research question is: What is the experience of community?

Does Follett’s theory of “community as a process” happen in real life? The safest path to answer such question seemed to be asking people actually engaged in neighborhood improvement group practices to share with the researcher their group involvement experiences. Therefore people’s stories constituted the raw “data” of this study.

In short, this study started with a summary of Follett’s community concept --
highlighting the main elements of her “process” theory-- and its relevance to her vision of
a “New State” (importance). It then engaged fellow citizens in indirect discussion about
neighborhood improvement projects. The interview questions refrained from steering,
and indirectly asked what “community” (i.e.; neighborhood group practices) meant to the
neighbors. Only after thorough exploration of what they made of their own experiences
with group collaborative practices, did the researcher ask –again indirectly-- what they
made of the elements proposed by Follett. (The model for this is Ralph Hummel’s
article\textsuperscript{11} on Stories as “Science”).

The next step of this investigation was to explore the implications of the respondents’
statements in regard to these elements for Follett’s theory of politics (critical
interpretation stage). Finally the researcher reported on the advantages and disadvantages
of using popular definitions of social phenomena in social and applied research, with a
final discussion of implications for the “Greats” in community research.

To answer the question of “how we study community?” the researcher chose to refer
to actual people in neighborhood groups. The approach makes this a case study which
aims at maximizing the validity of the research on community as a process as an ongoing
and dynamic activity. Storytelling was found to be the most appropriate approach to get
at the neighbors’ ideas because people relate best to their experiences as \textit{they} live them
and as they are able to recall them — in their own terms.

f. The logic of inquiry

A phenomenological logic of inquiry (Husserl 1970, Schutz 1962) looks into people’s lived experiences. A phenomenon is “that which shows itself as Being and as a structure of Being” (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 1962:63). In other words, a phenomenon is that which shows itself in its own terms when is properly addressed. In this context the role of the researcher is clearly that of an alert observer and listener so that people are able to “open” themselves. Psychologist Richard Hycner warns the novice of phenomenological research that the aim of the investigator is nothing less than “the reconstruction of the subject’s inner world of experience” (Hycner, R. 1985: 291).

Likewise, van Manen (1990) alerts us of the essential value of this approach:

...the deeper goal, which is always the thrust of phenomenological research, remains oriented to asking the question of what is the nature of this phenomenon [(community)] as an essentially human experience” (p.62) “We are less concerned with the factual accuracy of an account than with the plausibility of the account — whether it is true to our living sense of it. (van Manen 1990:65)

The inherent changing nature of social phenomena may be due to the unpredictable, evolving and continuously changing social situations as we encounter them in our daily lives. In that context, the path for grand generalizations and predictability may seem truncated if we seek to meaningfully study social phenomena, the kind of research that studies people, and especially people working together as One in the framework of Follett’s permanent integration process. In this respect, sociologist Bent Flyvbjerg (*Making Social Science Matter*, Cambridge University Press, 2006) makes the case for a case study emphasizing its value and appropriateness for a meaningful social science research that remains “faithful” to the social matters themselves:
There does not and cannot exist predictive theory in social science. Social science has in the final instance nothing else to offer than concrete, context-dependent knowledge, and the case study is especially well suited to produce this knowledge. Predictive theory and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs. Concrete-dependent knowledge is therefore more valuable than the vain search for predictive theories and universals. (Flyvbjerg 2006:73)

g. On the neighborhood associations and the people interviewed

As far as the area chosen to conduct the interviews and observe the public meetings, the Highland Square neighborhood seemed like a great “laboratory” of diverse groups of people, due to its salient heterogeneous character—from architecture, to people’s occupations, criminal patterns; to its intrinsic residential-business neighborhood dynamic. The Highland Square neighborhood is characterized by its bohemian population which boomed in density in the mid-1950s rubber industrial Akron. A historical and dense urban area of West Akron, the Highland Square arises as a distinct artistic neighborhood of eclectic population which homes neighborhood grown entertainment options from restaurants to coffee shops and movie theaters. Its people seem to be from a wide range of socioeconomic, educational and religious backgrounds as well as different sexual orientations and ethnical origins. The Highland Square area brings together a diverse population comprised by people from different ethnic origins, races, educational backgrounds, and employment situations as compared with the larger city of Akron neighborhoods.

The researcher interviewed 23 people from four neighborhood improvement groups which were created at different times around particular issues striking the neighborhood and its inhabitants, such as crime and safety, historical development, arts and recreation, planning and zoning, cleaning and trash pick-up, the elderly and the children in the
neighborhood, the people in need, among other issues. These four neighborhood associations are located in the west side of Akron, Ohio, a Rust Belt city on its way to economic recovery. The area at hand is situated at the edge of the inner city area. A former rubber industrial city, Akron used to pride itself for its abundance of jobs and flourishing economy for many decades up until the 1970s. Loss in economic activity brought a loss in prosperity and decay in inner Mid-Western American cities.\textsuperscript{12} Akron was not the exception to such socio-economic transition which involved not only loss of jobs and employment but also a great deal of population, who migrated along with the jobs to more promising destinations.

Therefore, the groups interviewed reside in a “decayed” inner city neighborhood characterized by a mixture of people (employed and unemployed) and activities. Its main attribute is that—although a residential area—businesses and residences are kept intact from the “good old times” where the neighborhood used to be a very attractive and charming area in town. Its true neighborhood “flare” is the small businesses in walking distance from residences, and its adorned Victorian housing architecture. This area is comprised by sub areas where criminal activities are continuous while other areas are considered by its inhabitants as “safer.”

In the whole, this inner neighborhood is an area in transition that has spots of blighted housing while it also has impeccable residences. It has a mixture of traditional families and single parents, businesses locally owned and supported and the chain-stores. The arts and recreation are aspects characteristic of the Highland Square as well as a very concerned population for the future of their “beautiful” neighborhood. For the purpose of

protecting the identities of the participants and to remain confidential to the groups and subjects of this study, the author has replaced the real names of people and groups for fake ones. These four groups will be referred as: “Miraflores,” “Pagoda,” “Campinha,” and “Manizales.”

h. Protocol used

The researcher interviewed twenty-three active neighbors of the Highland Square area in Akron, Ohio. Furthermore, she attended and observed five public meetings of a handful of neighborhood organizations. The neighborhood groups were selected following a snowballing technique and under the prerogative that the groups’ main aim was to engage in joint efforts that seek to improve any aspect of their neighborhood. Some active neighbors chose to voluntarily participate in the individual interviews and share their stories of neighborhood improvement experiences with the researcher in a one-time face to face interview. The snowballing technique recruitment approach allowed the researcher to gain an entrée to the different groups, and to conduct individual interviews with the active citizens, as well as to observe some of the groups’ public meetings.

Story-telling appeared as the most adequate approach to capture the essence of people’s experiences, through their freely narration of experiences. Therefore, the design of the thirteen open-ended questions (see Appendix B) was done very carefully and keeping in mind that the purpose of those questions was to get people to tell their stories --to narrate them, to describe them—in the most meaningful way to them rather than aiming at any conceptualization or definition.
The researcher’s entrée to the different Highland Square neighborhood groups was a personal acquaintance who lived in the area and directly introduced the researcher to one of the group’s leader, who opened the door to different neighborhood group members within that area.

Through an interview approach, the investigator gained an insight to people’s experiences of collaboration toward the improvement and/or revitalization of their neighborhood. As abovementioned the phenomenological approach guided this research endeavor of comparing people’s experiences—as the neighbors related to them—with the theorists’ ideas (Follett and Kemmis) of “community as a process” and neighborliness as evolving political practices. In other words, how these active neighbors view this process and how they feel about being part of it constitutes the core of this research question hence guiding the entire research process before us.

To get to these specific points the researcher utilized a carefully prepared open-ended interview questionnaire, the point of which was to encourage reflection about the experience rather than elicit or evaluate specific aspects or items of their lived experiences. The questions sought people’s descriptions as they got in touch with their experiences. Attending the groups’ meetings aimed at observing people’s dynamics and interactions and deliberation as a whole, as a “process,” from up close.

The following questions guided the interview process with the 23 participants. The researcher digitally recorded and safely stored the interview recordings. Some follow-up questions came up at certain moments of each person’s stories as needed, depending on specific aspects of the story telling process and using the researcher’s judgment:13

---

13 See Appendix C for the detailed interview transcriptions that these questions prompted.
1) What neighborhood group do you belong and for how long?

2) How did you become a member of this group?

3) What usually happens at your meetings?

4) Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you describe what it’s been like working on that issue?

5) Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an issue? How have you dealt with it?

6) How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your neighborhood?

7) Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?

8) What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader?

9) If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your neighborhood group, what would you say?

10) For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you?

11) Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or agencies?

12) What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst?

13) What does “community” mean to you?

The author aimed at formalizing the research question from ordinary people’s definition of community. There is an aspect of quantity and quality in their
conceptualizations that goes beyond what the theorists have said. In the process, the researcher learned things that would have not learnt from the theorists or the numbers alone. In that sense, “judgment” has become one of the most crucial assets from doing interpretive analysis, an essential skill for the professional researcher and scholar. Theory takes the concepts apart, but it should be a matter of the grassroots understanding of the theories and what the theorists say, or “Practice Illuminating Theory” (Ralph Hummel 1998).

This research is a process of discovering what is out there in contrast with nailing things down forever. Follett’s tennis match metaphor illustrates this point: the game is the process; the rulebook is the definition of the game, the laws. The game is the actual playing of the ball –the process in which two or more people play the game—rather than the rules.

Since—as mentioned above—the unit of analysis is in effect people’s ideas, the researcher is looking for sameness rather than for differences; for what Follett calls “one consciousness,” the self-and-through-others, the unity or group idea, sameness in different events. It aims at building a concept from people’s viewpoints while attempting to bring meaning to an often taken-for-granted idea—that of “community.” The central question is, again: how does the concept come into being? The researcher looks at the idiosyncrasies of the people who refer to it, and her stance is addressing the problem of method. However, method is a matter of authority -- “Says who?” as the New Yorker would ask. Husserl talked about intersubjectivity in 1840 and from then till today we have benefited from the dialogue that Heidegger, Schutz, Berger and Luckmann, and Hummel enriched and expanded. It is a case study illuminating theory, which means that
the meaning of “community” changes when the context changes; people’s perspectives change over a thing that is accessible to all the participants through intersubjectivity, a shared world of things and symbols.14

i. Interpretative explication: from “fused” ideas to “clear” themes

Werner Pluhar (1987, Kant’s Critique of Judgment) prompts the social researcher to undertake the task of bringing clarity and distinctness to the fused perceptions, beliefs and ideas as the people apprehend them. However, in order to permeate into people’s worlds the researcher must remain faithful to the reality itself as experienced by the subjects. That is, the way to go about this task – the method— would permit the researcher to capture the reality in its intrinsic dynamic. By staying put to “the beginning of all things” – to the experiences themselves as lived and re-created by the people through storytelling—the researcher may be able to start building theory from the ground up, from the dynamism of people’s practices as they perceive them at first hand.

In a similar vein van Manen alerts us that “the insight into the essence of phenomenon involves a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience.” (van Manen 1990:77)

In his Researching Lived Experience van Manen leads us to question many taken-for-granted assumptions and concepts that most people unquestionably adopt. His example of “time” as an experience that most people could easily refer to in their daily lives would easily parallel the experience of “community.” Everyone has a notion of what community [time] is. What is more difficult to actually come to a “reflective determination and explication” of what community is; that is, the determination and explication of meaning

of community. Therein lies the difference between the pre-reflective –lived--
understanding of the meaning of community that people may have, and their reflective
grasp of phenomenological structure of the lived meaning of community. (van Manen
1990:77)

The first step for interpreting interview “data” is to identify the specific themes as
they appear in people’s narratives. To undertake this task it is imperative that the
subjects’ specific contexts and languages are taken as the primary source of information
for the interpretation process. In this sense—one ought to reiterate—their words and their
expressions become the raw material for a meaningful study about people, where “the
person” and “the group” present their perceptions, as fused and mingled as they might
appear to the researcher.

van Manen makes the point that meanings are multi-dimensional and multi-layered
which precludes them from being grasped in a single definition. The main reason for this
is that the essence of a phenomenon is never simple or one-dimensional: “Human science
meaning can only be communicated textually—by way of organized narrative or prose”
(van Manen 1990:78). To come to an understanding of the underlying meaning of the text
van Manen recommends thinking of the phenomenon at hand—in this case the
phenomenon of community—as “meaning units,” “structures of meaning,” or “themes.”
(van Manen 1990:78) In this sense, thematic analysis begins to help the researcher’s main
task of bringing clarity and order to fused and mingled perceptions of the experience of
community. Thematic analysis consists of bringing to the fore the theme or themes that
the person’s narratives symbolize as s/he expresses them in his/her own terms and with
all the emotions that telling a story or recalling an experience may entail.
Phenomenological themes are thus structures of experience. So the process of coming up with themes and attempting to explicate the phenomenon inevitably brings the researcher closer to its essence or “the experiential structures that make up that experience.” (van Manen 1990:79)

Interpreting lived experience is a discovery, “a free act of seeing meaning” (79) where the researcher is bound by her own lived experiences, culture and background to interpreting a story. Far from a rulebook, interpretation is a creative act of discovery, a process. In this sense, a phenomenological theory of inquiry inexorably aims at discovering the in-betweens, the taken-for-granted assumptions regarding the phenomenon at hand. In effect, this research intends to be subjective, or –more appropriately—*inter*-subjective.

In light of the abovementioned epistemological and methodological frameworks this dissertation pursued two levels of interpretation of people’s experiences of community process. The first stage –a lower level of interpretation—aimed at documenting and describing the persons’ own interpretations regarding their neighborhood improvement group experiences (see Chapter IV). The second –higher—level of interpretation aimed at holding people’s themes (their interpretations) against the main theorists’ ideas of what they believe constitutes community, which appears on the theoretical framework section (see Chapter V). Ultimately the whole project aims at looking for ideas that cover community better than the rest of experts alone. In the main the discussion critiques Follett. Finally, the second and higher level of interpretation led the researcher to yet another stage of discovery—what is best thought out as “Practice Illuminating Theory” (Ralph Hummel, 1998).
Some difficulties of using this protocol

Epistemologists agree on that every interpretation is always subject to re-interpretation. So expectations to find one single answer to thoughts and ideas are fallacious. Indeed, as long as the interviewees’ underlying voices remain “the beginning” or start point of the research there is not such a thing as “right” or “wrong” interpretation. Rather, there exists as many different interpretations as many people undertake the task of interviewing and interpreting texts.

Interpreting people’s ideas may be an exhausting and lengthy process as it may take a great deal of effort and thinking to determine what to include and what to leave out of the thematic analysis or explication. One may painstakingly ponder before each narrative and
each theme for hours, reading them over and over, attempting to come to a judgment of what deserves to be included in the interpretation and what needs to be filtered out.

What to take into consideration for the central case of the study and what is to be left out emerge as very hard-to-ignore quandaries. Meanwhile, therein lies the richness of this approach as an intersubjective logic of inquiry where the subject-researcher is part of the interpretive process. Whether to bring an idea or a thought to the main interpretation process; deciding what to incorporate and what not to include as stories and ideas, is a matter of the researcher’s own judgment and gut feeling that would indicate to her that such decision may bring greater internal coherence than others to the issue at hand. The main dilemma through this process of carefully selecting themes was the feeling that by no means a single idea, belief, story of the interviewees should be left aside.

Therefore when selecting the themes that arose most often in people’s narratives the researcher undertook similar paths at each round of not clearly knowing *a priori* how to proceed in face of a specific idea. It was a matter of feeling, of a hunch, of a gut feeling – my culture, background, past, present, my own being; in short, who I am-- regarding each single idea, each issue brought up by the interviewees. For example, when attempting to explicate a theme, say, “recruitment,” the researcher found very many ideas behind it, behind a simple word, “recruitment.” How would the researcher know that she had picked the right word? Why recruitment, and why not “reaching out”? Or caring for others as one aspect of recruitment? Then, caring could be in the same “category” with “togetherness,” “relationships,” etc. When is the researcher supposed to bring all those other related topics up? She decided that the quotations and comments would serve that
specific purpose. It was, again, a judgment call for the researcher of these social phenomena.

In a nutshell, attempting to circumscribe the entire array of many and very rich sets of ideas to a handful of themes became more difficult a task than what the researcher had foreseen ahead of time, before she started the interpretation stages. It took her many hours of staring at the narratives, going back and forth and finally deciding how to cut the original richness. She had to, in a way, cut the richness of the “pure” (original) narratives. However, she painfully recognized the need to come up, not with 10 themes, but probably with 25, in order to begin to capture all the ideas of the people interviewed.

The researcher unmistakably found that the neighbors interviewed had gone ways ahead and beyond M.P. Follett, D. Kemmis and all others. In some respects people had not addressed Follett’s issues the same way as she did, though many neighbors did and in a greater depth. It all required the researcher’s judgment.

Without doubt, for each person the researcher found up to ten quotes illustrating one theme, but she had to read over and over to see what could better –more significantly, more essentially—capture and convey a theme. Clustering people’s ideas in categories became a very hard and artificial process for the researcher. It seemed artificial because the themes were all part of each other in a sense. It was just like Follett’s description of community process. The researcher herself came up with five points of Follett’s theory because all the aspects of “community as a process” were truly intermingled, part of each other, inseparable in her writings. That is how these narratives seem to be. Reflecting on these “fortuitous” events, the researcher decided that that was exactly what the endeavor of phenomenological social science research ought to be: to respect people’s ideas, even
if they seem fused and indistinct, rather than bringing premature conceptual clarity to the
“confused” and fused ideas of people.\textsuperscript{15} It is a full circle. Life itself is mingled and fused
and the best way to maximize that richness is by doing interpretation of meanings, of
people’s experiences. A research process that separates the groups from their contexts of
reality in order to “come to grips with research” is simply wasting away the essence of
community. That would be a process of banal research simply because the people
“subject of study” are being left outside of the study itself, rather than integrating them in
a “fair”, well deserved—that of the author of a story, the doer of a life, a creator’s creation
— manner. For social science research to be truly democratic (to be about people), it
needs to include the voices of those being studied. Otherwise it would just respond to the
finite mind—a finite lived experience—of a single person, the researcher—who is looking
into the lives and practices of people outside her own world.

Another problem the researcher faced throughout the interpretive stage was the one of
quantity. In reading through all the themes coming up in each person’s narratives she
asked to herself repeatedly, does it really matter whether the theme appears in one or in
fifteen people’s narratives? She concluded that it did not really matter. So, rather than
asking what themes came up the most and which are the ones that only came up a few
times or only once, may tell us absolutely nothing about the essence of the theme. The
essence seemed to the researcher more important than the repetition of a theme or the
number of times that people mentioned it/them. The researcher thus deemed appropriate
that all she needed to care about was what people were telling her; if it is one person only
or the 23, does it matter? What is the point in looking at what themes repeat rather than

\textsuperscript{15} See Pluhar’s Introduction to Kant’s \textit{Critique of Judgment}. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub.
looking at what themes come up? Max van Manen talks about a “theme” as the essence of a thought or an idea. However, in the process, the researcher was not sure whether one theme would become “more” essential than others due to its repetition. Its only appearance in the text, in the narratives, was enough for the researcher, that is, if it came up once it was already significant. And then she kept moving on to the next. Of course, most of the themes reappeared in people’s stories though the researcher made the choice of not reading too much into why some people did not mention some themes that, say, another person—and perhaps that sole person—brought up.

The need to use interpretivism resides in that it is a more suitable approach, posture, attitude, towards the study of the social—living—world. This approach seemed the one that most openly lets the reality and its prolegomena talk back to us, the social researchers. That is, it seems like the method that least distorts what happens out there in social phenomena, giving a fair chance to the subjects to have their expert say—from their practical knowledge—considered. There is a distortion—no doubt—from reality to interpretation. However, the interpretive approach allows the researcher not to lose touch with reality while bringing to the fore meanings, processes, and change, that is, social phenomena’s inherent essence, its nature and its intrinsic dynamism; what gives life to reality.

Another problem emanated from what at first seemed like “arbitrariness” of the research approach. The selection of what goes into a concept is arbitrary, but not entirely random: i.e., in physical science, the “thing” must fit into the intuition's dimensions of time, space and magnitude; while in meaningful social science of meanings, they must fit into social time, social space (sense of place), and signifying and meaning. Max van
Manen talks about “existential themes” as the fundamental aspects that relate to all human beings. These could help the social researcher reflect on a common, shared, ground of human beingness: “lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), and lived human relation (relationality)” (1990: 101)

Interpretation of social phenomena ought to have “internal coherence” in regards to the person’s context: his/her story, his/her narratives as far as the researcher can tell. In his introduction to *Interpreting Politics* (New York: New York University Press, 1987) Michael T. Gibbons ascertains that

One aim of interpretive theory is to uncover the internal coherence amongst ideas, beliefs, intentions, actions and practices, to show how he understanding of participants makes sense in terms of institutions and relationships within which they are located. (Gibbons 1987: 3- 4)

Therefore the researcher decided that each person’s idiosyncrasies marked the internal coherence of that person’s own inner world of experience; world that the researcher was seeking to discover. Next chapter interprets the participants’ inner worlds of experience.

k. A note on the numbers

On occasion, the author may count how often a specific idea appears. Use of terms like “many,” “most,” “all,” “several” is, however not intended to indicate relative importance of an idea in a given setting, which may be an assumption typical of conventional study. The point here is not how many people in a population agree with an idea as a descriptor of the community experience, but whether such an idea appears at all. If an idea contrary to or in accord with Mary Parker Follett’s emerges out of the interviews, it is taken to demonstrate that non-experts, people with experience but not
scholars are able to come up with an idea about their lives that may also be used by an “expert.” The issue is not how many people support, or deprecate an idea. The issue is whether the idea is meaningful in both places, or whether an idea can illuminate theory because it gives concepts content, or because the idea helps recover content otherwise lost from a concept.

1. Standards of validation

This dissertation follows Alfred Schutz’s criteria to test phenomenological research. In this vein – and borrowing from Max Weber – Schutz refers to the relevance issue and to the adequacy issue; the latter he subdivides into causal adequacy and meaning adequacy. How an event comes to be must be explained both as to its causes and the meaning these causes have for participants. (Schutz 1967:229-236; Weber 1968)

After pursuing the interpretation stages of people’s narratives described above, the researcher will question whether or not she is to be satisfied with the logic of the explication process. Schutz argues that our role as researchers of social phenomena is to inquire whether our research holds both causal adequacy and meaning adequacy. On the one hand, causal adequacy is a reconstruction of the causes of the events without which the phenomenon would not have arguably come into being. On the other, is the question of how participants might have interpreted that progress (or the experiences of the participants in their own terms)? The matter at hand is: what explains specific actions? In causal adequacy the researcher seeks for plausible sequence of logically linked explanations. In meaning adequacy she looks for the structures of meaning. She ought to ask: “if I take this piece out of the explanation, does it make logical sense in that culture?
Meaning adequacy is to be guaranteed by getting back to the participants of the research and asking them whether the researcher captured the essence of their meanings. If the answer is positive, then the researcher is able to determine that her research actually depicts people’s experiences more or less faithfully. Therefore, people’s feedback on the interpretation defines the meaning adequacy of the interpretations that the researcher had undertaken.

In traditional social science research, the scientists rarely utilize concepts and terms that have any meaning for the “subjects” of study themselves. This may be because they use a different, alien, language to the people in direct contact with reality. However, what is the relevance of abstract scientific terms defined by experts to real life?

The relevance issue becomes of importance in phenomenological research because the terms and meanings of concepts are left up to the participants themselves who have the actual experience with the phenomenon at hand. They are thus able to judge pertinently the relevance of the concepts in connection with the actual social reality. Those meanings would be of interest to the interpretive researcher who would later appropriate the concepts as so constituted by the informants – the “subjects” of research – for the study of social reality. In that sense, the concepts and terms would be relevant as long as the people in direct touch with the experience so confirm it. Likewise, the research would be “irrelevant” if the researcher has misapprehended or misinterpreted the subjects’ stories and interviews. In the latter case, the investigator would fail to understand what the people are meaning thus misrepresenting and misinterpreting reality.

What follows represents an attempt to dealing with all the issues discussed in this chapter, especially the collective construction of a concept that is – by definition and by
practice – a collective construct. Chapter IV deals with the first interpretive stage of the informants’ stories and interviews to come up with the essence of the concept. Thus the idea is to come up with a concept that has meaning to them as the first-hand “knowers” of the reality of “community.” The relevance issue gains importance in defining the concept at hand in the terms of the people who live in a community or have had the experience of being part of a neighborhood improvement group. This move aims at bringing validity to the conceptualization of community as the researcher attempts to capture people’s meanings through the extraction of themes through thematic interpretation and explication.

Chapter V discusses the second – more abstract – interpretive phase of this inquiry where the researcher attempts to illuminate the theorist’s conceptualization of community (M. P. Follett’s “community as a process”) with the people’s themes as they emerged in Chapter IV. The purpose is to come up with a conceptualization of community that is better grounded in reality, that is, more “valid” in the sense of being faithfully depicted through the people’s understandings of the lived phenomenon of community. It seeks to bring a sense of “reality” and grounding to unfounded theoretical abstractions. Practice may thus be able to illuminate theory and finally bring content to a concept usually empty when taken out of context. The context of “community” may be closer to the collective practices of the people than to the methodological individualism of the isolated researcher.
CHAPTER IV

DATA INTERPRETATION

This dissertation seeks to answer the question how do people experience community?

The author undertook the task of interpreting people’s answers, which became the “data,” with a prior literature survey on the concept of community. This follows the definition of what seemed one of the most promising existing community theories, Mary Parker Follett’s process theory, which also makes claims on behalf of the community experience as potentially leading to political participation in ever larger political units and eventually to the State.

Thus this chapter reflects in depth on people’s contributions to the theoretical concept of community. Here the researcher examines the tenet that theory ought to learn from practice through people’s experiences --“practice illuminating theory” (Ralph Hummel, 1998). This section both asserts that people do have the capacity to contribute to concept

---

1 In this essay Professor Ralph Hummel gives a counter-intuitive answer to the question of whether ordinary people can contribute with anything valuable to theory building. Following influential philosophers of knowledge—such as Husserl, Heidegger, and Kant—Dr. Hummel argues that we are all too familiar with the typical emphasis on theory shedding light to practice. However we barely stop and think of what practice can teach to theory. (Ralph Hummel, “Practice illuminating theory,” Administrative Theory and Praxis, June 1998, Vol. 20, No. 2, 150-158) The research at hand makes use of Dr.
formation while it harvests pre-concept content from 13 questions asked of 23 neighborhood group members; the participants were members of the four neighborhood associations of the Highland Square neighborhood in Akron, Ohio: Miraflores, Pagoda, Campinha, and Manizales. The researcher attended five public meetings of the mentioned groups. People’s narratives were interpreted in light of answering the final question: What do people involved in community have to say that might change the experts' views of community? To that end, the researcher attempted to re-construe reality as seen by the people she interviewed. Furthermore, she proceeded to raise some of the ideas as they came out from people’s stories up to the next level of abstraction: that of specific themes. Themes were grouped from clustering original ideas according to similarities and differences. Themes will later be compared with Follett’s characteristics of community as a process (Chapter V).

This chapter seeks to vindicate the promise of “practice illuminating theory” by assessing in which ways people’s experiences may contribute to the concept formation of “community.” In what follows, Figure 4.1(a) displays the steps followed in coming up with people’s themes, from the raw narratives through ideas and final themes. Figure

Hummel’s essay to make a case for the practices of community as important experiences that may shed light to Follett’s process theory.

See Chapter III for a specific description of the neighborhood associations and the people interviewed as well as for the methodological approach utilized in this dissertation.
4.1(b) schematizes the posterior interpretation stage. It inquires whether people’s themes may illuminate Follett’s conceptualization of community.  

(a) First interpretation level: people’s interpretations of their own experiences

(b) Second interpretation level: people’s interpretations versus Follett’s theory of community process

Figure 4.1: Interpretation stages

---

3 See Appendices C and D for the interview transcriptions and an example of the whole process, from the raw narratives to the emergence of clear themes.
1. Bringing clarity to fused perceptions: from the people’s narratives to clusters of meaning and themes

The interpretive explication process aims at capturing the essence of people’s ideas and meanings regarding “community” as they relate to them, in their own terms.

The researcher interviewed 23 neighbors from five neighborhood associations of the Highland Square, West Akron, Ohio, and she attended five public meetings of some of the neighborhood groups.4

The process the researcher pursued to come up with the following three interpretive sections can be best depicted by the example that can be found in the Appendix D of this dissertation. The researcher went through a sequence of steps for analyzing or explicating interview data. Authors such as Max van Manen (1990) and Richard Hycner (1985) offer a systematized approach to interpreting interview narratives. The ones that this research has followed constitute an adaptation from these main authors. However, van Manen’s more general approach to dealing with interview data5 seemed the most beneficial for interpreting the interviews of this case study.

The researcher pursued an in-depth interview process guided by a set of open-ended questions. The questions – as explained in Chapter III— aimed at recovering people’s

---

4 See Chapter III for an explanation of the methodological approach utilized in this dissertation. See Appendix C for a full transcription of the participants’ responses, and Appendix D, for an example of the process from the raw narratives to the clusters of meaning and to the final selection of the larger themes.

5 In his 1990 work Researching lived experience Max van Manen suggests three different approaches to interpreting interview data. The selective reading approach seemed most appropriate in this research. (van Manen 1990: 92-93) See Chapter III, Methodology, for a thorough explanation of the process followed.
experiences in their fullest senses and meanings in their own terms. All this is to make explicit that which cannot be made explicit: life.

In trying to remain true to people’s own terms, the researcher digitally recorded each interview and group meetings, with prior authorization from the subjects. She then transcribed the interviews one by one, adding to each person’s narratives the corresponding side notes that the researcher had taken during the face to face encounter. Gestures, emotions, body language, voice tones and language in general dominated the face to face interviews. The researcher decided that these constituted an important part of people’s meanings and of the very story-telling dynamic.

Following the advice of well written psychologist Hycner, and pf pedagogue van Manen, the investigator decided to proceed within certain caution so that her own theoretical framework did not interfere with people’s narratives during both the interview process and the first stage of interpretation. Therefore “bracketing out” her framework and assumptions (i.e., Follett’s community as a process; the researcher’s own ideas; etc.) seemed mandatory to remain true to the phenomenon itself. If the researcher’s role is to be a mirror whereupon the subjects can reflect themselves freely, that is, for the researcher to be able to illuminate –through questions—the people’s inner world of experiences, she needed to make the effort of leaving the theoretical framework aside during this first interpretation stage.

After interviewing the people, the researcher listened to each interview “for a sense of the whole” (Hycner 1985:281) several times, and then continued re-reading each individual narrative. The purpose was to get a feel for people’s ideas in the context of

---

6 See Appendix A for the University of Akron Institutional Review Board approval.
their own narratives; for which listening to both the verbal and the non-verbal expressions was very useful. As indicated above, people’s intonations, pauses, emphases, and emotions constituted the researcher’s journal that helped her later find people’s units of meaning⁷—their specific ideas regarding different aspects of group process.

From ideas and perceptions to larger themes

The first level of interpretation aimed at documenting and describing the persons’ own interpretations of their experiences of community.

Once the narratives were down on paper, the researcher had the chance to revisit them over and over in the attempt to survey the themes, ideas, aspects that were coming up more often, and the ones that came up the least. Although a matter of significance—the sole mentioning of a theme would give the researcher the idea that such theme was important enough for the person—she also decided to define what were the themes or issues that came up repeatedly, and which were the themes that appeared only once. That may be somehow telling of the issue at hand. In the scheme of things, the number of times that a theme showed did not matter as much to the researcher as the sole appearance of a theme or its emphasis in a person’s narrative, or what other themes it would evoke.

Van Manen reminds us that phenomenological themes “are not objects of generalization” and that they are more like “knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through meaningful wholes.” He defines themes as the essence of a matter, as sense of focus that inquires about its

⁷ Richard Hycner speaks of seeking for the “units of general meaning” to refer to the process of getting at the essence of a meaning expressing in words, phrases, etc.—a condensation of what the participant has said, the essence of the narrative. (Hycner, 1985: 282)
meaning, a form of capturing a phenomenon, a sense we are able to make of something:

“Themes are the stars that make up the universe of meaning we live through” (90). So a phenomenological theme is much more a fuller description of the structure of a lived experience than a singled-out statement, definition or category (92). By using themes, the reader can see the background against which the explicit stands out.

In this context, the researcher committed herself to isolating thematic statements through what van Manen calls a “selective reading approach,” in which

...we listen to or read a text several times and ask, What statement(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described? These statements we then circle, underline or highlight. (van Manen1990: 93)

In the research at hand the investigator went after the statements that seemed essential or revealing about the experience of being part of community process. As van Manen suggested in his own work, could the researcher select some sentences or part-sentences that seemed thematic of the experience of community? (94) Through the selective reading approach the researcher came up with the following examples (see below: “Example” and “Possible meaning”) that coincidentally and at first glance, bring Follett’s theory of community to the fore.8 This is hence an example of how the author utilized the selecting reading approach by beginning with the raw narratives up to succinct themes selecting the quotations that captured the core meaning of their thoughts — the essence of the participants’ experiences:

---

8 In other words – and as a first attempt to illuminate theory— within the following selected quotations appear to lie elements of the theory of community process, which will be discussed further in the next chapter (Meta-Interpretation).
Example 1: “Everyone brings something unique to the board because of their unique personalities, so when they are not there you don’t get to hear and feel what they have to offer.” (Stella) Possible meaning: “uniqueness”

Example 2: “Because we are a group we are taken more seriously than a single person would. I think that the person alone isn’t considered as valuable as the group.” (Tracie, from Miraflres) Possible meaning: “groupness;” “power-to”

Example 3: “You want people to know about the Highland Square neighborhood as a gathering place; it is not the buildings, it’s not the historic preservation, it’s the people.” (Eric, from Pagoda) Possible meaning: “gathering around a place.”

Example 4: “It is more a social event as well as just a real meeting, somehow of a challenge to keep it on track. But since everyone has their heart on the same place, it does go on.” (Chris) Possible meaning: “values;” “group’s definition of the common good.”

Example 5: “Part of the problem is that we are a grassroots organization with no big money behind. We have a lot of big hearts and souls and drive, and lots of wonderful ideas and we work toward building a business plan and putting all the pieces together.” (Juliet, from Pagoda) Possible meaning: “creative experience.”

After isolating thematic statements for each person, the researcher read them over to capture what themes appeared at all or/and recurred, attempting to boil the themes down to a maximum of ten or fifteen per person so that it would be easier to work with clear and distinct ideas. Next, the investigator read across people’s themes and selected what seemed the most essential themes for each person. She then reflected on the themes that
people brought up more emphatically and the themes which people mentioned either once or twice.

It is worth noticing that the researcher aimed at capturing the raw comments focusing on the manner in which the person interpreted his or her own experiences. In order to be able to know what was essential from what was not as primordial, the researcher invoked people’s own words as the vehicle that would best capture their experiences.

She then began to isolate themes by writing them down, reading them several times and by going back through the person’s comments that illuminated each specific theme. She then moved on to the next person attempting to capture how his/her quotes would shed light in the common idea or theme under discussion. After going through this procedure with a dozen of people, the researcher became sensitized to the issues that came up most strongly, and the painstaking task became a little better known to her. She then began to recognize the themes that kept emerging over and over among the different people, from the first to the last person. The more the researcher read the themes and the comments, the more ideas kept coming up. She decided to build clusters from the comments as a way to describe the major themes from which to derive meaning – how do the interviewed people interpret those meanings?9

After getting through all the themes, the researcher clustered in seeking coherence across all the individuals’ themes. She then began the crusade of differentiating the themes that were typical from the ones which were not. That led her to define the themes that seemed most important, most essential, to explicate the phenomenon of community from the people’s viewpoints themselves. Crucial questions seemed to be: What is the

---

9 The process of interpreting raw data through clusters of meaning and themes is illustrated in Appendix D of this dissertation.
essence of their experiences? What is the key of their experiences that make the phenomenon of community what it is? The researcher thus came up with eight broad themes which she illuminated with a sample of people’s comments on each theme’s essential character.

This interpretation process became the guide of the research itself. The people did the speaking, the sharing of their experiences and meanings. The researcher simply did the sorting out — inherently a matter of judgment. Judgment in sum is defined as a matter of fit.

For the second level of interpretation the researcher brought back her theoretical framework – the one that she had left aside during the previous and more concrete interpretation stage — and made an attempt to hold the selected themes that emerged from the people’s narratives against the theorists’ ideas. The goal was to reflect the ways in which –borrowing from Ralph Hummel’s 1998 essay — practice could illuminate theory. The researcher’s interpretation process was in that instance needed to establish the ways in which people’s interpretations were similar to or different from what a main process theorist, Mary P. Follett, had enunciated. In that sense, people’s interpretations of their experiences would bring life to theory. The researcher thus pursued an interpretation of an interpretation.10

2. Lower interpretive stage—the neighbors and their power-knowledge (practical)

This section discusses the themes that emerged from people’s stories as they related to their experiences of being part of neighborhood improvement groups. This level of interpretation is the most concrete of all levels because it emerges directly from the

10 Cf., Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* at B93; and Heidegger’s *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Richard Taft tr.. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1993 [1929].
interview process with the people. This is a stage of people’s interpretations of their own experiences.

The researcher interpreted the interviewees stories and condensed them in eight themes that clearly emerged as the essence of people’s experiences in neighborhood improvement groups. In an attempt to remain faithful to people’s own terms, the researcher used -- as much as possible -- people exact words and expressions in order to synthesize their experiences into concrete and meaningful themes for the people. The themes were thus shaped with the voices of the neighbors in mind and in their terms as they expressed them in the interview process.

The emergent themes were: 1) Reaching in—reaching out: the group as neighborhood leader, pulling people together; 2) Empowering of the whole—working together and accomplishing what would be impossible by oneself alone; 3) Practical politics: “a give and take”; 4) Learning/knowing as a whole: new –group- knowledge means power; 5) Finding freedom in and through the group: the whole as more than the sum of its parts—person becomes a human being in being-with-others; 6) Uniqueness within diversity: ownership and shared pride for the place and its people; 7) The larger good: pursued noble cause of the group; 8) Personal changes through the group and interpersonal benefits: friendships, bonding. These themes will be discussed next.11 Table 4.1 “Themes per person” displays the themes as they emerged in each person’s interview and later interpretation process done by the researcher. Following Table 4.1 there is a thorough

---

11 The reader may notice that one issue was omnipresent throughout the narratives and themes: that of the common good. Even though a separate category for it has been created, one should notice its permanent recurrence throughout all other themes and throughout all narratives.
explication of each of the eight themes enunciated above in light of people’s specific stories and examples.

Table no.4.1: Themes per person

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paul</th>
<th>Tracie</th>
<th>Kathy</th>
<th>Stella</th>
<th>Gary</th>
<th>Jennifer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reach out, group as neigh leader,</td>
<td>Bringing life to neigh—group as neigh leader</td>
<td>Networking; force of the group to deal with crime; making neigh a better place to live</td>
<td>with others change is possible; reach out; worthwhile experience</td>
<td>work together and accomplish what would be impossible by oneself</td>
<td>larger goal; protection; pursuit of a noble cause; neighborhood; passion for life; caring for the whole brings people together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>being able to be oneself; freedom, acceptance, respect, no prejudices or stereotypes, no fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities, benefits</td>
<td>Leader as group’s glue</td>
<td>Knowing-learning opportunities through group</td>
<td>Uniqueness within diversity</td>
<td>sitting down and deliberating; mutual learning; benefits of coming together</td>
<td>diversity, honor and pride; information, knowledge, opportunities and possibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreements—disagreements</td>
<td>Collaboration, deliberation</td>
<td>Organization, strategies, majority rules</td>
<td>practical politics, non-confrontational philosophy; respect and recognition</td>
<td>learning to work with others; define issues in neighbors’ terms; legitimacy; democracy</td>
<td>belonging; caring; selflessness’ offering, giving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Togetherness, Caring</td>
<td>Counting on others, caring, togetherness</td>
<td>Attachment; uniqueness of place &amp; people; coming together as a body</td>
<td>People coming &amp; sticking together; Caring</td>
<td>need to belong, caring; being part of a larger endeavor, watching out</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-betweens, friendships</td>
<td>Bonding; friendships; family-type feelings</td>
<td>Relationships; learning together; genuine joy, friendships; substance; external skepticism</td>
<td>deeper involvement &amp; connectedness; heart in common action; shared pride</td>
<td>It’s about people, relationships, selflessness; fluidity; everyone counts, can make a difference</td>
<td>leave your mark, in the group; future generations; neighbors as caretakers; group as neigh leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanding outwards</td>
<td>Empowerment of the whole</td>
<td>Empowerment of the whole; larger aim</td>
<td>betterment of all; ownership of the place; make a difference</td>
<td>sense of ownership; opening of the self to others</td>
<td>Personal changes through the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>being a human, not a thing; labeling &amp; categorizing is pernicious</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table no.4.1: Themes per person (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chris</th>
<th>Eva</th>
<th>Laura</th>
<th>Amelia</th>
<th>Melanie</th>
<th>Nick</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common concerns; working together is easier than by oneself;</td>
<td>Opening of the eyes toward neighborhood’s deeper needs; give back to the neighborhood; Greater good</td>
<td>Shared sense of care, commitment to the whole; Faith in community building</td>
<td>Sticking up for the whole; difference brings richness</td>
<td></td>
<td>Being part of a much larger group, endeavor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniqueness of the place and its people; fuzzy boundaries; dynamism; growth, change; problems; people is all that matters</td>
<td>eclecticism; neighborliness; joint learning; pull people together; uniqueness</td>
<td>Internal and external collaboration; deliberation; encourage others</td>
<td></td>
<td>Socialization; common concerns and needs; singularity and dynamism of the neighborhood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization, communication; tremendous learning; External appreciation; recognition; disagreements</td>
<td>Open forum, discussion; agreements, disagreements</td>
<td>Learning to relate to others; Grown interaction; selflessness</td>
<td>Learning to be/grow together; Pride in working together</td>
<td>from reaction to partnership w/others</td>
<td>Turning a problem into a solution; give and take; responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>belong; passion; altruism; help others; inner need; desire</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>real champions make things happen</td>
<td>joy when people come together as a whole; appreciation</td>
<td>Positive vs. negative energy</td>
<td>Genuinely caring for others, a coming together; a rejoinder</td>
<td></td>
<td>life makes sense; best time is when sharing with others;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personality driven organizations; good intentions but no time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table no. 4.1: Themes per person (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Martha</th>
<th>Matthew</th>
<th>George</th>
<th>Becky</th>
<th>Eric</th>
<th>Jerry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pertaining;</td>
<td>getting together and start solving issues as a group, much easier and more fun than doing it by yourself; having an idea, sharing it, buying into it, having others be part of it</td>
<td>mission is to improve the neighborhood; being persistent and working as a whole</td>
<td>Wholeness: Most things in the neighborhood are personal; caring; genuine concerns for disadvantaged</td>
<td>preserve uniqueness of the place as a gathering nucleus; right of neighbors to decide the fate of their place; power of the group mightiest force</td>
<td>presence vs. absence; taking responsibility for improvement of the whole; selflessness; ownership of the place; will to improve</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>looking for this in life;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>donating time, volunteer;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>impact in your neighborhood;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improving other people's lives,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>caring for the disadvantaged</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>act maturely;</td>
<td></td>
<td>empowering experience; learning together, caring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>part of a larger aim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consensus in face of conflict;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>compromise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>working together;</td>
<td></td>
<td>sitting down and talking through problems; considering all parts to the whole, to the puzzle; compromise and conversation</td>
<td>Politics, give and take to get things done</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>picking your battles; taking for granted relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helping each other; honesty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wholeness of your life; deep</td>
<td></td>
<td>Knowing others; interacting; ownership in the neighborhood, personal investments, uniqueness of the neighborhood</td>
<td>genuine internal care, process of personalities; friendships with opposing group--different focuses</td>
<td>feelings and lives attached to the place &amp; people; powerful as a whole, as a group; incredibly rewarding and inspirational experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>connection to the place</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundamental rights of citizens</td>
<td></td>
<td>most joy when putting your heart</td>
<td>understanding of the big picture, of the whole; community outreach; Frustratingly rewarding experience</td>
<td>beyond power; friendships, part of something larger, nobler; most rewarding than any invention of the imagination; a discovery; a big family;</td>
<td>fortunate to have others; invested feelings and practices; shared dignity for the place, pride</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

109
Table no.4.1: Themes per person (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kevin</th>
<th>Grant</th>
<th>Peter</th>
<th>Mary</th>
<th>Juliet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>watching people enjoy, freedom, laughing</td>
<td>Legitimacy; public recognition; bureaucracy, dichotomies</td>
<td>make a better place to live; belonging to the group is a matter of interest; freedom of speech</td>
<td>hard time to make of their place what they want it to be; Labeling, categorizing is pernicious</td>
<td>unique area within the city defined by its people; landmarks of the neighborhood need to be preserved;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sense of being home; people coming together for the sake of the common good; determination and dedication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>city does not welcome disagreements; devastating racial practices for the neighborhood; wanting to kill a neighborhood initiative or idea</td>
<td>Grassroots organization with no big money behind; big hearts and souls; work toward building; putting all the pieces together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personality driven org; people put their hearts in what they believe; having no money does not mean not caring; business-like organization; collaboration</td>
<td>Majority rules; explosive, uncontrollable, personalities which don’t deal well with dissent, unfortunate; opportunities and benefits of working with others</td>
<td>Impositions onto the neighborhood; impractical and senseless projects; lack of cooperation among people; disenchantment; strong stomach to deal with politicians</td>
<td>conflict; different opinions; need to speak from a position of power to be listened; betrayal of city officials, undemocratic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy and wisdom are the life of the group; everyone is essential</td>
<td>Listen to others; humbling oneself; sharing; giving; brainstorming together; support, trust; listening; respect for the individual and his/her ideas; soul and heart in the organization</td>
<td>joy when meeting others, collaboration, it’s all about people</td>
<td>cities need to operate through smaller units—neighborhoods; first coming together; most rewarding things that she did in her life; be able to get people involved in your ideas and work together; joy in doing things with others</td>
<td>Gathering and sharing; getting their ideas validated; Love for the neighborhood; great value in diversity, extreme power that we could use to pull the neighborhood together; negative outlook of group; great potential of the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustrating and satisfying at once</td>
<td>inside vs. outside yourself; everlasting changes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Labeling, categorizing is pernicious for speaking; keep human beingness alive</td>
<td>people don’t count as money does; money-driven mayor that makes neighbors feel very uncomfortable; city ignores recommendation from neighbors; city should respect and support the neighborhood; no respect for the human being,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
a. Reaching in—reaching out: group as neighborhood leader – pulling people together

One of the findings is that the participants in this study spoke of “reaching out” and pulling people together as a part of a larger endeavor. The neighbors talked about working toward a more organized setting and structuring of the groups in order to achieve the larger goals of improving an aspect of the neighborhood. Transcending the smaller unit or group outwards to the larger area parallels the feeling of transcending oneself to reach out to others outside myself. One example is that of the following participant, who continuously emphasized in her narratives the group’s concern to include the disadvantaged neighbors of the area:

We decided that we wanted to become a non-profit organization, 501c3, tax exempt status so we could get grants to provide programs for community outreach so that we could work with disadvantaged neighborhood kids in arts and also maintain the Holydays and Arts in the Square (Becky, from Pagoda)

Another common and striking finding among the people interviewed was that of “patrolling” the streets in an attempt to show to the greater area that a group of people would not let crime spread out in their place. In this sense, several neighbors inferred that their aim when patrolling the streets was to make sure that the rest of the neighbors knew what the group was about: caring for others and for a dared area. That is, reaching out to the larger neighborhood in an attempt to become stronger. The members of one specific
neighborhood organization – Miraflores — opted to make sure that they would be “out there,” not afraid of crime, and “sending a message” of fearless action, of ownership of the neighborhood and of a sense of protection for the whole. The issue of “reaching in and reaching out” can be exemplified in one typical aspect that most neighbors referred to: counting on the people of the group to reach outside the group, to recruit new participants through the example, through letting people know the types of activities that the neighborhood group delivered to the larger area; mostly, through showing that the group as a whole had the mission of caring for all. In the following example, the neighbors, conscious of the crime problems in the neighborhood, decided to stick together, pull their strengths together to patrol their neighborhood and to show that by sticking together, by pulling in, they could also pull out a safer neighborhood:

We thought not of patrolling the neighborhood so much but just making a presence and sending a message when we are out…that we are not afraid to be outside, that we are not staying inside. One or two police officers would come with us and we’d just walk the dogs through the different parts of the neighborhood. Some people have had safety problems so we just wanted to make a presence in the neighborhood. (Kathy, from Miraflores)

In reaching in - reaching out, another issue among most the participants was that of being an exemplary model to the rest of the city’s neighborhoods, while making something unconceivable or most difficult, happen for the common benefit of the neighborhood. A neighbor talked about his “best experience” of accomplishing a great deal of work with others in the middle of hostile weather conditions: “it was pouring outside…a rainy, cold, horrible day” (Eric, from Pagoda). However, in the midst of such conditions this neighbor emphasized the spirit of the people participating in this group activity, as they “got out there,” not a few but very many neighbors in that hostile
weather condition to “pull this thing together.” In this sense, it is amazing to see how when people get together to work for something bigger, more precious, more beautiful than what they could individually accomplish—a neighborhood garden—there is nothing that could possibly stop them. Pulling-in the energy of the whole made possible to plant all the thousands and thousands of plants and it only happened because of the strength of all the participants when working together. That is how “pulling-in” people’s efforts resulted “pulling-out” the neighborhood garden, a joint project.

Pulling-in the strength of the group—pulling in the richness and mutual support—to “pull out”, not just a group project, but more important, to pull out an example for the rest of the city. An example that the city mayor even commended the group on. Despite the “horrible” weather conditions, the whole group was out there for many hours—“the whole day”—working on a project for the benefit of the whole seemed like an amazing experience (Eric, from Pagoda). This experience of pulling-in to pull-out for the larger area, signified to many the arriving at a shared sense of awe that until this day it has remained in the minds and hearts of many of them. This—such as other similar experiences of the groups interviewed—was inspirational and everlasting. Getting accomplished their project in hostile conditions made the group stronger, probably stronger than what they could have possible imagined until they did get together to work on that project. Finally, this experience of reaching out to others in the larger area through common work, through a project that the group accomplished, made the participants as individuals feel “great” and, as the following participant exclaimed, it was worth the effort even through most volunteers ended up catching a cold afterwards—an extraordinary experience:
My best experience with the group was the first planting day in the garden [that we had created]. It was pouring outside, we had many thousands of different plants and 77 to 80 volunteers on a cold, rainy, pouring and horrible day; everybody was out there for 7 to 8 hours. And we pulled this thing off! And that was so cool! I’ll never forget. Even the mayor stopped by and said to us ‘you guys are doing a great thing. This is what a neighborhood should be about.’ And I was so inspired by hearing that! And that was a great feeling of getting that accomplished; you can’t believe how great that makes you feel. It was worth it, even though we all caught a cold after that and we were sick for a couple of weeks [laughs]. (Eric, from Pagoda)

b. Empowering of the whole—working together and accomplishing what would be impossible by oneself alone

Another striking finding that most participants revealed in their stories was that of becoming a stronger force than by oneself alone. In this sense many people talked about “the power of the many.” As Amelia relates, “it says something when you see sixteen people walking together with their dogs down the street without being afraid.” A way the neighbors reflected on the issue of collaboration, of becoming a mightier force by joining others, was when talking about “solidarity” as putting oneself in the other person’s shoes and “walking together down the street” without being afraid of criminal activity or other external danger. The fact that only some neighbors have had crime related problems –like break-ins, burglaries, etc. — does not mean to the participants that the problem is not of all the people inhabiting the area, or that people would just turn around and “not look”, as Tracie later regretted. (See Appendix C for extended narratives and stories)

People discovered that becoming a part of a larger group meant not only having fun in social events, but also, and mostly, becoming empowered to levels that they could not have imagined before. One of the reasons for that – the neighbors relate — is accomplishing great things, fighting criminal activity, such as prostitution and drug dealing, within a much cared and beloved area for all the neighbors. While an
empowering practice for the group members, it also became an empowering “sight” for
the larger area. On several occasions the interviewees made explicit how people living in
the area would become curious of what a group of people were doing together; they
would “come out to their porches and start asking questions” to the group members
walking their dogs. This served the larger purpose of getting to know others living in the
area, which — in turn — helped to make the neighborhood safer as people started to know
their neighbors. It also motivated people to recognize that some neighbors cared for the
public, shared, place and were out taking care of it. In Amelia’s words the issue of
solidarity can be better understood:

The crime and safety committee developed the pooch patrol which is very successful.
We get together once a month as many people as want to and we walk our dogs
together in different parts of the neighborhood different months. The idea behind is to
show solidarity, it is a great social event, and it also says something when you see
sixteen people walking together with their dogs down the street without being afraid.
It is very positive. And people come out to the porch, and ask questions and see that
we are out there. (Amelia, from Miraflores)

Another meaningful experience related to being part of a neighborhood group was the
greater value of the many, that is, the empowering of the whole. This was expressed as a
unique experience and distinct from trying to accomplish things individually. Being taken
seriously by government officials constituted another benefit of being part of a larger
endeavor that many participants referred to. To illustrate this point this specific neighbor
reflects:

Because we are a group we are taken more seriously than a single person would. I
think that the person alone isn’t considered as valuable as the group. That’s why I
think that in group we get more notice from the government or the police. (Tracie,
from Miraflores)
In order to become an empowered “whole,” many neighbors expressed as crucial to first being able to know others on the basis of spatial closeness, to have a neighborhood, a central place where to meet. That comes before any attempt to pull the whole together. Knowing each other becomes empowering because of the things that as a whole, a group of people can accomplish for all. In that sense, and as Mary relates, this is a much better way to deal with issues like crime in the neighborhood, because nobody is capable of knowing the neighbors and the neighborhood better than the neighbors themselves. And, as most participants claimed, the neighbors know “what’s normal and what’s not” as well as “who belongs to the area and who doesn’t.” Knowing others is by default empowering because it allows the neighbors to take control over their street, their block, their area, thus taking ownership of a cared space without depending completely on the government to keep them safe. Mary illustrates this point as follows:

I think that you need the people support-system. I do believe that cities work better when neighborhoods receive the support they need because then you have people watching out for each other, but for that you need to have a neighborhood where the neighbors know each other first. It’s like crime watch programs. It’s a whole lot better than having police patrolling in the streets because they don’t know what’s normal and what’s not; unless you have the community policing and that’s only as good as their ability to spend lots of time in the streets in one-on-one relationships with the neighbors, knowing who is unusual, who belongs and who doesn’t belong to the neighborhood. (Mary, from Pagoda)

c. Practical politics: “a give and take”

Most people reflected on the issue of “give and take” as an essential aspect of continuing group life. Some neighbors talked about the need to protect the group and its individualities that a long process and lots of effort took to form in the first place. Therefore, when disagreement happens –way too often, in the view of many neighbors—the group tries to move on without letting the differences immobilize the group’s
dynamics. The larger goal seems to keep things moving. When people cannot agree, the group lets the differences be present there—“we let it be” (Amelia)—and bring the issue back at a later time. These groups deal with most controversial issues by seeking consensus. While one group utilizes the Robert’s Rules of Order, other groups endorse consensus by voting or majority rule. It seems that there is a protocol in place in all these groups to deal with disagreement. A neighbor talks about some disagreements in her group:

We are very protective of the group since it took nine to ten years to grow, and since we are all volunteers it is very hard to do on your own time. So we are very protective of that. So when we have disagreements, if we can’t all agree on one thing, we let it be. And we bring it back to discussion until we find a common ground, a point in the issue where we can all agree with. And then if we still have dissent we don’t move to action until we feel we have a consensus. (Amelia, from Miraflores)

However, “the give and take” that takes place in these groups transcends the mere realm of voting for an issue or reaching consensus. Practical politics is seemed as a way of survival, of getting things done, of negotiating and of not “burning bridges” among members. Because, ultimately and as most neighbors put it, it takes relating to many others—both inside and outside the neighborhood organization and especially beyond the group itself—to accomplish things for the betterment of the whole. In other words, to make things happen in the neighborhood seem to depend not only on the will of the group members or the larger neighborhood, but also—and most especially—on the connections and interrelations. This networking also favors or disfavors “the good track record” of the group, between its members and the government, on the one hand, and the neighbors and other groups, public and private agencies related to certain project, on the other. As the following neighbor explains, the “give and take” aspect of these relationships can be
better depicted in people’s expectations and their will to negotiate and collaborate, to
trade and to return favors, to make concessions ("you scratch my back, I scratch yours"),
such as George describes:

We’ve learned that to work with your city government is a give and take issue. You
can’t get all you want. You have to give and take concessions; it is like politics. Like
you scratch my back I scratch yours. It is nothing bad. You go there wanting ten
things and you come out with three, and you still are ahead of the game more than
you were before. (George, from Miraflores)

Another permeating aspect of practical politics within these groups is that of not
having to like each other in order to work together as a group with larger endeavors. In
effect the group members recognized that although many of their fellow neighbors cared
a great deal for the neighborhood as a whole, it did not necessarily mean that they had to
share other aspects in their lives. In some cases people recognized that although they did
not fancy their neighbors – in, say, personal lifestyles — they recognized that there was
still something there that united them. What would bring them together was the common
care for the place and the well-being of its people and the betterment of the area. This
situation is seen as a positive in living with – and relating to — others as long as they are
part of a joint and greater endeavor. This neighbor brings up this point by telling a
specific experience:

I enjoy seeing and talking to my neighbors, I enjoy saying ‘hi.’ It may not be the
people you would want to go on vacation with, but I am happy that they care also and
that they are involved, and that’s what really matters. We don’t have to agree on
everything but at least help participating, and that’s great! I hope that you find a way
to spread this everywhere. (Jerry, from Campinha)

d. Learning/knowing as a whole: new – group – knowledge means power

One of the most outstanding findings is that the participants in this study spoke of the
experience of learning together as a group while working with others in different
activities and projects. By getting to know others, the participants explained, not only does one learn about other people, but also one discovers oneself as individual in working with others. People refer to the daily practice of knowing others as one that takes time and good predisposition to approach others, spend time in different activities and – mostly – care for the whole. Knowing more of each other through working together prompts the neighbors to recognize the richness and marvelously of that unity—“we have a great array of people in the neighborhood […] I realized how rich we are” (Laura, from Campinha). Recognizing and embracing the richness of diversity means an “opening of the eyes” toward others. By working together the neighbors learn about the various needs “of the different constituencies” and thus come to the realization and determination to work for others’ specific needs to make the whole thrive—“as a group we need to do something about it” (Laura, from Campinha). While triggering people’s innermost passions to work with others, learning together as a group has made the neighbors strong advocates for the whole area, its people, and the larger good. A neighbor, Laura, illuminates this point as follows:

I realized that we have a great array of people in the neighborhood and I realized how rich we are. We have senior citizens who are architects or were in the war. Or from people who have kids you learn what other people’s needs are. As a group we need to do something about it. So being involved in the group has really opened my eyes to what the various issues are in the different constituencies. And it has made me very passionate about the neighborhood. Being involved in the neighborhood has made me a stronger advocate for the area and for the people living in it. (Laura, from Campinha)

Learning about the larger constituencies of the neighborhood means to the group members, interacting with others, both inside and outside the neighborhood organizations. Many participants made specific note of the great mutual learning that
happens between government officials at the local and state levels and the neighbors. In working together on historic preservation issues, zoning, health, the neighbors come across public officials and develop relationships through informal channels of communication and exchange. This goes both ways: from the city down to the neighbors and the opposite way. But it also happens laterally among the group members, among different groups and among officials.

The neighbors gain information in multiple ways. The issue of power-laden relationships between the city officials and business associations or other local organizations may affect the neighborhood as a whole. The bottom line idea is to be able to play the game. But before playing it, one must learn the rules, both formal and informal. In this sense, knowing means power: having access to the resources available to the neighborhood and interacting with public officials may mean to have some sort of say in the decision making process at the local level. Amelia’s experience may illuminate this point:

We have learned a lot about how the city government works, what things are really important to us. And how to get things accomplished. When our group started, we knew very little about how to work with the city. Going through housing guidelines the city talks to us, takes us more seriously now, and we get a lot done now. (Amelia, from Miraflores)

To be a mighty force within the city is not an insignificant claim for a neighborhood group. The neighbors’ experiences of working with others in a very diverse setting makes them agree that such networking constitutes an invaluable asset for learning and growing as groups. It also means power for the people involved in those gains, which are usually not counted or recognized when working in a typical pyramid-type decision making
setting. Working together may raise the neighborhood to a higher level that allows them to achieve even greater aims that benefit the whole. In this vein, a neighbor comments:

I live in one street where there are international artists, people involved in bands, in the theater, so many artists…and so many people involved in academia choose this neighborhood because of the diversity. I just think that if we can use all this power that we have to pull the neighborhood together in some way, we’ll all be better. (Juliet, from Pagoda)

e. Finding freedom in/through the group: the whole as more than the sum of its parts—person becomes a human being in being-with-others

Some participants shared with the researcher their experience of being-with-others-in-group, not only as a growing and empowering process, but also as an experience without precedent. It seems to be due to the character of what constitutes a group of diverse people that recognizes everyone’s value— “every person has value” (Becky, from Pagoda). The experience of working with others for the benefit of all has taught the neighbors that the moment one person is not there, the dynamics are inexorably different — “without the single part the whole will collapse” (Becky, from Pagoda). In this sense, the neighbors grasp better than anyone else the feeling, the experience, of unity, of becoming one through the whole. This is how the “working together” can even happen:

Every person has value, the property owner has the same value as the renter, the senior citizen, working together with all others, or being part of the community, where we are all valued, and where everybody, everyone is part of it, you can’t take one segment out. It is the whole to the part, and not the part to the whole. Without that single part the whole will collapse. Every part working together is needed in working together. (Becky, from Pagoda)

The value of each person cannot be underestimated. The neighbors had the experience of counting on others at all times as essential pieces to the “puzzle” of what constitutes the richer whole. Some neighbors have gone further in describing the meaning
that being human has when taken in the otherness of living and interacting with others the way we are, in a totality rather than in isolation:

Even the crazy old lady, she is part of the neighborhood. I can’t imagine our neighborhood without all the crazy people, without the youngster of whom everyone is afraid to let in their stores. They all have the potential to be good and the potential to be bad, whether they are good or bad. So, for the common good, reach out and bring them in so they don’t feel excluded, so that by bringing them in they feel part of the community and that just builds a stronger place to live. (Becky, from Pagoda)

Freedom was a powerful theme that emerged in the stories of the neighbors interviewed. They related their experiences of finding personal freedom through the group. This was an inspiring experience for them all. Some people of them expressed these feelings in terms of “unity”, becoming “body and soul”: “We believe that for a neighborhood to be healthy that we need to be merged in body and soul and a grocery store is a very central element of the neighborhood” (Juliet, from Pagoda). Others made reference to the feeling of freedom, recognition, and value as human beings by others through the group experience:

It has been really rewarding for me, it just makes me feel a lot better because I grew up very different. I always had many people make fun of the way I talk, the way my family lived, what we had... In the group nobody stereotypes me, everyone knows that I am my own person and I live my own way. They don’t compromise me. (Jennifer, from Pagoda)

The freeing experience this neighbor felt was a process of experiencing life in its fullness, in all its presence, in its full range of colors and shapes – that of the group as a whole and of its members as distinct and unique individuals. Recognizing “others” for what they do rather for what they possess becomes a theme hard to ignore among these neighbors. The group appears as having changed the lives of its members in meaningful ways that they can relate to.
The experience of group life means for the people a process of being re-born, anew, of finding freedom through the group and in the working-with-others, and in accepting each other as they are. Finding oneself through the respect and recognition of the group, of others -- “everyone knows that I am my own person” (Jennifer, from Pagoda) — not only brings life to the individual but also to the group. The group practices free the individual’s innermost fears and desires and take them to a higher level. Therein can the individual offer his/her potentialities and share them with others. An example of this point is the power of what helps the ones in need which empowers the individual to create together a better place for all. One neighbor shares her own experiences:

It should be about the neighborhood and making it the best place. Because when you have that growing on, you can draw so many outside people to the town, to the neighborhood that can add a lot, and who can make it even a stronger place. (Jennifer, from Pagoda)

How can people feel proud of a place unless they feel attached to it in some sense? Some neighbors expressed their views and feelings on this issue claiming that unless cities are divided up into smaller units – like neighborhoods with actual neighbors as opposed to the suburbs’ anonymity and isolation — people will keep leaving cities and the cities will keep malfunctioning and filling themselves with crime and poverty. In their own terms both Mary and Emma share their views on this important issue by claiming that neighborhoods are about people and relationships:

I do believe that if cities are going to survive and especially big cities, you got to break it down into small units; you gotta be able to deliver service on a small scale. Otherwise cities become too big and too inhuman and too impersonal and that’s when people say ‘why should I live here?’ You want people to live in the city, give them a reason to do it. Houses are great, but it’s really about people, about relationships, and that’s what neighborhoods enable: people to have relationships with each other within a smaller area so that they can feel that sense of community and sense of belonging. (Mary, from Pagoda)
And Emma reflects:

You can’t buy people. You can’t buy this type of community; all this energy! You know, public officials spend tons of money on revitalization of business areas with the hope of bringing cities back to life. But this type of community [neighborhood group] is the only key, and you can’t buy this with money. Either you have it or you don’t. People care for each other, they relax, and they have fun. They are not just neighbors but friends. I think that this is unique and I have never been in anything as lively as this neighborhood group. Instead of spending so much money in worthless means to stop people from leaving the cities, they need to pay more attention to neighborhoods, to these groups and try to bring them in touch with government. They ought to put their efforts in trying to connect government with different neighborhoods rather than staying so faraway from people’s community life. They don’t connect with citizens, and that is the mistake. I wish we could all be working together as a city, government and neighbors; that would bring a great deal of diversity of voices and will get much more good things done than what’s currently accomplished by only government working on their own, and us, neighbors, working on our own. (Emma)

f. Uniqueness within diversity: ownership and shared pride on the place and its people

Pride on their place is a central idea in the neighbors’ stories. The experience of “ownership” of the place and its people emerged as a recurrent issue in people’s narratives. Some people talked about the beneficial role of the neighborhood group for safety purposes such as to take back from crime and blight, the streets. Taking ownership of the place where the neighbors live and care about meant to put all their efforts and energies towards improving the shared (public) place. An important aspect the neighbors emphasized as crucial to recuperate the place from criminal activity and blight was to first recognize its problems, rather than ignoring them. Working together as a whole, the neighbors could eradicate the problems of the neighborhood and take pride on it. The experience of being part of a neighborhood group project exemplifies this very point:
What the pooch patrol does is bringing people back out on the streets and taking ownership again of where they live and caring about it, and the idea that you are not gonna shut your door and let crime happen in the streets and not look. You are gonna come out and walk your dog, and say ‘this is my street. I have a right to be here.’ (Amelia, from Miraflores)

Being proud of the place means to share the experience of working with others in achieving the common good. The grandeur of greater type of accomplishments for the area and its people throughout difficult times reinforces the shared pride for the place and joint work. The more the people become proud of the place they care about, the more they want to get involved and participate in the making and re-creating of the place and its charm. Pride in the place connotes a personal investment. Amelia illustrates this point with an example:

It’s been very rewarding to see the place where you live grow and change. We have the historic district. When you see people become proud of the place where they live, and want to become involved and do things, and you have an event where you have people come together and they feel good…it is very rewarding. It is different that just having a place where I go and come from my job and pay a mortgage. It is a real personal investment; there is a piece of you that stays in the neighborhood. (Amelia, from Miraflores)

Diverse lifestyles and differences among people’s ways of handling public matters in the neighborhood may bring disagreement among the people when working together. However, the participants expressed that despite “knowing all the good and the bad stuff about your neighbors” the experience of working with others outweighs the negative by far. The benefits of sharing with others in common projects and endeavors strengthen the whole to unconceivable levels. This example illuminates the theme at hand:

I almost – in a way – wish that I didn’t know so much about my neighbors because I am more irritated with some of them that if I would just say ‘hi’ to them. It’s kind of strange. The opposite effect of what you would anticipate because in the beginning we didn’t know much about each other, and then we started really getting close, and it
was very positive. And I think overall our relationships have been very very positive, we know much more about each other. But along with the good stuff that we know about each other we now know all the bad stuff about each other. You know what? I hate my neighbors! [Laughs] I really don’t, but couple of them are so nitpicking on everything that drives me crazy! But I never knew that about them until... like in a meeting, we have to really work through issues, I would have never known that had we not had the chance to... it is kind of a mixed bag of what you know about your neighbors, good and bad. (Matthew, from Campinha)

g. The larger good: pursued noble cause of the group

Besides not agreeing with each other, people recognize that the larger idea of the common good of the neighborhood is what brings them together. It is what they all have in common, an idea, and a practice, which brings them together in unity. While learning to work with others, a “give-and-take” takes place among the members of neighborhood groups. But the most important aspect is that of recognizing that because of the concerns for the common good, people are able to motivate each other and grow together letting the differences among them arise. The group experience of becoming closer to one another in the common concerns while keeping individual differences alive is a common theme for many participants. Laura illuminates this point with a story:

Ted and I butted head like crazy. We had a really hard time. He ended up moving away. I learnt then that it was not about me, that we all wanted to make the neighborhood better. I could see people growing, engaged and enthusiastic, and that made me feel great about it. I am very proud of all the work we have done; this will help stabilize our neighborhood and will be a great thing for it. With this very hard beginning I am happy to know that what I do will impact the neighborhood for longer than what I will be around. (Laura, from Campinha)

Likewise, George emphasizes the noble cause that the group members pursue of watching out for each other:

Community is a group of people that comes together with a common interest: basically watching out for each other. You don’t have to be friends, buddy-buddy, but
keep each other safe. People coming together form community. (George, from Miraflores)

Appreciating the togetherness and great work of the whole in the Highland Square neighborhood is what some group members emphasized as the most rewarding aspect of living in that place; that of genuinely caring for others:

The neighborhood does that. We all have the benefit of interaction. If we all didn’t care about the neighborhood, it would look quite different, especially in the spring, when there are flowers out there. Because people are out there and there is a level of strength and pride of who we are and we celebrate that. Every so often I sit back and reflect how fortunate I am. I don’t have a beautiful house: it is old, and sits in an old neighborhood. But it is great to live there. It is a great feeling. You know? Betty would call and say ‘hey, do you know that there is someone out there in your porch?’ We are all very lucky to be there and it is a very sad day when anyone decides to move out. (Nick, from Campinha)

h. Personal changes through the group and interpersonal benefits: friendships, bonding

When all the neighbors come to reflect on the genuine benefits of being part of a larger aim, that of their neighborhood improvement groups, they put forward amazing experiences that relate to many qualities of the “coming together as a whole”. Some of them refer to extraordinary personal changes. Some others talk about learning how to be and work with others, a feeling of maturing as a person, learning to disagree and still be able to work with others; taking responsibility for what matters in your neighborhood; being genuinely happy in the presence of others; and being able to enlist others in one’s idea and make it happen. Other people highlight how others can change people’s lives for better and genuinely care about others: a sense of belonging somewhere in the world. These experiences have in the whole made people stronger as individuals and as groups, learning the values of friendship, and bonding. Finding one’s place in the world may
finally be “the most rewarding thing” in someone’s life and may just be at the core of one’s neighborhood—within the group within others.

Some experiences of the people interviewed illustrate with a great deal of passion the experience of interpersonal benefits when being part of a larger aim that is within their reach—the neighborhood group:

It was a very positive experience. It’s made me think more about relationships, of consider things; realize that it is beyond my ego. If we are having a problem I pick up the phone and I say: ‘Is everything ok? I didn’t mean for the discussion to become tense, I hope there is no hard feeling.’ It’s really helped me grow as a person, to learn about relationships, of how people and groups work together. It was a great experience but it also was a very intense year so I was glad that was over. (Laura, from Campinha)

Tracie also illuminates this idea:

Community is a sense of feeling of togetherness where you live, that you know your neighbors, that you have a support system, something in the community that bonds you with others. It is a feeling of togetherness with other like-minded people. Kind of a family type feeling. (Tracie, from Miraflores)

An example of everlasting changes through the group is that of Jennifer:

Community means… I’ll give you a quick example: I grew up in Iowa, in a small town. We had a fire in the dead of winter. I was nine years old. And I remember our neighbors, watching our house burn, offering us to take us in, to care for our dog because my dad’s family lived across town. We had our home remodeled. But our neighborhood where we lived was like the UN and I grew up like that, my dad’s friends were from all parts of the world. My father lived in Paris after the war, so he came back pretty cool thinking about lots of things. So that has always stayed with me, because these people cared about us. Because some people would not have done anything. So community means to me that you really belong, that you really know the people in your neighborhood, that there are people with whom you can just interact without feeling scared, and that you are not going to get robbed, raped, and abused. You have to be careful, too. But if you belong to a group like this, you get the chance to see how things work, and to get involved more and more. (Jennifer, from Pagoda)
Recognizing that government is us all means to take responsibility and pride on the place:

Community means to me people that work together and are genuinely happy to be together; that they take pride of the area where they live. All you have to do is put in some labor, which is not even as bad as you think, because people get together, have a good time, somebody makes doughnuts, it is a very enjoyable thing and you just have to care and it’s been very rewarding. This neighborhood has the feeling of a little town. I think that people need to understand that you are the city; it is not some magical entity that’s there to do whatever you want; that’s you, so if you don’t make an effort, why would anybody else? Someone has to get started, take the initiative. Unless you get involved you will never know! It makes people so much happier. Being part of this group has benefited us in ways that we never imagined when we started. Everything we have done has branched out in many other good things. What else could you ask for? (Jerry, from Campinha)

Finally, Mary summarizes beautifully the experience of “groupness” and the lifetime benefits that such experience entails:

[Being part of the neighborhood group] is probably one of the most rewarding things that I did in my whole life. Learning that you can take up on an idea and make it happen, even when everybody is looking at you and say “you want to do what?” and just being persistent and say “yeah,” and enlisting people and getting them engaged in the idea. Those are skills that translate anywhere. And it was probably my first experience as an adult, because I was in my mid-20s then. You know, really having that kind of a success…what was really cool is that it didn’t really get attributed to me, at least for the first couple of years. It was like everybody showed up, did their part, had a really good time, and sat back afterwards and said “wasn’t that fun?! Let’s do it again!” And that—in as small scale—is what makes the neighborhood work: it is people doing their work and saying, “It worked; that was fun; let’s do it again.” (Mary, from Pagoda)

3. Composite summary: The neighborhood group as life itself

The essence of the phenomenon of community as expressed by the interviewed neighbors can be summarized as the meaning of life itself. The neighbors relate to the experience of neighborhood improvement groups as dear endeavors, true feelings for one another and the caring for the greater good. The neighbors make the point that whereas
people may not agree with their neighbors in life styles, ways of pursuing projects or
approaching other people, they all share something that keeps them attached to the place
and to others: caring for the place and, mostly, caring for fellow human beings.

Disagreements are in general considered “obstacles” to the “smooth” development of
meetings and for the day to day transactions among participants. However, many
neighbors recognized that in the long run conflict is not necessarily a negativism. Quite
the contrary, people believe that through struggle, through disagreements and even fights,
they have come to learn something new of one another; a gain which could have not
happened if the people had been all in constant agreement.

Another significant aspect is that of “uniqueness.” Not only people believed that their
place was beautiful and unique – and thus worth of being cared for-- but also they
thought that the people constituted its greater asset. People care about others and realize
that within the diversity of the neighbors lies their intrinsic potential for growth and
development, an already happening process of self-governance.

People recognized that what keeps them from moving out of the neighborhood, in
spite of its high crime rates, blight and old housing, is the shared impetus of care for the
place and hard work. This is reflected in people’s incessant efforts for keeping the place
up, for protecting what the neighbors considered dear to them all, such as the walking-
friendly streets, its little shops, its Victorian style houses, its eclectic population, the kind
neighbors; in short, the charm that makes life itself happen in every corner of the
Highland Square.

Many people found in the group what nothing in life could get close to providing
them. People valued the unique group dynamics and decided to never let that freedom go,
which only people in association could foment and allow. Some people have found a feeling of “liberation” and “freedom” through these groups because for the first time in their lives they might have felt valued as individuals, cared for by others, and not labeled or “encased.” They found in the neighborhood groups what good families are about “you don’t agree with each other, you fight, but still you care deeply for one another.”

(Amelia, from Miraflores)

Finally, through working with others on a continuous basis, people discovered that they have the potential for being good and bad, that no one is “either” “or”, but that we all have the capability to work for the betterment of something bigger and for projects beyond ourselves. Even when a neighbor expressed dissatisfaction in knowing “the good and the bad stuff” about his neighbors, the underlying feeling is that of fellowship. While sometimes people get tired or annoyed with one another, those feelings seem to be superficial in the larger picture of the benefits that the neighborhood group enhances.

In the dynamics of neighborhood groups is where the fountain of community as a process lies. How do people’s ideas and experiences enrich the theorist’s thinking and hypothesizing on community? Practice points the way to theory. This will be the focus of next chapter, Meta-Interpretation.
CHAPTER V

META-INTERPRETATION

This is the culmination of an unusual exercise in theory building. Here the citizens’
theory of community will be laid side by side with Mary Parker Follett’s.

Table 5.1. The neighbors’ ideas of community vs. Follett’s characterization of
community as a process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Neighbors’ Ideas</th>
<th>Follett’s Characterization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reaching in—reaching out: the group as neighborhood leader, pulling people together</td>
<td>Creative thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering of the whole—working together and accomplishing what would be impossible by oneself alone</td>
<td>Unifying activity, dynamic unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical politics: “a give and take”</td>
<td>Practical politics <em>par excellence</em> and the fountain of freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning/knowing as a whole: new—group-knowledge means power</td>
<td>Neighborliness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding freedom in/through the group: the whole as more than the sum of its parts—person becomes a human being in being-with-others</td>
<td>Common good as the <em>Leitmotif</em> of the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniqueness within diversity: ownership and shared pride for the place and its people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The larger good: pursued noble cause of the group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freeing the Self through the whole// Personal changes through the group and interpersonal benefits: friendships, bonding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This chapter discusses a higher, more abstract, level of interpretation than the prior interpretation discussed in Chapter IV. In seeking a more grounded and richer conceptualization of “community”, it compares the people’s ideas and the theorist’s ideas regarding the concept at hand. Table 5.1 summarizes this exercise.

The purpose is to see how practice may illuminate theory. Drawing from Chapter II and Chapter IV this section exhibits in depth the process ontology of community in light of the interviewees’ ideas regarding their own experiences. More specifically, this chapter addresses the question of how people’s ideas of community – as explicated in the first interpretation stage discussed in Chapter Four — shed light into Mary Parker Follett's theory of community process. This meta-interpretation chapter argues that there are some ways in which the themes that emerged during the people’s story telling process either correspond with or amplify Mary Parker Follett’s thinking. The comparison reveals similarities and differences that will be addressed in light of “practice illuminating theory.” (Hummel 1998)

When we lay community members’ reflections next to Mary Parker Follett’s ideas of community we have transcended traditional social science already telling what community is from the expert’s side alone. The findings of this task will be discussed next. At first glance, it seems that the neighbors have thought of community in similar, coalescent, ways with Follett. Yet there are some differences.

Finally, this chapter aims at opening the dialogue further to discuss the concept of community from the viewpoint of the experts, namely, that of the people involved in actual community processes. This aims at bringing clarity to academic assumptions regarding this important concept. The final chapter of this dissertation will deal with the
implications of both the essence of the concept of community and its formation for political philosophy. The implications of the concept of community as an integrative and richer approach – that of process that is continuously evolving through deliberation—within the larger theoretical framework of active citizenship in Public Administration will be then explored.

1. Higher interpretive stage—Rejoinder: the neighbors vis-à-vis Mary Parker Follett

This chapter presents a higher interpretive level, where an interpretation of yet another and prior interpretation (that of the people’s themes—the most basic, most grounded and concrete level) is explicated in light of the main theorist’s viewpoints. In effect, the researcher seeks to explicate people’s themes in light of Follett’s characterization of community as a process while enriching the theorist’s conceptualization with the members’ ideas and concrete experiences.

On recapitulating of what this study has so far discovered in terms of how people’s ideas could illuminate Follett’s theory of community, one may list the following criteria of community as they emerged from the neighbors interviewed, on the one hand, and from Follett’s theorizing, on the other:

a. The neighbors’ ideas regarding community

The neighbors expressed their ideas regarding community in different ways throughout the interview process. However, after the data interpretation stage (Chapter IV) the researcher came up with the following eight main themes as they emerged
directly from the people’s stories. These themes\(^1\) attempt to represent the essence of people’s thinking as they were reflected in their stories – their inner worlds of experience:

- Reaching in—reaching out: the group as neighborhood leader, pulling people together
- Empowering of the whole—working together and accomplishing what would be impossible by oneself alone
- Practical politics: “a give and take”
- Learning/knowing as a whole: new—*group*- knowledge means power
- Finding freedom in/through the group: the whole as more than the sum of its parts—person becomes a human being in being-with-others
- Uniqueness within diversity: ownership and shared pride for the place and its people
- The larger good: pursued noble cause of the group
- Personal changes through the group and interpersonal benefits: friendships, bonding

   b. Follett’s characterization of community

   As discussed above and according to Mary Parker Follett’s writings on community as a process (see Chapter II), the following aspects constitute her own ideas about the essence of community as a process, as interpreted by this researcher:

- Creative thinking
- Unifying activity, dynamic unity
- Practical politics *par excellence* and the fountain of freedom
- Neighborliness
- Common good as the *Leitmotif* of the group

\(^1\) Chapter IV discusses in detail the interpretation process in which people’s narratives were evolved into essential themes.
Next, the researcher proceeds to bring to new, unified and enriched “categories” what she considered to be informative propositions from both the neighbors and Follett. That would help conceptualize and understand the meaning of community in a much richer and grounded (based in real life experiences) way than by using the theorist’s ideas alone.

The following combined themes characterize community in an integrative and richer manner. By bringing together the neighbors’ ideas and Follett’s characterization of community this chapter seeks to remain true to this research’s ongoing commitment to illuminate theory through practical experiences of the people actually involved in community processes (as defined earlier in this dissertation). Therefore what follows is a discussion of the themes from Follett’s theory and their parallel themes as they emerged from the practice of the neighborhood improvement group members interviewed.

c. Combined propositions (Follett and the neighbors) for a richer concept of community

This section combines both Follett’s ideas of community (underlined) and the neighbors’ eight themes (non-underlined and separated with a double slash “//”). It constitutes a higher level of interpretation. To this end, the researcher aimed at comparing what both the theorist and the neighbors have said about community, with the larger purpose of coming up with a richer, more grounded, concept of community.

The following combination of ideas seeks to bring together the theorist’s idea and the neighbors’ ideas on community by reflecting on similarities and differences among the two. Ultimately, the eight themes as they emerged from the prior level of interpretation – with their respective descriptions and corresponding stories quoted at length – seek at illuminating Follett’s theory of community as a process.
Creative thinking// Empowering of the whole—working together and accomplishing what would be impossible by oneself alone// Reaching in—reaching out: the group as neighborhood leader, pulling people together

Unifying activity, dynamic unity// Learning/knowing as a whole: new–group-knowledge means power// Finding freedom in/through the group: the whole as more than the sum of its parts—person becomes a human being in being-with-others

Practical politics *par excellence* and the fountain of freedom// Practical politics: “a give and take”// Finding freedom in/through the group: the whole as more than the sum of its parts—person becomes a human being in being-with-others

Neighborliness// Uniqueness within diversity: ownership and shared pride of the place and its people

Common good as the *Leitmotif of the group*// The larger good: pursued noble cause of the group

Personal changes through the group and interpersonal benefits: friendships, bonding

In this second level of interpretation the researcher brought back the theoretical framework discussed earlier in this dissertation (Chapter II) and made an attempt to hold it against the selected themes that emerged from the people’s narratives. The goal was to reflect in which ways –and borrowing from Ralph Hummel’s 1998 essay—practice could illuminate theory. The researcher’s interpretation process was therefore needed to establish the ways in which people’s interpretations were similar or different to what the main process theorists (i.e.; Follett and Kemmis) had enunciated. In that sense, people’s
interpretations of their experiences would bring life to theory. The researcher thus pursued an interpretation of an interpretation.

2. A ground-up making of (the concept of) community: Practice illuminating theory

In what follows, the researcher begins with the theory, adding the voices of the participants to elaborate on the criteria for a theory of community grounded in people’s experiences. She thus turns to laying side by side the criteria for conceptualizing “community” that the neighbors and Follett expressed. This leads to a claim for a more informed and democratic concept formation. The aim is to better understand such concept in a brighter, clearer, light—that of the people along with the theorists regarding the substance of “community” as a concept and as a process of formation (creation and recreation). This way the concept of community will finally acquire content (substance). (Cf., Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason)

a) [Creative thinking// Empowering of the whole — working together and accomplishing what would be impossible by oneself alone// Reaching in- reaching out: the group as neighborhood leader, pulling people together.]

In this section of the meta-interpretation stage, Follett’s idea of creative thinking as a crucial aspect for community process is being illuminated by the neighbors’ ideas of empowering the whole, reaching in to reach out, achieving freedom, among others.

Creative thinking: the process of integration

Mary Parker Follett refers to creative thinking of a group as the process of integration. She emphasizes the group process’s inherent dynamic force: “The members of a group are reciprocally conditioning forces none of which acts as it would act if any one member were different or absent” (Follett 1926: 31). Therefore, according to Follett,
community is a *creative* process because it is a process of integrating, rather than “aggregating”. Intertwining the multiple ideas of the group members becomes the group process of growth and mutual learning as it is created and recreated through yet further processes. Follett recalls these as the dynamics of “circular response,” “creative experience,” and “constructive conflict” which all contributes to and aims at attaining the larger process of integrating ideas, purpose and wishes into the Group Idea or larger will. The process of integrating ideas, wishes and purpose becomes essential to foster true group process:

We find the group idea not by mechanical aggregation, but by the subtle process of the intermingling of all the different ideas of the group. A says something. Thereupon a thought arises in B’s mind. It is B’s idea or A’s? Neither. It is a mingling of the two. We find that A’s idea, after having been presented to B and returned to A, has become slightly, or largely, different from what it was originally. In like manner it is affected by C and so on. But in the same way B’s idea has been affected by all others. Not only does A’s idea feel the modifying influence of each of the others, but A’s ideas are affected by B’s relation to all the others. And A’s plus B’s are affected by all the others individually and collectively, and so on and on until *the common idea springs into being* [in a synthesis]. It is not a question of my idea being supplemented by yours, but that there has been evolved a composite idea. In this sense, “I” represents a whole rather than one of our separate selves. The course of action decided upon is what we all together want, and I see that it is better than what I had wanted alone. (M. P. Follett 1926:24)

What makes collective thinking so unique is that its most salient aspect, its nature—process—makes the group as a unity become real. The “group idea” is the coming-into-being of a “collective mind;” the becoming-a-reality of the group as a dynamic force, as a process: “In a collective mind every part is bound up with every other part, every tendency is conditioned by every other tendency” (Follett 1926: 25). In this sense, integration is creative because a new shared understanding emerges as the process of
deliberating and interacting with others (Follett 1926:24). Follett illustrates the group process of integration with the following metaphor:

The group process is like a game of tennis: A serves the ball to B. B returns the serve but his play is influenced largely by the way the ball has been served to him by his own method of return. A sends the ball back to B, but his return is made up of his own play plus the way in which the ball has been played to him by B plus his own original serve. Thus in the end does action and reaction become inextricably bound up together. (Follett 1926:25)

The creative thinking that goes on in a group process can be elaborated by the experiences of the neighbors interviewed. For instance, this neighbor talks of her experience having an idea which became a “group idea” and then a group action:

So Jennifer had this idea; she expressed it either here or over across the street where we had the holyday festival, and people came together to help others in their community. So it’s having a sense of place that draws people together, to have a way of communicating through a newsletter and the website, which doesn’t really reach everyone. So I think if we have this Main Street program that would tie the whole neighborhood together. (Juliet, from Pagoda)

How do we know that we are part of a group process? Follett suggests that our ability to proceed from integration of the self to integration as a group would allow us to see that we are living group process. Despite its collective nature, creative thinking reaches “psychic coherence” only with the full contribution of every member: “To take our full share in the synthesis is all that is legitimate.” (MPF 1926: 26)

In the group process of ceaseless creating the whole, the individual gains significance while relating to others and thus (re) creating him/herself in turn:

The individual always escapes […] because his sustenance is relation and he seeks forever new relations in the ceaseless interplay of the One and the Many by which both are constantly making each other. (MPF 1919: 582)
The constituting of a new and richer idea emerges from a permanent and inexorable process in the interplay with others as a group. This is the “result” of the process of interpenetration which becomes more complex as we meet every time and discuss the idea further and anew. To illustrate this point of creative thinking Follett refers to the power of the collective as the deeper roots—the group process—which makes us a better society:

Great men make their environment and are made by their environment. There wells up in the individual a fountain of power, but this fountain has risen underground and is richly fed by all the streams of the common life. (MPF 1926: 95)

A couple of ideas of the neighbors illuminate Follett’s point on the co-creating of social life itself through the improvement of different aspects of the neighborhood:

“Seeing people come together and watch out for crime being solved effectively and having something effective happen has been the best experience” (Gary, from Miraflores). Meanwhile George reflects:

The plan is to have a couple of streets take care for themselves, like Campinha; this is the model of what we would want to see in other parts of the neighborhoods...when you have groups like Campinha who make events for their street and the whole neighborhood... We need more streets that take ownership of their little corner of the neighborhood and work for its improvements. Miraflores should be the umbrella for all the other little groups. (George, from Miraflores)

---

2 The Campinha group is a neighborhood organization that nucleates the neighbors of few streets in west Akron, Ohio. People meet frequently to talk about issues and concerns common to their area. They also undertake in projects to clean their streets, clean up graffiti, beautify gardens, fight crime and socialize.

3 Miraflores is a 503c., non-profit, neighborhood based association. It is organized in several subcommittees each of which deals with a specific issue. There is the Crime and Safety committee, the Housing and Historic Preservation committee, the Beautification committee, among other ad hoc subcommittees.
Creative thinking: joint decision making

Creative thinking is for Follett essential in group decision making. Since a group of as few as two or as many as a hundred or more people has to face the world as a whole, their decisions ought to be joint decisions, which are to be reached through what Follett calls the process of “interpenetrating” of thoughts and feelings. Interpenetration makes us aware of who we are within “others:” “it transfers the center of consciousness from the single I to the group I” which results in a decision “of the two-self… a three-self, a several-self, perhaps a village-self.” (MPF 1919: 578)

This neighbor elaborates Follett’s idea of the “group I” or “jointness” in the decision making process through a real life experience:

So four or five of our neighbors stood up [in behalf of the neighborhood] and spoke [against a zoning violation] and literally because of what they said, the councilmen changed their minds. And they voted and voted in our favor. That was very big. That was a success story. The citizens stood up and the council listened to us. (Amelia, from Miraflores)

Creative thinking: achieving freedom

Freedom constitutes a benefit that community practitioners claim to gain in group process. In this vein Follett reminds us that personal freedom is generated and re-created through group process at each moment:

I must each moment find my freedom anew by making a whole whose dictates, because they are ‘integrating’ to which I am contributing, represent my individuality at that moment. We are […] “achieving” our soul, our freedom. In community as process I integrate opposing tendencies in my own nature and the result is freedom, power, law. To express the personality I am creating, to live the authority I am creating, is to be free. (MPF 1919: 578)

The neighbors thought about freedom in various ways. A facet that a neighbor explored transcended the individual gaining of freedom to achieving the group’s freedom
through the whole, as a neighborhood. Follett is of the idea that such achievement ought to be done by bringing together differences—through “integration.” More specifically, this neighbor makes the specific claim that by pulling together for the well being of the disadvantaged people the general conditions of the whole can be improved. Rather than excluding the ones who are up to no good crime wise, for instance, this neighbor suggests working with the different constituencies in order to help bring up a better neighborhood. In her own words:

Instead of reacting to crime, we should be actively pursuing helping have a better community that has more choices for the disadvantaged people of the neighborhood, for people to have the opportunity to be able to have an education and to grow to be good citizens. That way I think we are going to bring crime down. (Becky, from Pagoda)

Other neighbors related to freedom as what constituted them, as their identity as a group. For instance, this neighbor speaks of the artistic accent of the people living in the area and the great asset of being able to be who they want to be, who they really are through demonstrating their art—freedom:

Just the idea that we can have a festival with architects, and writers, and sculptors and painters and knitters, all these people who live within a few blocks of this neighborhood can put together a festival of arts, that’s a demonstration of who we are, and that’s a real highlight, that’s a very positive thing, and it could be much better. (Juliet, from Pagoda)

Once more Follett brings to our attention the intrinsic value of collective thinking as creative power to achieve group autonomy:

Community is that intermingling which evokes creative power. What is created? Personality, purpose, will, loyalty. In order to understand this we must study actual groups. […] If that group can evolve a common will, then that group is a ‘real’ person. […] Wherever you have a genuine common will, you have a ‘real’ person; and wherever you have a common will and ‘real’ personality, you have power,
authority, sovereignty. As the process of community creates personality and will, freedom appears. (MPF 1919: 577- 578)

Many neighbors made this point and elaborated it in their own terms and according to their own experiences. The following neighbor relates to her experience of becoming part of the neighborhood group as a way to take part, to share on the tasks of revitalizing the larger area. She expressed this as a feeling of wanting to be part of a larger endeavor of creating power which aimed at improving and bringing the neighborhood back to life, freeing it from the urban maladies such as blight and criminal activity:

I purchased the house in this neighborhood and I immediately joined the West Hill Neighborhood Organization because they are known for cleaning up the streets, for historic preservation and for crime prevention of the West Hill neighborhood. They are bringing it back to being a well respected area like it used to be. I wanted to be part of it. (Tracie, from Miraflores)

Creative thinking: caring for others and pulling people together

Another relevant aspect in Follett’s theory of community process is the realization that the participants may discover through the group process the foundations of their initiatives and concerns. These are rooted in the care for each other and pulling together, bringing their strengths together when standing before the world. In other words, when people get together to work towards a common cause, the self as an individual disappears: “The laissez-aller which people allow themselves when alone disappears when they meet.” (MPF 1926:32)

Follett relates this sense of altruism and utter caring for the well-being of others to deeper and richer feelings that elevate the participants to unknown levels of mutual connectedness. Pulling themselves together fires their emotions and fulfils their beings in the world to a never imagined dimension. Working together for the betterment of the
whole appears as the sole way to accomplish magnificent tasks, those which would be
unconceivable or undoable by the individual in isolation. Being part of the group makes
life worthwhile living. To this effect Follett says:

We see this again and again. Sometimes the ideal of the group stands quite visibly
before us as one which none of us is quite living up to by himself. We feel it there,
and impalpable, substantial thing in our midst. It raises us to the nth power of action,
it fires our minds and glows in our hearts and fulfills and actuates itself no less, but
rather on this very account, because it has been generated only by our being together.
(MPF 1926: 32)

Caring for others was a recurring theme among the participating neighbors. The
different groups highly valued caring for others as they considered it the noblest aim for
which the groups were constituted to begin with, that was their reason for being, for
existing. One neighbor’s words may bring a clearer idea about this point:

The grocery store would be a way to keep an eye on our senior citizens because we
can see them on a regular basis. Now we don’t see them much on a regular basis. We
see them popping up into Walgreens to buy their food: all pre-packaged, high sodium,
high cholesterol. Most of them do not own a vehicle. 16.6% of the people living here
in the Highland Square --or a thousand households-- do not own a vehicle. That’s a
lot of people relying on public transportation, pushing people to go to the corner to
get your needs met. And the theater has a similar aspect to it: you don’t have to get
into your car to go to the suburbs; you can walk down the street. And it helps the
local economy to have entertainment that you can walk to. You might go to dinner to
one of the neighborhood restaurants, and afterwards you might go to Mary Cole’s to
get ice cream. The American suburban life style is not sustainable. (Becky, from
Pagoda)
b) [Unifying activity, dynamic unity// Learning/knowing as a whole: new–group –
knowledge means power// Finding freedom in/through the group: the whole as
more than the sum of its parts — person becomes a human being in being-with-others.]

This section discusses Follett’s unifying activity as an essential characteristic of
community process along with the neighbors’ ideas to the formation of the concept of
community. In this sense, the people interviewed illuminate Follett’s ideas with such
attributes as dynamism and change, discovering oneself through the group by differing
and agreeing with others, etc.

Unifying activity: dynamism and change

Mary Parker Follett speaks of the unifying activity of the group to signify dynamism
and continuous change, paralleling the constant change of life itself. Two times a
situation is not the same because people’s views, perceptions and feelings as well as the
intersubjective situations and/or external aspects indefectibly change enough to create a
new situation altogether. To this extent Follett suggests that the flow of lived experience
does not abandon itself, but rolls itself into the new flow of lived experience endlessly:

*La durée* does not abandon itself, but rolls itself into the new *durée* endlessly, the
qualities interpenetrating so that at every moment the whole is new. Thus unifying
activity is changing its quality all the time by bringing other qualities into itself.
(Follett 1919: 582)

This is a learning process for the participants because it prompts them to learn
together generating a new, common, knowledge that emerges from their interactions.
What the changing quality of the unifying activity is for Follett means a process of
learning together and generating new knowledge for the group members interviewed. To this end some neighbors elaborate and expand Follett’s process thinking as follows:

I realized that we have a great array of people in the neighborhood and I realized how rich we are. We have senior citizens who are architects or were in the war. Or from people who have kids you learn what other people’s needs are. As a group we need to do something about it. So being involved in the group has really opened my eyes to what the various issues are in the different constituencies. And it has made me very passionate about the neighborhood, I really love this neighborhood, I love this area. If someone would contact me and say ‘I live in this area and I need help with such and such’ I would do anything I could to help them get in touch to whoever they need to. Being involved in the neighborhood has made me a stronger advocate for the area and for the people living in it. (Laura, from Campinha)

Another neighbor, Chris, elaborates on this issue as follows:

The people who work the best are the ones who say that they have the desire to get something done and want to fit in with the group, that’s the way Miraflores works the best. In all these groups there is tremendous room to be tremendous leaders, because there are so many things that can be addressed. If a particular person wants to be a champion, all s/he has to do is do it, as long as they have a positive idea that fits in with the mission of the group. (Chris, from Miraflores and Campinha)

Unifying activity: differing

The group process’s inherent dynamism and change appear omnipresent in Follett’s thinking. Dynamic unity, while highly valued, is an often taken-for-granted part of group processes because when people get together they engage in deliberation as fruit of differing. Both Follett and the neighbors interviewed seem to agree on the dynamic unity aspect intrinsic of differing which constitutes the reality of group process:

The act of relating is the creating act. We must remember when we say that the essence of individuality is the relating of self to other difference, that difference is not something static, something given, that it also is involved in the world of becoming. This is what experience teaches me—that society needs my difference, not as an absolute, but just so much difference as will relate me. Differences develop within the social process and are united through the social process. (Follett 1926: 63)
The neighbors of the Highland Square who shared their experiences with the researcher addressed the issue of working together despite – and in acceptance of—individual differences. To this effect Tracie and George reflect on the benefits of disagreeing:

We have had disagreements in respect of how we view the way the city has been handling crime in this area and some of us feel that more is being done than another person feels, or some people feel that crime has been going up in an area more than others. It is more a disagreement about the approach. We all agree that there is a crime problem. In the end we all learned something. (Tracie, from Miraflores)

A community would talk to each other when there is a major issue going on. At least the neighbor on the street, if you don’t agree you can talk informally about the problem over a glass of beer, and how to deal with it, sit in the porch and deal with it. (George, from Miraflores)

Unifying activity: the law of the situation

Another crucial aspect of dynamic unity in Mary Follett’s theory of community as process is the idea of the “law of the situation,” “circular response” or “law of the group” as dynamic elements of its permanent constituting and re-constituting. Follett speaks of them in depth in all her writings, particularly in The New State—first published in 1918—and in Creative Experience (1924). With those concepts she means “process:” the activities that go on in a group as the dynamics of “interpenetration” or true relating among the participants.

The basic tenet of this particular thinking is that which brings the group’s life into being—the inherent changes and dynamic interactions among its participants. In other words, the uncertainty of group life is its constant change; the group’s status of “becoming”, of being constituted as that the group is re-creating itself from within at every turn. For Follett this means that the process of integration takes care of differences
of ideas among the participants in a fruitful and more enlightened way than what
“compromise” alone would allow, because integration frees the individual. Follett’s “law
of the situation” –that process of coming to a solution following the intrinsic group
dynamics– is at the core of the unifying activity, the creator of the group’s spirit and its
incommensurable power. In this sense Follett asserts,

Every individual is necessary to the whole. Working with others creates a strength
that is not numerical, but rather it is the feeling that all together we have struck out a
new power in the universe […] The law of the group is not arbitrary but intrinsic. The
group spirit is the pillar of our days and nights, it is our infallible guide; it is the Spirit
of democracy. (MPF 1926: 42-43)

The neighbors interviewed for this study agreed in many ways with Follett’s “law of
the situation” in that the situation itself should guide the group members’ practices and
decisions. The following quote depicts this idea of finding a solution to the way a
summer festival was being run by people within the group stepping up and taking charge
while others stepped down. The process was of value to learn that what matters the most
is what brings people together rather than what separates them. In this case, making the
neighborhood summer festival happen was the shared goal. Although the members had
different approaches on how to make it happen, the situation of “wanting the festival to
happen” determined the ways to go about making it happen: by some people taking the
lead and other people trusting what the situation required for the festival to continue its
course:

After five years of running the summer festival there were disagreements about the
way I was running it, because I guess I was doing things my way, kind of unilaterally,
just because I was used to do things that way. So I just stepped down. And other
people took it over and took on for another 10 years and they did run it. Later it
became a much more formal and structured organization. (Mary, from Pagoda)
**Unifying activity: discovering the Self**

A unifying activity means to Follett the creative process that the members of a group engage when they meet and create a joint initiative, as a whole rather than as individualities whose ideas were compiled vaguely as in a checklist form. Therefore, integration is more than simply the bringing together of “ideas.” It transcends to the whole beingess of the people involved—including feelings, emotions, desires, etc.—and the identity of the “whole” being constituted through a continuous process. Follett clears this aspect for us as follows:

The unification of thought, however, is only a part of the social process. We must consider, besides, the unification of feeling, affection, emotion, desire, aspiration—all we are. Sympathy is always a group product. Through the group you will find the details, the filling-out of Kant’s universal law. Kant’s categorical imperative is general, is empty; it’s only a blank check. But through the life of the group we learn the content of universal law. (MPF 1926: 44)

In this vein, a person is not an alienable individual who simply “counts” as a number, a vote, or who could easily mutate from one universe of aims to another—we may choose the groups we would want to belong—the person is a part of a larger and richer process of relations and joint practices: the group process. The individual finds him/herself over and over again through and within the group process by discovering her/his intrinsic value through the group practices:

The individual finds the wellspring of his life in the collective idea and the collective will of the social process.” (MPF 1926: 60) […] “Individuality is the capacity for union. The measure of individuality is the depth and breadth of true relation. I am an individual not as far as I am apart from, but as far as I am a part of other men. My individuality is difference springing into view as relating itself with other differences. (MPF 1926: 63)
This is how a neighbor reflected on this issue of becoming part of a larger aim, of belonging to something bigger and thus “discovering” herself:

By being involved in the group I actually feel that I really belong to more than I ever had. And I’ve lived in this neighborhood for over 20 years! Akron is the longest place I have lived in. I’ve lived in many other places. I feel more part of the neighborhood being part of the group. I feel that I have more to offer now that I am involved. I can bring out other people in the neighborhood and get them more involved. It is nice to have more diversity. (Jennifer, from Pagoda)

The theme of “finding” of the self through the group process can be only realized through continuous integration of the self and the others thus constituting reality together; a meaning of what is real by the people who are in the process of constituting reality in its fullest meaning. This point is not insignificant in Follett’s writings as she devotes deep discussion to what the group process allows internally (to the participants and to the individuals) and externally (to the larger society). Discovering reality as a group process means in turn a new way to conceive and live a meaningful individuality within the larger group and larger society:

A man is a point in the social process rather than a unit in that process; a point where forming forces meet straightway to disentangle themselves and stream forth again. The only reality is the interpenetrating of the social mind and the individual into experience. (MPF 1926: 60)

Some of the interviewed neighbors reflected similarly on the idea of the individual’s skills and particular contributions within the larger aim, of the group:

These types of groups are limited tremendously high by experience, knowledge, interest of the people that comprises them. If the person or champion of a particular project is not there, it may not be anybody else to fill its shoes, to fill in that responsibility. And then that job may not get done because we have no knowledge to do it. There is a key person behind each project. These small neighborhood groups take direction from the skills and desires of the people who are active in them. (Chris, from Miraflores and Campinha)
Follett goes on beautifully describing the process of becoming One—building of a reality by the group process of creative thinking:

There is no way of separating individuals, they coalesce and coalesce, they are ‘confluent.’ It is as in Norway when the colors of the sunset and the dawn are mingling, when the to-day and to-morrow are at the point of breaking, or of uniting, and one does not know to which one belongs, to the yesterday which is fading or to the coming hour. The new state must rest on a true conception of the individual. (MPF 1926: 60)

A neighbor interviewed spoke similarly of the issue of “becoming One” through others, in the being-with-others of the group:

For me is what community should be, and that is every person has value, the property owner has the same value as the renter, the senior citizen, working together with all others, or being part of the community, where we are all valued, and where everybody, everyone is part of it, you can’t take one segment out. It is the whole to the part, and not the part to the whole. Without that single part the whole will collapse. Every part working together is needed in working together. Even the crazy old lady, she is part of the neighborhood. I can’t imagine our neighborhood without all the crazy people, without the youngster who everyone is afraid to let in their stores. They all have the potential to be good and the potential to be bad, whether they are good or bad. So, for the common good, reach out and bring them in so they don’t feel excluded, so that by bringing them in they feel part of the community and that just builds a stronger place to live. (Becky, from Pagoda)

c) [Practical politics par excellence and the fountain of freedom//Practical politics:

“a give and take”// Finding freedom in/through the group: the whole as more than the sum of its parts — person becomes a human being in being-with-others.]

Follett’s idea of power-with, rather than power-over, is illuminated greatly by the participants’ different themes, such as power-to, practical politics as a “give and take” and through a process of discovery of oneself through others – the group.
Practical politics: “power-with”

Follett addresses the issue of practical politics from a distinctive viewpoint: that of letting the differences among people be present and be used in constructive and creative ways—in the creating of community. Constructive conflict aims at conciliating differences through deliberation. Rather than using “power-over” one another, Follett suggests using “power-with,” that is, bringing all our ideas together through collaborative practices. In this sense Follett argues that there is only self-and-through-others: “The study of community as a process does away with hierarchy, for it makes us dwell in the qualitative rather than the quantitative.” (MPF 1919: 582)

The neighbors agree with Follett emphasizing that the crucial aspect to re-create community process is the very different personalities (diversity) of the group members. However, the neighbors expand Follett’s ideas of “power-with” to a more encompassing “power-to.” The moment that a group is strongly or univocally headed, the richness of the diversity fades away. This is how a neighbor reflects on this point:

There is no one leader; there is a kind of commune-like arrangement or community where everybody accepts a good amount of responsibility of what happens. So it doesn’t matter who is chairing the meeting; what matters is what everyone brings to the table. I don’t know if we would be successful if there was only one leader; we are successful because there is not just one leader. We have 40-50 very different personalities that happen to live in the same area. (Nick, from Campinha)

Likewise, Juliet adds: “Community is what a good family should be: you don’t always think alike but you always care about each other.” (Juliet, from Pagoda)

Follett describes the ideal characteristics of a dynamic group that builds on differences to create a richer process. Individual responsibility is crucial to the binding process by contributing with something useful to the whole, to the larger aim:
No member of a group which is to create can be passive. All must be active and constructively active. It is not, however, to be constructively active merely to add a share: it must be a share which is related to and bound up with every other share. And it must be given in a way that it fits in with what others are giving. (Follett 1926: 28)

One can see how this is a concern for the neighbors interviewed as they believe that all neighbors ought to be part of neighborhood associations and thus take responsibility for the happenings and the fate of the area where they live. A neighbor reflects that rather than waiting for a “superior” force to come and clean after the citizens, people should recognize that they are the city, they make the town, and they constitute the ultimate power:

It’s a little frustrating because many people think that the city is some entity that has unlimited wealth and that is there to clean up after you. And each of us make up the city, so it’s not like the city is somebody else that is going to come and clean the street signs and scrape the sidewalks. It is your street, you know? You pay the taxes to get the streets repaired and the lights up so I think that you really have to take ownership. When doing part of this with the neighborhood I feel like it is very important to me what happens because I really feel connected with the ownership, you feel a strong sense of ownership, because you know that most things that are going to get done is because the group is going to do it, otherwise it won’t get done. (Jerry, from Campinha)

Many neighbors regret the still existing vestiges of “power over” and hierarchy within the city departments, especially the office of the city mayor. They strongly believe that they have the right to decide the path and fate of their neighborhood, though, the rigid structures of representative governance may not be contributing to make people’s voices be heard as well as the neighbors may desire. They repudiate the omnipresent power-over by the rich over the poor, the imposing of the power of the fewer over the many:

I truly believe that people who live in a community have the right to contribute to the ideas of how that community should be formed. And the idea of design guidelines respect to the type of businesses that we want, for example, I think we have the right to do that. But the mayor of our city always says: ‘put your mouth where your money
is.’ So in other words he is saying that he is not going to listen unless we have a million dollars to buy a building and renovate it. With saying that, he is saying that we don’t have the right to *say anything*; that we don’t have the right to say what our community should look like, and what should go into our community. And he only wants to talk to people who are putting their money where their mouth is, as he says again, and again and again, that is *extremely* frustrating to me. (Juliet, from Pagoda)

Another neighbor contributes to this thinking as follows: “I don’t deal well with people who lie, with people who throw their power at you because they can. I hated that part” (Mary, from Pagoda). Meanwhile, Mary adds:

We would send a delegation of folks to talk to the planning department and we would ask them, ‘do you realize that this doesn’t make sense for this neighborhood and that all these big houses, it’s impractical to turn them back to all single houses.’ Not that it made any difference. (Mary, from Pagoda)

A case in point of the neighbors’ repulsion for the lack of power-with is Mary’s stance on the poor way that government officials treat the citizens:

The city has not been known for being particularly welcoming to people who want to be active and involved in their neighborhoods. It seems that people in downtown have an idea of what they want to do with the city, and if you along with that, great! And if you don’t, it’s not fun. And I think that we are just getting pretty tired of that. (Mary, from Pagoda)

**Practical politics: from the individual to the universal—“a give and take”**

More important yet to create community process is the doing away with hierarchies and power-over, with *aprioristic* defining of ideas and concepts, with already “finished” resolutions before the dialogue takes off. Follett extends the idea of practical politics as the process of learning and thinking together, as a group:

What is to be avoided is the one person-ring of finality and the rounding-up of the whole question, that which leaves nothing more to be said about the subject. To compare notes on what we have thought separately is not to think together. We need social attitude, that is, that of a man willing to take his place in the group, no less and no more. (Follett 1926: 28)
Follett emphasizes the unifying of opposites as the sure key for group process that guarantees life to the community:

We do not go to our group to be passive and learn, and we do not go to push through something we have already decided we want. Each must discover and contribute that which distinguishes him from others, his difference. The only use for my difference is to join it with other differences. The unifying of opposites is the eternal process. We must have an imagination which will leap from the particular to the universal. (Follett 1926: 29)

Some neighbors were of the idea that beyond agreeing with every point under discussion, what the group process allows its members is to become cognizant of different ways to approach common matters, and of various venues to solve common problems. One neighbor reflects on his experience of practical politics in community, as follows: “Sense of community is where there are active people concerned about what’s going on, whether I agree with them or not.” (Chris, from Miraflores and Campinha)

Many of the interviewed neighbors defined politics as a daily, constant, activity based on a “give and take” among the neighbors and between the group and the local and state officials these groups come in contact with constantly. In these neighbors’ words:

Being a part of a much larger group, giving in to that group and taking from it a little bit… I think that there is a give and take we all partake in, in order to get the added benefit of being a part of this larger group. (Nick, from Campinha)

It’s kind of a give and take. We sat down as a group and discussed the whole thing, some of us wanted a grocery store, and some of us didn’t care. The point is that what is there now is better than what was there before. (George, from Miraflores)

Other neighbors defined these inter-relations as “a game” – coincidentally in a similar manner as Follett’s tennis match metaphor—which rules the neighborhood group and its members must learn to play in order to survive within the larger city, and –more
importantly—in order to get things done, and their projects followed through. These neighbors reflect on the idea of practical politics as a “give and take:”

When it comes down to how do you get things done, you know, do I personally like the Mayor? Not really. I think he is a bigot and a blowhard. Do I like all the council members? No! But because I don’t like them doesn’t mean that they are not doing a good job. So you have to choose your battles wisely. When it comes to politics it’s a give and take. I look at downtown and I think the city did a great job revitalizing downtown even though it put the city in great debt. That is the game we are trying to play here. We are a neighborhood and there are many things we want but only a certain things that we are gonna get. We can have the cake and eat a little piece of it; you can’t have the whole thing! (George, from Miraflores)

Playing the game requires the foreseeing and experience of their participants in deliberation. The following neighbor talks about how to maintain beneficial relationships even when the parties in deliberation do not agree:

We are strategic about how we talk to them, we are nice to city officials. We don’t always agree with everything they say. But if they do stuff that we don’t agree with we would talk one on one, and we tell them how we feel about the issue. But we don’t attack them in the paper. It is a relationship and we don’t want to ruin it. Then when you need them they’d be there. Our relationship with the city is very good, and we continue to nurture that. People go to council meetings. We make sure that we are in touch with them, just to let them know what we are working on. Trying to keep them updated without taking too much of their time. (Laura, from Campinha)

The “give and take” aspect of neighborhood politics was brought up by many neighbors as a learning process where both the neighbors and the city officials and other agencies benefit from these interrelations which resemble that of a network or web. In this neighbor’s words, the group learned to listen first before becoming suspicious of external attacks, in order to be able to work together with agencies and other groups. The purpose is always to strengthen the existing relationships and nourish new ones, and ultimately, achieve the larger end that the neighborhood group may uphold:
We try to listen first to what’s going on; that way, they would be more willing to talk to us. If they talk to us we are more aware of the different pieces to the pie, and we are stronger. There may be more pieces to the puzzle that what we are just thinking. Maybe we need to modify what we think. We are open to relations. It makes for better governance, we can operate better, and we can be more effective the more communication with city government we have. Like the police have been more responsive since we have been more willing to listen. (Amelia, from Miraflores)

Another neighbor illuminates Follett’s point of practical politics with the following example that highlights the relationships not only within the neighbors but also outside the neighborhood, across agencies and government officials and with other neighborhood organizations. The underlying idea is that the neighborhood group is essential to get the ground up “diagnosis,” aims, wishes and goals of the neighborhood. However, but without the interplay of the group members and external actors – such as government officials and other agencies—the improvement projects at the neighborhood level would hardly get done. This neighbor’s experience may illuminate the idea of the need for networking:

We’ve learned that to work with your city government is a give and take issue. You can’t get all you want. You have to give and take concessions; it is like politics. Like you scratch my back I scratch yours. It is nothing bad. You go there wanting ten things and you come out with three, and you still are ahead of the game more than you were before. (George, from Miraflores)

Practical politics: a process of discovering

Differences and diversity become more important for creating community process than homogeneity and like-minded viewpoints because they bring richer ideas to the discussion. This co-learning process is a discovery. Discovering the self as well as discovering the group’s inherent qualities lies in the richness of its members—proper of diversity—and in the people’s capabilities to express their singularities and bring their
differences to the fore. By interacting with others and integrating ideas, values and purposes, the individual discovers his/her uniqueness and thus him/herself as a human being that is part of a group dynamic, discovering also how the differences may contribute to a richer group experience. The group discovers hence itself as it is being constituted permanently by diverse points of view. In Follett’s words:

The person discovers his/her true nature, gains his/her true freedom only through the group, that is, by means of practical politics. [...] The *laissez-aller* which people allow themselves when alone disappears when they meet. [...] We feel it there, an impalpable, substantial thing in our midst. It raises us to the nth power of action, it fires our minds and glows in our hearts and fulfills and actuates itself no less, but rather on this very account, because it has been generated only by our being together. (Follett 1926: 32)

A way to discover the “other” is to be flexible to what people have to say and be open to deliberation and interaction. In this vein, this group member illuminates Follett’s thinking as follows:

You need to take other people’s opinions in mind and make sure that you really consider them; that you don’t just come in to the meeting with your mind made up about something. (Matthew, from Campinha)

One may not always agree with other people on certain issues, we may not like our neighbors’ lifestyles. But there is something certain that we all may share: our sense of caring for the whole. This neighbor conveys this message clearly:

I enjoy seeing and talking to my neighbors, I enjoy saying ‘hi.’ It may not be the people you would want to go on vacation with, but I am happy that they care also and that they are involved, and that’s what really matters. We don’t have to agree on everything but at least help participating, and that’s great! I hope that you find a way to spread this everywhere. (Jerry, from Campinha)
In “Constructive conflict” Mary Parker Follett notes that integration is rooted in the finding of ways to satisfying all parties by incorporating conflicting desires into a solution that attends the diverse needs. She claims that genuine power can only be grown in the process of interpenetration. In this integrative context, conflict becomes constructive because it prompts people to create new solutions that satisfy conflictive needs; that is, uniting diversity by creating new values. Integration can be reached by bringing the differences to the table (what is there to integrate) and by breaking them down in its constituent parts so that the participants can arrive at a new, richer, solution that accounts for a priori differing values. Mary Follett asserts,

Genuine power can only be grown, it will slip from every arbitrary hand that grasps it; for genuine power is not coercive control, but coactive control. Coercive power is the curse of the universe; coactive power, the enrichment and advancement of every human soul. (Follett 1924: xiii)

The “good health” of a community group resides in its capability to remain truly democratic and to allow the different voices to be its constitutive parts. The moment that people feel that the groups are being tilted toward one personality over another people begin to lose interest and start fading away from the reality of the group process, because the process itself has already died out. The idea of genuine power can be well understood in its practicality and concreteness in this neighbor’s terms:

People have to have their say, feel that their opinions are appreciated. You are not going to be the winner in an issue but at least you know that your point of view has been heard and that the consensus would come to the best approach hopefully. So I think that people feel that they haven’t been able to contribute because some people

go off in their own direction without listening to the whole and without being inclusive. (Juliet, from Pagoda)

d) [Neighborliness\Uniqueness within diversity: ownership and shared pride in the place and its people.]

Follett’s idea of community process is tied to the idea of place and neighborliness. The interviewed participants in this study spoke in similar terms, emphasizing the values that people attach to the place where they live and care for. In that sense, while Follett talks about the neighborhood as the cell to build a New State from the ground up, the people describe their experiences and ideas of caring for the place as what brings them together and also as what keeps alive their differences. In what follows, the voices of the people seek to illuminate the theorist’s idea of the place in the concept of community.

Neighborliness: shared place as the polis

The issue of “place” in Follett’s writings refers to the basic cell—the neighborhood—from which to start building the new, truly democratic, State, up to the regional and national scales. The principle of group organization, according to Follett, is most fruitfully carried out through the neighborhood because the people who inhabit it usually share similar needs and goals. The principle of group organization rests on the idea that a group of people live in the same neighborhood and could organize themselves to give and receive community service in an efficient way hence bringing democracy closer to efficiency:

The unit plan—aims at three things: (a) to organize the people of a limited district democratically, so that they can get a clear idea of what their common needs are, and what they think ought to be done about them; (b) to organize democratically the specialists of the neighborhood and of the city so that the highest skill and the experience can be applied to meeting the needs disclosed; and (c) to bind the people and the technically skilled groups together in such a way that the people can tell the
specialists what they want done, and the specialists can point out how to do it, submitting plans, programs, and policies to the people for their approval. To put it on another way, the plan is an attempt to bring efficiency to democracy. (Follett 1926: xv)

One neighbor reflects on the difficulties that these groups face in order to achieve their goals of neighborhood improvement through different projects. Some constraints are timing, participation, resources, among others. Nevertheless it seems that the positive aspects of community process outweigh by far the negative ones:

These types of groups are limited tremendously high by experience, knowledge, interest of the people that comprises them. If the person or champion of a particular project is not there, it may not be anybody else to fill its shoes, to fill in that responsibility. And then that job may not get done because we have no knowledge to do it. There is a key person behind each project. These small neighborhood groups take direction from the skills and desires of the people who are active in them. (Chris, from Miraflores and Campinha)

The aspect of “neighborliness” that Follett brings to the fore in *The New State* is paramount for her theory of constructing the new state from the ground up. She recognized that since people know best of their own needs and those of their neighbors—because they are in continuous communication—it would be easier for the neighbors to come together, join their efforts and energies as a group and exercise democracy directly by addressing the issues at hand:

Our proposal is that people should organize themselves into neighborhood groups to express their daily life, to bring to the surface the needs, desires and aspirations of that life, that these needs should become the substance of politics, and that these neighborhood groups should become the recognized political unit. (Follett 1926: 192)

With a specific story, this neighbor elaborates on Follett’s thinking and deepens its meaning of shared place to a level of shared reality and shared beingness:
Community is where people work together; take pride in where they live and in their neighbors, work toward pulling people together rather than dividing people. To have central accord is an important part of community, where people know they can find their friends; to have a place where people can express themselves; a place where if a neighbor is in need other neighbors might find out about it. There is a person that comes in here, her name is Jennifer. She is not working right now but she waited until her check came in at Christmas time in order to help a family that came to the neighborhood festival without proper clothing, and had babies and they didn’t have all the things they needed to exist. And Jennifer saw that and she was spending her own money to help them. And so I though “gosh, if Jennifer is doing this…”, so I gave her some money, and then Mike gave her some money, and Jennifer then gave her some money, and someone else gave her a dollar, and so forth. So Jennifer had this idea, she expressed it either here or over across the street where we had the holiday festival, and people came together to help others in their community. (Juliet, from Pagoda)

In this sense the neighborhood becomes the basic unit of deliberation, interpenetration and group process because it is where people learn to become a constituting part of a larger endeavor. The importance of the “place” for Follett – as well as for Arendt and Kemmis-- resides in that since people care about the place where they live and that they share – issues such as health, education, social work, planning, zoning, among others-- become crucial points of daily deliberation, concern, wishes, wills and purposes of the neighbors. Follett illustrates the point of becoming real at the level where we live (the neighborhood):

The only place in the world where we can change ourselves is on the level where we are real. My neighbors may not think much of me because I paint pictures, knowing that my backyard is dirty, but my artist friends who like my color do not know or care about my backyard. (Follett 1926: 199)

The neighbors reflected on the political community that the neighborhood group enables as a meaningful place to live, to be valued as persons, and to grow and transcend as human beings. In this sense, the group members illuminate Follett’s thinking as follows:
By being involved in the group I actually feel that I really belong to more than I ever had. [...] I feel *more* part of the neighborhood being part of the group. I feel that I have more to offer now that I am involved. I can bring out other people in the neighborhood and get them more involved. It is nice to have more diversity. (Jennifer, from Pagoda)

**Neighborliness: bonding and sense of ownership**

Follett thought that by coming together as a neighborhood group the people could convey to upper level—local, regional—decision makers what the *real* and most grounded needs of each neighborhood were. What matters is the process of becoming: of being part of a whole, of learning to live together and finding that beyond the differences that keep the members unique individualities, they all share something bigger and dearer: the care for the place. The shared care for a place and for other fellow human beings strengthens the bonds among the group members through the process of interpenetration. In Follett’s own terms:

> The strength of the group does not depend of the greatest number of strong men, but on the strength of the bond between them, that is, on the amount of solidarity, on the best organization. [...] Synthesis is the principle of life, the method of social progress. Men have developed not through struggle but through learning how to live together. (Follett 1926: 96-97)

Bonding is highly valued among the group members of the Highland Square neighborhood associations. Knowing each other through the neighborhood organization allows for closer relationships among people who already share a common place and the care for it and its inhabitants. A neighbor shares his experiences regarding the feeling of bonding that grows through group activities:

> I love my neighborhood. I think that if it wasn’t for the neighborhood group I would have sold my house and moved out a long time ago. But people make our environment nice. So I look forward to see Terry and Jane across the street, and Ken and Joe, so we do a lot of things together. For a lot of us it is like a secondary family
because many of us live alone. […] My neighborhood group makes my home feel like home; otherwise it would just be a house. When I bought the house it just felt right from the get-go; there is a genuine life to those two blocks and the people who live there, and that makes a difference. I have lived in many different places, Pittsburg, Manhattan, and now Highland Square in Akron is by far my favorite area, and I attribute that to the place I live in and the people who live around me. (Nick, from Campinha)

The neighbors refer to a sense of ownership of both the place and its inhabitants that people develop when they start interrelating with others. Along with “bonding” the neighbors found that what brings them together in fellowship is the commonality of sharing the place and feeling ownership, pride, and responsibility for its care and maintenance. Furthermore, the neighbors create a sense of “ownership” or strong care for their fellow neighbors; a feeling much related to bonding but possibly deeper in its sense of attachment and shared values. The place may act as a metaphor that pulls the people closer together developing practices and feelings unknown to them until the moment they join with others in common activities. Or it may seem as the most real and tangible element that brings people closer together. In any case, this topic was raised over and over by the neighbors from the Highland Square associations:

I feel that I have more ownership because I see the things that we’ve done, the things we’ve improved. When there is something bad that happens it really bothers me because I know that we put a lot of work to do it. And it makes me wonder why more people don’t do the same. And we really care; I know that we make a difference. We make improvements; it is not perfect, but that’s ok. I drive on other streets and I see houses and the streets that could be beautiful with a little work, and I say: ‘Gosh, why don’t spend two hours a week? It would just be beautiful!’ (Jerry, from Campinha)

Mary Parker Follett --like Daniel Kemmis-- brings back up the idea of differing as an intrinsic value of the individuals and thus of the group itself. When there is something that the neighbors all care about, something that they all share --the place, the
neighborhood—the differences stand on a second plane and, while they bring richness to the group process, they also remind the people of their individualities. Recognizing what brings the group members together, what they all share is paramount in working in group process. In this sense Follett reflects,

To recognize the community principle in everything we do should be our aim, never to work with individuals as individuals. [...] Every decision of the future is to be based not on my needs of yours, nor on a compromise between them or an addition of them, but on the recognition of the community between us. (Follett 1926: 79)

Neighborliness: diversity means richness and progress

Besides conveying the needs of the neighborhood to the higher level administrative and political strata, Follett reminds us of the noblest aspect of neighborhood group processes: that of breaching long-time established and justified social injustices that are now at our reach through group process in diverse inner-city neighborhoods. Prejudices of race and class are for the first time broken from within, from the dynamics and joint practices of group process that focuses on the value of working together. For once, people begin to be valued for what they are rather than for what they possess; only through the group process this seems plausible.

In a neighborhood group you have the stimulus and the bracing effect of many different experiences and ideals. In so far, as neighborhoods are the result of some selective process, they are not so good for our purpose. In a more or less mixed neighborhood, on the other hand, people of different nationalities or different classes come together easily and naturally on the ground of many common interests: the school, recreational opportunities, the placing of their children in industry, hygiene, housing, etc. Race and class prejudices are broken down by working together for intimate objects. (Follett 1926:197)
A neighbor illuminates Follett’s thinking as follows: “I’ve always loved my neighborhood, but the more I work on projects and the more people I get to know, the more I realize the incredible neighborhood we live in.” (Juliet, from Pagoda)

Follett believes that the more diverse is a neighborhood, the more fruitful is the group process that the people create. The inherent characteristics of the people living in heterogeneous urban neighborhoods explain for Follett why a neighborhood group has an intrinsic and irreplaceable value that can be found in no other group: the value of utilizing educational, economic, social, racial, and any other differences as creative aspects rather than as obstacle to progress. To this effect Follett urges us:

We must recognize that too much congeniality makes for narrowness, and that the harmonizing, not the ignoring, of our differences leads us to the truth. Neighborhood organization gives us the best opportunity we have yet discovered of finding the unity underneath all our differences, the real bond between them—off living the consciously creative life. (Follett 1926: 201)

In the same vein, one neighbor reflects on the advantages and disadvantages of knowing others. His balance is overall positive when he reflects on the daily practices of interacting with others whom we may not completely agree with:

I almost --in a way-- wish that I didn’t know so much about my neighbors because I am more irritated with some of them that if I would just say ‘hi’ to them. It’s kind of strange. The opposite effect of what you would anticipate because in the beginning we didn’t know much about each other, and then we started really getting close, and it was very positive. And I think overall our relationships have been very very positive, we know much more about each other. But along with the good stuff that we know about each other we now know all the bad stuff about each other. You know what? I hate my neighbors! [Laughs] I really don’t, but couple of them are so nitpicking on everything that drives me crazy! But I never knew that about them until…, like in a meeting, we have to really work through issues, I would have never known that had not we not had the … it is kind of a mixed bag of what you know about your neighbors, good and bad. (Matthew, from Campinha)
e) [Common good as the Leitmotif of the group// The larger good: pursued noble cause of the group.]

The larger good as the raison d'être of the group is substantial both in Follett’s and in the neighbors’ thinking of the Greats of community. The neighbors illuminate Follett’s idea of the common good with concrete examples, such as a learning process which – within the time – it evolves into a new being: the larger good becomes the Being.

The common good: a-learning in the doing

The larger good as the raison d'être of the group is fundamental in the understanding of Follett’s theory of community process and democracy itself. Follett believes that to make the actual group association --the practice of community—real, each member must truly uphold the larger aim as wished value towards which they ought to work along with others. Unless each and every person takes upon that oath (symbolically or not) the larger good cannot be realized: “the larger interest must be made personal before it can be made real” (Follett 1926: 33). Moreover, Follett emphasizes that people come together to create a common and genuine idea, which becomes the larger will. This neighbor agrees with Follett and expands her idea based on her own lived experiences:

A group of us got together because we cared about our neighborhood, we loved living in the neighborhood, and we had common concerns. We decided to form this group so that we could work together to enhance what we liked about it and to better the things we thought that were problems. The reason we did that is that we got tired of just sort of sitting there and expecting the police, the city and everyone expecting them to solve problems. We should help, we could help and we were the ones living there. So rather than complain and blame let’s get together and see what we can do together. I loved the older houses, I thought that it was a beautiful place to live and then I bought a house there. We were worried about crime, we wanted to improve the values of our homes, and we wanted to protect what was there. (Amelia, from Miraflores)
Moreover, Follett emphasizes the idea that the need for creating and preserving the common will as main value of the group is what arises from working with others, through sympathy and true shared sense of caring. In order to make the common will part of the constitutive group process, Follett believes that its members must understand not only the value, but the process of becoming and creating the common will. This process can only be understood in the doing; learned as the people interact and create the common will. People, thus, not only learn about the value of democracy and its inherent principle of caring for others beyond the individual self, but also they learn about the process of coming together as a group and joining in practices that endlessly create and re-create the common will. To this effect Follett reflects:

From the group process arise social understanding and true sympathy. At the same moment appears the social will which is the creative will. There is a necessity of creating the collective will and it is only by doing the deed that we shall learn this doctrine. We go to our group to learn the process. We learn how to create the common will in our groups, and we learn here not only the process but its value. This is getting into the inner workshop of democracy because the very essence and substance of democracy is the creating of the collective will. (Follett 1926: 48)

Most neighbors addressed the issue of “learning in the doing” as a main aspect of working with others toward the larger good of the neighborhood. This neighbor reflects her experiences:

Ted and I butted head like crazy. We had a really hard time. He ended up moving away. I learnt then that it was not about me, that we all wanted to make the neighborhood better. I could see people growing, engaged and enthusiastic, and that made me feel great about it. I am very proud of all the work we have done; this will help stabilize our neighborhood and will be a great thing for it. With this very hard beginning I am happy to know that what I do will impact the neighborhood for longer than what I will be around. (Laura, from Campinha)
Another neighbor highlights taking the initiative to improve what is “public” and thus the larger good:

Few of us felt that we could not wait for the city to do everything. So some of us decided that we would break up into little committees to clean up things, and we decided that no one should have to do that by themselves, so we formed the beautification committee that I was part of. I just wanted to participate. I don’t want to have someone else do what happens at our street. It is important to help out. (Jerry, from Campinha)

The common good: a life of its own

Follett’s community process theory is rooted and given life to through the process of integration or interpenetration of ideas, wishes, and purposes among the group members to attain the common good as the neighbors define it. The group creation of the common will follows the same process of continuity and change, dynamism and irresoluteness. Creating the common will is for Follett an endeavor that begins within the group but which takes upon its own life and dynamics once it is created. Its creation is simply the point of start for its evolving and progressing. She talks about the “absolute” good will as the dearest value of group process which gains a life and spirit of its own seeking perfection endlessly:

This is the process of the generation of the common will. First, it appears as an ideal, secondly it works itself out in the material sphere of life, thereby generating itself in a new form and so on forever and ever. All is a-making. This is the process of creating the absolute or Good Will. To elevate General Welfare into our divinity makes a golden calf of it, erects it as something external to ourselves with an absolute nature of its own, whereas it is the ever new adjusting of ever new relatings to one another. The common will never finds perfection but is always seeking it. Progress is an infinite advance towards the infinitely receding goal of infinite perfection. (Follett 1926:51)
The following neighbors speak of the common good with a life of its own as people work together toward a noble and greater goal. Mary has experienced group process as something that extends beyond the single person to capture the whole:

It takes to listen to people, especially in neighborhoods like this because there a lot of different people; this is a very smart neighborhood, with a lot of highly educated people who already know a lot about what it takes. There are certain qualities for leadership that you need to have because ultimately what you want is the neighborhood to work for itself, you know. It’s not that’s about you; it’s about the neighborhood, so at certain point you have to be able to step back, and say ‘ok, go, do!’ (Mary, from Pagoda)

Likewise, Matthew and Nick explain in their own words and from their lived experiences what takes to leave the “self” aside to embrace the larger good:

The neighborhood does that. We all have the benefit of interaction. If we all didn’t care about the neighborhood, it would look quite different, especially in the spring, when there are flowers out there. Because people are out there and there is a level of strength and pride of who we are and we celebrate that. Every so often I sit back and reflect how fortunate I am. I don’t have a beautiful house: it is old, and sits in an old neighborhood. But it is great to live there. It is a great feeling. You know? Betty would call and say ‘hey, do you know that there is someone out there in your porch?’ We are all very lucky to be there and it is a very sad day when anyone decides to move out. (Nick, from Campinha)

Community means not only where you live, where you work, but means everything: your grocery store, your bank. I feel very connected to the Highland Square area. I live here, my friends are here, and I work here. For me it’s every aspect of your life; who you get in touch with. I love my square, and I hope that we can make it a better community that’s more tied together. Because I think when people feel that way you don’t want to see graffiti, you want it to get cleaned up; you don’t want to see that happen. (Matthew, from Campinha)

f) [Freeing the Self through the whole// Personal changes through the group and interpersonal benefits: friendships, bonding.]

The participants of this study talked in length of the aspects of personal gains in ways that are unique to the process of “groupness.” The neighbors interviewed spoke of
feelings, values, discovering the “other” within oneself, and learning to live with others, to listen and to put oneself in the other person’s shoes. The neighbors spoke of these issues as relevant to the feeling of freeing oneself from cultural and societal norms that ties the individual within a pre-conceived set of expectations. In being-with-others, people discovered that they could be truly free through the group – a process of learning in the doing.

Freedom: discovering life in/through group process

One of the highest values of group process is reaching freedom and finding life through the group. Freedom of the individual self through the group is not an insignificant part of Follett’s process theory of community. In her writings she reiterates that the utter gain of working with others in group process is discovering what would be impossible by oneself alone: that we are constituted by others [“My freedom is my share in creating, my part in the creative responsibility. Those who are free are the ones who win their freedom through fellowship.” (1926: 72)]. The great discovery that we are being constituted by the Other –the whole—liberates us from mere individualism finding life through the intertwining of ideas. Follett succinctly (but powerfully) reflects:

The true nature of every man is found only in the whole. A man is ideally free only so far as he is interpermeated by every other human being; he gains his freedom through a perfect and complete relationship because thereby he achieves his whole nature. By joining with others we find liberty and increase all our capacity for life through the interweaving of willings. (Follett 1926: 69)

This is how many neighbors felt about this issue and how they depicted --from their own experiences and in their own terms-- the meaning of “freedom,” as a feeling born within the group, utterly related to “others”, to the interrelations with the whole:
[Being part of the neighborhood group] is probably one of the most rewarding things that I did in my whole life. Learning that you can take up on an idea and make it happen, even when everybody is looking at you and say ‘you want to do what?’ and just being persistent and say ‘yeah,’ and enlisting people and getting them engaged in the idea. Those are skills that translate anywhere. And it was probably my first experience as an adult, because I was in my mid-20s then. You know, really having that kind of a success…what was really cool is that it didn’t really get attributed to me, at least for the first couple of years. It was like everybody showed up, did their part, had a really good time, and sat back afterwards and said ‘wasn’t that fun?! Let’s do it again!’ And that—in as small scale- is what makes the neighborhood work: it is people doing their work and saying ‘it worked, that was fun, let’s do it again.’ (Mary, from Pagoda)

A propos of this topic, Jennifer expands our understanding of freedom attained through the group with a specific example:

Community means… I’ll give you a quick example: I grew up in Iowa, in a small town. We had a fire in the dead of winter. I was nine years old. And I remember our neighbors, watching our house, offering us to take us in, to care for our dog because my dad’s family lived across town. We had our home remodeled. But our neighborhood where we lived was like the UN and I grew up like that, my dad’s friends were from all parts of the world. My father lived in Paris after the war, so he came back pretty cool thinking about lots of things. So that has always stayed with me, because these people cared about us. Because some people would not have done anything. So community means to me that you really belong, that you really know the people in your neighborhood, that there are people with whom you can just interact without feeling scared, and that you are not going to get robbed, raped, and abused. You have to be careful, too. But if you belong to a group like this, you get the chance to see how things work, and to get involved more and more. (Jennifer, from Pagoda)

Likewise, another group member (Jerry) emphasizes the feelings of liveliness and happiness that a neighborhood association enables within its members:

Unless you get involved you will never know! It makes people so much happier. Being part of this group has benefited us in ways that we never imagined when we started. Everything we have done has branched out in many other good things. What else could you ask for? (Jerry, from Campinha)
Freedom: the personification of the will

Follett’s theory fruitfully integrates the core values derived from working as a whole for the larger good as the basis for politics and ultimately the support for collective thinking and collective practices. In Follett’s words:

I am free for two reasons: (a) I am not dominated by the whole because I am the whole; (b) I am not dominated by “others” because we have the genuine social process only when I do not control others or they me, but all intermingle to produce the collective thought and the collective will. There is no Will except as we act. Let us be the will. Thereby do we become the Free-Will. (Follett 1926: 70)

Freedom then is for Follett the identifying of the individual will with the Grand will, what she calls “the supreme activity of life” (Follett 1926:70). To this effect she elicits:

Is not the very essence of this freeing of the spirit of man the process of taking him from the self-I to the group-I? That we are free only through the social order, only as fast as we identify ourselves with the whole, implies practically that to gain our freedom we must take part in all the life around us: join groups, enter into many social relations, and begin to win freedom for ourselves. When we are the group in feeling, thought and will, we are free: it does what it wishes through us- that is our liberty. (Follett 1926: 70-71)

The feeling of freeing oneself through the group is clearly brought up by the neighbors, as the following statements show:

Community is a sense of feeling of togetherness where you live, that you know your neighbors, that you have a support system, something in the community that bonds you with others. It is a feeling of togetherness with other like-minded people. Kind of a family type feeling. (Tracie, from Miraflores)

My experiences have all been great. There have been fun, easy, and hard times. Some days I feel like raising my hands and telling all the board members where to go. In a way it’s like work but more fun. You enjoy neighborhood organizations more if you put your heart into it. (George, from Miraflores)

Community means to me people that work together and are genuinely happy to be together; that they take pride of the area where they live. It isn’t a black and white
line; it is just caring and communicating with people who you live close by and working together and caring about each other. (Jerry, from Campinha)

Interpersonal benefits: “the pungent sense of effective reality”

Follett spares some discussion on the benefits of becoming part of a neighborhood group process. Besides higher level gains, such as freedom and liberty, she urges us to consider other day to day, palpable, advantages of being a part of the neighborhood group: “it makes possible the association of neighbors, which means fuller acquaintance and a more real understanding.” And she continues with a much taken-for-granted benefit that we usually overlook: that of substituting confidence for suspicion:

Mere acquaintance will lead inevitably to friendly feeling. We certainly do feel more kindly to the people we actually see (that is, ‘the pungent sense of effective reality’). Neighborhood organization will substitute confidence for suspicion—a great gain. (Follett 1926: 192)

The participant neighbors reflect on the thought of caring for others as human beings:

“At the tree lighting in the Legion, I was amazed to see how other people have it worse than me, even though I’m unemployed” (Jennifer, from Pagoda). Caring for others seems the quintessential piece for people to join neighborhood groups and for group constitutiveness:

In our community we are a group of people who are interested in keeping our neighborhood nice, keeping the property values up, and genuinely interested in one another as a people. Community is the coming together of people who have a similar interest but then I think it grows beyond that, and then it becomes personal relationships as well, that’s community building. We are not just concerned about the neighborhood but about the neighbors as well. I think there are different depths of layers of community. At the most basic it’s just a shared interest about our houses and making our neighborhood look nice but then it goes deeper than that, as you grow with the group. (Laura, from Campinha)
Valuing the group practices means to value one another in a genuine way. To this end, Jerry elaborates as follows:

I would say the best thing [of working in my neighborhood group] has been doing chores with my neighbors, like --it may not sound so much fun-- planting flowers, or I don’t really enjoy scrapping stickers out of signs, but being *together* with your neighbors, and doing things together so that when you are done you feel proud, it makes you feel good. And I think that’s the best part of it. It is sharing the community feeling. I don’t even think as them being neighbors but as being friends that we are doing it because we care. (Jerry, from Campinha)

**Interpersonal benefits: learning by doing**

Follett is of a mind that the neighborhood organizations create an opportunity for “constant and regular intercourse” among its participants as an actual, real, way of learning to be part of a group process. Practical experience can lead us to recognize the value of our interrelatings and joint group practices and ultimately to appreciate life itself. Again here Follett believes that the group frees the individual in ways that only joint practices can teach her:

People must socialize their lives by practice, not by study. Until we begin to acquire the habit of a social life no theory of a social life will do us any good. It is a mistake to think that such abstractions as unity, brotherhood, etc., are self-evident to our wills as to our intellect. I learn my duty to my friends not by reading essays on friendship, but by living my life with my friends and learning by experience the obligations friendship demands. Just so must I learn my relation to society by coming into contact with a wide range of experiences, of people, by cultivating and deepening the sympathy and whole understanding of life. (Follett 1926: 193)

This is how a neighbor reflects on her own experiences of learning to work with others and evolve feelings through group practices. She gained a sense for the Other, a sense of altruism and true care for other people. This, she notes, may have helped her to
liberate herself from her own individualistic shell that constituted her before she joined
the neighborhood group:

It was a very positive experience. It’s made me think in a different way. Being a
leader is different than being a member of a group. It made me think more about
relationships, of consider things; realize that it is beyond my ego. If we are having a
problem I pick up the phone ad I say: ‘Is everything ok? I didn’t mean for the
discussion to become tense, I hope there is no hard feeling.’ It’s really helped me
grow as a person, to learn about relationships, of how people and groups work
together. It was a great experience but it also was a very intense year so I was glad
that was over. (Laura, from Campinha)

Follett’s theorizing reaches levels that could not be recognized by others in the
beginning of the twentieth century simply because her ideas were ways ahead of her
contemporaneous time. Community as a process brings to the fore an additional benefit
of learning in practice: that of learning how to become a more complete human being.
Once again, the group allows its members to recognize and value life itself and to break
the imprisoning jail of the isolated individual. Through the group, the individual learns
the value of association, the game of co-habiting, of thinking together and integrating
ideas – of practical politics. These learnings are useful as well for all other aspects of life:

When we have come together and got acquainted with one another, then we shall
have an opportunity for learning the rules of the game-- the game of association
which is the game of life. (Follett 1926: 193)

This is how a neighbor reflects on this learning process of being part of a larger Self,
the group process:

It was fun, it wasn’t like work, and it wasn’t definitely one person doing everything
by himself. It pulled our block together so that we considered each other friends.
Then I asked my neighbor to help me with something not related to the neighborhood
at all [...] I would have never asked a neighbor to do something like that had I not
know him more personally right now because of all the work that we have done
together. So it has just turned our neighborhood into much more social group so that
we look out for each other and they are also our friends, not just as neighbors. And
even though I said that negative aspect of each person, their idiosyncrasies, it has been very very positive for our block and personally and in so many different ways. (Matthew, from Campinha)

Learning together has made this neighbor’s involvement in the group much stronger:

In just ten years, the changes that have happened, the fights that we’ve fought, the things that we’ve worked on have strengthen my commitment by getting involved. (Amelia, from Miraflores)

3. Community: An experience-based concept. Practice illuminating theory

A new, richer, and more grounded concept of community emerged as a result of a ground-up concept formation approach. Practice can indeed illuminate theory. The abovementioned aspects that the neighbors brought up when talking about their experiences of community involvement seem to greatly amplify—in the sense of bringing specific examples to the fore—Mary Parker Follett’s community as a process.

It is necessary that this researcher comes forward with these findings. Originally, she thought that the neighbors may have been adding, enlarging, and deepened Follett’s theory. However, and after the two interpretive levels of interpretation, it seemed clear that Follett collected her own “data” in a similar way that this author did it herself: by talking to people and letting them express their lived experiences. Like in Follett’s theorizing, this study has found that community as a process is a reality. All the aspects that Follett mentioned as intrinsic in community process, such as integration, interpenetration of ideas, creative thinking, constructive conflict, the group idea, practical politics, neighborliness and the greater good, and process itself, have been found over and over in the stories of the participating neighbors.

Although the neighbors interviewed may not have expanded greatly Follett’s theory of community as a process, they did bring to it an intrinsic sense of reality, a deep
meaning that theory alone was not able to convey. They indeed illuminate theory. Many are the examples that the neighbors brought as immediate, flourishing and ubiquitous in their sense of reality, of palpable truth –that which they feel and in which they live. Examples of community as a process were abundant in the interview process, and many of them have been selected for the earlier section of this chapter. People’s voices bring to Follett’s community process the “filling in the blanks” of her theory, the substance of her theoretical construct. In a sense, the real richness becomes the greater understanding of community process that the neighbors bring to the fore through examples, through their narratives and stories. The learning power of a story cannot be underestimated as the story arises from lived reality, from reality.

The combined propositions are not mere additions but rather amplifications, a sense-making of theory through reality: through lived experience. A new concept emerged from the ground up, through the concrete example. It brings hidden issues to the fore that may prompt a richer dialogue about active citizenship in Public Administration.

A new conceptualization of community as it emerged in this study (from the people who live in one) is not an insignificant contribution to the field of Public Administration and to the social sciences in general. A more accurate perception of what is going on out there in the world is being brought to us through the concrete examples, in their full meanings, in their intrinsic richness, which social scientists cannot possibly convey by themselves alone.

This case study offers a rich conceptualization of community. Follett’s community as a process becomes a lived concept, a concept with content through people’s latent and palpable stories that grant reality to an otherwise abstract enunciation or set of linked
propositions regarding the interconnected life of the people of a neighborhood group. These are the voices usually ignored in social science research which researchers have the obligation to bring up. This case study, thus, brings together an encompassing and grounded conceptualization of community. The statements of the people explicated earlier convey the fullest dimensions and meanings of each experience as people reflected in each story, each argument. Community as a concept grounded in reality illuminates the main theorist’s approach as described in this chapter.

What “creative thinking” means to Follett is already known to us. However, this case study sheds light in an already very insightful concept. People thus enrich this aspect of Follett’s ideas by talking of things such as “empowering of the whole” when working together as a group and accomplishing what would be impossible by oneself alone. The neighbors referred to this as a mighty force of the group to deal with criminal activity or other unwanted and pernicious situations, such as blighted housing and gang-related graffiti. The neighbors also referred to this as a process of “reaching in” and “reaching out,” which may mean the opening of the self to others, to the larger good. In that sense, the group emerges as the neighborhood leader that pulls people together, into a group process where its members empower one another through joint practices.

The neighbors shed light to Follett’s “unifying activity” and “dynamic unity” by speaking of a joint learning chore: knowing as a whole. A new “group” knowledge seems to emerge in the group process and this is perhaps a very salient aspect that Follett may not have covered in such depth and with such great detail of examples as the neighbors themselves expressed. In direct connection with group knowledge is what the neighbors referred as “group power” and as “finding freedom in/through the group.” The neighbors
agree with Follett repeatedly on that “the whole is more than the sum of its parts,”
because the person becomes a human being in being-with-others, *through* the group.

The neighbors bring to Follett’s theory of practical politics the aspect, as they define it, of “a give and take.” This continual “learning how to play the game” – in the doing – parallels what Follett refers to as the group’s “creative experience.” That people found freedom in/through the group experience is of paramount importance in Follett’s conceptualization of group process. Neighborliness is for Follett what for the neighbors constitutes more than just a word that may rhetorically evoke “neighborhood” and “neighbor” (by association). For the neighbors interviewed, the place brings to them a richness that they cannot find anywhere else. This seems to relate to the uniqueness of the neighborhood where they live, of its distinctive aspects, in the midst of its great diversity. In this sense people felt a sense of ownership and shared pride not for the place alone but especially for its people.

Finally the neighbors illuminated Follett’s ideas with multiple sorties their experiences of giving to others, of selflessness and altruism, of caring for the larger good. This noble cause of the group made people secure, happy, enthusiastic and passionate about improving different aspects of the neighborhood. These attributes emerged through the specific examples that the neighbors offered. Along the way, people developed practices and habits that defined them as citizens in the sense that the Ancient Greeks gave to the term: people became responsible for the future of the area, conscious of the coming generations and of a reality that exceeded that of themselves as separate individuals. Personal changes happened throughout the group process where people
discovered many interpersonal benefits, such as friendship, bonding, and family feelings to mention only a few.

The next, and final, chapter concludes this dissertation by prompting the reader and researcher to broaden the dialogue about “community as a process” in the field of Public Administration. The case for practice illuminating theory aimed at in this study, will be reflected upon.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

DID PRACTICE ILLUMINATE THEORY?

This chapter reflects on the significance of this dissertation research for practice illuminating theory in Public Administration. It inquires how people’s ideas may shed light on the concept of community. In fact, there are a number of implications for the field of Public Administration.

What follows discusses some of this dissertation’s modest claims seeking to widen the dialogue on active citizenship and governance in the field. The reader may ultimately decide whether the substantive and epistemological claims of this study are plausible for a more democratic dialogue in politics and administration regarding community.

1. People have something to say: substantive implications. It might be argued that this study makes a contribution to the literature in a number of social sciences. That argument takes the position that asking participants in a situation is not only a legitimate move but a necessary one for research on the social, organizational, or political actions of human beings.

This dissertation sought to answer the question of what people involved in community have to say about community. The purpose was to see what community
members themselves might contribute to experts' views of community, perhaps even changing experts’ views on the concept. This was done by asking the participants of this study questions of their experiences to arrive at yet further questioning. In effect, Martin Heidegger asserted that there are two types of questions: “one type is that of some questions which lead to clear answers; while the other type is the questions which lead to more questions.” (Heidegger 2005: 55)

The latter has been – without doubt— the connotation sought out through the logic of inquiry of this theoretico-practical exercise. This dissertation started with some questions and produced more questions reflected in people’s examples of their concrete experiences as they came up in the storytelling. Widening the dialogue and seeking to ask “more questions” and to foment deliberation seemed a reasonable move on the way to building the democratic state from the ground up, from the daily practices of the political community at the neighborhood level.

Ultimately, this approach aims at advancing the substantive understanding of community through a democratic and more realistic – i.e., grounded — concept formation against a traditional approach. It also questions how we pursue research in social sciences — how we seek and validate knowledge about the social world. This dissertation sought to question and to oppose the status quo in social science research that reproduces and perpetuates an scholastic fallacy. This “fallacy” transcends largely the mere academic sphere and provokes misleading paths of life and work. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu referred to this as an illusion because the scientist gets inside the societal normalizing machine.
This work is in behalf of the ordinary people so that they talk for themselves about their experiences rather than giving the researcher a blank check to deliberately come up with the definition of a concept s/he has no real – lived – experience with. The scientist creates this illusion the action of “picturing all social agents in the image of the scientist,” to which normalizing process Bourdieu referred to as the “most serious epistemological mistake in human sciences” (1998: 132-33). This “scholastic fallacy” tends to insert both the research and researcher in the normalizing societal machine of doing things and thinking of things in one best way.2

The main contributions of this research are both substantive and methodological for the study of community. Beginning with the concept creation and validation by the members of the community themselves, the researcher undertook the rarely visited approach of starting the inquiry from the particular (people’s experiences) and comparing it to the theoretical concept or abstraction (Mary Parker Follett’s “community process”). As discussed before – and according to theorists of knowledge such as Kant, Heidegger, and Schutz– in making ourselves a concept of a part of reality, we tend to look for what is the same in what is different. “Concept” is the unity of one consciousness regarding what is common in many different things or events (Cf. Kant). This research granted equal importance in the process of concept formation to the ordinary person, the practitioner (who actually may have hands-on or practical knowledge joined with the experience of community) and to the theorists.


2 For example, see the work of Frederick W. Taylor, The principles of scientific management. New York: Harper. 1913
In this sense, this constitutes a “pre-scientific” dissertation. By focusing on grounding concept formation in the experiences of the people, the concept must be reexamined before any further study can be done. That is, no conceptualization can succeed without content – in the sense of being the prior and essential step to any further measurement in social sciences. The concept of community needs to ground itself again and again in the practice of community before any conceptualization can proceed. We must determine the “what” of what is going on, before any measurement can be conducted. What we are actually seeking “to get a sense of” comes before the measurement itself. Although essential, this idea has been neglected in social sciences.

An idea is formed by those who live what we are attempting to define. They are the source of our concepts. They bring the concept to life. This is paramount for creating a more grounded conceptualization process and more democratic, especially when it concerns community and democracy. If we do not posses a coherent concept (i.e., based on real, concrete, experiences) then when we go out into the field we may encounter contradictions between what we think we are measuring and what we are actually measuring. We may be measuring a fictional and abstract make-up; not reality.

A case for practice illuminating theory has been the focus and purpose of this dissertation along with the plausibility of broadening the dialogue on community from the ground up. As the narratives in Chapter IV have showed, this research sought to make a case for the active citizens’ unique contributions and ideas to the formation of the concept of community. This rests on their “expertise” in everyday life. After all, they have the practical knowledge in what it means to be active parts in neighborhood groups. In short, and as Alfred Schutz’s writings helped this author make conscious, this
theoretico-practical endeavor sought to retrieve from anonymity the neglected subjective viewpoint of actors, or the “forgotten man” of social sciences. After all it takes two to hold a conversation about what is real.

The fact that much conceptualization that goes on in social sciences today which does not consider the contributions of the social sciences “subjects” themselves may simply respond to the power differentiation of the researcher and the ordinary person. The researcher does not have a problem with this difference in authority to define concepts -- s/he may actually not even realize of its existence. In this sense, s/he who defines the concepts holds the power to enunciate what is “viable” in theory building (obtusely paralleled to what is “real” out there, where social phenomena reaches its fullest dimensions) from what is not, thus subjugating the ordinary individual to a lesser share in the authority to define what is real. Without doubt, such situation replicates and reproduces the omnipresent power-over in culture.

This power difference does exist and is imposed by scientists as a prelude to conducting “scientific” social research, as the realm of the “experts.” The issue of power is historically ignored in social science research. Hence deeper discussions regarding power differentiation when it comes to knowledge and concept formation are greatly needed if one seeks a meaningful social science research.

2. The richness of the narrative. Interviews based on this assumption display a greater richness of meaning and detail than is obtainable in surveys.

Asking questions that would lead to more questions rather than to clear-cut answers appeared – in this case – to lead to a more meaningful social science research. The researcher undertook this task by letting the phenomenon speak for itself. That meant
asking questions and seeking descriptions and ideas that revealed what people called “community.” Social science research tends to utilize terms that may make sense only to the researcher. A phenomenological approach sees phenomena as suspended on the in-betweens of questions and answers. As people use concrete examples of their experiences in their narratives, they fill in the “gaps” of what – to the scientist and researcher – constitutes the “unexplainable” (Cf., Kant). Thus the people fill with meaning – with content – what would otherwise be an empty concept of “community.”

This insightful approach (led by asking questions of the subjects of the study) brought meaning to the concept of community. The concept had for once a meaning and an understanding rooted in the experiences of those who have the experience and are better able to judge the relevance of social science concepts: the social subjects. Social scientists seldom use language familiar to the so called subjects, which is why the relevance issue moves to the resistance of social science research that integrates the subjects for arriving at a grounded concept.

The dialogue about community is thus open to non-traditional spheres of inquiry such as the people who engage in community processes themselves. The purpose was to come up with a richer and more grounded concept that is able to capture and reveal what is real, what “community” is from the standpoint of those who live in one – an always-being-constituted- political process. The outcome of the study happens to confirm suspicions that people have something to say about their own lives and therefore, produces in some sense, democratic “knowledge” than is otherwise possible. This has been reflected by the community members’ own terminology. The dialogical experience of the subjects of
research may constitute the main contribution to the field of public administration: that of people’s ideas as a felt sense of reality.

The concrete experiences of the community members brought an overwhelming sense of concreteness and liveliness to the process of community under study, thus insisting that concept formation has basis in the reality. The concept of community has now content. In that sense, this dissertation offered specific contributions to how to proceed methodologically on a step-by-step basis with a phenomenological logic of inquiry in the study of social phenomena and with the interpretation of meanings.

The richness of the story resides in the power of synthesis and concreteness when a person narrates an experience. Ralph Hummel makes a case for the advantageous role of storytelling in organizations – for employees to cope with problems – and in study of social sciences alike. His examples refer to the managers who – in order to make sense of a convoluted reality – tell stories to each other and thus reconstruct reality intersubjectively:

Managers care first and foremost about putting a problem together, in a way that makes sense to those concerned, before taking it apart. […] The story and the story-telling emerge as the prime means of orienting oneself. (Hummel 1991: 36)

Hummel argues that the story is a powerful tool to prevent us from falling into the analytic science trap of dissecting reality and thus turning the people into isolated entities. In this sense, the story becomes a tool of engagement with others as the story is being told. It is also a tool of engagement with our own selves as the story gives meaning to the reality of the story-teller. (Hummel 1991, following Berger and Luckmann 1967)

What can be learned from a case study that is based in story-telling or narratives? Even though the researcher may not be able to produce generalizations and predictions
from a study of people’s experiences and meanings, she was able to gather a great array of descriptions that refer to life experiences and concrete examples, all of which help to better understand social phenomena. The case study allows the researcher to learn from it in a way that no other method allows: that of being faithful to the specific details, to the specificities of the case. The descriptive approach allows for a better understanding of the reality as life does not come to us in dissected pieces, but rather as a complex flow of events which are hard to separate into rationalistic or pre-conceived parts or to assign meaning from outside. The meaning is to be given by the situation as it expresses itself in the form of a story, an anecdote or a narrative.

Bent Flyvbjerg invites us to discover the great plausibility for learning from case studies and to embrace different approaches to social science inquiry. He argues that:

[…] formal generalization is only one of many ways by which people create and accumulate knowledge. That knowledge cannot be formally generalized doesn’t mean that it cannot enter into the collective process of knowledge accumulation in a given field or in a society. A purely descriptive, phenomenological case study without any attempt to generalize can certainly be of value in this process and has often helped cut a path toward scientific innovation. (Flyvbjerg 2006: 76)

3. Practice can illuminate theory. Citizens can have something of value to say to an expert. (Cf., Husserl 1970)

The researcher must think how and why practice may illuminate theory by weaving in the warp and woof of the rich tapestry of life into a coherent experience. Ultimately, why would anyone seek a concept formulation that starts from the ordinary people’s experience? The overwhelming presence of reality that embeds people’s everyday experiences — especially in the field of community groups or neighborhood organizations – ought to be the starting point of any social science research. The task is to remain true to the facts themselves (Cf., Husserl 1970). Who can best discern what is real
from what is not in neighborhood improvement groups than the people actually partaking in community group practices?

The practice of community can be best understood and explicated by those who are active in its midst because – as we could see in the interview narratives and interpretation process of this dissertation – people’s experiences do bring rich meaning to otherwise empty concepts and theoretical assumptions. As Martin Heidegger, following Husserl, put it, we ought to get back “to the things themselves.” In effect, as early as his Critique of Pure Reason, Immanuel Kant insightfully warned the social science researcher against what he rightfully perceived as a blind or obtuse approach to the study of social concepts. He synthesized this thought by asserting: “Thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind” (Kant 1968: A51/B76). With that slogan he meant that intuition and concepts together constitute the fundamental elements of our cognition. These elements are inseparable so that neither concepts without intuition corresponding to them in some way nor intuition without concepts can yield a cognition.3

Furthermore Kant commentator and translator Werner S. Pluhar4 inspired the researcher to think about her role in the process of concept formation and her obligation as a future member of academia. She came to realize that there may be nothing wrong

---

3 “Thoughts without [intentional] content (Inhalt) are empty (leer), intuitions without concepts are blind (blind). It is, therefore, just as necessary to make the mind's concepts sensible — that is, to add an object to them in intuition — as to make our intuitions understandable — that is, to bring them under concepts. These two powers, or capacities, cannot exchange their functions. The understanding can intuit nothing, the senses can think nothing. Only from their unification can cognition arise. (Kant 1968: A50-51/B74-76)”

with theoretical assumptions, though assumptions that are not real to the person making them – thus lacking empirical content – may call for further investigation. However, when an issue becomes real through its makers, the role of the social science researcher who aims at exercising *phronesis* – Aristotle’s practical wisdom⁵ – is that of bringing clarity and distinctness to the indistinct and unclear ideas of the people as they “live community.” Everyday thinking has its own standards of validity which are “just as secure as is necessary for the practical project of life that determines their sense.” (Husserl 1970:125)

An important aspect of this dialogical exercise is the discussion on methodological individualism versus collective thinking (or phenomenology) in the study of social phenomena – and especially when studying community – which reflects in social life, a theory of knowledge alien to traditional science. A substantive contribution to the understanding of community was the discovery that “community as a process” is not an abstraction but rather an everyday practice in neighborhood groups, reminiscent of the political community that the ancient Greeks praised, and a real promise for democratic governance at the local level.

Community members reflected on the changes that these groups created in their personal lives by granting them a purpose, a sense of realization and by freeing them from living merely on the basis of individualistic concerns. In the sense, the social structure of community replicates the knowledge structure of phenomenology. The group is for the individual a means to attain bigger and nobler aims than the mere existing in the world as the person which is a part of a larger, unaccountable, universe. A discovery of

this dissertation is that Follett’s idea of “self-and-through-others” constitutes these neighborhood groups’ daily practices. The process of integration emerges as the essence of shared practices that evolve over time weaving people together (Cf., Follett 1919, 1920; Kemmis 1990). Here they come to know what it means to seek the larger good of the whole.

4. Asking people questions brings meaning to the concept. The conventional turn to imposing the researcher’s definition of phenomena via an "operationalization" is premature as long as participants have not been consulted as to the meaning such terms have for the people. Only then can the participants determine the meanings.

A problem already arisen in the second chapter of this dissertation is that theorists are impeded from grounding a concept unless and until they consult and ask questions of the social actors about the essence of what the theorists are enquiring about. It would otherwise be an attempt to illuminate “nothingness,” or something that does not exist, an abstract construct. Who can better express and relate to the essence of community other than the community members themselves? Only they can direct our aim of capturing the lived meanings of group dynamics that group members had in their stocks of lived community practices. If community as a lived reality – as a process and practice – is a-making, then the concept formation ought to follow the process of continuous “becoming.” The joint practices of creation and re-creation of intersubjective reality allow for a realistic and concrete depiction of the lived world. The pictures and ideas that emerge from the standpoint – and in the eyes and words – of those who experience the reality of group practices thus make intelligible the concept of community process. This approach hence allowed the researcher to redefine such concept in a meaningful way; that
is, grounded in reality, in the concrete examples of people’s lived experiences of community.

Besides making people aware of the multiple resources that are available to citizen groups to improve their common places, neighborhood group practices bring reasonable formality to its members anchored in their daily experiences of trust, civic virtue and a true sense of fulfilling their individual needs, of being with others in the world and working for a larger aim. These experiences also suggest that interactions between neighborhood associations and government officials and other agencies are vital relationships for the development and constant recreation of community groups and for getting the projects that the groups put forward accomplished. Likewise, these positive relationships benefit the public administration processes by legitimating its democratic endeavors, allocating their resources according to people’s needs – as the neighbors define them—and ultimately bringing efficiency closer to democracy. (Cf., Follett 1926)

5. People’s own terms describe the phenomenon more richly than the theorists alone.

Phenomenology emerges as necessary precondition for quasi-experimental research to proceed.

Interpretative explications of people’s experiences have -- through this study -- allowed deeper and richer insights for answering a research question that has “the collective” or “the group” as the focus of its inquiry. In phenomenological interpretation research, a grassroots approach – as undertaken in this dissertation—unveils the obscure realm of the taken-for-granted assumptions about neighborhood improvement group dynamics and, ultimately, of the practice of community as a process.
The concept of community resembles in this context a constant process of creating a new state of being. An interpenetrating process of creation and re-creation of the polis, community as a process becomes exactly that: a creative and evolving concept that refers to the group’s constitutive process, rather than to an immutable entity with aprioristically defined boundaries (Cf., Follett 1919, 1926). This dissertation has shown that the only certainty one can have regarding “community” is its unpredictable nature embedded in permanent change. The political nature of people’s joint practices frames the concept of community within dynamic and always changing boundaries. The moment after the “snapshot” of a community group is taken, its reality is already fully anew.

6. Methodological intelligibility. This finally solves both the problems of relevance (of abstract scientific terms defined by experts) to real life, and the demands of theorists of meaning who, since Max Weber, have demanded both meaning adequacy and causal adequacy.

Explication of community as self-description served to remove the exclusive authority of experts to define the concept of community. A concept that belongs to the theorists alone is handed to the actors of community groups themselves. The center of attention is far removed from the theorists and from the researcher as departure points. It is rather focused in the realm of people’s lived experiences hence bringing intelligibility to the understanding of the concept at hand. The ideas of the participants elicited in their own terms, and with their very remarks, emotions, and gestures, became the focus, the point of departure to recreate the concept of community anew: from the ground up.

Rather than testing the neighbors’ inputs against that of the theorist’, the researcher pursued just the opposite: she attempted to take people’s ideas of their experiences and
contrast them with that of the theorist (M. P. Follett) to see whether or not that concept could be enriched. In short, the author sought to bring the concrete in its fullest sense, with its flesh and energy, forward into the process of concept creation. This sense of concrete, lived, reality that the people contributed to the formation of the concept of community tends to escape both the theorist involved in research and the person who lacks that experience under a traditional logic of inquiry that departs from the theorist or the researcher alone.

Concept formation in this dissertation became a collective process because the concept of community was established not by the isolated individual, nor by the theorist, nor by the researcher, but by them all in a dialogical process that has only just begun. This icebreaking exercise of bringing the polis to the center of discussion to create a more grounded, richer and more concrete concept has been a major success of this initial theoretico-practical inquiry. Making concept formation a truly empirical and democratic process may be in effect a step forward to leveling social science research. The construction or construing of social reality is a democratic process in the sense that all the people consulted have something to say. Through referring to people’s experiences and expertise, the theorists can make a truer sense of what is “out there” in the real world, which they are attempting to understand, and make clear and distinct.

During the two major interpretive stages that this dissertation carried out (the concrete and the more abstract, described in Chapters IV and V respectively) the researcher was prompted to utilize her own judgment to decide in which ways people’s narratives were telling of the essence of the concept of community. Essential to the theory of knowledge is judgment in organizing the vast amounts of data, the hours of recordings and
transcriptions, and later the interpreting of them all and seeking to capture what is the
essence of people’s ideas. Coming up with the themes from the people’s narratives was
only the first hurdle that the investigator had to struggle with. Once that was done,
judgment was again necessary in deciding whether a neighbor’s idea belonged to one
theme or to another, or to both, and why, and why not. All these and many other matters
required the judgment of the researcher. Judgment, of course, can be validated only by
the larger community of like-minded scholars (Cf., Kuhn 1962).

Influential were the authors who discussed at length the significance of
phenomenological interpretation and even approached the necessary steps to pursue
meaningful studies of social science phenomena (Cf., Hycner 1985; van Manen 1990).
Others, such as Heidegger 1962, Schutz 1962, Berger and Luckmann 1967, and Hummel
1991, for instance, have discussed in length the ontological, epistemological and
methodological implications of undertaking a phenomenological logic of inquiry. While
the discussions of the latter authors served as profound theoretical bases upon which the
researcher built her case and the fundamental triggers to undertake the phenomenological
task of searching meaning through people’s experiences, it appears that they have failed
to give a precise methodological – step-by-step, so to speak – instruction.

The theoretico-practical exercise presented here posed questions to people and
described with a case study and concrete examples the details, the “how-to,” of this type
of epistemological research, from data collection through interpretive explication of
people’s narratives, as well as the challenges that the phenomenological logic of inquiry
entailed along the way. It sought to put to a test whether practice could illuminate theory
and ultimately whether social science research can become democratic and participative in its making, and thus become meaningful.

7. Resistance

The researcher dealt with the unusual task of having to vindicate her logic of inquiry over and over before skeptical audiences of social scientists. Some in the audiences demanded that the author persuaded them that a phenomenological logic of inquiry and a collective methodological approach was more appropriate and insightful to study collective phenomena. The paradox of studying collective phenomena by methodological individualism seems to escape many critics. The essence of the collective theory of inquiry to answer the research question at hand requires that the “collective” becomes the primary and final source of all validation standards. It requires these rejected “Others” over the more traditional—and unrealistic—methodological individualism.

This research attempted to contribute both substantively and epistemologically to a more meaningful and insightful social science research. It attempted to transcend the research status quo by asking the ontological question of “what community is” and accessing the answer with a dialogical epistemology, that is, through a phenomenological logic of inquiry.6 The substance needs to be conceptualized before we can conduct scientific analysis. How can anyone dissect reality without first considering it as what it is; as a whole? This claim coincidentally is in harmony with the interviewed neighbors’ and Follett’s ideas that the “whole” is “more than the sum of its constitutive parts.” In this sense, practice—as reflected by the participants’ experiences greatly and richly —

---

6 Not coincidentally “phenomenology” is rooted in the Greek words *phenomenon* and *logos*. Phenomenon is—according to Martin Heidegger—“that which shows itself in itself (in its own terms) when appropriately addressed.” While *logos* refers to something said or argued.
did illuminate theory. The only claim of this dissertation is the discovery of new ideas from the ordinary citizens that could illuminate the professionals’ theorizing without losing touch with what is real, with the everyday group practices. Restricted to the discovery of new ideas, the conclusion is to be a claim of further questions.

Due to a lack of prior studies that had the people at the center of the research – from the data collection stage to the interpretative stages – the researcher faced unanticipated challenges as she worked herself through this investigative task. Most of these oppositions point to the manner in which the researcher interpreted the data collected from the participants in her study. (Refer to Chapter III)

What justified this diversion from normal social science practice? Number One, the intent of research: to discover whether participants of community had anything to offer to theorists. This might ordinarily be taken as a question of the distribution of commonalities, their relative importance, preferably weighted by the number of people who agreed with each other, etc. However, it was not the purpose of this dissertation to fulfill the dictates of methodological individualism, but to seek out the one idea or many ideas that would reflect the lives of those practicing community, even if only one of the ideas was held by one person. For this purpose, that one person and that one idea is all the help an expert requires (especially if it was a good idea). The method chosen to answer this question is both politically and methodologically anti-individualism.

The issues involved in the epistemological debate on social phenomena in general and of community in particular are obviously complex and difficult to resolve. This may be due to their largely philosophical nature as they involve questions not agreeable to direct empirical testing that would yield clear-cut answers or finalized discussions. They are
rather open to deliberation and disagreements because these inquiries are essentially value-laden.

In his survey of methodological individualism, Swedish sociologist Lars Udehn (2002) finds gut reactions stirred up by normal social scientists’ perceptions that their most sacred and real beliefs are being attacked. However, as Udehn also points out, this misapprehension is in part due to confusion of the epistemological “community” concept and its social incarnation. As it is, with law and the citizen in the political arena, there is no excuse in claiming ignorance of the law. The “law of the situation” (Follett 1924) must be obeyed by those who seek the truth or reality of social phenomena. If it is not, there is a guarantee that a cop will ask surely those who confuse the license of their profession with liberty while the rest of us, who see a wider social science, may find consolation in Immanuel Kant’s dictum that even the categories of experience are nothing more than the creations of free citizens.7

8. Implications for democratic politics

The quandary of the field of Public Administration lies between bureaucracy and control, on the one hand, and democracy and freedom, on the other hand. Both public administration theorists (Stivers, Wamsley) and its critics (Hummel) agree that public administration as a field of study is located between efficiency and control, on the one hand, and freedom and democracy, on the other hand.8 It is the public administrators’ job

---

7 I would like to dearly thank Professor Ralph Hummel for his keen contribution to this section of the chapter and for triggering my mind continuously throughout the whole dissertation process.

8 Personal communication with Professor Camilla Stivers, fall 2005. Also, refer to two works: Wamsley, G. L. Et al. (1990). Public administration and the governance process: 200
to make sure that the latter does not get overridden by the former. However, and just as important, it is the role of social science researchers to start conducting research by actually asking a very basic, but often ignored, question of the type of knowledge that is gained in the practice of community.

One significant implication is for political theory’s continuing dialogue toward an encompassing understanding of community and its repercussions for citizen participation. A concept of community constructed from the ground up may tell the social science researcher something new about the nature of concept formation and of its concrete content. When theorists build a concept from the ideas of the people directly involved in the experience of community, this concept may have the real plausibility to shed light in the explication of many social phenomena which have the collective as center of attention. Above all, such an approach may have the potential of revisiting our understanding of democracy, community, and active citizenship.

A research that begins with life as it is lived in real (social life) situations frees the investigators from academic and definitive narrowness and takes them to a more grounded and democratic area of knowledge. The knowledge that is created behind “closed doors” in the simplicity of concepts and away from where things actually happen, perpetuates a damage that the power of a few over others has imposed in the midst of our souls for centuries. The implications of such anti-democratic approach to life and to research — unfortunately still much in vogue now as in Follett’s times — has shown its scary side. We, researchers of social sciences, are as much to blame for social maladies shifting the political dialogue. In Wamsley, G. et al. Refounding public administration. Newbury Park: Sage Publications; and Hummel, R. (2004). A Once and Future Politics: Heidegger’s Recovery of the Political in Parmenides. Administrative Theory & Praxis, vol. 26, No. 3, 279-303.
such as inequality as are unscrupulous politicians. The pernicious consequences of narrow sided research approaches that look at reality as a paralyzed thing, as an amoeba needing superior decision power (preferably from the outside), may provoke catastrophic consequences for the larger society diminishing the capability of people to trust one another and work together.

This case study sought to construct a better – more realistic — representation of community by starting from the beginning – where the lives are lived – from the ground up, in order to (re) create the concept (or allocate meaning to an empty word). This is the pre-scientific phase that most scientists usually ignore: that of defining the concept to be studied or measured beforehand.

Building a concept from the ground up empowers the people at the bottom of the largely accepted and reified knowledge “pyramid” that determines where knowledge is to reside – at the cusp of the research inquiry. This dissertation aimed at building a more encompassing and realistic idea of the meaning of community than a theorist’s definition alone could provide. It was written to oppose the abovementioned elitist belief that knowledge conspicuously resides within the strict and exclusive realm of scientists. This study thus aimed at recognizing the value of practical knowledge of the ordinary citizen who is engaged in group action and hence what he or she has to teach to the outside observer, such as the social scientist.

This dissertation suggests a great potential for democratic governance because it asks the people – the subjects of all social action and thus of social science research — about the daily practice they engage in, that of neighborhood improvement group processes. This approach would certainly redefine the meaning of Public Administration research
and practice. The neighborhood level appears as the cell where democratic governance has the potential to develop; where the political community that the ancient Greeks envisioned is plausible at all. Putting the people’s contexts of experience back in the center of social investigation makes for a meaningful social science research endeavor. It aims at transcending traditional logics of inquiry that emphasize the view of the scientist over the people being studied—which in the real world of human beings happens to have a voice, a body, a life.

In this sense this study contributes to the argument that the neighborhood has the potential of constituting the equivalent of the Greek *polis*. As Daniel Kemmis (1990) asserted, the place weaves practices among people that evolve over time creating meaningful relationships. Those learned practices enable people to gain trust in one another and empowers them with civic virtue, two fundamental values of the Aristotelian *polis*. (*Cf.*, Aristotle; Kemmis 1990)

As discovered through the neighbors’ narratives, the place – the neighborhood — is being constituted permanently by people’s joint efforts, work, wishes, desires, and concerns. When people get together with the purpose of improving the place that they share and care about, the neighborhood becomes the center of people’s interactions, where they connect and engage in common work on a daily basis. The relationships that are created and nurtured within the framework of a shared place and shared goals for its improvement grant the group members with a life lived in its fullest sense, that is, shared with(in) others.

Therefore, since the neighborhood is the place with which the people identify themselves– as the sphere where their lives are lived, where they connect to others, to
different services, in short, to public administration – it is palpable that the neighborhood constitutes the basis for the political community that Aristotle envisioned. This study showed that the neighborhood as the *polis* is plausible and actually a happening process at least in the neighborhood studied. It also carries a tremendous potential for people to become closer to one another, to exercise civic virtue and mutual trust and for public administration to become more democratic. Governance from the ground up ought to be seen as what Follett called “community process,” that is, an integrative dynamic that is always in-progress, in the making, evolving. These very attributes make difficult to put one’s arms around a “community,” because its nature is deliberation. Community is inherently political.

The grassroots conceptualization of “community” that this dissertation undertook, followed a process of discovery not only of new knowledge for the researcher, but also a discovery for neighbors of their own potentialities. The neighbors interviewed said that no one in academia or public offices had ever bothered before to ask them about their daily practices of group activities which to them represented their liveliness, their dreams of freedom come true – their lives having become fulfilled.

The larger aim of this study was to open up the dialogue to the formation of the concept of community to different, deeper and more inclusive levels of society, starting from the people actually experiencing community in their own skin outwards to the more abstract levels– but more distinct: the experts’ community theorizing. It could be of great benefit to other community-oriented professions to see, use, and refine this research as an example of how to proceed in a more grounded way.
9. Future research

This research is a piece of a larger puzzle as it seeks to bring to open discussion the collective process of knowledge creation, that which is essentially different from knowing and discovering by oneself alone as an isolated inquirer. Therefore, this study makes a contribution to the substantive issue of collaboration, not only in what comprises neighborhood group activities for the specific sake of neighborhood improvement (as in the particular projects that the neighbor participants in this study clearly related) but also what belongs to the higher realm of conferring authority to the doers to declare the importance of such process. The collective process of working for the larger goal of the common good happens in the context of group process that Follett explained and the people insightfully illuminated with concrete examples.

Further research is necessary in all areas in public administration where the field of community is an important aspect of the focus of study – such as safety, education, health care, social work, etc. Specifically, public administrators ought to work the closest with the people they serve. Rather than ignoring the lay citizens, theorists and practitioners of public administration should not underestimate their mighty potential to improve democratic governance at the local level. From the narratives of the people interviewed, further research may confirm that collaboration and interaction with neighbors are primordial to the citizens to achieve freedom and – in some cases—to survive.

In addition to the concrete examples with which the neighbors illuminated Follett’s theory, many more lessons could be learned from the participants’ experiences, highly beneficial to the social scientist and the public administrator alike. Some of them could be advanced as the nuances of engagement among the neighbors and public officials,
private agencies and non-profit organizations. Other benefits that people received for being part of a larger goal are related to feelings that develop in the process of these intersubjective practices among neighbors and with public officials. The participants believed that both formal and informal interactions among groups and public officials strengthened their relationships over time. The neighbors also referred to these relations as important benefits to influencing formal decision making at the local level, when the neighbors partake in the give-and-take game of practical politics.

An example of a neighborhood group influencing decision making in the formal sense was the zoning code enforcement issue that many neighbors brought up in their stories. The members of the neighborhood group Miraflores pushed the issue through the City Council and successfully got the Council members to agree to enforce the zoning code in the neighborhood, specifically regarding few neighbors who were in violation of them. This is a clear example of citizens groups influencing local decision making. These neighbors told the researcher that they had unsuccessfully attempted for many years, if not a decade, to get these specific zoning regulations implemented and enforced by the City Council. The Council members had a tradition of tabling the issue. The neighbors showed up more frequently. They started to put pressure and make a case so that the zoning laws became enforced. After many years of effort and work between the neighbors and the City Council members, the neighbors finally and proudly came to realize a long wanted issue for the betterment of their neighborhood. The neighbors were conscious of this. Had they not been tenacious and strong as a group towards getting this issue passed, they would have never accomplished such success.
Finally, this study has the potential to reflect further on the roots of the American administrative state and challenge the classical claim of a division between administration and politics. In this sense, this research endorses Dwight Waldo’s appreciation for the political, for conflict as a positive aspect of life itself, for administration as an inherently political and necessarily conflictive activity (Cf., Waldo 1948).

Future research should go hand-in-hand with the study of groups interacting as such, as groups in action. One step would be to listen to the group meeting recordings that the researcher attended and to explore the group dynamics in situ. The question of practice illuminating theory may be more holistically answered by seeing whether Follett’s ideas of community process actually happened in the group dynamics. In other words, future research is paramount in explicating the process that Follett and some of the neighbors talked about individually. Process can show itself as it happens in the actual group dynamics, in the moment, during group meetings and activities. This would seek to discover the practice of community at first hand, in their public meetings and activities and reflect on whether Follett’s community as a process as salience in a real group process, rather than focusing only on individual interviews with the group members.

Such study should focus on addressing the networking processes among neighborhood associations and public officials and on finding ways to enhance their collaboration. The purpose of this collaborative effort would be activist: to help achieve the objectives that the neighbors themselves had set up, in their own terms. Their insights and experiences of living in the neighborhood and partaking in different activities over the years constitute the source of all empirical knowledge.
Understanding these experiences from the participants’ own points of view could be of high value to public administrators and academicians alike. By working together with neighbors and sharing different types of expertise, both public administrators and the citizens may benefit greatly from this continuous exchange and dialogue. This approach to solving problems and to providing services to the neighbors – problems, needs and services as defined from the ground up – could help Public Administration to become more relevant at the level where lives are lived.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


--------------. (1972). *What computers can't do; a critique of artificial reason*. New


Northern Illinois University Press.


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL

The University of Akron

November 28, 2007

Maria Veronica Elias
1952 Thornapple Ave.
Akron, Ohio 44301

Ms. Elias:

Your protocol entitled "Experiencing Community Process: The Dynamics of Community Improvement in Selected Akron Area Neighborhoods" was determined to be exempt from IRB review on November 27, 2007. The IRB application number assigned to this project is 20071126. The protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and matches the following federal category for exemptions:

☐ Exemption 1 - Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices.

☐ Exemption 2 - Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior.

☐ Exemption 3 - Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior not exempt under category 2, but subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office.

☐ Exemption 4 - Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens.

☐ Exemption 5 - Research and demonstration projects conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine public programs or benefits.

☐ Exemption 6 - Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies.

Annual continuation applications are not required for exempt projects. If you make changes to the study's design or procedures that increase the risk to subjects or include activities that do not fall within the approved exemption category, please contact the IRB to discuss whether or not a new application must be submitted. Any such changes or modifications must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

Please retain this letter for your files. If the research is being conducted for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, the student must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
Associate Director

☑ Approved consent form attached

Cc: Ralph P. Hummel, Advisor
Rosalie Hall, IRB Chair

Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
Akron, OH 44359-5102
330-972-7666 • 330-972-621 Fax

The University of Akron is an Equal Education and Employment Institution.
Script to recruit participants for interviews

"My name is Veronica Elias. I am a doctoral student at the University of Akron and I am studying neighborhood improvement groups. We don't know much about how they do what they do. So, I am talking to people who are active in these groups in order to understand better how these groups work. To this end, I would like to converse with all of you who are willing to share with me your experiences in neighborhood improvement projects. These conversations will be absolutely confidential. Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw from the research at any time. Your statements and identities will remain anonymous throughout the whole research process.

What I am going to do after I had talked to all the people I want to talk to, I am going to try to see how it all adds up and I will write a short summary of what I will have found, and I will send that to you and to all others. I would ask you to comment briefly on it. Does my interpretation of community improvement process ring true based on your own experiences? I would like to know if this captures your experience. The groups will not be identified by name at any moment of the research process, including the final dissertation draft and later publications. Nobody will know what neighborhoods I went to and the people I have interviewed.

My contact information is: Maria Veronica Elias, mvel@uakron.edu; and my advisor's is Dr. Ralph Hummel, hummel@uakron.edu. Would you like to know anything else about me or my project at this point? Do you have any questions for me? Is it ok if tape this conversation? If at any time you don't feel comfortable, I can turn the recorder off. All you have to do is tell me."

APPROVED
IRB
Date 11/07/13
The University of Akron
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What neighborhood group do you belong and for how long now?
2. How did you become a member of this group?
3. What usually happens at your meetings?
4. Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you describe what it’s been like working on that issue?
5. Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an issue? How have you dealt with it?
6. How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your neighborhood?
7. Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?
8. What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader?
9. If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your neighborhood group, what would you say?
10. For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you?

11. Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or agencies?

12. What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst?

13. What does “community” mean to you?
APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTIONS

Tracie
-What neighborhood group do you belong and for how long now?
MIRAFLORES, since August of 2007

1) How did you become a member of this group?
I purchased the house in this neighborhood and I immediately joined because they are known for cleaning up the streets, for historic preservation and for crime prevention of the West Hill neighborhood; they are bringing it back to being a well respected area like it used to be. I wanted to be part of it.

2) What usually happens at your meetings?
We discuss the crime issues in our neighborhood; what is happening to stop crime in that area with the help of police.

3) Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you describe what it’s been like working on that issue?
Like my house being broken into. The house which I have not moved into yet has been broken into seven times since Christmas time and I have been involved with the police and one detective who has a file on it. In the meantime two people have gone to court; probably two of the many people who have tried to break into my house, and the crime and safety committee chair, Joe Boyle, came to court with me when I went to speak against these people trying to break into my house. And he came to represent the WH neighborhood group. Also the neighbors since they know what’s going on they have been keeping an eye on my house. It is nice that they know what’s going on around them and also that they have helped me. But nobody should be breaking into my house.

4) Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an issue? How have you dealt with it?
I am so new to the group (I have only been to couple of meetings). We have had disagreements respect of how we view the way the city has been handling crime in this area and some of us feel that more is being done than other person feels, or some people feel that crime has been going up in an area more than others. It is more a disagreement about the approach. We all agree that there is a problem that there is crime. In the end we all learned something. We still all think that there is a problem with crime.

5) How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your neighborhood?
It is nice to know that there are people who care about what’s going on around them. I wish more people cared about the neighborhood. Some people turn around if they see something wrong. That’s why I moved into the neighborhood because I knew that there were some people who cared and were doing something about the neighborhood.

6) Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?
Joe Boyle is the glue that brings things together

7) What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader?
You have to live in the WH neighborhood, and there is a fee. And then get involved in whatever committee interests you most, like I am involved with the crime and safety meeting. [Leader] you have to care and be able to stand up for your conviction and the ones of those who are in the group.

8) If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your neighborhood group, what would you say?
So far it’s been great. It is nice to see that people are watching out for my house and that in other areas people don’t do events together like we do here, getting together to do things.

9) For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you?
Best is knowing that others want to approach crime. The worst is that there is still crime

10) Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or agencies?
The police officer who comes to our crime and safety committee meetings is kind of the liaison between the neighborhood and the government. I don’t think that the city council, the county council or the mayor of the city address crime as it should be addressed. I think that we need more officers in the streets. That way there would be less crime. But we don’t have that. I think they should have a more proactive approach. I would like to see some of the officials come to our functions and events and meetings more often. I have not seen one of the officials whom I have invited to our meeting, so it’s frustrating.

11) What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst?
The best is because we are group we are taken more seriously than a single person. I think that the person alone isn’t considered as valuable as the group is. That’s why I think that in group we get more notice from the government or the police. Worst: each of us still has to look after our own things, like if I am broken in I would be the one that has to deal with the criminal on my own. It would be nicer to go to court with others from the group. When it comes to dealing with crime you are still alone.

12) What does ‘community’ mean to you?
Community is a sense of feeling of togetherness where you live, that you know your neighbors, that you have a support system, something in the community that bonds you with others. It is a feeling of togetherness with other like-minded people. Kind of a family type feeling. I moved into this area knowing about the problems. But this
area has come a long way. Five years ago I would have not driven through here, and now I am moving in. But I see what the WH group has done and their reputation of caring about their neighborhood. So that’s why I feel safe living in this neighborhood, it is because I know that I am not alone trying to solve crime problems. They have done a great deal of work in getting rid of a lot of crime in the area. So as an outsider looking inside --I haven’t moved in yet but I bought my house already-- I come from a neighborhood where my house has never been broken in, I have never had a problem there, BUT there I don’t have a community group. It’s a sensitive character that you have not seen since the 50s or 60s. People don’t know their neighbors anymore, and I want more of how things were when I was growing up, knowing my neighbors.

Stella

-What neighborhood group do you belong and for how long now?
MIRAFLORES, for five years

1) How did you become a member of this group?
I’ve known many of the members from the previous organizations. I expressed an interest and they have allowed me to come on to the board.

2) What usually happens at your meetings?
We discuss what the committees are working on. We plan things together. We go through all the agenda. Pretty much what you saw tonight.

3) Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you describe what it’s been like working on that issue?
One of the big issues we worked on was a zoning issue, where a landlord was violating a zoning law by having too many apartments in his building, and we successfully got it straightened out by going through the appropriate channels to get him not to be able to do that anymore. There were different hearings, a prosecution through the city… it took over five years to get it resolved. But we were persistent and in our pursuit of getting it done, we did it.

4) Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an issue? How have you dealt with it?
Yes, there have been times when we could not reach consensus. But we let the majority prevail. It is relatively democratic. I don’t think people are shy to express an opinion even though it may not be what the group wants. But overall the majority makes the decision.

5) How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your neighborhood?
It just makes me feel more involved and more connected. When I see things that need to be changed, I know that there are ways to get those changes to happen.

6) Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?
We have a lot of unique personalities. So for sure there would make a difference if any of them was not there, but only because of that something very unique that they bring to the table, a wide diversity on the board. The attorney who is part of the board would take up on issues that nobody else would, he is kind of the bulldog. Everyone
brings something unique to the board because of their unique personalities, so when they are not there you don’t get to hear and feel what they have to offer.

7) **What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader?**

Nothing. Just pay the dues. Anyone can become a member, you don’t even need to live within the boundaries of the neighborhood, and we have a garden and city tour, so some people get interested in what we are doing. We don’t care if they don’t live within the neighborhood. [Leader] I think that being able to get people together and get the job done, knowing the different strengths of the people working with you and being able to put their best abilities into good use. One fellow who came tonight when we all acted surprised, his name is John, and he is also an attorney and he helped us in our zoning battles. So when we had to deal with that issue, we were able to use him to get it solved.

8) **If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your neighborhood group, what would you say?**

I would say it is worthwhile to have done it. I don’t want to do it forever, I am glad I did it [laughs] I am getting old and tired and so I don’t want to do it forever. But I feel that I was able to contribute and it has been a great experience to be able to help when I could.

9) **For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you?**

Probably the worst experience is when someone thinks that you are involved for he wrong reasons, that your heart is not there and that you are doing it for business or ego or something like that. Sometimes those misconceptions happen. I can’t think of any specific example. We do really have a very unique group, a very good group. In my five years I don’t remember having any conflict with anybody. I think we are just adults about it and we deal with everything quite well. Some of the fundraising that we have, like the garden tour and people coming from other parts of the community to see our neighborhood, they recognize what we are doing, and that what we do makes a difference, that is very positive, those are the best experiences. When we are recognized as a very good neighborhood organization makes me proud of it. And I think we are very careful not to rub people the wrong way. You heard the letter that Jane read tonight. It’s all about we don’t want to offend anybody, we want to work with everyone together, we don’t take sides in battles. And I think that probably not everyone agrees with that, but I think that as an organization we have to uphold that philosophy so that just we can get things done without making enemies.

10) **Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or agencies?**

We have a really good working relationship with the city of Akron, specifically the planning department. They are working very closely with us in the housing guidelines that we are working on for over a year. They respect us and they know that we have the betterment of the entire neighborhood as our goal, and they are more than willing to put staff people’s time to help us achieve our goal, and I think that’s wonderful. I think the city respects us, and we get the recognition of being a well run neighborhood organization. They are a lot of organizations in this area which don’t
have a very good reputation, that are more controversial. We are not seen that way. We try to get along with everybody.

11) What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst?
The best one is working in these guidelines. The worst one is probably trying to get the police to recognize that we do have a crime problem in the neighborhood. We have a crime and safety committee that meets regularly, but we don’t seem to facilitate a whole lot of change downtown that affects our neighborhood. We have been trying to lobby for years for police officers to work specific neighborhoods, the same officer working always in the neighborhood so people would know him, and he would know who belongs to the neighborhood and who doesn’t. But the city seems very reluctant to apply that, that a patrolman would work only one sector of town. The downside of that is that they can be bribed and all that, and I guess that’s why they did away with it in the old days. But I think that seeing police in the streets used to be very common in the old times; a policeman would work certain area and everyone knew who he was. We feel need that for a cop to understand our neighborhood better. We have a lot of little alleys, a lot of little streets. A street cop would know the neighborhood better.

12) What does ‘community’ mean to you?
Community means just the neighbors around you, when people stick together for a common goal, for the betterment of the entire area and they are willing to work toward that goal; when everybody wants to see things happen. When they are not afraid to come out of their house, to talk to their neighbor. When people come together to make their neighborhood something special. And I think that we have that. It has been a good experience. I wish there were many more young people who would start taking responsibility of their neighborhood. I think that it’s very important for young people to get involved in their communities earlier in their young adulthood. Even as a renter, it is their neighborhood, it is their community, and we don’t hear enough from the people who live in the neighborhood who are not owners, wanting to get involved it’s like they don’t have ownership here, almost like they can’t make a difference. They really could and we would welcome them. Like “I am a tenant but I still live here, there are issues.” We would really like to hear that voice that we don’t have right now. Everybody in our board is a home owner, and relatively well to do, better than average. We have a great demographic diversity on our neighborhood: a lot of poor, elderly, and we don’t have that voice in our board. We are conscious of that and we try to make sure to consider how they would feel about issues. But it would be nice to have that involvement. And I don’t know why that is. It seems to me that the old people think that it is too late for them to make a difference; young people seem to be so busy with other things. I don’t want to make excuses for them because I don’t know. I don’t think that we as a neighborhood organization reach out to other groups within the neighborhood. We try to make our newsletters available in public places like the coffee shop, and we would welcome anyone to come to our meetings like the one tonight. So we are always willing to listen to everyone. The senior citizens are demanding a grocery store in the HS, and we have known that for a long time, but still it isn’t happening, and we don’t know what to do to make it happen, but it
seems that we fall into deaf ears. The mayor says that he is working on it, so let’s see what happens.

Peter

-What neighborhood group do you belong and for how long now?
I belong to the MIRAFLORES. I was one of the founding members around 1998. I’m not sure, really, I lose track of time [laughs].

1) How did you become a member of this group?
There were some people in the neighborhood who were a little concerned about some things happening in the neighborhood like drugs, prostitution, and environmental health issues, like trash and litter, and run-down houses. We needed to get some clout with the city to get things accomplished and to make all citizens who live here more aware about what was occurring. So we decided that we needed to have a meeting and we decided that we would incorporate the organization as a non-profit organization; we were about 12 people.

2) What usually happens at your meetings?
Generally, in the crime and safety committee meetings --which I have been to lately-- we discuss the actions that we can take regarding the different problems. The board of trustees meeting is basically more business, they talk about the different issues of each of the committees.

3) Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you describe what it’s been like working on that issue?
One of the issues that we have dealt with is that we had a lot of litter, junk, and a lot of trash in the neighborhood and I worked with the health department supervisor on that. And we worked with the solid waste program and were able to get assistance from the Summit-Akron solid waste delivery program and get large dumpsters delivered into the neighborhood, so that we would have clean-up weekends. These dumpsters were kind of semi-tractor trailer size, and they were spread out throughout the neighborhood. People could clean up all the trash out of their basements and backyards and they could put it in these dumpsters. The neighbors who could not take the trash to the sites where the dumpsters were, we would take our tracks and help them load the trucks and we would take their trash to the dumpsters sites. And we got out tons and tons of trash. We did this for several years. We had spring and fall clean ups. It went on for about three years and then the Solid Waste Authority said that they would not provide the funding anymore, because they paid the dumping fees, all the dumpsters. It was a lot of money. I’d like to see them do that again. However our neighborhood organization will occasionally do clean-ups by itself. But we don’t have the funds for a large recycling process. We have also dealt --it’s coming up-- with the main concerns about what’s bringing the neighborhood down; we focused and condensed those issues down to five or six. I have also participated in the sidewalk survey, where we would go to the field, observe and assess which were the sidewalks that needed some work. Some of them were falling off and in bad shape so we identified the addresses where the sidewalks were deteriorated and then we would inform the city. The city fixed a small amount of them and they told us basically that if the homeowners wanted to fix the sidewalks that it was their decision, even though there is a city law that requires that the sidewalks be in good condition. Along with
that we have the issue of the many absentee owners that we have in the neighborhood, and the city didn’t want to get into that. I also participated in a zoning project. There were many houses in this neighborhood which have been converted to multi-family houses: they turned single family structures into multi family structures. And the majority of them had been done illegally with absentee owners. So I was involved in surveying the houses with that type of issue. Then we pushed the city to enforce the zoning code in that area. And some of that information was used later for the historic preservation district area and the projects around that.

4) Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an issue? How have you dealt with it?
There is always times when people don’t agree. We try to be democratic. Everyone has the right to express their say as long as they are respectful. We have had uncontrollable, outraged, explosive type of personalities in the organization that have been really difficult to control, which is unfortunate. You always have the right to disagree, but in the end the majority rules and that’s how the decisions are made.

5) How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your neighborhood?
I’ve lived in the neighborhood for 25 years and it is really discouraging when people don’t want to get involved. I have a neighbor next to me like that, who complains about things going on in the neighborhood but won’t pick up the phone and complain. By joining this neighborhood organization I realized that there are ways to get things done.

6) Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?
I’d say that there are a number of people in the organization who are the motivators. I would hate to see the president of the organization, Jane Startzman, leave. She has always been very active since the beginnings of the organization; she has a good and steady way running the organization. She knows how to handle the politicians, she is not an abrasive person; she is more of a sales person, persuasive. But there are a number of others who are crucial, like my wife, she is responsible for the beautification site in the neighborhood which is part of the Keep Akron Beautiful. We have a site on West Market. We do a lot of work there like planting, mowing the lawn. But I would let her talk about that.

7) What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader?
Anyone who lives in the neighborhood can belong to the group. That’s really about the only restriction, residing within the defined boundaries of the organization. Those boundaries run from near downtown, West Market Street, Exchange St., and another portion in Aqueduct. There is a due that is annual and nominal (like five bucks) and even if you don’t formally belong to the organization but attend the meetings you are free to speak. But to be able to vote you have to purchase the membership. [Leader] you need to know what you are doing and be able to motivate people, to persuade people to do the tasks that the organization needs to do. To be able to make people do what they need to do. They have to live by the example, to be responsible, to follow through and make sure that things get done.
8) If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your neighborhood group, what would you say?

It’s good. It’s been very rewarding, very interesting; I’ve met a lot of new and good people. I also met people I don’t like to be around. And we were able to get other people involved in the organization.

9) For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you?

The best experience for me has been the weekend clean-ups. I had worked in the Health Department and I know that litter is the first step toward decay of the houses, and then it is a progression of deterioration. The toughest part for me has been being part of the board and deal with people. I would rather do something myself rather than getting people to do it. Sometimes I don’t deal really well with people. And that’s why I stepped down from the board. But I still kept working in the clean ups and in our beautification site. We prepare the beds in the spring, then we plant the flowers and then the city comes again in the fall to help us out again.

10) Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or agencies?

We were able to get a lot of assistance from officials through the city of Akron and Summit County, collaborating with other city health departments. We have a good relation with the Akron Police Department. I wish we could get a better service than what we are getting now, but I know that the police department deals with many crucial issues. We don’t have their consistent presence but all and all our relationship with the city has been great. They helped us with beautification sites, with concerts and other things.

11) What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst?

The best has been working with the parks and recreation office of the city. We don’t have a good working relation with our council person. He has the tendency to be very defensive, very belligerent. He gets offended easily if you criticize him. I don’t think that he does much for us, even though people think that he does it all. I think that the credit is for the different divisions of the city who do their part to help us; like the development here across the street. He would take the credit for it, but the planning department has really done the job.

12) What does ‘community’ mean to you?

It should be people who care about each other and work together for the benefit of us all as opposed as working for yourself. Participating and make this a better place to live, that’s what participation means to me.

Paul
-What neighborhood group do you belong and for how long now?

I belong to the MIRAFLORES, for three or four years now.

1) How did you become a member of this group?

I became a member because the group invited me to become a member. People in the group wanted me to join the group. And as you saw, I am an attorney so; they wanted to have an attorney as part of the group, they thought that it was a good thing.

2) What usually happens at your meetings?
The meetings in the MIRAFLORES are very well run. So we have a formal agenda and generally we do get down to business, and we go through committees, one by one to see where things are. Each committee always has something that they are working on and they report on it. We have the crime and safety committee that has dog and community walking on Friday nights so just to get people into the community and they are constantly organizing people. The same with the housing committee, to which I belong to. We have a board meeting once a month, and then in the meantime each committee has their own meetings, once a month at least in between the main board meetings. We have the membership committee as we keep trying to identify, first who lives in the neighborhood, we have a good database of who live in the neighborhood, and our budget is probably based on the dues that people pay, which are minimal, like 20 or 30 bucks. But they can provide us with funds to make very simple things that bring the neighborhood together such as helping to pay our jazz concert once a year, the Halloween activities, which is a lot of fun; we have a house tour and a garden tour, all on an annual basis. And there is a specific committee for each of these activities. For example this year I am in charge of Halloween [laughs]. So we are going to have a costume contest, and I have started contacting the judges and people, and it is January! And we are already talking about Halloween in October! The meeting is very well run, it is well structured. We usually get done in about one hour, and that is pretty good in terms of other groups I have been part of. After the meeting we usually go out and have something to eat or maybe something to drink and we continue the discussion in a more informal way. Some things would tie up the meeting too much, so we prefer to discuss them in a more relaxed way later. People recognize what we are doing for the community and they donate money.

3) **Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you describe what it’s been like working on that issue?**

Oh yes, we have an interesting issue going on right now. We are working on improving the housing for the neighborhood and one of the things that we are trying to do is to preserve the historic nature of the neighborhood, so we are currently in the process of developing guidelines for repair and rehabilitation of the homes. In conjunction with that, we have invited the Cleveland Preservation Society into the neighborhood and they provided a grant that would provide low interest loans, if the renovations of the houses are historical accurate. And that is really very significant, because it makes what would have been unaffordable, affordable; just due to the low-interest rate. Oh, yes, we work on all kinds of things.

4) **Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an issue? How have you dealt with it?**

We deal with that through humor mainly [laughs]. Yes. In fact, we expect conflict as we work through the design guidelines. We expect to have some conflict with the neighborhood on that, in fact. But we have tried to listen to people; we do use humor in terms of how we manage the differences within the group. To some extent the decision making in the group does devolve down to: ‘what is the common denominator? what does everyone agree on?’ We are much more opposed on what everyone agrees on --getting a structure in place that everybody agrees on-- than a structure that there is conflict within the group on. So the design guidelines are a perfect example of that. We had a lot of discussion about how strenuously to enforce
the design guidelines and in effect we have really evolved guidelines and then we’ve tried to develop mechanisms in the community such as the loan program that’d make it a carrot and not a stick; so that if you accept the design guidelines you’ve got access to money and low interest loans. If you don’t, you can still rehab your house but you are going to do it on your own.

5) How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your neighborhood?
I’d say I have pretty good connections in the neighborhood, in terms of interactions with other people. It definitely increased them to another level. So it definitely makes you feel good about the neighborhood. It makes you aware about activities like the garden tour. I had never gone to a garden tour until I joined the group, I went on the garden tour last year and I had a blast! So it’s helped increase my involvement in my community in my daily life and it is helped my connections with other people that I didn’t know before. And the people who usually join these groups are nice people; people who would you want to know. So I am happy about that.

6) Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?
That’s interesting. I think that our group is kind of different in that sense. I don’t think that it’s dependent of any particular person showing up at that meeting. The meeting would run effectively; the projects continue on and there is nobody critical to have that meeting run well. There is nobody in the group who is critical. There is always someone missing one meeting, and still works remarkably well in that sense.

7) What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader?
We invite people to be part of the group. But if you live within certain boundaries of the West Hill area you can become a member, anyone can. [laughs] I don’t know if there is a trick! [laughs] Ohhh I think it’s pretty simple. People who become leaders are people who care about the neighborhood or about something that they want to see happen. So that’s all it takes: that you care about your neighborhood. And then you are drafted [laughs] we draft leaders in the neighborhood. So if someone cares about something, that person is drafted to do it! So I got drafted to organize the Halloween event this year. Last year was the first year in many years that we got that back. And it was a blast! Kids were coming off the woodwork to go trick or tricking, we had like a hundred kids show up in that party. I don’t think anybody realized how many kids there are in the neighborhood until we had that party! It is an older neighborhood and it has changed a lot, but there are still a lot of kids and they love the Halloween. And it brings life to the streets, which is nice. It all started because last October things got messed up. I wasn’t happy with how it was organized, and after stating my complaint people were like “well do you want to be in charge next time?” so that’s how I got drafted and that’s how our group does things.

8) If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your neighborhood group, what would you say?
[laughs] sum it up? I think that the neighborhood group has helped me keep connected to my neighborhood and become drafted into participating. I do now more for my neighborhood that what I would have done otherwise. Also I think that the information that we get in the neighborhood group is very interesting, because that’s
information that you need to live your life. It’s about how to access different schools; it is information about how to access different loans, about which houses are available for sale cheap. So we help the people in the neighborhood buy houses. So if we know that there is a house that is going on the market, we know way before anybody else and we can actually create economic opportunities, profit opportunities, literally because since we know of house for sale before it is posted in the market, we can rehabilitate it and sell it at profit. Schools, business opportunities for me and many other people in the group who have businesses. It certainly helps when you show up, I introduce myself as an attorney, and fairly well known. And before you know it, three months later, you got a new client, just from an introduction. So I think that there are added benefits to it, also political opportunities. I was on the city council years ago and if I ever decided to run for office, this is a strong political base, too. So for anybody who would want to jump into city leadership this would provide you with an incredible political base to achieve it! That means instant volunteers, and instant donations, and instant organizers. And there are members in the group who are tied to the arts, the art museum, the ballet, so all these provide links into the neighborhood and broader community because you get to know of events that are going on around the area.

9) For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you?
[laughs] I think we have a pretty functional group. I can’t think of any bad experience happening in the group. There is nothing bad that has happened in the group in the time I’ve been active. The best experiences: all those events I mentioned before. Seeing all those events happening and getting the money worth of the effort of all the members of the group participating. The events themselves are really surprising. I never thought it would be so much fun, like the garden tour around the neighborhood, people everywhere talking and walking. That was probably the best highlight.

10) Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or agencies?
We have very close interactions with governmental agencies. We have Jerry Eagan who shows up in our housing committee meetings. He is an administrator for the planning division of the city. He is helping us with the housing guidelines. We have Officer Gould form APD who works very closely with the crime and safety committee meetings. These guys don’t come to every meeting but they come a lot. We have other officers who show to other community events (like MacCozzi who is the sergeant for our district) in his cruiser at all times, and some times for the events, so he has become very well known in the neighborhood, because they become interested in the neighborhood. The same with Jerry Eagan. He shows up on duty and sometimes off duty. The councilman is also very aware of the voting power of the neighborhood, too because our neighborhood votes very strongly together. They know that people discuss the elections and whether the councilman has done the job or not, and it’s very cohesen group.

11) What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst?
Our group has been very aware of how govt perceives the group. Groups can have extremist in them, almost irrational, lashing out, being angry at the government.
Obviously we want crime solved and problems solved in our neighborhood, so we have been very aware of govt and how to deal with government. But in a sense it is because this group is so sophisticated. It is an old group which has been around for a long time, and it’s learned what works and what doesn’t work. It tends not to like irrational statements. So there is a gentleman in the neighborhood who has acted very irrational. He is very upset about crime in the neighborhood, and we are too! So that was probably the most difficult thing. So here you have a person who wants to be part of the group, but boy! What he is saying, and how he is being insulting of the people he is addressing and how that affects the group and reflects on the group. His behavior began to improve later.

12) What does ‘community’ mean to you?

[laughs] it’s not an easy question! To me it is about interactions with other people, and friendships, and communication; it’s all those networks and friendships that you create overtime. And that is what links us. For example when I moved into the neighborhood my income was very low. Now it is very high. And we are still at that same neighborhood. And I know that one of the reasons that we are still there is because that sense of community. In the West Hill, people like their houses, work hard to bring them up to date. We all appreciate the old Victorian styles. So we like where we live. So then the issue is: do you like who you live with. That is a challenge because of the diversity of the people living there: rich and poor, it’s probably the most diverse neighborhood in the city in that sense. In essence we do like who we live with. It may not always be comfortable, because there is crime in the neighborhood, and we don’t like that! We like having a diversity of people in the neighborhood, even though I have a very traditional family with two kids, I work, my wife doesn’t; we like living in a neighborhood with people of different races, the gender preference issue with the gay population, not everybody is well to do. In some ways I and my wife want to expose our children, not to a dangerous situation, but we don’t want them to grow up in a sterile situation. So our children are interacting with people of all races, all kinds of behaviors, and still decent people.

[phone conversation] oh boy! That was a perfect example of connections due to the group. That’s money; that now goes to my brother rather to another person. V: Does he live in the neighborhood? WM: no, but it doesn’t matter! He is getting a loan to rehab some houses. That is the information that is constantly flowing. From one phone conversation I got three pieces of information. We have to be organized if we want to be in the group. Our neighborhood would go to hell without a group like that! And our neighborhood has come back. You can visually see what has happened in the last ten years in the neighborhood in terms of the improvement to the houses, in terms of the people who have moved in, in terms of the activities in the neighborhood. Crime is a core issue. One of the things we are reacting to is crime. It is simply a safety issue to know my sergeant in the middle of the night. I can call my sergeant in his cell phone! And he’d come to my porch in the middle of the night. And the emergency number has worked great for us. The police are very protective of this neighborhood, they get there in less than five minutes most of the time, I don’t think that any other neighborhood in the city gets such a quick response! Those are very specific reactions: we needed the police so we got to know the police. The landlords are another issue. We were concerned about the landlords and the tenants, and we
were interested in getting the zoning local laws enforced, and that’s why we needed to go to the city to the zoning department and get the laws enforced. The same with the prostitution issue on Crosby Rd. and that’s an active driver for the neighborhood and for the group. The dog walking on Friday nights, which always ends up in a bar. So I think that the group formation and action started as a reactive response to crime and other problems (like zoning irregularities). It is an inoculation of a problem: we are responding to the foreclosure problem, to the crime, to the zoning irregularities of landlords-tenants. I guess the group is responsive to all that.

Nick

- What neighborhood group do you belong and for how long now?
  Campinha neighborhood association, I guess that’s how we call ourselves—how long now? I guess I’ve been since 2004, or no! it was May 2005, which was when the group really got formed

  1) How did you become a member of this group?
  I bought a house in the neighborhood and actually Ken and Joe who live in 82 Dodge invited me to the first block party that the group ever had, one month after I moved into the neighborhood. I went to the party, where I met a lot of people, about fifty neighbors from both streets Payne and Dodge. It was at this block party that we started talking about things that we had in common and things that we liked. We also started to talk about the concerns and needs that our neighbors had, and that our neighborhood was probably a little different from everybody’s else. Most of us have dogs and there are almost no children, although at the time there were a couple of teenagers on Payne. So it creates a different dynamic, it’s not your typical suburban neighborhood; it is somewhere in the cross of urban and suburban. Because both of us are professionals, there is a good number of single folks, there is not a big number of families. So we agreed on forming a group and on starting to meet frequently. So there is an awful lot of communication in the neighborhood; when we walk our dogs we talk to each other because people are very nice. This is what’s called a ‘transitional’ neighborhood because there are areas of wealth and areas of poverty. And because there are certain areas with crime we need that communication that’s why we’ve come together.

  2) What usually happens at your meetings?
  We usually eat stuff. We talk about what’s going on in the neighborhood, we talk about social activities. Mostly it is an opportunity for us to get together and touch base. We get together and see how everyone is doing, especially during winter months. In the summer months there is no one day when you don’t see many of the people just out walking their dogs or working on their yards. But in the winter months we see each other less. The weather is too cold. We talk about our concerns, our interests, where we would like to see the neighborhood go; and sometimes we disagree and I think you saw that on our last meeting. I have a pretty strong opinion about the store at the end of the street and how to go about it. Many people disagree with me, and that’s ok. But it’s a chance for us to voice our concerns and try to get solutions. That’s what we achieve, in addition to trying to strengthen our bonds of friendship; we do a lot of that.
3) Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you describe what it’s been like working on that issue?

The cats issue. When we first moved to the neighborhood there were a lot of street cats, and I actually have a small pond in my backyard, and it had fish in there at some point. So at any given point there would be about seven cats in my backyard, not friendly cats—that was before I got my current dog. So my yard became a cat breeding ground; it was in my yard, Betty’s yard and the other neighbor’s yard. And all the neighbors identified this as a problem because these cats kept breeding. So we had originally five cats and all of a sudden we had 20 cats and were all grey hair and all had this tiger stripe. You could just see, ok that’s the father, that’s the mother. So we came together as neighbors because we also have a lot of cat lovers. We’ve got to do something, all our yards smelled bad and the cats kept breeding and we had to do something about it, and Jodi and Sarah, and Ken and a few others had some resources. They came up with this new program: trap-neuter-release program, so we weren’t killing the cats. The other concern with killing the cats was that it would not solve the problem because we would have new cats in the area in no time. So they came up with this program and we all chipped in money to pay for the trapping and neutering and releasing of the cats. So we would rather have cats that cannot breed and adopt out all their kittens. So now we only have about five cats in the neighborhood, so we went from an uncontrollable cat population in the neighborhood to five cats that can’t reproduce. And I am ok with that. I was very angry at first because my yard was always full of cats and I wanted to go ahead and kill them all. But I think that Jodi and Sarah provided a nice bounce to… they said, let’s be humane about this. The group got together and gave the cats rabbi shots so we got healthy cats in our neighborhood that is much better than sick cats.

4) Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an issue? How have you dealt with it?

We haven’t agreed on a lot of issues. The most recent was that there is a listing of all the neighbors in the homeowners association and we had some people who went to some of the rental properties, and it was after a week that they had moved in, one of the folks gave them a listing of all our personal information, cell phone number, e-mail address, etc. I didn’t think we should be giving them all our information to renters until after a few months, because as home owners they can learn to know where we live, where we work and what time we are coming and going. So it was more of a trust issue. And we discussed it quite a bit and we decided that we could take out of the list whatever we didn’t want it to include. Many of them just agreed that our e-mail addresses, a phone number where they could reach us and our addresses, that was enough, but we didn’t include all our information, that made people feel a lot more secure.

5) How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your neighborhood?

I love my neighborhood. I think that if it wasn’t for the neighborhood group I would have sold my house and moved out a long time ago. But people make our environment nice. So I look forward to see Terry and Jane across the street, and Ken and Joe, so we do a lot of things together. For a lot of us it is like a secondary family because many of us live alone. So it is kind of nice to have someone who can watch
your back and look out for you. I need that. If I lived in a neighborhood where people live in isolation I would have probably moved out a lot sooner. My house is old, it needs a lot of work, and it is not worth a lot per se, so there is value in doing stuff with that group.

6) **Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?**

I think everybody. I could not say one person. I think that everybody brings something to the table. And when somebody is not there, people always ask where is so and so. If anybody leaves or is not there everyone notices it. The expectation is that the relationships can stay for a long time. I could not say “if Benita wasn’t there the meeting would fall apart,” it just would not be the same. And you can see that when people notice that someone is not there.

7) **What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader?**

You have to live there, kind of, sort of… and then be willing to be involved a little bit and talk to folks. [Leader]: having great neighbors. There is no one leader; there is a kind of commune-like arrangement or community where everybody accepts a good amount of responsibility of what happens. So it doesn’t matter who is chairing the meeting; what matters is what everyone brings to the table. I don’t know if we would be successful if there was only one leader; we are successful because there is not just one leader. We have 40-50 very different personalities that happen to live in the same area.

8) **If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your neighborhood group, what would you say?**

My neighborhood group makes my home feel like home; otherwise it would just be a house. When I bought the house it just felt right from the get-go; there is a genuine life to those two blocks and the people who live there, and that makes a difference. I have lived in many different places, Pittsburg, Manhattan, and now Highland Square in Akron is by far my favorite area, and I attribute that to the place I live in and the people who live around me.

9) **For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you?**

Best experience is anytime that we get together we have a great time. The block party on the initiation of the group was the best. The worst thing, I don’t think that is the “worst” thing; I think that it is just the nature of a group this large, is that we sometimes don’t agree, and I am opinionated, and we all have opinions… and that makes difficult to come up to a decision or resolution, but ultimately I would say “ok, I don’t care, I agree” or whatever. There has not been a horrible situation. The most horrible thing was when my neighbor’s puppies got stolen; have a neighborhood pull together after that was nice, but that was a horrible feeling. Everybody just shares their opinion and talk out the differences; we try to reach some consensus. Wherever we feel stronger we follow.

10) **Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or agencies?**
Typically Holli, and Greg and Benita handle that. I filled up the zoning ordinance request for a party. But that’s all I have done. I know that the mayor has stopped by at our events but I’ve always missed him.

11) **What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst?**

I don’t think that I really have had a good or bad.

12) **What does ‘community’ mean to you?**

Community means to me being a part of a much larger group; giving in to that group and taking from it a little bit. I think that there is a give and take we all partake in, in order to get the added benefit of being a part of this larger group. We all have the value of having a great neighborhood group, but we have to work hard for it, not just have parties. It is watching for each other, cleaning graffiti; it’s reporting things and it’s holding neighbors accountable. That’s what the neighborhood is about. If there was an abandoned house next to mine it would soon become a methamphetamine lab. So we have to collectively go against the owner and be like “you need to stop this and not allow this to happen.” So community is a group of people with shared goals and interests coming together and working collectively to achieve the common good. So I think that in that context the neighborhood does that. We all have the benefit of interaction. If we all didn’t care about the neighborhood, it would look quite different, especially in the spring, when there are flowers out there. Because people are out there and there is a level of strength and pride of who we are and we celebrate that. Every so often I sit back and reflect how fortunate I am. I don’t have a beautiful house: it is old, and sits in an old neighborhood. But it is great to live there. It is a great feeling. You know? Betty would call and say “hey, do you know that there is someone out there in your porch?” We are all very lucky to be there and it is a very sad day when anyone decides to move out.

Melanie

- **What neighborhood group do you belong and for how long now?**

MIRAFLORES, probably…how many years? since they started. Probably… maybe 10 years, I’m not sure, Ron knows better

1) **How did you become a member of this group?**

We were members of a smaller group. It was just people getting together and just wanting to do good things for the neighborhood; it started from a smaller group I was part of.

2) **What usually happens at your meetings?**

They have one meeting a year that involves all the members. But then they have spin-off meetings of the smaller groups. For example I am a member of the crime and safety committee and they meet once a month, and they have a housing group, anything that pertains what may be happening in the city, a smaller group may spin off of the larger one if there is a specific concern, like housing or crime.

3) **Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you describe what it’s been like working on that issue?**

Barking dogs. We had a dog that was barking constantly, and so we called the dog catcher and he came out and talked to them and ended up that the guy ended up in jail because he became belligerent. But that’s a good example because the neighborhood
got together and called the dog board. Prostitution is another good example. We have a large problem with prostitution in the area. Through the crime and safety committee we created flyers last year informing the people of the neighborhood which numbers to call if they saw any type of crime, and that was good.

4) **Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an issue? How have you dealt with it?**

That happens all the time. There is a vote taken and a consensus and we go along with that.

5) **How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your neighborhood?**

You are more aware of everything that is going on in the neighborhood. Sometimes it is frustrating that things don’t happen faster and that those prostitutes are still out there. Awareness of what’s going on in the neighborhood and you are quicker to do something about something because you have the backing of the whole group.

6) **Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?**

In the crime and safety committee, Joe Boyle is the heart and soul of that committee. Officer Gould plays a big role: when he is not there questions don’t get answered. Those two people are very critical for that group.

7) **What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader?**

Just an interest, you are interest in one issue, what’s going on in the city, like in the crime and safety committee. [Leader]: background and an intense interest, like Joe is very interested in the crime and safety issues, and he is very proactive and your leader is going to be that kind of person. Someone that people trust, recognize, respect and admire and who is there and follows through, and that’s the biggest one, to follow through in what they say.

8) **If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your neighborhood group, what would you say?**

[laughs] Since Ron and I have been involved in the group since the beginning, the leadership of the group has changed throughout the time. Younger people came along, which was very good, with fresh ideas, they took MIRAFLORES to another place. The core group kind of stays the same, and then good people come in with good ideas. They are not doing the things the same way the previous leadership used to do things but still seems to work quite well.

9) **For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you?**

Best things: the support, they are very supportive of each other, even though some people don’t get along sometimes because they have different ideas, they are respectful of each other; they can usually work things out. The worst experiences, I don’t think there has ever been anything really bad happen.

10) **Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or agencies?**

When the group first got started they were more reactionary, before MIRAFLORES, and the city didn’t like that, didn’t get along with them. But now, the people from MIRAFLORES get along with the city very well. The city really respects
MIRAFLORES because they are very proactive with the city. I am at the background, take care of the garden, the park, got the flyers going. Ron knows who to talk in case he needs to interact with the city.

11) What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst?
The best was the grant that I got from the city before Ron and I got married, I was able to build my house by low interest loans. The worst thing is the problem around the prostitution issue, and the problems in the city, and when we had to call the police and Ron almost got arrested. The city is not doing a lot about the prostitution in the neighborhood.

12) What does ‘community’ mean to you?
It means a group of people who live together or in close proximity and the way their interactions happen, for the better or the worse, everybody is a part of it, some people choose to do good things for the community, some people decide to steal a bike from a garage. But if you are part of a community you have to adjust. You don’t want to move into this neighborhood if you are racist, because we have a large black population part of the community. It’s how people get together and how they interact.

Matthew
- What neighborhood group do you belong and for how long now?
Campinha, since October 2006

1) How did you become a member of this group?
We formed the group, me and a couple of neighbors. We were very interested in getting started a group and we all kept taking talking about it. So finally I put up a flyer and went to neighbors’ homes and said this is the date, this is our first meeting. So I kind of put it together. But there was interest even before from other neighbors. People kept talking about it. So I thought, why don’t I get everyone together and set a meeting and we can also start talking about our “b s”? Our first meeting was October 2006.

2) What usually happens at your meetings?
We have a person who facilitates the meeting and then we divide the tasks. Some people were interested in one aspect of the block but not on the other parts. So we broke into committees. So we had a person in charge of each committee. So after that first meeting each committee representative –a person in charge of each committee-talked about a topic; gave an update on that area. We had like a social chair that formed outings, like dates and times to get together with the neighbors and have parties, to go to a restaurant all the neighbors together. Some people were interested in cleaning up graffiti, so they would talk about that part of the block. So that’s how we conduct our meetings: there is a facilitator, and then that person opens the floor for each committee chair to each talk about what the committee worked on since the last meeting, and then we talk of what we want to happen at the next meeting. It takes one hour and a half usually.

3) Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you describe what it’s been like working on that issue?
Yeah…the most recent thing that comes to mind was kind of controversial. We have a phone list of all of the neighbors which has all their phone numbers, e-mail
addresses, and we put that together so the neighbors would know about each other better or if they had an issue or they saw something happen at someone’s house, they could look up the list and call them. It’s been two years that we had that list with all the neighbors’ information on it. At the meeting last October some people were upset that their information was going on to all the people in the block; they wanted only certain people to have their information, but not everybody. So that was probably the hardest thing in our meeting, because some people felt that way and other people felt “oh no, everyone should have that information! And why should we discriminate? You can go to one of these computers and pull information about your neighbors anyway.” Some people were very uncomfortable with that. So we distributed the list around and we said: “if you don’t want your information in it, just cross it off and it would be taken out in the next edition.” So that’s how we resolved it. But it was very back and forth. We had to wait and see of how the group would feel about it. Most people felt like everybody should have it on the other side.

4) **Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an issue? How have you dealt with it?**

That was probably the biggest issue. We had a block party organized, but then we found out that the same day of our block party there was a restaurant that a famous Akronite singer was going to open the same day of our party. So couple of neighbors wanted to change the date because they said that most people would want to go to this event of the city, which is for the city not just for our block. So all the committee members of the social committee—organizing the party—took a vote because we could not come to an agreement. So we ended up changing the date. But there were some hard feelings because some people really wanted to stay on the original date. So we ended up switching, but it took some compromise and a lot of conversation.

5) **How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your neighborhood?**

Oh, that’s an interesting question. I don’t know if you will hear this thing, but I almost in a way wish that I didn’t know so much about my neighbors because I am more irritated with some of them that if I would just say ‘hi’ to them. It’s kind of strange. The opposite effect of what you would anticipate because in the beginning we didn’t know much about each other, and then we started really getting close, and it was very positive. And I think overall our relationships have been very very positive, we know much more about each other. But along with the good stuff that we know about each other we now know all the bad stuff about each other. You know what? I hate my neighbors! [laughs] I really don’t, but couple of them are so nitpicking on everything that drives me crazy! But I never knew that about them until…, like in a meeting, we have to really work through issues, I would have never known that had not we not had the … it is kind of a mixed bag of what you know about your neighbors, good and bad.

6) **Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?**

If our committee chairs weren’t there, we could not move it along in that department. We have a cat crusade. We are raising money to help the feral cats in the neighborhood and if that person in charge of that part of the group wasn’t at the meeting we would not have much to talk about in regards to that. But I don’t think
that one person carries enough weight that it would destroy our block club. But it
definitely helps when more people are there so we don’t have to repeat ourselves.

7) **What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader?**

Just live on the block and wanting to be active, whatever. We are trying to get more people to come out. The overall neighborhood feeling is that the more the better. To be a leader you have to be organized, put a lot of time into it, put a lot of time even before the meeting so you know what kinds of issues you want to bring to the table, what your thoughts and beliefs are. You might change them as you hear other people talk, but I think it’s important to have a little bit of the direction before you go into the meeting. I was in charge of one of the committees but someone is now taking my place thankfully, it was very time intensive but I felt like I needed to put the time into it, because people were coming to hear and to get things done. It’s important that you put time into it. Also that you take other people’s opinions into mind and that you really consider them; that you don’t just come in with your mind made up about something. Like with the block party that we were gonna have. Someone said “let’s change the date” and I immediately said “no, we have told the neighbors already.” But then as we talked to the other committee members it was very clear that was a cut: that half of the people thought we should and half of the people thought that we shouldn’t change the date. So I didn’t think that it was fair for one person to make the decision, even though I think the group saw me as the leader. It was important to take other people’s opinion. And I am glad that we did, because once we did it we realized that most people could change the date, and it was more democratic, people had more of a say in it…it was just a better process than having one person making the decision. I also think that a leader needs to say when someone makes a mistake or someone has done something wrong.

8) **If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your neighborhood group, what would you say?**

I think it was very positive and very very empowering, because when I moved into the neighborhood we used to handle all these cats by ourselves and all these little kittens were getting killed in the road every week! And I was like “I just want to catch all these cats and get them fixed so that they can’t have kittens.” So it was an idea I had, and then talking to my neighbor I learnt that he had the same idea. So all of us coming together… like if I would have tried to do that by myself I would have spent hundreds and hundreds of dollars, and I would probably have not gotten so much done, I would have not lasted. But doing it with the group it was empowering that all that happened… like this last year we captured 33 cats and took care of them and did what we needed to do, and that fixed our problem in the neighborhood. It was fun, it wasn’t like work, and it wasn’t definitely one person doing everything by herself. It pulled our block together so that we considered each other friends. Then I asked my neighbor to help me with something not related to the neighborhood at all, like my friend’s car broke down in my driveway, so I couldn’t get my car out, and he couldn’t get his car out, and I called my neighbor who drove this person on the way to work; he never met my friend before and yet he drove him all the way to Canton to get his car keys, that was what he actually needed. I would have never asked a neighbor to do something like that had I not know him more personally right now.
because of all the work that we have done together. So it has just turned our neighborhood into much more social group so that we look out for each other and they are also our friends, not just as neighbors. And even though I said that negative aspect of each person, their idiosyncrasies, it has been very very positive for our block, and personally and in so many different ways.

9) **For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you?**

   The best was our block party. Even though we switched the date it was such a success! We had a neighbor who wrote a grant which paid for our food, our entertainment and then she got ice-cream. So our party would have been just a lot of fun; but it kind of went up one more notch, like a huge notch, like it raised the bar. We had a hundred people in our party and that was the best part of it because it was a mixture of the neighbors, our friends, and we were all together. All my friends were “oh, my gosh! I wanna live in your neighborhood! It was definitely the best.

   Everyone was out dancing, all these ice-cream and food, and a band. The firemen and firewomen of the fire station on our block were all there with us. It took a lot of work in planning but it turned out being phenomenal. The worst thing: we have a business at the end of our street and the owner never cleans up the garbage that is outside his store. So when we had the clean-up day we had 25 neighbors to clean up the area. It was phenomenal, who would think!? We started cleaning up the neighborhood, which is good too, but then he [the business owner] started yelling at some of the volunteers. So that was bad. The neighbor yelled at ended up leaving; all and all has been really good. Another negative thing is that the neighbor who lives right by that store really feels that the business should be cleaned up. So we have tried to do other things to clean up that store so it would be nice for her, and for us, but we live further down the block. And she’s been like “I don’t wanna do anything for him anymore, because I was trying to work with him but the store owner doesn’t want to work with us.” So she has gotten burnt out and she doesn’t want to deal with him anymore. I keep saying to her “Let’s do it because we can write a grant and get money to do this clean-up in the store. The store owner is never gonna do it.” But she doesn’t want to have anything to do with him anymore, partly because of the way he acted and he yelled at the volunteers. But also I see the negative aspect in the way she is kind of giving up. I don’t feel that she went about it in all the right ways, so I wish we would have put more time in working with the owner of the business. But overall it has been very positive.

10) **Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or agencies?**

   The grant that we received was through the Akron Community Foundation. The mayor has come to a bunch of our events, like the neighbor day of cleaning up throughout Akron. That was a lot of fun because we were able to take him around the backyards and show off our neighborhood, and so we feel good about that because now he knows about our street. Also our block captain seat on the city council meetings and represents us. She used to go even before she joined the group. But now when she goes she says “I am here representing the Campinha block group.” So it highlights our group passing on our concerns and having that link with government.
11) What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst?
We finally decided to write the grant to get that store cleaned up. The issue is that he has some planters in front of his store made of concrete and are they falling apart. They look really ugly. We are trying to get new planters, just like the ones that the city has around the city. So I decided that this was something that I really wanted to see happen. So I talked to the block committee and they were in support of it too. So I got in touch with the city and they were really helpful in putting me in touch with the people who work on these planters so we could get a dollar estimate. It took me to sell what we were trying to do. Then I had to get in touch with the city engineers, because these planters were on the sidewalk, and so if we replaced them we needed the city’s permission to put them there again. So that worked out good. So then I had to talk to Keep Akron Beautiful, and they agreed to help out if we got the grant, to help us water the flowers, etc. It was positive. It wasn’t coordinated, I had to do bunch of telephone calls but they gave me some direction and who to call. The worst one was recently, when someone vandalized three blocks, taking spray paint and painting all over, writing messages all over, in a hundred different places. And because we had worked so hard we were all outraged, so mad to see this happen! We had gotten all the graffiti cleaned up in my block and now there are in 15 places in the sidewalk. So I called the police department to just make a police report. And I didn’t want them to send an officer, I didn’t want them to clean it up, I just wanted them to know so that they could drive more often, even maybe that night because we knew that had happened the night before! And they wouldn’t take my police report! And I was so mad! How is the officer of this area going to know? And the officer could not give me an answer. So I sent an e-mail to everyone on the block, and then someone finally reached some big wig. And they called later that day saying that they would send someone to look at it. It made me feel better but at the same time it made me feel like if it wasn’t for the block group nobody would have done anything or would have taken it up another notch. All I wanted was that an officer would look at it to determine whether this was a bigger issue. And it took really pushing to make that happen, and then they did.

12) What does ‘community’ mean to you?
Community means not only where you live, where you work, but means everything; your grocery store, your bank. I feel very connected to the Highland Square area. I live here, my friends are here, and I work here. I didn’t use to work here, but I purposively changed jobs so I could impact the area of where I live. So when I am working I know that is impacting my community. For me it’s every aspect of your life; who you get in touch with. I love my square, and I hope that we can make it a better community that’s more tied together. Because I think when people feel that way you don’t want to see graffiti, you want it to get cleaned up; you don’t want to see that happen.

Mary
[On survey sheet]: “I don’t feel comfortable completing the section about my salary. I ill leave it blank”
-What neighborhood group do you belong and for how long now?
My involvement with Highland Square started 20-30 years ago. The city was going through its community development grant process and Highland Square was a neighborhood development area. So several of us who lived in the area formed the Highland Square Community Council to represent this neighborhood as it went through this planning process because there was going to be a rezoning and they were dividing the neighborhood, and everything east of Rose Ave. was going to be multi-family. And west from Rose it was going to be rezoned single family. And that’s basically why we got together. I guess you could call me president of that group. I was involved from 1978 to 1984. And also something we do, we started the Highland Square festival; the first one was here in South Highland, on the side where Two Amigos is. It occupied a large area up to Rose. It was a musical and art festival. And we did it under the principle that it is better to get people together when they have a good time. So that when they leave the meeting they already know each other and I think the festival went on in that vein for about 15 years. The HS development program went on for five years. They are still doing it in different neighborhoods. The city goes in and inspects the houses and then you can get grants and loans to fix them up. But of course what happened here is through code violations.

1) **How did you become a member of this group?**
We were kind of self selected. We were all politically active and we started to think of how we were going to deal with this [rezoning issue].

2) **What usually happens at your meetings?**
They were very informal at first but later on they started to become more formal and I think we formally incorporated it with the State of Ohio. We were first very informal and would get together and discuss how we would deal with the issues at hand and sometimes we would send a delegation of folks to talk to the planning department and we would ask them, “do you realize that this doesn’t make sense for this neighborhood and that all these big houses, it’s impractical to turn them back to all single houses.” Not that it made any difference. We just got together to talk about these things. And at that time we were wanted to talk to the business district association. The main difficulty here in Highland Square at that time --and I don’t know if this has changed-- was that people didn’t want to cooperate with each other. So it was hard trying to get all the businesses together and that’s when we decided that we probably needed something like a party or a festival.

3) **Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you describe what it’s been like working on that issue?**
One of them is the expansion of Highland Square and the other issue that we are dealing with is the future of the theater. I worked for the newspaper for many years and it is not considered entirely ethical to be involved with groups that you might potentially cover, so I didn’t get directly involved during that time. But I did get involved in one meeting where Steve Albrecht told over at the Acme at Wallhaven telling us what he wanted to do. He wanted to put a grocery store here with all the parking on the front. We kept saying “No, no. This is not a suburban shopping mall; this is an urban neighborhood and we want to build the stores by the street and put the parking lots in the back so people can walk.” And he kept saying “because of the topography of the street I need to have the store here, and bla, bla, bla.” And then I said “well then you can take the store and move it from W. Market to the corner with Portage Path.” I have gone to some of the PAGODA recent meetings regarding the grocery store. I haven’t been involved in the group as
deeply as I used to for a while now because I see Lisa pulling out her hair, as the city is very hard to deal with. This group is now working to find a buyer for the theater and turn it into a community center. But between Albrecht and the city, I am not entirely sure why Albrecht wants to build the grocery store on the other side of the street. These guys think that they can widen W. Market St. and that will not produce any inconvenience to the stores.

4) Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an issue? How have you dealt with it?
After five years of running the summer festival, there were disagreements about the way I was running it, because I guess I was doing things my way, kind of unilaterally, just because I was used to do things that way. So I just stepped down. And other people took it over and took on for another 10 years and they did run it. Later it became a much more formal and structured organization.

5) How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your neighborhood?
I live just a couple of blocks away from here. I have become more convinced that cities need neighborhoods; they need to operate through smaller units than just a centralized civic government and treating every place of the city as the same and doing kind of a boiling plate in each area. Especially in Akron, neighborhoods have distinctive personalities and people kind of gravitate there: they were even born and raised there, or they find a kind of spirit there, or it’s convenient to what they need. One of the biggest issues in this area is the over concentration of what I would call social service assistance homes, because you have a lot of big old houses that were vacant and you have a lot of people with needs and mental health patients recovering, and half way houses for a variety of disabilities in this area, in street lines, in bus lines, and that is fine. But what that also did was to concentrate the people with a high need [of sport??] in a small area. In one sense, it makes a lot of sense to put all these people in neighborhoods but that was an issue the neighborhood group kind of galvanized around, because you can only take so much before people say “I don’t feel safe.” I think the problem is that it’s become so concentrated in this area... If the city had this around the city then it would be easier and good for the neighborhood. I think that you need the people support-system. I do believe that cities work better when neighborhoods receive the support they need because then you have people watching out for each other, but for that you need to have a neighborhoods where the neighbors know each other first. It’s like crime watch programs. It’s a whole lot better than having police patrolling in the streets because they don’t know what’s normal and what’s not; unless you have the community policing and that’s only as good as their ability to spend lots of time in the streets in one-on-one relationships with the neighbors, knowing who is unusual, who belongs and who doesn’t belong to the neighborhood.

6) Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?
Lisa is so involved that I think that if she would just say ‘I don’t do it anymore’ it would be difficult for the people to come in and pick up all those pieces. Mark Smith was involved for a long time, he is an architect; he and his dad are into urban beautification. And few other people. Lisa is kind of a linchpin now who puts an awful lot on her shoulders, and based on my experience, I can see how she gets tired. She is in the middle.
She can see how the city is not playing fair and she’s also talked to the mayor and he has his own opinions about the neighborhood. The city has not been known for being particularly welcoming to people who want to be active and involved in their neighborhoods. It seems that people in downtown have an idea of what they want to do with the city, and if you along with that, great! And if you don’t, it’s not fun. And I think that we are just getting pretty tired of that.

7) **What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader?**

Showing up and be willing to spend time. Especially when you get really involved you find out the behind the scenes politics and *that* takes a really strong stomach [laughs]. You’ve got to keep going, you’ve got to have enough faith that what you are doing is right for the area and you put up with whatever is thrown at you. [Leader]: ‘trick’ is not a particularly… I know what you mean... It takes to listen to people, especially in neighborhoods like this because there a *lot* of different people; this is a very smart neighborhood, with a lot of highly educated people who already know a lot about what it takes. So you have to have a fairly strong personality and be willing to find things out and listen. Also the leader needs to have certain level of energy and enthusiasm so you can persuade people to come along with you. I think that there are certain qualities for leadership that you need to have because ultimately what you want is the neighborhood to work for itself, you know. It’s not that’s about you; it’s about the neighborhood, so at certain point you have to be able to step back, and say “ok, go, do!”

8) **If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your neighborhood group, what would you say?**

It’s probably one of the most rewarding things that I did in my life. Learning that you can take up on an idea and make it happen, even when everybody is looking at you and say “you want to do what?” and just being persistent and say “yeah,” and enlisting people and getting them engaged in the idea. Those are skills that translate anywhere. And it was probably my first experience as an adult, because I was in my mid-20s then. You know, really having that kind of a success…what was really cool is that it didn’t really get attributed to me, at least for the first couple of years. It was like everybody showed up, did their part, had a really good time, and sat back afterwards and said “wasn’t that fun?! Let’s do it again!” And that –in as small scale- is what makes the neighborhood work: it is people doing their work and saying “it worked, that was fun, let’s do it again.”

9) **For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you?**

The best was getting people together and being able to affect not only things that happened here in the neighborhood but also how people perceived the neighborhood from outside and even how the city perceives it. And people can tell me whatever they want but I am *convinced* that ---the Harvesty Park festival has been going on for just a little bit longer than the HS festival—I am convinced that the city did that on the west side of the city because it wanted some of that fun that we had here in the square with our festival. The city saw how successful it was and how it brought people together, and I think they said “oh, we can do that!” The worst thing was having to deal with people who were not honest, who didn’t really care why you were trying to do what you were trying to do, just wanted to sop you because they could. And dealing with people like that is *not* easy; I
don’t deal well with people who lie, with people who throw their power at you because they can. I hated that part.

10) Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or agencies?
There were some people in downtown who got what we were trying to do, and so, those relationships were friendly, and we talked and there were just calling up for permits and right down hostile. They run the gamut because there were people especially in the planning department, --this was under a different planning director—they needed to have proof that they talked and had interaction with the neighborhoods for these programs in, but after a while it became clear that it was just so that they could check off, not that they really wanted to have an interaction with the neighborhood. They run the gamut.
Fortunately some of the people who got back then what we wanted to do are now in charge, so I am hoping that people like Lisa will have an easier time. Though she has described to me that the mayor hears her name and just automatically goes blank: “there she goes again.” He’s been around for a long time.

11) What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst?
The best sounds silly. It was the festival because it really brought the neighborhood together. There were kids at the first festivals who later had booths playing drums and showing the arts, and I think it brought the neighborhood together. I worked for West Side Neighbors, formed back in the mid-60s to fight the real estate block busting that was going on in the west side, when a real estate agent would knock in your house and say: “hey, a black person just bought your house, do you want to sell?” which devastated that neighborhood. So they got very well organized and they got an office and federal grants. And I was director of a crime prevention program over there. This was in the late 70s.
There was a guy who had been released from a mental facility and he was living in a half way house. He abducted and killed a woman and her child and that was when we started to find out where all the half way houses were and how concentrated they were in the west side, in this neighborhood and further west like Delia. I think I had a fairly good experience in trying to deal with council members and state officials in trying to identify and publicize what was going on. Some people were really very helpful in this initiative. The worst was just with a councilman who is no longer in the city council, John Frank, who was trying to kick the festival out of District Park. So he would go to council meetings and say lies, things that we did, that was real difficult.

12) What does ‘community’ mean to you?
Oh, boy! That’s a big one! I think shared sense of values, sense of identity. Do you know the phrase “home is where when you go they have to let you in”? That’s how I feel about Highland Square. There is a place where you belong. And when I say ‘a shared sense of values’ it’s not even political values, it is the value of diversity. Look around here; this is a great neighborhood. I do believe that if cities are going to survive and especially big cities, you got to break it down into small units; you gotta be able to deliver service on a small scale. Otherwise cities become too big and too inhuman and too impersonal and that’s when people say “why should I live here?” You want people to live in the city, give them a reason to do it. Houses are great, but it’s really about people, about relationships, and that’s what neighborhoods enable: people to have relationships with each other.
within a smaller area so that they can feel that sense of community and sense of belonging.

Martha
- What neighborhood group do you belong and for how long now?
MIRAFLORES, formally with Highland Square business association until that dismantled. I have been in the MIRAFLORES for 4 years as a group member and in the board.

1) How did you become a member of this group?
To be on the board, I asked to be a member of the board and then I was voted on. To be a group member you have to pay a fee of ten dollars.

2) What usually happens at your meetings?
We do committee reports. We have 4 very specific areas that we cover: crime and safety, housing, historic preservation, membership and events that we do throughout the year. Some of those are fundraising events but a lot of them are community events. So it is a committee-based organization as far as most of the work is done in committees and then we meet once a month and talk about them.

3) Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you describe what it's been like working on that issue?
I don’t work with crime and safety, and that is the most noteworthy because people care about crime. But I work with the housing and historic preservation and housing issues. There are a lot of older residents in our neighborhood who can’t maintain their homes; they have trouble paying the heating bills, so much less painting and taking care of their homes. So we work with another organization called “Re-building together” which is a national organization and every year we volunteer and go to a house in the neighborhood and we make any repair that the homeowner may request; everything from painting, plumbing, replacing floors, dealing with water damage. I like doing that because it has an impact in a house of your own neighborhood.

4) Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an issue? How have you dealt with it?
Absolutely. I think housing ownership is a fundamental right in the United States. And I think we have a hard time dealing with that. People sometimes don’t want to put standards in their houses, how to maintain them. I think people have the right to do with their houses whatever they want even when it is not attractive to other people. I think that is an issue that any group dealing with housing is going to have. In our group it is by consensus. When we all don’t agree with something then it doesn’t get done. So most of our votes are unanimous or nearly unanimous. We only put forward ideas and solutions that everyone will agree to. We compromise in committees so by the time it comes to the board we can all agree to that, to those pieces. So the hard work is done in committees with people inputting their negative or positive opinions. And then we are given ideas to pass in a unanimous way. The language is toned down. If the language is too harsh we toned down the language, we compromise in particular issues.

5) How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your neighborhood?
Just being around so many people who are active and who are living in non-traditional families, in a non-traditional neighborhood. There is a lot more of single mothers, single people, people without kids. So it’s how we understand the neighborhood; it is where I want to be, it’s where I belong, the kind of dynamic that I enjoy being around. So being in that group has led me to those people because I don’t think that sitting out in your porch you will necessarily meet everyone you want to meet. I knew that I liked the neighborhood. I am not one of those people who are afraid of crime. This is exactly where I want to stay. I want to stay here. I can’t imagine leaving this neighborhood. No one in the group is easily offended. It is not an argumentative group by any means. We realize that we have to be in an organization with a united front, that we have to agree with the issues or it’s just not going to work. We all know each other pretty well so it’s easier to communicate. The age group is very good too, so people are more dedicated without so much turmoil in their lives.

6) **Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?**

Yeah. The woman who does our newsletter, she is a graphic designer. Without her we would not be able to do it. It would be so expensive. If she wasn’t in the group, we would have to look for a whole other means of how to look for money. I think the issues are easy to understand and I think that the person who does the crime and safety has a crucial energy level that makes things happen.

7) **What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader?**

The payment. Nothing. To be a leader is a different matter altogether. It takes time. Without a strong leadership, things get led by the wayside [omitted, ignored], the energy level gets less and less for everyone. I think willingness to do it is a huge part. They have to drive a lot of stuff and lead us.

8) **If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your neighborhood group, what would you say?**

Some of them have been really positive. I made a lot of really good friends. I have met my neighbors who I would have not met under normal circumstances. I really like Rebuilding Together and other agencies that I’ve gotten to meet, and working with the city. Just to have different avenues to donate my time. It has all been really positive. It is hard to constantly give your time. But when you find something like this where we are not combative with each other; that we all get along, you actually want to go to meetings and get stuff done.

9) **For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you?**

Interesting question. The best experiences have been working with the elderly maintaining their homes because it was the most fulfilling. I like doing things that all you need is donate your time and your enthusiasm and that you don’t need to have a lot of money, but that donating your time and enthusiasm is what counts. What I enjoy least about it is occasionally difficult to get new programs started after so many years of doing always the same. It is more tedious to get something new started. We are a bit of a bureaucracy.

10) **Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or agencies?**
It has been very positive. We have very good relationship with the city ward councilman; we are in contact with him. We go to the city council meetings each week. We deal with the Ohio Historical Society, the County Historical Society. The fact that we do these things on consensus, and that are never antagonistic, we try to come up with solutions, rather than pointing fingers. We go to them first with our concerns. A problem that you can have is when you assume that you know all the facts. For example, we want some new housing guidelines. Instead of doing them first and then taking to the city, we went to the city first to give us some advice of how to do the guidelines and then we started from there. So they know what’s going on. If you don’t include them from the beginning that’s not how to get something done. Go to the experts first, and then make a decision. As long that you go to the right people. It’s been pretty responsive. Instead of fighting against them you understand their issues, too, like lack of money or other issues they are leading with.

11) What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst?

The police department has been the best. Officer Gould comes to our meetings. They have been very straightforward and honest in telling us what’s going on and how to deal with some issues, how to help us. But I think that is inherent with being a police officer. There are much more used to dealing with the public and being very involved. They work different events for us too. The worst, they were couple of instances of miscommunication with the Mayor’s office before I started, but I don’t know much about it. In the city they take criticisms very seriously.

12) What does ‘community’ mean to you?

Community is whatever you make of it. It is the group that you most identify with. It is a neighborhood community, so it is the people who live in the same circumstances as I live in, same income, background, wanting to live closer to the city, in older houses, and dealing with those issues, who have the same preferences. With community based work you have to be in that community to be involved with it. We have a lot of renters in our neighborhood, when I go to meetings I am always thinking of what someone of my age in my situation would want to see happen. What could I do to make the renter’s experience a good experience?

Laura

-What neighborhood group do you belong and for how long now?
I am the immediate past president of MIRAFLORES. I was on the board for seven years and this is the first year that I’ve been off. I am also member of Campinha group for the last 2-3 years. I did some things with PAGODA in certain projects.

1) How did you become a member of this group?
In MIRAFLORES, I had just finished the last semester of school and a friend had gotten some tickets to some event of the neighborhood, and you know my master is in non profit groups. And I am into community building and that kind of thing. And then my husband Greg said to me “you should do it; that would give you something to do” and that’s how I got involved in MIRAFLORES. And then I got interested in joining. In Campinha, someone started to help form a block group in our block and we said that we’d like to get involved, because a community that is involved or interacts on a
somewhat regular basis, I think, is stronger than where people don’t talk or get involved with each other. That’s how I got involved.

2) **What usually happens at your meetings?**
Both of them have agendas. The crime issues, what’s going on in those areas, etc. People bring up common concerns like vacant houses where we see people get in and out of them very regularly, the graffiti problem. We contacted the city and they helped us cleaning it up. We talk about special events, other meetings that we want to have, and we try to talk about getting people involved and working in different projects.

3) **Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you describe what it’s been like working on that issue?**
This past week we woke up before the snow came and someone had gone graffiti the block on our neighborhood; it looked like they were like all over the neighborhood one night doing graffiti. Greg had mentioned it because he walked the dog that morning, but I didn’t see it, so I thought it was like one graffiti. So when I got to work one of the people who lives on Campinha sends out an e-mail and said “they are all over the place, what are we going to do? I called the police and they said that it’s not a crime so that they could do nothing.” I’ve been kind of lucky that I know some city officials so I went ahead and sent his e-mail to some of them. I wanted to confirm if that was our responsibility, or if the city could help, or if they had any advice for us. And next thing I know they called the police and they had them take statements. The leaf removal crew for the city said that would come up and help us remove the graffiti, because it is hard to remove it from the concrete. So within fifteen minutes, the whole neighborhood knew about it. People were saying, “I am available on Saturday to help if we need to” and the city got back with us right away. It was an issue that would have demoralized the neighborhood because this happened. But because we were proactive about it and the city said that could help us, it ended up helping the people of the neighborhood in two ways: believe a little bit more in city government and what they will do, and it also brought us together as a group, like this is something that we are going to stand for. Working with the city on that issue made the people feel better. We decided that we were going to be very strong against this type of stuff, and we were going to be very proactive and that we were not gonna let that kind of thing happen in our neighborhood. [Jerry Egan, city official, planning office, introduces himself: “I am an interested observer. I was the last to leave the HS business association block. I was an advocate to shovel the snow of the sidewalks, this is a walkable neighborhood.”] He would attend meetings whenever we would ask him. He works for the urban planning department. In MIRAFLORES now we are trying to get guidelines for our houses. Some of our houses were built in the 1860s. And from a historic preservation viewpoint we want to keep our old houses. But some of those houses are too expensive or too far gone to bring them up to standard. We want to make sure that what’s built in their place is not a ranch house but similar type of housing to what is existent in the neighborhood. So he has met with us in several occasions and now he is helping us build those guidelines and put them in place. Now we need to have some public meetings on these guidelines at the end of January and in February. And if they pass those public meetings then they go to city council. And we can say “we have had three public meetings and this is what people approved, and
because the people approved it we would like you to approve it as well.” He has been working with the groups on different issues and helped us understand what’s realistic for housing guidelines. Some people wanted to be like all the houses have to built of brick, but brick is very expensive. So are we open to having that fake wood that has the texture of real wood, because real wood is really expensive as well. So people can build a house that is right and looks right but that is not too cost prohibiting.

4) Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an issue? How have you dealt with it?

I am sure there has. One that comes to mind when I was president. We were doing the Glendale cemetery event; we had been doing an event there every summer where we would sell a little bit of food, and we would have like four jazz bands. People would stop and see each band by trolley, like one of them was traditional jazz, and the other was blues. A great event. Very expensive, very time consuming project, because you know all the musicians --that is their livelihood-- we have to pay for their time and effort. We had to take electricity into the cemetery, rent the trolleys, some other things. We as a volunteer group got it all done out there, we got plugged up, everything that the bands needed. And it did cost a lot of money. Because of how expensive it was, we were trying to keep the event down in price for the community. We had about 250-300 people. But because it was so expensive we only ended up making like five hundred bucks on the event. For me it’s not worth the time and the effort because there wasn’t a lasting improvement to the community, though it was a cool thing to do. A lot of the people coming weren’t from the neighborhood, so they would come and go not getting involved with the neighborhood. It did cost us a heck of a lot of money, all our time and effort would be put into that, and we would become grumpy with each other. At the end, people would be upset with each other because they felt that some people didn’t pull their wedge, etc. So by the second year as a president we were thinking of doing it again and I brought up these issues, and I said: I think this is a great event but I think we really need to be clear about what is that we want to do, what do we want as a result. This is the result: we are spending 600 hours. Is the returning that we are getting what we want to get?” I felt that we needed to have a discussion as a full board rather than making some people’s decisions prevail over the other people. So we had an in-depth discussion, it wasn’t just my decision of “no we are not gonna do it” and it wasn’t the two other people’s idea who wanted to do it. It was a full board decision. Some people in the board thought that I was trying to kill it. So I talked to them and I told them that it is important that we discussed this in depth. We needed to talk about all the details, and be on the same page of what we were doing. This made everyone feel better. So after a full board meeting we decided that it is a great event but at this time we were not going to continue. And that we would focus on something a bit more cost-effective. As a leader I needed to bring up these issues to discussion that we all knew what we were getting ourselves into.

5) How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your neighborhood?

In the beginning I thought that everyone should be involved. But later by being involved I realized that people have other things in their lives and that even though they may not get involved they do support us. And I’ve gotten better with knowing
that people may give us monetary support, or just say good things about us. But I also realized that we have a great array of people in the neighborhood and I realize how rich we are. We have senior citizens who are architects or were in the war. Or from people who have kids you learn what other people’s needs are. So as a group we need to do something about it. So being involved in the group has really opened my eyes to what the various issues are in the different constituencies. And it has made me very passionate about the neighborhood, I really love this neighborhood, I love this area. If someone would contact me and say “I live in this area and I need help with such and such” I would do anything I could to help them get in touch to whoever they need to, just like you contacted me. And if I needed to be personally involved and the person needed me to make the call for him/her, I would do it. Being involved in the neighborhood has made me a stronger advocate for the area and for the people living in it.

6) Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?
There was a gentleman who used to be a member of the board, his name is John. He is no longer on the board. Really nice guy, very concerned bout the neighborhood, the heart put in the right place. He was a very divisive personality. People would get mad; it was causing us not to work well. We got very catty with one another, and snippy with one another, it was not healthy. We were focusing more on him than in the neighborhood. He was causing a lot of tension in the group and once he went off the board we focused as a group and we got a lot more done because he wasn’t there impeding us. I know he is a sweet guy, he wanted to make changes, but his style of interacting with the group didn’t match with where the rest of the group was at. I think it is for the betterment of the neighborhood that he is off the board. I think it’s made us a better working board. We are more positive than what we used to be.

7) What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader?
Since we are a volunteer group we really are a working group. We expect you to take into some tasks as it was needed. So what we are looking for in people is a commitment to the neighborhood, beyond the desire to make things better but an actual willingness to follow through on that desire, to help. And it doesn’t mean that you have to take on the committee all by yourself, but you need to take the responsibility to do some tasks, to follow through, to get things done. For me, my interest just continued to grow, the issues I got involved at first made me become more interested and more involved. Being a leader of any organization, you have to make sure that you are talking about the right issues, of the big picture issues; at the board level you should be talking about what’s our partnership with the city, have we contacted them? Should we be working with other groups? Being a leader means bringing up the right issues to discuss, being able to voice your personal opinions but make sure that not only your opinions are the ones heard but also all the rest. Making sure that you are delegating to some extent things that need to be done and hope that each of those individual committees take responsibility for those commitments, feel responsible, so that they start to take on by themselves on their own. Help each person grow on their role I think is key to strengthen the group. This strengthens the organization.
8) If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your neighborhood group, what would you say?
It was a very positive experience. It’s made me think in a different way. Being a leader is different than being a member of a group. It made me think more about relationships, of consider things, realize that it is beyond my ego. If we are having a problem I pick up the phone ad I say: “Is everything ok? I didn’t mean for the discussion to become tense, I hope there is no hard feeling.” It’s really helped me grow as a person, to learn about relationships, of how people and groups work together. It was a great experience but it also was a very intense year so I was glad that was over.

9) For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you?
Being the president was both the worst and the best. Some people in the board didn’t want me to be a president at first, but I still wanted to do it, I felt I could do it. Ted and I butted head like crazy. We had a really hard time. He ended up moving away. I learnt then that it was not about me, that we all wanted to make the neighborhood better. I could see people growing, engaged and enthusiastic, and that made me feel great about it. I am very proud of all the work we have done; this will help stabilize our neighborhood and will be a great thing for it. With this very hard beginning I am happy to know that what I do will impact the neighborhood for longer than what I will be around.

10) Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or agencies?
We have a good relationship with the city. Before I got involved, MIRAFLORES didn’t get along well with the city. For a couple of years the relationship was tense. You shouldn’t need to kiss ass in order to get government to work for you. It wasn’t a fair situation. People used to attack the mayor. We got a lot better about dealing with the city; we now use more discretion when we approach the city. We don’t go to them for every little thing but when we think that we need help we go to them and they are very receptive to us. They can’t do everything for us. They get back in touch with us right away, like with the graffiti. We are strategic about how we talk to them, we are nice to them. We don’t always agree with everything they say. But if they do stuff that we don’t agree with, we would talk one on one, and we tell them how we feel about the issue. But we don’t attack them in the paper. It is a relationship and we don’t want to ruin it. Then when you need them they’d be there. Our relationship with the city is very good, and we continue to nurture that. People go to council meetings. We make sure that we are in touch with them, just to let them know what we are working on. Trying to keep them updated without taking too much of their time.

11) What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst?
The worst is the one with Marco before I got involved in the group. The best one was the concert in the parking lot of the library that we co-sponsored with the city to sell beer. There is couple of different groups in the area but the city called MIRAFLORES --called us-- to help them in this concert and to raise some money. It was great that they came to us. That’s awesome. We have a good relationship; the city knows that we are working with them and not against them to get things done.
12) **What does ‘community’ mean to you?**
Community is a group of people that have an interest in similar issues. In our community we are a group of people who are interested in keeping our neighborhood nice, keeping the property values up, and genuinely interested in one another as a people. Community is the coming together of people who have a similar interest but then I think it grows beyond that, and there becomes personal relationships as well, that’s community building. We are not just concerned about the neighborhood but about the neighbors as well. I think there are different depths of layers of community. At the most basic it’s just a shared interest about our houses and making our neighborhood look nice but then it goes deeper than that, as you grow with the group.

Kevin

- **What neighborhood group do you belong and for how long now?**
Pagoda; I’ve been an active member for about one year. And I am the president of Manizales, a fenced-in area for dogs. I am also a recent MIRAFLORES membership committee member.

1) **How did you become a member of this group?**
I wanted to be active in the organization besides attending the meeting. I also knew some people in the group from the neighborhood, just as friends.

2) **What usually happens at your meetings?**
There are 2 kinds of meetings: the small, board meetings; and the larger meetings, to which everyone in the neighborhood is encouraged to attend. The board meetings have more of a formal structure in that there is an agenda and we move through old business, new business, open discussion and determine what it is that the goals of the organization are, and what we are going to attain with the next meeting. We look at projects that have been ongoing and look at the strategy and ask why they are being successful or why they are not being successful. And then we try to go from there. The larger –community-- meetings are more informational and they try to encourage getting people more active with the board or with the organization. We have a number of community efforts where we’ve been trying to work with the city and other neighborhood organizations. Like the neighborhood block watch group, the safety patrols, there are some efforts to try to focus on the neighborhood’s grocery store and neighborhood development that have been going on in this neighborhood. So we encourage people to be active, to contact their city officials. We give them the addresses, phone numbers, contact information at those more general meetings.

3) **Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you describe what it’s been like working on that issue?**
One project that I have been more active in was the fundraising project to bring along the annual event we have here at the square called “Arts in the Square.” We get neighborhood artists to come to display what they have available and invite the neighbors to learn about the neighborhood and the artists. But we had to pay for advertising and that’s why I was involved in the fundraising. That was very successful because we raised almost 2,000 dollars, which for us was amazing as a small group. An issue that we are dealing with is the grocery store. We had a grocery store across the street for a number of years, the Stark Market. It closed down to allow the developer to come in and basically do a total rehab on the side of the street
where the market was located. There was a lot of concern during the negotiations between the developer, the city and the [...?] which were all involved in respect to the placement and size of the lot. There was a lot of concern about the fate of the grocery store. We wanted to make sure we had a grocery store in the neighborhood. There was a negotiating agreement between the city and the developer that there should be a grocery store restored to that side of the street. However, when the plans were going on, the plans were running with 6400 sq feet, which is too small for too most groceries to make a profit, if you go around and ask grocery stores. So there was some concern at that time that was kind of ignored by the city. So we considered an effort to raise the awareness of the neighborhood and that has been the issue, so that if they really want a grocery store they really need to contact their city representatives on city council, the mayor, and let them know that we want that grocery store in place. So that an education campaign has been a project that we have been working on for quite a while now, but with limited success. I think there is a lot of thought, and it’s kind of up to whoever develops that business. You can’t legislate what sort of business to build in certain place; someone has to come and want to build that type of business. And I think that’s why there is limited success; because a lot of people understand this so they don’t want to pressure the city to go along with this. We have to see how things fall out. The city has been working very hard and they did a great job lately about informing us and letting us know what the process is.

4) Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an issue? How have you dealt with it?

[Laughs] Sure there are times like that constantly. We discuss it and we vote on it, and whatever the opinion wins the day of the vote it will be the opinion that the group will adopt. That’s how small democracy works, I think.

5) How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your neighborhood?

It’s been frustrating at times. It has made me stayed in the neighborhood and I feel more invested in the neighborhood. I know lots of people. I’ve been in the HS area for the last 13 years. I thought about moving in the last two years because of the increasing crime problem and I wondered whether or not the city would continue to encourage a walkable neighborhood and an urban neighborhood or if they were going to discourage that. There was a point when there was some talk of not keeping on-street parking here along West Market which is our main thoroughfare, which runs through here, the center of the square. The talk was about making it a 4-lane street coming through the square, and along with other projects, fortunately none of those things happened. We have a kind of controlled traffic that goes by the middle of the neigh and that’s kind of the defining aspect of our area for commerce or gathering in the neighborhood. So being active in the group has made me wanna stay, it’s made me prouder of the area and more satisfied with living in the area.

6) Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?

Yes, yes. There are many people. The main person is the current president, Lisa. If she was not in the group I am not sure if the group could exist. She is a stay home mother. Her kids are little bit older and I think that has allowed her the opportunity and the time to do some things that would have not happened if it wasn’t for her. She
has had the opportunity to talk to city officials and go to city offices that are only open during the day. All the rest of us works and could have not taken time off to go to talk to city officials. So she would be missed for that issue. She would also be missed because she has a great deal of experience and a great deal of energy that she springs to the work that she does, so I know that she would be missed. The other person who would me missed is the wisdom that Rosemary brought to the organization. Mark Smith would be missed because he does such a good job with the website we have and he continues to at least go there and continue updating it. That is a hard question. When you have a volunteer organization everybody is going to be missed. The moment that they are not there either some thing will just not happen or everybody else will have to pick up the slack of that missing person. And that’s why everyone should be welcome. Because every time you get someone new, you will get new skills, new things that the person can bring to the table. In a small organization like ours, when you start to work together from the grounds-up, a lot of times people are not as welcoming as they should be. I work with a second group locally: the Akron dog park, a 503c organization (nonprofit). We have a very small group, and we need to be more welcoming because sometimes people disappear, and when they ask them “why?” they said that some people rubbed them wrong because they always wanted to be in control. And it’s hard to deal with personalities that want to be always in control. That way you are not treating the organization as a democracy. And you have to keep that in mind.

7) What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader?

Well. That’s what we are trying to define. We are working on getting all the documentation together and the requirements. All it takes so far is to show up and be willing to work. You have formal officers but if you show up and come to meetings and want to help out, you are a de facto member. To be a leader takes to listen, listen, you have to listen to people.

8) If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your neighborhood group, what would you say?

It’s a great experience, I am glad I did it. And I would recommend to anyone to get more active in their neighborhoods, or in a group. You would be rewarded by other people; you’d be rewarded by the whole experience.

9) For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you?

The best experience was helping with Arts in the Square when I did it first, like two years ago. This is going to sound stupid, but it was the best experience because we had this huge area in the street blocked up with chocks and spray paint that washes away. It was open, anyone could write whatever they wanted there, kids could do drawings. The looks on the kids’ faces because they could go to the street and do all their drawings… that was so great, the kids had so much fun! That was the best moment ever with this group. The worst moment is at any meeting where we fight about policy and strategy, or what are we going to do next, which happens frequently. The worst moments are the ones of all meetings where we cannot reach consensus, they just don’t feel good. A lot of times they drag on. Good leadership, as I said before, takes to listen. But you can do listen for a good amount of time, but then you
have to also know when you need to go ahead and move forward. We had a few meetings where we were arguing back and forth. The leader needs to step in and say “ok, enough discussion. What are we gonna do next?” and if they can’t decide, just table the issue for the next meeting, and move on. Nobody wants to sit in a meeting for more than one hour. There is no point in longer meetings.

10) Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or agencies?
My experience with both groups’ interactions with government I believe is the policy of these groups that is the president who talks with the government officials. Interactions happen through the president. I see many negative interactions and a few positive. The positive are always great. But the negative are just gonna happen between people and organizations.

11) What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst?
The best issue was when we got a very positive feedback form the city on the Arts in the Square event. The worst experience has been the one related to the grocery store. It has been very hard communicating with government about this issue.

12) What does ‘community’ mean to you?
[Wow...tough question!] Community means a sense of happiness and a sense of belonging. It makes you feel good…a sense of being home. I guess that might mean the Highland Square home.

13) Would you like to comment on anything else?
The more organized the group is from the start, the better. The PAGODA has changed. It started off as business association. When we first formed we were disorganized, and we are still somehow disorganized. The dog park has been a totally different experience; very well organized from the get-go. We got our nonprofit status very quickly; our meetings form the rule of order every time. With a more structured group like the dog park, the better the chances that the group will continue, the better the chances that the group will grow. The MIRAFLORES are very structured also. Another truth about all these organizations is that they depend on the people of the groups; they are very much personality-driven. It takes someone with vision, with an idea, running with it and bringing people together around that issue and stay together. MIRAFLORES’s nature is also very much like that. Lately, a couple of their people have left and I wonder whether that organization is going to make it, stay afloat. A lot of these organizations are a lot like businesses: you need to plan in order to survive and go forward. They also need to define their mission. The PAGODA came up as a result of couple of crises. Now they need to sit down and establish where the organization is going besides crises, besides the grocery store, besides the theater. Lisa has a good vision for that. She would like to see the organization having a community center. That would be an excellent way to proceed as a separate, established, organization. When you reach the 5oc3 status you are like a business. You are not just a group of people sitting around the table and having a talk. There are a lot of great organizations around here because many people put their hearts in what they believe. MIRAFLORES are much better structured. I am part of the membership committee. They have a much better relationship with the city. And I can give you a reason why I think that is. Joe and Jane are realtors, and they had already
had good relationships with the city because they have always visited the different
divisions of the city. Versus the members of our group, which are not really into
politics, we are not actually down there dealing with people at different departments
all the time. The people of our organization in the PAGODA have jobs that not
necessarily tie with the city in the same way that being a local realtor does. For
example, Jane is very active. There was a home tour, and she organized that, which
required working with the city promotions department, but we don’t have something
like that to promote. And as a sales person she knows a lot, and when the city looks at
Jane they see a person who has an interest in that area, and her money is here. She is
active. They treat her very well, I think. On the other hand, if Lisa or I go there they
see us as another taxpayer, like we would not bring anyone new into the
neighborhood. What they don’t realize is that we are also staying, and yes, we are tax
payers, so what? But we have also fallen in love with this area! We are here because
we want a community. I came from Columbus, and I love cities. I want to walk
anywhere in the neighborhood that there is a coffee shop like this one and I don’t
have to get into a car and drive. I can just put my shoes on and get walking.

Kathy
-What neighborhood group do you belong and for how long now?
MIRAFLORES, same as Jane ad Holli for a year and some months.
1) How did you become a member of this group?
One of my neighbors approached me and asked me if I would be interested in joining
the group. I knew her from before from a neighborhood Christmas party that we had
had. And she thought that I might be an interesting person to have on board, because I
care about the neighborhood and working to improve it. That’s how someone
approached me and asked me to join.
2) What usually happens at your meetings?
Well, it depends. We have a lot of different meetings. We have our board meetings.
Those are more organizational and planning; we decide what our goals would be for
the year and then we talk about the type of strategies we need to accomplish them.
And then we have different committees, and those committees would have meetings
every month to talk about their specific issues. Like the crime and safety committee
has a meeting and talk about the issues that are the most relevant to the safety of the
neighborhood; in the membership committee we talk about how to get new members,
we do the newsletter and maintain the website. We work on how to improve those
and how to get information out to the neighborhood. We also have historic
preservation. They deal with that aspect, getting houses on the national register,
creating historic districts. They are working very hard to create design guidelines so
that they can have certain rules in place, so the homes can keep their historic
integrity.
3) Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you
describe what it’s been like working on that issue?
A problem? Let’s see, what would be a good success story…Well something that
came into discussion in the crime and safety meeting, we were talking about getting
out in the streets with our dogs. You know many people in the neighborhood have
dogs. We though not patrolling the neighborhood so much but just making a presence
and sending a message when we are out. That we are not afraid to be outside, that we are not staying inside. So just from a simple idea that someone had, people liked it and now we have an organized group of whomever neighbors want to join and we go out once or twice a month to walk our dogs together around the neighborhood. One or two police officers would come with us and we just walk the dogs through the different parts of the neighborhood. Some people have had problems so we just made a presence in the neighborhood.

4) **Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an issue? How have you dealt with it?**

Yes, we have issues that we don’t agree on. So that’s why we follow Robert’s Rules of Order, those are meeting rules, like standard rules that a lot of groups go by and it allows for some structure. If there I a question, then it is presented, and then someone makes a motion, and it basically comes down to a vote. So even if there is disagreement we follow that rule, we take a vote and the majority rules. But that’s after discussion. So that someone has to approve putting the idea to a vote then we discuss it, then we take a vote. That’s how it works.

5) **How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your neighborhood?**

Well it’s made me feel better about it. It is nice to know that there are people, my neighbors, who are working to make the neighborhood a better place. But also just knowing them on a personal level. It is more pleasurable. It is like a real neighborhood not just a house you live in. It is just a real shared community. We do things together, we feel comfortable, if you need some help, or if you want to offer help to somebody, it is just knowing your neighbors and looking out for each other. I have also come to be impressed with the diversity of people in our neighborhood, we have a lot of different kinds of people, a lot of talented diverse individuals, and I appreciate that. And I don’t know if I would have learned that if I wasn’t involved in this group because I would have not had the chance to get to know some of these people.

6) **Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?**

I think we all matter. But some people I can think more than others. Probably like in all other groups there are some people who get more involved than others, they may be more willing to give more of their time. Holli was a real asset to our board probably because her professional background and she was very involved as far as finding sources to come up with money, to finance our projects. She has just a real nice way of getting things done, she has a lot of energy and commitment, and she is very organized. She helps the rest of us make the most use of our energy and our work. She was very important when she was on the board. Her husband, Greg, is also one of the persons willing to volunteer and give out his time. Any one person would be missed, though, because we all have different kinds of expertise in different areas. And that’s important when we come together as a body, to all have different experiences. Like Warner is an attorney, so he can help us with something that has legal ramifications, he can give us good advice. Barb is a realtor, so she can help us with housing issues. Joe has construction experience, so that when we are talking g about home improvement he can help us with that; Ken has financial experience, so
he can help us with our budget. Everyone has something to help the group, everyone is important.

7) **What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader?**

You just have to live in the neighborhood and join with ten dollars due for an annual membership. We are a neighborhood organization and that’s how we reach out to people who live within the boundaries of the neighborhood. [Leader] it’s probably several things. The first thing is to have a mission, or goal, or something that you want to accomplish, and then be willing to invest some time in it. And to be able to reach out to others.

8) **If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your neighborhood group, what would you say?**

I have found it very beneficial for me. I like things when there are win-win situation, when everyone benefits. And this is the way I have found this to be. The neighborhood group is working to make West Hill a better place to live. We have achieved real accomplishments. It’s helped me too. I found people whom I have become friends with. I feel that I have contributed with something valuable that is beneficial. I’ve taken on things that I would have not otherwise, and in the process I learned things, like I maintain the website and I enjoy that. I started a running group. I got to meet people and I got to do things that I genuinely enjoy doing with other people. So it has gone all the way around.

9) **For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you?**

There are a lot of good things. I would have to answer in two ways. On a personal level and a professional level as far as the neighborhood organization goes. I do feel proud of the accomplishments that we’ve made in the neighborhood, the improvements that we’ve made. And then it has been very gratifying for me to meet all these wonderful people, develop real friendships based on substance, our common beliefs and work toward a common goal. So I am proud for all the accomplishments we have made on the professional level but also on the personal level it has been very enjoyable and gratifying! The worse things probably when you encounter not just resistance, but people can be suspicious of what you are trying to accomplish or negative, and that can be difficult to deal with. We have had public meetings where people would challenge us or worse maybe accuse us of ulterior motives or not being effective. I guess it is to be misunderstood of what we are trying to do.

10) **Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or agencies?**

I think that it’s very important because that is how we are going to get a lot of things done. Some things we can do on our own. But to really affect change we need the city’s cooperation, even state and even federal. So we reach the city in a number of ways: it is our policy that every Monday we go to the city council meetings, a representative of our neighborhood group attends each meeting so that we are current on what’s going on, but also they do realize that we pay attention and that we are involved. If something happens we can make a comment on it. And we just communicate with them; we ask them to come speak to our meetings, we try to engage them. Like in our housing guidelines that we are working on, we started to
work with the zoning department of the city, because that’s who we would need if we were to apply these rules. We work with the health department, we work closely with the law enforcement, and they help us with our crime and safety. And we help them. They help us and they tell us how we can help them. We do neighborhood watches; we know the phone numbers to call if we see something. So we are really helping them do their job. If we see something suspicious we would call them, something that they may otherwise not know because a policeman was not around to see it. So we help each other. And they appreciate that, so they help us in return.

11) What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst?
When our council representative comes to our meetings, and when our representative—our president—goes to the meetings, well he carries some weight because he also is the president for the city council. The president of the city council comes to our neighborhood meetings to listen to our concerns and take them back to the council, so they can hopefully act on them. That’s the best thing, just getting that acknowledgement from the city that they think that we matter, that our work is making a difference enough that they would pay attention to us when we ask for their help or their attention. I can’t think of any really bad experience, and that may be probably because I haven’t been with the group for very long. But I am sure that there might have been times when we wished that we had more of a response.

12) What does ‘community’ mean to you?
Community? Well… that’s a good question! It is thought-provoking. It is our fellow human beings to whom I want to think as my brothers and sisters, all of us. And those that live in the closest proximity to us we just have the most interactions with, simply because of that proximity. So I suppose that’s the physical community, and then ideally, you want to develop and foster relationships with those people. And it doesn’t have to be on an intimate level, but just acknowledging them, respecting them, appreciating differences, learning from different people. I’ve been really impressed with this group, with the things that we have accomplished. It inspires me to tell people “you can also do something about a problem that you may have, you can make a difference, if you get people together and you organize.” I guess it’s that sense of empowerment; but you have to take the time and make the effort yourself, but you can make a difference. Something in the neighborhood or in the city, state, nation, world… people can make a difference, they can matter, work within the system and if you want to change it you have to work in it. You can make a difference, that’s why the city has council meetings so that citizens can come and make their voice heard. Thing do happen if you put the time and effort.

Juliet

What neighborhood group do you belong and for how long now?
I belong to the Pagoda. I have been with them ever since their beginning. There is also a Highland Square Business Association. Those are two different neighborhood organizations and they kind of melted together. The neighborhood association was created when we were threatened by a big Taco Bell coming to the neighborhood. That type of business was not compatible with our neighborhood. That was 10 years ago. I have been involved in the neighborhood with the development association from 1979 till
108 61 264

1989. From 1979 to 1989 the city had a redevelopment program, so government money was pumped into neighborhoods, and I was the head of that group for this neighborhood. I was also part of the Summit County Historical Society history project, writing the history of the neighborhood. And in my background with local schools I was always interested in local history and taught local history to elementary school children and art history and preservation. That’s the area where I have knowledge and I am interested in gathering data and historic information and preservation. I am with the Progress and Preservation Society, which is a group that tries to preserve neighborhoods. And that started about 25 years ago.

1) **How did you become a member of this group?**
I have an interest in history and preservation and I have exhibited leadership skills. And people have asked me to be part of boards and organizations.

2) **What usually happens at your meetings?**
The PAGODA hasn’t been meeting very much of late. But at our meetings [laughs] there is a great deal of discussion about a lot of negative things that are happening in the square and what we can do to present the problem to the people and gather support. One of the negative things is that our grocery store was torn down and a new one was promised to us. And it’s been a couple of years now that we don’t have a grocery store. And we believe that for a neighborhood to be healthy that we need to be merged in body and soul and a grocery store is a very central element of the neighborhood. So there’s been in these meetings that we are planning how to get a new grocery store. We inform the people through the information that has been gathered by some of the members of the group; we’ve done protesting at the site where the grocery store is supposed to go, we have written letters to the mayor and to our council member and people in the planning department encouraging them to bring this element back to our neighborhood to make it a healthy, walking, active community. Highland Square is unique to other areas in the city, and there are so many people active in community and interested in doing things within the neighborhood rather than just getting in their cars and going elsewhere or just living in their homes and not really contributing to the works of the neighborhood. So it’s a unique neighborhood and not everybody thinks the same. And there is often conflict in the meetings or in the community, people thinking that we should be going in different directions. So the meetings can be constructive, sometimes they are not, sometimes they’d go off in tangents because there are so many needs and they don’t always focus on the problem at hand.

3) **Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you describe what it’s been like working on that issue?**
Besides the grocery store issue which has been a powerful issue within the neighborhood there is been an issue regarding the Highland Theater. The HT is a landmark in the HS. It was threatened to its demolition this last year. And the owner of the building took out a permit to tear it down. Many people in the neighborhood thought that it should be preserved. Lisa Broswick took the leadership on that and did all the research. Now we are applying for a non profit organization status to be able to buy the theater. However its owner has not been very open with us. Part of the problem is that we are a grassroots organization with no big money behind. We have a lot of big hearts and souls and drive and lots of wonderful ideas and we work toward building a business plan and putting all the pieces together. The owner is not
interested in talking with us at this point. We have raised money to hire attorneys to represent us, and they are from the largest law firm in town, and they should speak from that position of power. And hopefully we will be able to get more people behind us working toward the goal of convincing the owner of the theater that we are genuine and serious and that we are able to step forward and purchase the theater because that’s a major concern for us.

4) Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an issue? How have you dealt with it?
Most definitely. People coming to the meeting have started to drop out; they don’t come as often, and I don’t know that’s even been resolved. People have different ideas of how to handle the grocery situation or the theater issue, and the result has been a lack of people coming together which doesn’t promote the cause at all, it just makes things fade away instead of making them stronger. That’s what happens when there is disagreement and you just don’t move forward. People drop out when they feel that the meetings don’t go in the direction they wanted them to go, they fade away, and they get frustrated. That’s not a good thing. But people that are in the leadership right now, like Lisa, realize that she is leading a band that is not following her and she does an awful lot of work all by herself in the name of the association. But our association has not been meeting. So I know that she’s gotten upset with me once or twice, because I tell her: “Lisa we have to get more people talking and involved. One person cannot do everything” she does all this gathering of information, and tries to get it out of people, she is very passionate. Now she has sent out some information to nominate committees and get people together. She has set up some dates, to come together and nominate people to sit on a board and to be far more formal than [she] has been in the approach; because people have drifted away. We would have meetings and not have them at a regular time and a regular place and the agenda would be fuzzy. She is making a big big effort to pull it all together. So that hopefully will work, to spread the work around, instead of just one person or two doing all the work. You won’t have the people buying in unless you have the people sitting down at the table and expressing their ideas, having their ideas validated. It cannot just be one person doing all the things.

5) How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your neighborhood?
I’ve always loved my neighborhood, but the more I work on projects and the more people I get to know the more I realize the incredible neighborhood we live in. I live in one street where there are international artists living in my street, people involved in bands, in the theater, so many artists, and so many people involved in academia choose this neighborhood because of the diversity. My involvement allows me the privilege of knowing more and more people and realizing how incredible this neighborhood is. The frustration, though, is to try to get all the people on the same page. I just think that if we can use all this power that we have to pull the neighborhood together in some way, we’ll all be better. My involvement has helped me to know so many people but also the frustration to know that with all this potential we could be doing a much better job to pull the neighborhood all together.

6) Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?
I just think of all the things that Lisa does; she is a powerful force. She gathers information; she finds all these things that are available to the community but unfortunately a lot of people don’t want to follow her. So what we want to do is to keep her very much involved in the group but have her step down from the leadership role. And get someone upfront with more universal draw. A lot of people don’t want to follow certain people. And that makes it difficult. Even though they have good ideas, the way they express them, the way they lead, their style is not conducive to a cohesive organization.

7) What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader?

[Laughs] show up! You need a person in charge of membership to keep track of the members and keep bringing people back from a contact list. And they can express getting involved in certain activities, like safety, elderly, or kids, bringing the grocery store around, about saving the theater, etc. Hopefully people will be utilized according to their interest and their skills and what they can bring to the group. On the leadership question, we have not found that combination yet, that trick [laughs]. I think a good leader has to be no combative, has to speak knowledgably on the issues at hand, and need to keep people involved. That’s the real trick: to make everyone feel as if their input was truly appreciated; people have to have their say, feel that their opinions are appreciated. You are not going to be the winner in an issue but at least you know that your point of view has been heard and that the consensus would come to the best approach hopefully. So I think that people feel that they haven’t been able to contribute because some people go off in their own direction without listening to the whole and without being inclusive. For a good leader to lead s/he has to know how to include everyone in the deal as if they had a role, and that’s important in all aspects of life: in the family, in organizations, in every aspect.

8) If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your neighborhood group, what would you say?

[Laughs] Sum it all up? I would hope that all my involvement has resulted in positive change in some positive direction. But I still have big frustrations because I still know through my experiences that tell me that there are better ways to do things. And I think that my neighborhood has more potential than others to do this and it is based on the people of Highland Square, and the reasons why they are drawn to the neighborhood: they are liberal people who accept people of different colors, creeds, sexual orientations; they are people who are interested in the arts, in architecture and preservation, and because of all those people who are drawn to this community I am proud of all the cultural experiences that we have here at the neighborhood. But that’s also a source of frustration, like I said before, because I know that there are better things that can be done. Looking at the strip here, with so many vacant buildings both the new ones and the old ones, it is really pretty scary. I know what’s behind all. I know the people in the community and some of the reasons why this is happening, and it’s frustrating to see that with all the power that is within this community, better things can be done. It is frustrating when the mayor of our city says “Oh, Highland Square has fifty different opinions and if we left them alone nothing would get done.” Maybe he is right about that, unfortunately. But I wish that the city of Akron had a better attitude toward the Square and helped us facilitate some of these things and I
wish that a leader would step forward to pull all these elements together. It is very very frustrating because I know of the potential of this community. And I don’t think there is greater potential in any of the other neighborhoods.

9) For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you?

[Laughs] Over the last couple of years we have had the “Arts in the Square” which is an art festival in August and again it hasn’t reached its full potential yet. But just the idea that we can have a festival with architects, and writers, and sculptors and painters and knitters, all these people who live within a few blocks of this neighborhood can put together a festival of arts, that’s a demonstration of who we are, and that’s a real highlight, that’s a very positive thing, and it could be much better. My big frustration is that the city has not allowed design guidelines to be formed in such a way that it doesn’t allow certain contractors in the community to fit into the neighborhood rather than have the neighborhood trying to fit into the contractors’ concept of what we should look like. I truly believe that people who live in a community have the right to contribute to the ideas of how that community should be formed. And the idea of design guidelines respect to the type of businesses that we want, for example, I think we have the right to do that. But the mayor of our city always says: “put your mouth where your money is.” So in other words he is saying that he is not going to listen unless we have a million dollars to buy a building and renovate it. With saying that, he is saying that we don’t have the right to say anything; that we don’t have the right to say what our community should look like, and what should go into our community. And he only wants to talk to people who are putting their money where their mouth is, as he says again, and again and again, that is extremely frustrating to me. And over the last year I put over a 1,000 dollars in my house, and I pay taxes, and I vote and I am a democrat, and all my life until the last election I voted for the democratic party but I am very frustrated with the current administration, he is all-powerful, and he again and again says that we don’t have the right to speak up unless we have the money to buy something and invest it, we don’t have the right to say what goes into our community. And I think that’s not right. We pay his salary, the planning department people’s salaries; we pay taxes, and certainly capital improvement is coming out of our taxpayers’ pockets. It’s sad, it’s very sad.

10) Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or agencies?

[Laughs] Back when I was working with the Highland Square Development Association and housing rehab, the government would send me everything [all necessary information]. I would always know when there were complaints about landlords, when there was a zoning violation, I’d know everything that was going on. We’d have monthly meetings and I’d developed good reports with the city. The former mayor would come to my house and sit at my table and we would discuss the issues of the neighborhood. I felt that there was a great deal of cooperation. Now I feel that even though the city feels really frustrated with us we feel very frustrated with them. They don’t tell us things for fear that they would get a protest which could be very very true. Like they mayor has said “put your money where your mouth is” and if you don’t have the big bucks to invest in the community he doesn’t want to sit down at the table and talk to you. In part that is our problem because we don’t have a
cohesive group that would get together and speak with one voice, because there are too many people thinking in many different ways. But this mayor makes me feel very uncomfortable. I have always been active in my community. And it’s very tough dealing with that.

11) What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst?

The housing rehabilitation project was a success because many houses were brought up to code, and the city was very cooperative with us. The big frustration is working with the business district and trying to get the design guidelines. It would be great if the city would follow the study done six years ago, a type of the Main Street Program. All these recommendations were made, and the city paid for part of the study, which was like US$70,000 but, again, the city government didn’t want to rough out all the feathers of certain contractor that had built in the neighborhood and have him enforce or apply the recommendations to the neighborhood. I would love to see the recommendations implemented to our neighborhood by a Main Street Manager (a person who is hired to implement those recommendations). That study has been ignored, to make two to three store building. We fought for years for Albrecht to move his parking lots to the back; he wanted the parking lots in the front, and Walgreens is a good example. For a walking community you need to put the parking to the side or the back because every time you have a parking lot in the front of a building what you are saying is that the people are not important, but the cars. But this is a walking community. The city never paid attention to that report. The city should have said “the theater is important to the community and we would do anything we can to help them save this” but they haven’t said that, they have actually entertained the thought of tearing down the theater. I think that we would have a much better community [if the city listened to what the community wants].

12) What does ‘community’ mean to you?

I want to say Angel Falls [laughs]. Community is where people work together; take pride in where they live and in their neighbors, work toward pulling people together rather than dividing people. There is a sign in here [in Angel Falls coffee shop], I am not sure if it’s still here, that is about to build community. And I think of the many things that Jim King --the owner of this building-- does to build community: he provides this space for people to gather, that’s an important part of community, to have central accord, where people know they can find their friends; to have a place where people can express themselves; a place where if a neighbor is in need, other neighbors might find out about it. There is a person that comes in here, her name is Geri. She is not working right now but she waited until her check came in at Christmas time in order to help a family that came to the neighborhood festival without proper clothing, and had babies and they didn’t have all the things they needed to exist. And Geri saw that and she was spending her own money to help them. And so I though “gosh, if Geri is doing this…” , so I gave her some money, and then Mike gave her some money, and Jennifer then gave her some money, and someone else gave her a dollar, and so forth. And Geri doesn’t drive and so she takes the bus to go to the store to buy groceries, so someone volunteered to start giving her rides to the store. So Geri had this idea, she expressed it either here or over across the street where we had the holyday festival, and people came together to help others in
their community. So it’s having a sense of place that draws people together, to have a way of communicating through a newsletter and the website, which doesn’t really reach everyone. So I think if we have this Main Street program that would tie the whole neighborhood together, having a Main Street manager who would have an office… that would be a wonderful thing to have in our community. People could go into that office and say “hey this is what’s happening, and we really need help on this.” It would really be a to-go place. Community is what a good family should be: you don’t always think alike but you always care about each other.

13) **Would you like to comment on anything else?**
People that are moving in this neighborhood and that can’t afford to move to the suburbs choose to have community. I talk to people who live out in the country and they don’t know their neighbors, they don’t talk to neighbors, they don’t see their neighbors. It’s not important to them. It *is* important to the people who choose to live here to be able to see and talk to their neighbors, to be able to walk to the store. That’s why the grocery store is so important and there are so many poor people. Nina Hollister is a senior citizen who is very active in the neighborhood and lives on the elderly housing, you might want to contact her.

**Jerry**

- **What neighborhood group do you belong and for how long now?**
I belong to the Campinha block organization since its inception, about one year and half or maybe two years. It’s always the same people who show up and always the same people who don’t show up.

1) **How did you become a member of this group?**
Some of the neighbors discussed things that we wanted to have done and things that we should do. Few of us felt that we could not wait for the city to do everything. We started with a block party. A few of us just hit it off right and we decided that in order to have a sense of community we should have a block party. So some of us decided that we would break up into little committees to clean up things, and we decided that no one should have to do that by themselves, so we formed the beautification committee that I was part of. I just wanted to participate. I don’t want to have someone else do what happens at our street. It is important to help out.

2) **What usually happens at your meetings?**
The beautification committee specifically, we came across the problems and issues that we wanted to do. We wanted to replace the planters at the end of the street, so we discussed who would have to pay for them, if the city would have something to do with it because of the sidewalks, and if the neighbors by the planters would have anything to say or any problem with us putting new planters. I wanted to make sure that we covered all the basis and we considered everyone’s opinion, that we took all the sides into consideration, so we don’t waste time or that it doesn’t get vandalized or that we didn’t have any problems.

3) **Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you describe what it’s been like working on that issue?**
One of the issues that we have is with painted graffiti and paper stickers or vinyl stickers and the combination of them. We spend time scrapping stickers off the street signs and scrapping paints off of utility boxes and mailboxes and light polls. I
remember that when I moved into my house there was graffiti in a light poll in front of my house and since I happened to have paint of the same color, I just painted it over so just that I thought that it’d look better than the graffiti. So, many times me and about four other neighbors would come out with buckets, scrapers and gloves to scrape the paint or stickers off the signs. I took spray paint and spray painted the utility box that was covered with graffiti and it looked a lot better. Actually it wasn’t even in our street it was on the corner, but we figured that while we were at it we might as well take care of it.

4) Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an issue? How have you dealt with it?
Let me think about that…I guess one of the ideas that wasn’t very well received was the idea we had of putting flower baskets in the street polls. Some people were concerned that it would be difficult to water them because they would be very high and lots of issues. I just thought that if each of us took care of the plant that was closest to their house then it would not be an issue. Myself and whoever else that wanted to have the flower baskets there just let it go, because we thought that there were so many other things that we could all work on or agree on, so we said, ok let’s just do a different project. You have to be realistic because you are dealing with neighbors, and not everyone wants or likes the same thing. You have to be easy going, and understanding and patient.

5) How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your neighborhood?
I feel that I have more ownership because I see the things that we’ve done, the things we’ve improved. When there is something bad that happens it really bothers me because I know that we put a lot of work to do it. And it makes me wonder why more people don’t do the same. And we really care; I know that we make a difference. We make improvements; it is not perfect, but that’s ok. I drive on other streets and I see houses and the streets that could be beautiful with a little work, and I say: “Gosh, why don’t spend two hours a week? It would just be beautiful!” It’s a little frustrating because many people think that the city is some entity that has unlimited wealth and that is there to clean up after you. And each of us make up the city, so it’s not like the city is somebody else that is going to come and clean the street signs and scrape the sidewalks. It is your street, you know? You pay the taxes, to get the streets repaired and the lights up so I think that you really have to take ownership. When doing part of this with the neighborhood I feel like it is very important to me what happens because I really feel connected with the ownership, you feel a strong sense of ownership, because you know that most things that are going to get done is because the group is going to do it, otherwise it won’t get done.

6) Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?
Yes I think that Holli and Greg Mallak because they also belong to the MIRAFLORES that extends to a bigger area, and they keep us up to date on what’s going on with that group, a much larger group. It helps us with ideas, with connections, and that makes a big difference. Just knowing that you are part of a bigger group, that you have a common goal… that’s very motivating and that helps you a lot.
7) **What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader?**

Pride and motivation and wanting to make things better and realizing that it’s up to you to make a difference. And that maybe someone else would do it, but many other won’t. Some people do, some people don’t! I guess some people in our area don’t do anything, and it’s so fortunate that so many people care for the neighborhood and make an effort. [Leader]: Just staying motivated, staying communicated, because something like this where there are no rules and it’s just a group of concerned neighbors that do things; if you don’t have deadlines, it is very important to have someone or a group that keeps you motivated and going. Because otherwise it would be easy to just give up, or wait for somebody else to call you, or somebody else to organize a meeting, so that’s why you have to stay motivated and you have to have some rules, because things otherwise don’t happen. I would say you have to stay motivated and organized to be a leader. There is no bigger power that it’s going to check up on you or draw a deadline, nobody else (but the leader or leaders) will make sure that things get done and help define what needs to be done, and stay organized.

8) **If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your neighborhood group, what would you say?**

I would say that we have done a great job so far as a group considering that it hasn’t been around for that long and that it doesn’t have so many people. I would definitely say that our street has improved, even in little things that you wouldn’t notice if you didn’t live there but that people who live there notice, like paint gone, graffiti gone, and stickers gone. If you don’t live there you don’t even pay attention to it or notice it, but if you do live there, it *does* make a difference. Not to mention, just the added bonus that you get to know everyone who lives around you and I think because of that it has helped us also with crime and communicating. I know that last summer the neighbor on the one side of me saw something suspicious at the neighbor’s on the other side of me, and nobody was home except for her, and she went up and confronted the kids who were stealing stuff from her porch. And I think that if it wasn’t for the organization and knowing each other and knowing that those kids shouldn’t be there, she probably would have not done anything. But I think because of getting organized and knowing each other and knowing about each other, we knew that those neighbors go out of town for weeks at the time, and I wasn’t home. And that’s a benefit of knowing and being involved is that it is not just about cleaning up the neighborhood but that is also helping crime. It is so beneficial in *so* many other ways than just cleaning, beautifying or organizing, that it’s helped in a lot of other ways. And I think people are more patient with each other, and that if stuff were going on instead of calling the police on your neighbors, if you know them and you are friendly with them, you just go and talk to them rather than complaining. And I always tell my neighbors how spoiled and fortunate we are, because we like each other, we do things together…In so many streets you hear so many stuff happening…

9) **For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you?**

I would say the best has been doing chores with my neighbors, like --it may not sound so much fun-- planting flowers, or I don’t really enjoy scrapping stickers out of signs, but being *together* with your neighbors, and doing things together so that when you
are done you feel proud, it makes you feel good. And I think that’s the best part of it. It is sharing the community feeling. I don’t even think as them being neighbors but as being friends that we are doing it because we care. The worst thing is when there are times when you just don’t feel like doing any of these things [laughs], you know they call me to remind me, ok tomorrow we need to do this, so I think “I wish I didn’t have to do it” [laughs] but I think that’s normal to everyone with anything in life: you sometimes don’t feel like doing some things. And so you do it anyway, and you always end up enjoying it more than what you thought you would, and it is always something … like we had to dig out the trash from planters, and it was like “yak, this is gross” but it’s never as bad as you think. So the worst thing is doing things that you don’t want to be doing then, but the best part is that you get to spend time with some great people and accomplish things together and take great pride on these things. So it’s worth it by far.

10) Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or agencies?

When we had our neighborhood clean up day last year our group we got together to clean up a little business on the corner of our street in the opposed end of our street. Someone had called the mayor and so he came to visit us and took pictures for the newspaper and then he came to our house personally to look at our yards, and then he came to another neighbor’s party a couple of weeks later. And he said that he has wished that more neighborhoods and more neighbors interacted as we did because that would solve a lot of problems in the city. It made us really feel good that the top official of our city repeatedly acknowledged us and came to our houses and he came informally, not officially, and we were happy that someone from the city noticed and actually cared, it makes you feel good. You can see the changes yourself but it’s kind of good that someone else notices it and that at a much bigger level people understand what we are doing, besides neighbors and friends who usually care about what we do.

11) What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst?

Just from my perception, I felt hat when it comes to our block the police does a great job in responding to our calls. Or when we have had housing problems the local housing authority has been very good; they have all been unusually responsive to us. And I think that it is because they know that we really care about our homes and they appreciate that, and I really think that they are more supportive to us than to a lot more of other neighborhoods because we are really involved. The negative was that two of my friends felt that the police was harassing them when after leaving my house they were just sitting in their car talking and the police thought that they were up to something bad and they weren’t. So my friends thought that they were being harassed and then followed. But then again, the police was trying to protect us and our neighborhood. It is kind of funny that by having extra help and extra response the negative becomes anything that seems suspicious, and then it is nothing really… but I would rather have it that way. One time in one of the housing meetings at the city we showed up and told them our concerns and that made a huge difference because it was clear that we cared for the neighborhood and we were the only ones out of 20 houses who did that. If you don’t care you can’t expect response or resolutions.

12) What does ‘community’ mean to you?
Community means to me people that work together and are genuinely happy to be together; that they take pride of the area where they live. Community is that fuzzy area. In our case it is our street, our block, but we’ve gone to other streets beyond our little area. Community isn’t a black and white line; it is just caring and communicating with people who you live close by and working together and caring about each other. This is my second experience of being involved in a neighborhood group, because I used to have a house in Phoenix. And my house was in a much more challenging neighborhood. And still within a larger area some neighbors got together and we got the city to bring dumpsters and we went around and cleaned our neighborhood with the materials of the city. The city paid for everything but we went around and did all the work. It is great that some neighbors were concerned as well because it is one of those things that is hard to do by yourself. I’ve been lucky to have lived in two houses in two different places and in both cases I’ve been able to find people, not even seeking --you just somehow come across them-- who cared to make things better in the neighborhood; that’s all it takes. You know, we didn’t have much money, and there is a lot of support for that kind of thing if you just do it, you know, even from businesses. We got donation of gloves and cleaning products. Places are willing to help you, they are happy that someone would do it, as long as someone is willing to do it. And that’s all you need, people willing to do it. And it is funny to me that it doesn’t happen more often, because it is not that hard and it’s very rewarding, and a lot of times it doesn’t cost anything at all. I know that in Phoenix the city said that they would give paint to people who could not afford it to paint their houses or fix them up. It is amazing all the help you can get. All you have to do is put in some labor, which is not even as bad as you think, because people get together, have a good time, somebody makes doughnuts, it is a very enjoyable thing and you just have to care and it’s been very rewarding. I think that it depends on the type of place and the personality of the place [for people to get involved]. It happens in this neighborhood I think because it has the feeling of a little town, as opposed to suburban neighborhoods, where people don’t even believe that they have a neighborhood and they don’t feel comfortable going to somebody’s who lives near by and say “I think we should clean street signs.” In that case people would probably say “let the city do it.” But I think that people need to understand that you are the city; it is not some magical entity that’s there to do whatever you want; that’s you, so if you don’t make an effort, why would anybody else? Someone has to get started, take the initiative. I think that this area attracts people who care about the housing and the community; it is a different kind of person [that takes to get involved and do things with others]. It boils down to a different kind of person. And that’s why I think that there are more neighborhood organizations in certain places than others, because there is a type of people attracted to that, who wants a community, wants to spend time with other people. It just takes someone with the initiative to do things; there is money and programs out there that groups can make use of. I wish every street of the country had this type of groups, or at least 50%. That would make a huge difference. It makes people so much happier; I enjoy seeing and talking to my neighbors, I enjoy saying ‘hi.’ It may not be the people you would want to go on vacation with, but I am happy that they care also and that they are involved, and that’s what really matters, we don’t have to agree on everything but at least help participating, and that’s great! I hope that
you find a way to spread this everywhere. Being part of this group has benefited us in ways that we never imagined when we started. Everything we have done has branched out in many other good things. What else could you ask for? (32:00: kittens project; new neighbors moving in because of the street block group) People many times think that you need money to be part of a group, but you don’t! You just need willingness to do it. There are a lot of programs and people who donate money or products to improve your house or the neighborhood. All it takes is some time and work and that makes a huge difference. And so they don’t get involved but unless you get involved you will never know! People think that being part of a group would cost them money, but you can really take advantage of what the city and the state can provide. Maybe that’s one of the shortcomings of the city and the state: not to being more explicit about the resources that they can provide to the citizens to fix things up in neighborhoods, or for other things, like community group rooms. The good thing is that this is a place where people do want to get involved. And the one reason why I think I will never move from here is because of the neighborhood! I know if I move out I will probably not have the neighbors that I have now. It is funny, because I went to school one day and I said “I drove my neighbor’s car today because I took my neighbor to the airport” and people asked me surprised “you took your neighbor to the airport?” and I said “oh yeah, I dropped my neighbor at the airport and came to school with his car, and I’ll just take it back home after school,” and they were like “I would never ask my neighbor to take me to the airport!” and I said “really?” I didn’t think anything of it! That is something so especial that we don’t even think about. They thought that it was really weird!

Jennifer

G: When I heard about you and your project from Lisa, I said “count on me.” I am supportive of women and their projects. I wanted to help as much as I could

[On the informational sheet]: I hate these types of questions. Why do they call people a ‘minority’? I am a person, I have a name! How does it matter if I am a minority or any of this information! What really matters is what I do for the neighborhood not if I am black or white or if I am educated or not! Don’t put me a label. My name is Geri and I care about the neighborhood!

V: Yes, I know, they also call me a minority.

G: look at you! How beautiful you are! Why would they call you such an ugly name! Veronica is much prettier! [laughs]

-What neighborhood group do you belong and for how long now?

I belong to the PAGODA with Lisa and Rosemary. I am kind of new. Since last night’s meeting –the first official meeting– I am in the list to be a board member, which I would be quite honored to be. They are a great group of people, they are smart, grounded, and they have a hand on the pulse of things. And they all grew up here.

1) How did you become a member of this group?

I’ve been aware of the group for a while. Last year I went to the movie theater with Lisa, Rosemary and with the people who were trying to save the theater. I slowly got involved into the group.

2) What usually happens at your meetings?

274
The meetings are open, there is information, Lisa or whoever leads the meeting distribute flyers. The first meeting I went to was in the American Legion and they talked about the HS and grants and things, for the grocery store, the movie theater. It was very pretty informative. We all got informed about what we can do to get more involved, the characteristics of the grants, what other cities are doing. There are a lot of places in this country where they are doing a lot of similar things. Then we would have a discussion about what we want to do, we divide into groups, like environment. I am on the creative group because that’s what I do best: I am an artist, a chef, bla, bla, bla. We discuss how to improve the neighborhood, how to get quality people involved, people who are really passionate about keeping this neighborhood one of the best neighborhoods in this area.

3) Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you describe what it’s been like working on that issue?

Oh geez! I am new to this group. The other one group I belonged to was when I didn’t live here, looong time ago, before you were born. Well, when I did move here I got involved in the women’s Battered Shelter organization, and I gave to them, even though I am unemployed, I buy food and I give big big thanksgiving dinners for them. I have gone to rallies here to support the rights for women. That’s why I am so excited about Hillary Clinton. I waited yeeears for something like this historical to happen. That’s what I’ve been involved in the past, but it’s been a while since I was involved in neighborhood group.

4) Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an issue? How have you dealt with it?

Since I’m new, I really just kind of sit back and listen, because I really don’t know a lot. I don’t think there are disagreements so far but maybe people having their own ideas to add about something. I am new so I don’t have much idea.

5) How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your neighborhood?

Well, being involved in the group I actually feel that I really belong to than I ever had. And I’ve lived in this neighborhood for over 20 years! Akron is the longest place I have lived in. I’ve lived in many other places. I feel more part of the neighborhood being part of the group. I feel that I have more to offer now that I am involved. I can bring out other people in the neighborhood and get them more involved. It is nice to have more diversity. But even if you don’t have diversity, the as a group as a whole, you can still maintain the group and manage and handle what’s going on and what not going on and still make it one of the best groups. I think that sometimes people make the mistake of, and I hate this stupid political correct crap that we started talking about earlier. It shouldn’t be about this, it should be about how you feel your community, your neighbor, your neighborhood, your city, your city politicians, no matters how the screw up or don’t. I think that all that ties in.

6) Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?

Rosemary. She is the Highland Square historian. She knows a lot of people. She is a retired teacher, she is very very bright. She and Lisa really, because Lisa has also done a lot of things too. Rosemary seems to have a more even (?). Both at the same time would be a big gap if we lost them.
7) What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader? 
Just make contact and tell them that you are interested. They are pretty open to new people. [Leader] just a real passion for life, trying to be your best and that can add to making your neighborhood the best. You have to be careful because sometimes yaky yuppie people would slip in, like Mr. Albrecht, oh God! And just ruin it, change it, make it not what it used to be. In neighborhoods like this you just can’t do some things. The unique things of this neighborhood you just can’t change the historical features of the neighborhood.

8) If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your neighborhood group, what would you say? 
It has been really rewarding for me, it just makes me feel a lot better because I grew up very different. And I always had many people make fun of the way I talk, the way my family lived, what we had. In the group nobody stereotypes me, everyone knows that I am my own person and I live my own way. They don’t compromise me. Because this is about the neighborhood, and not about the different personalities, but it shouldn’t be about what I just mentioned. It should be about the neighborhood and making it the best place. Because when you have that growing on you can draw so many outside people to the town, to the neighborhood that can add a lot, and who can make it even a stronger place.

9) For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you? 
I don’t have any bad experiences. At the tree lighting in the Legion, I was amazed how other people have it worse than me, even tough I’m unemployed. So that aspect of seeing people out there who are really […] they are not very bright, they are not educated, they are just very humble, rural southern people, and they are very young. I got involved in that. I collected money, and things. My experience in the group so far has been great. I met a lot of different people. Lisa just shares all the info ration she gets. She is trying to get I hate to say it, I hate this word, she is trying to get a ‘minority’ business grant. I think minority should not b used any more. When it came out, it served its purpose. Now we need to take negative terms off of people’s culture. It is more of a hinder. I just tell people ‘call me Geri, don’t call me minority, I am not a thing, I am a woman and a human being. [V: they also call me a minority] isn’t that awful?! As fine and gorgeous as you are, why the hell they are calling you that! Oh God it makes me crazy! [laughs]

10) Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or agencies? 
I cannot answer that from my standpoint. Every time I talk to Lisa there is always something positive that is going through and that is going to happen.

11) What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst? 
I can’t answer that either.

12) What does ‘community’ mean to you? 
Community means… I’ll give you a quick example: I grew up in Iowa, in a small town. We had a fire in the dead of winter. I was nine years old. I was 12 when I moved of Ohio. And I remember our neighbors, watching our house, offering us to
take us in, to care for our dog because my dad’s family lived across town. We had our home remodeled. But our neighborhood where we lived was like the UN and I grew up like that, my dad’s friends were from all parts of the world. My father lived in Paris after the war, so he came back pretty cool thinking about lots of things. So that has always stayed with me, because these people cared about us. Because some people would not do anything. So community means to me that you really belong, that you really know the people in your neighborhood, that there are people with whom you can just interact without feeling scared, that you are not going to get robbed, raped, and abused. You have to be careful, too. But if you belong to a group like this, you get the chance to see how things work, and to get involved more and more. Community is when you have the feeling that you really belong, you take pride in your neighborhood and you left your mark there and made it better for other people.

I appreciate you asking me all these! Please let me know if you need to ask me any more questions! Linda and Loretta, you should talk to her. The family she is married into, used to own the grocery store, ok? And she is kind of new in the group like me. They had a grocery store for years and they were part of the community. So when I did catering Beth and Deni would always give me a discount. So here we have West Point and the bragging Acme who would never give me a discount. It was great! We need a grocery store here! I always help women. Guys in this culture usually get anything they want.

Grant

-What neighborhood group do you belong and for how long now?
MIRAFLORES, 6 months. I just got involved with the group

1) How did you become a member of this group?
Now that I have a little bit more time to give, to spend, I decided to join the PAGODA and they were very dysfunctional, they didn’t have the things in place to be a functional organization. Then I looked into the MIRAFLORES and they had all that: they had a board, a legitimate membership role that is actually documented. They have accomplishments and hey like listening to new ideas. PAGODA doesn’t want to listen to you unless you agree with them. MIRAFLORES is much more legitimate than the other group.

2) What usually happens at your meetings?
That was [last Tuesday] the first meeting I went to. But I was very impressed with it because t was very well organized: they had the agenda spelled out for that evening; they kept things on track in terms of the discussion. They are very efficient and very professional. The PAGODA has Lisa Bostwick who is always talking and talking and they usually don’t stick to what they say they are going to talk about or do.

3) Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you describe what it’s been like working on that issue?
The only one that I’ve dealt with is the recycling project. I e-mailed Jane and I said this is just a brainstorming idea and I asked “would you guys be willing to supporting us in any way?” She took it to the board and the board said that they would be interested in hearing us out, so that’s how I showed up there when you saw me at the MIRAFLORES board meeting. They were open to it, they returned phone calls, they
gave feedback, they suggested where to go next, they listened, and they don’t turn you down. It has been very positive.

4) **Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an issue? How have you dealt with it?**

That I could not answer in terms of the MIRAFLORES. In the PAGODA they just shut you down; they don’t want to hear any kind of dissent. The two people running it are very adversarial, either you are on their side or you are against them. They are always against everybody who doesn’t see the things in their way. They decide on what they want. It is not a democracy; it is more like a real dictatorship. You are either on board or you are not on board and they just shoot you down. They are just not open to… it is just not a positive working environment, it s like a dictatorship. It is either their way or the hard way. They are not open to dissent. The leaders are not even legitimately elected as leaders of the organization; they just declare themselves president and vice-president. Whereas the MIRAFLORES go through all the hoops, they have a president and a president-elect, they have boards and their president; they are more legitimate, more like a governing body.

5) **How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your neighborhood?**

I always loved the neighborhood. Working with MIRAFLORES is nice to see—not that I have not seen it in other places like church—people dedicated to improve the neighborhood and very open in terms of the neighborhood boundaries of WH; they would talk to anyone outside that area. It is nice to see how people are professional, adult, and mature and people coming together for the sake of some common good or common project and they go by getting it done. And they are very successful in getting it done. It is nice to see that kind of determination and dedication. That’s my impression of the neighborhood constituting mature adult people, whatever you want to call it, caring about themselves and caring about their neighborhood and their neighbors.

6) **Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?**

I think Jane Startzman would make a difference. If she would ever leave it would be a loss because she has energy and charisma and decency and all that kind of stuff that is very necessary to get people energized and make them feel that they can get something done, and keep them working together and solve problems, and smooth over any problems that might happen between members. She is just really the heart and soul of the organization right now. She is a great person.

7) **What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader?**

Anybody can be a member. What makes MIRAFLORES legitimate is that they have a newsletter that goes out once a month to over thousand people at the neighborhood. They have an office; they have all these things that you associate with a legitimate group. If you could not give the money I don’t think that it would be a problem to be part of the group. [Leader] you have to be able to listen, to be open to diversity and different opinions. A neighborhood organization *has* to represent the neighborhood. Otherwise they just are whatever they are, a small circle of the group. You have to be able to delegate and recognize that other people can take up the task just like you or
even better, otherwise you would get burned out; secondly you don’t build a sense of
team if you micromanage, if you don’t let everyone kind of do their thing, and your
job is kind of being the administrator, things work better, smoother. Otherwise people
get angry because they try to do too much without sharing.

8) If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your
neighborhood group, what would you say?
So far it has been very positive. I am very very optimistic and eager and enthusiastic
to get more involved, to help more, having met Jane and the board, particularly in
contrast with the PAGODA. MIRAFLORES really has a real sense of optimism about
it that can’t be underestimated.

9) For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that
you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you?
The best would be the integrity, honesty, and the commitment of the MIRAFLORES
members. They do what they say they are going to do. They are mature professionals,
they are optimistic. The worst would be the inconsistency and outright lies that come
out from PAGODA. For example, the PAGODA has a forum on their website here
people can write anything. And over the summer they had very racist comments,
every negative comment was there, really ridiculous. And this is a neighborhood
organization that is supposed to be representing neighborhood residents. It doesn’t do
any good to tear people apart. I confronted the president Lisa and asked her about it
and she lied and said that she didn’t know anything about it, and that she would take
it out the very next day. Those comments are still there six months later. That really
turned me off. It is a really a bad impression of the HS neighborhood like racist,
pompous. It is a real embarrassment. The MIRAFLORES’s website just tells you
what you need to know about the neighborhood group.

10) Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or
agencies?
I think that they are in very good terms with the city. They have not antagonized the
city like PAGODA. They are not adversarial; they don’t want to burn any bridges
because they know that in the long run, that pays off. One of the greatest things of
MIRAFLORES is that they achieved something unheard of before: they got the
cooperation of a Cleveland organization (the Cleveland Restoration Society) that
gives free advice to people to improve their houses. That will have a great effect in
the neighborhood. They are coming to the neighborhood, setting up their presence
here, giving out grant money at low-interest rates. Jane is in good terms with the
council members and the mayor, the planning department, and that is good for us. She
calls and they return calls, they try to help. They not always help the way we want but
at least they acknowledge us.

11) What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an
issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst?
I don’t have any at this point. I will know after this recycling thing.

12) What does ‘community’ mean to you?
Community means anything that makes you feel that you are partly connected to a
bigger community, to a larger cause, a larger group of people who have a common
interest. It is a question of identity; who do you identify yourself with. It could be
sexuality, nationality, and ethnicity. Basically it refers to your identity of being part of
something that’s outside of yourself but connected to yourself at the same time. And whether or not the community has a working agenda, if you connect with them, emotionally and psychologically not to feel isolated, that’s what it means. The events that MIRAFLORES organizes aim at getting people together, it could be by watching a movie, or a play, or a jazz band, or getting them together in the garden tour, or the restoration process by improving the quality of the neighborhood in the long run, changes that would probably last forever.

George
- What neighborhood group do you belong and for how long now?
MIRAFLORES, for three years. Board member and officer of the treasurer

1) How did you become a member of this group?
The real state agent who sold the house to me introduced me to the group, and I became a member, and then she offered me to be part of the board. The nice thing about this neighborhood in comparison with the previous neighborhood I used to live in is that I know my neighbors probably 2-3 blocks out in every direction, with the exception of a few, who are more introversive. You know everybody. I call it a small community. It’s not just a neighborhood. I went from living in a neighborhood where I barely knew 3-4 neighbors, to coming here and talking to everyone, walking your dog and having to stop to talk to people. And that’s what attracts me to the neighborhood.

2) What usually happens at your meetings?
We follow standard procedures. I go through the financial reports, tackle open-ended projects determined at our annual strategic retreat, the things we want to do in the following year. Summer is the biggest time for our projects. We would tackle these issues by forming committees around those events. After that, we tackle other neighborhood concerns, like the housing design guidelines to maintain the eclectic designs of the houses of this neighborhood. I don’t think it is a really restrictive guideline, but what we don’t want is to have houses torn down and be replaced by a ranch; it would be out of place in the neighborhood due to its architecture, these houses have a unique architectural design. There are few houses in Akron which are Queen Ann.

3) Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you describe what it’s been like working on that issue?
One of the issues was Crosby St. that runs through Akron which is well known for prostitution. It’s always been that way for decades. You can’t get rid of it completely; we can at least minimize it. We want to get funds allocated to the police department so they can do occasional sting up operations where the police come in bikes and arrest bunch of prostitutes. So we work in dealing with the city council. We try to work with them to try to send some extra funds to the Police Department for two sting ups a year, to clean up the prostitution. What would happen is that prostitution will die out for a couple of weeks and then reappear. We have to go to city council to ask them to free out some money for sting operations. Another issue of our organization is that the organization was able to pass a zoning regulation about vacant housing. We had an issue of a landlord whose house was zoned to have two units and he had six. And they took the issue to council years ago, and council tabled the issue, which
means that they didn’t want to deal with it, and it eventually would become a dead issue. Since I got to the board we have had new blood. We learn that to work with your city government is a give and take issue. You can’t get all you want. You have to give and take concessions it is like politics. Like you scratch my back I scratch yours. It is nothing bad. You go there wanting 10 things and you come out with three, and you still are ahead more than you were before. We worked with our councilman Marco Somerville and really didn’t do any favors for him --other than he was running for re-election so even if we don’t agree with Marco we publicly supported Marco. We could actually not give him any contribution campaign. But when people asked “who do you support?” we would say “Marco Somerville.” By doing so, when the issue of the property-tenant came back we brought it up in council. First we brought it in Zoning and after several meetings zoning ruled in our favor saying that “yeah, you have to bring back the house to two units.” Then we took it to city council and of course they had planned to table it again until we asked “how many here came to support West Hill and our case?” and we had up to 25 people stand up in City Council. So they decided not to table this issue any longer. After some of the people talked about the issue the council members realized that this was not only an issue happening in west Akron but also in many other wards. What changed between now and the past is that it is such a unique neighborhood that you have so many people who like the homes, the people and the neighborhood that we have a lot of people who move into the neighborhood. We kind of set precedent there when we pushed [our cause] in city council. We always try to have our presence in city council and we say “here we are”, “we are a neighborhood organization.” But at the same time we do support the city. Like there are other neighborhood organizations here in the square that when the issue of the grocery store came up were very strong about wanting a grocery store, but the truth is that is not realistically possible to make a profit in small grocery stores. We think that Albrecht did a great job in the area trying to bring new businesses. He has copped out things like Taco Bell, check cashing places, and other things. They wanted to go in there but Albrecht [Acme’s grocery store owner and owner of strip of land of the Chipotle] turned them down. He said: “we want certain clientele to come in.” So while one group is fighting Albrecht, yelling at the city, we come out and say: “they have done a great job.” We supported Albrecht, we supported the city, publicly have supported them. It’s kind of a give and take. We sat down as a group and discussed the whole thing, some of us wanted a grocery store, and some of us didn’t care. The point is that what is there now is better than what was there before. I am sure that some of the people Holli has to talk to you will probably just badmouth the city, badmouth the mayor, the city councilmen, but when it comes down to how do you get things done, you know, do I personally like the Mayor? Not really. I think he is a bigot and a blowhard. Do I like all the council members? No! But because I don’t like them doesn’t mean that they are not doing a good job. So you have to choose your battles wisely. When it comes to politics it’s a give and take. I look at downtown and I think the city did a great job revitalizing downtown even though it put the city in great debt. That is the game we are trying to play here. We are a neighborhood and there are many things we want but only a certain things that we are gonna get. We can have the cake and eat a little piece of it; you can’t have the whole thing!
4) **Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an issue? How have you dealt with it?**

There hasn’t been any major disagreement since I’ve been on the board. What happens are minor disagreements, and we discuss them at the board. If they are committee issues, the committees discuss them. If it needs to come to the board, then it is brought to the board. The issue has been so far minor, like switching banks where we run the funds out. I wanted to switch banks, one another member didn’t want to. I did some research of the banks and I took it to the board, we discussed it and they agreed to switched bank by vote. There is discussion among the table when the issue comes up. Down the road, I think the issue of the housing design will probably bring up more conflict. Our mission is to improve the neighborhood. After we all discussed the issue of donations we came to the realization that we could not donate as a group. We are trying to get more public meetings. We have one public meeting planned for the first weekend in October. The board meetings happen once a month. We do have to inform the public that we are going to have a public meeting. Being a member (annual fee) you can vote in the annual meetings. Paying members are voting members in the meetings. We do have several committees which meet monthly and some committees may have multiple committees underneath them, and ad hoc committees like the Halloween committee. We have all the information of the meetings on our website and we tell people that whoever wants to participate is welcome and you don’t have to pay to come to a meeting. The most popular ones are the crime and safety meetings. The housing guidelines were developed by our housing committee, they put it together, they brought it to the board, and we worded it. We gave suggestions and we love it, it’s great. And then we went to the city, we showed them the housing guidelines and asked them, what do we have to do to get these guidelines into the actual zoning laws. We had to go through a series of public meetings just on these guidelines. Then we had to go through the zoning board, have them make recommendations, go through a series of their public meetings, take them before city council, a whole lot of steps that we had to go through. The first public meeting for the housing guidelines, will be one of those special meetings we have to advertise for. If the public doesn’t like them, they have the right to say how they would like it to be. The city will not support something that the public doesn’t like.

5) **How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your neighborhood?**

It gives you a sense of ownership in the neighborhood. I have my own personal projects since I became a member.

6) **Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?**

I would have to say that Joe Boyle took it upon himself to revitalize the crime and safety committee. That committee was nonexistent for years. That has been one of the greatest assets that we have regained. He has formed a very strong relationship with Officer Gould from the Akron Police Department’s COPS office. We give public credit to Officer Gould. What is interesting is that people are afraid to call the police, and I don’t know why. That is one of the things that people tell in our meetings. People will tell him [Officer Gould] about criminal activity when we are at the meetings, but why don’t they call the police when the incidents happen? So from
that aspect we bring the police and people back together. If you look to American history in the 20s and 30s people would walk down the street and say hello to the police. And now things are not like that. With the report John has built we get a lot more police activity in this neighborhood because of the strong ties we have. If he stepped down from that position I don’t know if there would be anyone who could step up to replace him.

7) **What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader?**

If you wanted to be a member, you can just pay your dues. In my opinion, being a pay member is not enough. People who volunteer their time is what the real trick is. And that’s something that is harder than it sounds. It is easier to get people to say “here are my 10 dollars” and it is harder to get them volunteer their time. It is still the big challenge, the donation of their time. It is still 20% of the people doing 80% of the work. Most people can be a leader if they want to. If you have an idea, no matter how small it is. What is the definition of a leader? It could be someone who likes one specific aspect of the neighborhood and takes up on that sole activity, calls and asks for volunteers. In that aspect they are great leaders. They make the gardens beautiful. If you have an idea and you run with it, we’ll help you find people to work with you. I think that having an idea and being willing to explain it to the board is all it takes.

8) **If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your neighborhood group, what would you say?**

My experiences have all been great. There have been fun, easy, and hard times. Some days I feel like raising my hands and telling all the board members where to go. In a way it’s like work but more fun. You enjoy neighborhood organizations more if you put your heart into it.

9) **For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you?**

Best: we brought back the neighborhood Halloween party, with a fortune teller, pumpkin decorating, and several activities for the kids. We went out to the schools. We had a pastor, a couple of judges from Akron getting them involved. The street party was trick-and-tree in the neighborhood. Besides hiring security for the party, Akron gave us extra safety help in the neighborhood. The worst experience was probably one of the Rebuilding Together. One year at the last meeting, some of the board members could not make it. Some people ended up doing all the work. That caused some resentment for a couple of months, some board members talked badly about other board members. It is like friends who fight and then become friends again.

10) **Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or agencies?**

We deal with the zoning board and our current president, Jane, and our councilman Marco is a lady’s man per se. Now that Jane is president she calls Marco, and he’d call her back right away. Now we’ve gotten more interaction than ever before, we had no interaction with Marco before; we’ve gotten more attention from him. The city and the council had some bad experiences with the PAGODA, they are not big fans of that organization, and they are butt and heads. That goes back to the give and take
issue. We have developed a relationship with the council, with the police department (even the dispatcher in the APD who answers the phone knows who we are). We have come out and said “the mayor has done a great job on this or on that.” That’s how you forge relationships. We don’t take an attitude in the newspaper and trash the mayor. If the mayor does something that you don’t like don’t vote him! That’s politics.

11) What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst?
Best one: get the council to support the zoning commission, so the levy ruled in our favor. Worst: I don’t have any worst personal experience yet.

12) What does ‘community’ mean to you?
Community is a group of people that comes together with a common interest, basically watching out for each other. You don’t have to be friends, buddy-buddy; you shouldn’t be violent towards your neighbors. A community would talk to each other when there is a major issue going on. At least the neighbor on the street, if you don’t agree you can talk informally about the problem over a glass of beer, and how to deal with it, sit in the porch and deal with it. Keep each other safe. That’s my definition of community. People coming together form community. We need people like the one in Campinha. We come together in parties and meetings. I enjoy the neighbors I live close to. You know more than your immediate neighbors.

13) Would you like to comment on anything else?
The plan is to have a couple of streets take care for themselves, like Campinha; this is the model of what we would want to see in other parts of the neighborhoods. We can do so much with the people we have on MIRAFLORES! People get burned out. When you have groups like Campinha who make events for their street and the whole neighborhood. We need more streets that take ownership of their little corner of the neighborhood and work for its improvements. MIRAFLORES should be the umbrella for all the other little groups. We support Campinha. The one on Jefferson we also support. We are planning to have them talk to whoever got the group together in Campinha, as a success example; use the Campinha group as a source material to help this other group form its own group. They have done it already; let’s use their experience and knowledge to form another street group. Things start to gain momentum: we have two successful street groups, let’s form a third one. We are helping improve our city and we bring this to city council. That is how you play the game. The PAGODA are kind of indifferent. They’ve burnt too many bridges; they have upset too many individuals at the government level and the business people. The leading people of that group, we are not ready to deal with them. We are like oil and water right now. They are all about give me, give me. They become upset and start blowing up when they can’t get all they want. When they settle and are able to speak we’ll be willing to talk to them. There are things that you may not get. By “give” we have to show the city what we have done. The city would say “why would I give you a blank check?” And we would say “look, we have the Campinha, we have worked with police in helping the safety of the neighborhood, you have come to our events, etc.”

Gary

-What neighborhood group do you belong and for how long now?
Currently I belong to the MIRAFLORES for one year now

1) How did you become a member of this group?
I’ve already gone to 2 of them [of the meetings]. Different people present different topics of interest to the people of the organization that are related to the preservation of our homes, to the safety of our neighborhood in respect to criminal activity; any type of political climate that may be going on at the city and will talk with council members or the mayor. That’s what the MIRAFLORES is. I used to be the president of Elma Ave. Neighborhood Watch, where I live, and that was specifically to combat crime in our neighborhood. I am a member of it and no longer the president. Its sole purpose of existence is to proactively prevent criminal activity and respond to it effectively.

2) What usually happens at your meetings?
I got interested in the MIRAFLORES because I live in what’s known as the Highland Square. And we unfortunately have a group of people who are no voted and have no one to respond to, called the PAGODA led by Lisa Bostwick, who is the alleged president and Mark Smith who is the alleged vice-president. They do whatever they want. They are terrible representatives of the neighborhood and many people in the HS neighborhood are turned off by them and that’s what drove me to search out for the MIRAFLORES. I wanted to belong to a legitimate neighborhood organization that had an upfront agenda as opposed to a political agenda that is designed to fight everybody, from city hall to local merchants. And that’s what the PAGODA does. They represent nobody; they usually dictate the way people should think and feel.

3) Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you describe what it’s been like working on that issue?
I am going to refer to my Elma Ave. neigh watch group. We dealt with parents of children at Portage Path elementary school, who would park their cars in such a way to block our entrance and exit in a safe manner from our street. As a group we approached city council and the police and it was frustrating at first because we were blamed by the city council, specifically John Conty. The police chief at the time, Michael Matulavich, was also unsympathetic to us and basically we felt that he was blaming the victims, us, when all we wanted was for a small minority of parents of children at Portage Path to obey the traffic laws. So what happened is that John Conty tried to turn it to a racial issue and made it sound like we weren’t progressive in a time of diversity, which was extremely provoking. We kept defining it as a police issue rather than as a racial-political issue. We insisted that it be treated as a traffic issue. So finally, the police chief’s assistant, Rod Brock was very skilled and understanding and dealt with it the way we defined it, as a police and traffic issue to get parents change their behaviors and let us come in and out from our street.

4) Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an issue? How have you dealt with it?
In the Elma Ave. neigh watch group there was a time when we were trying to circumvent some criminal activity that was going repeatedly in the neighborhood and in order to do that we would identify certain youth in the neighborhood that were doing little things but also big things. Little things like break into people’s fences -- which many considered little but I didn’t- and walk in their backyards; but they would also walk through people’s backyards and come to people’s front doors to panhandle.
So we were trying to identify the youth who were doing this. So two members of our neighborhood group decided that we were being petty and began to attack us so it began to be like an attack to one another. One individual who had been robbed herself by her neighbors’ children going to her backdoor and taking her wallet off of her kitchen table did find that not as a neighborhood problem; that’s how things got distorted and we sat down and talked. If somebody next door comes to your house and steals your money, that is a neighborhood problem. Just because they are your next door neighborhood doesn’t make it any different. So the way we dealt with these differences is to be steadfast and decide that we would not let people tell us that we were being petty and overreacting because they were committing a crime.

5) **How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your neighborhood?**

To me, it opened my eyes to the people who care for the neighborhood and want to keep it a good neighborhood and it makes me want to continue to be a part of a neighborhood organization. We continue to use our phone tree, that is, if a neighbor observes criminal behavior s/he calls another neighbor all the way down the phone tree list and the police. So, watching that occur has taught me that neighbors and people can take back neighborhoods from criminal activity.

6) **Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?**

We could use more people’s presence in our group. The more people we have participating the more effective we would be. It’s not just one or two people, but several people in the street whose presence we would really love to have in our meetings, partaking on our phone trees, in keeping an eye on what we keep an eye on. They would make a difference if they just were present. It is important that people are active in their neighborhood organizations in some level. It is just the way things are: there is a core of people who do most of the work, and that’s the nature of things, but we still encourage all to belong. The more eyes you have watching your house, the more effective you are, especially in high crime areas.

7) **What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader?**

In the Elma Ave. neighborhood group all you have to do is to live in the street to be part of it. We encourage you to come to our meetings and be part of our phone tree and call the police when you see something. But you can be a member if you just come to one of our meetings and say “I want to be a member.” The MIRAFLORES is the same thing except that they ask you to pay a $10 due per year. With the MIRAFLORES you don’t even have to live within their catchments area. If you live close by and want to belong, you are welcome to belong. They are very open. This may sound funny but a good leader surrounds him or herself with good people, who are maybe smarter, more knowledgeable than the leader.

8) **If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your neighborhood group, what would you say?**

Gratifying and frustrating, all at the same time. But I think the positive outrages the negative. And the frustration comes from in-fighting, people wanting other people to do their work for them, people reluctant to call the police when they see crime. Overall is gratifying to watch people making a difference in their own neighborhood
when working together with public officials and law enforcement officers. Going back to the leadership issue, being a good leader is to be able to inspire other people to be able to communicate that you are willing to listen to people and that you do listen. I think that a good leader does more listening than talking. I found that to be the case when I had been led and when I was the leader. If you go to the MIRAFLORES you will see that kind of leadership in their president and their board. They are not always eager to get out and talk to people and at people. They want to hear what other people have to state. They know how to bring people who have expertise that they may not have, and allow the people with expertise to interact with the rest of the group. That’s a good leader, and I see that in the MIRAFLORES.

9) For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you?
The best would be working in my neighborhood watch group and being able to solve problems and watching them being resolved, problems that people didn’t think we could solve. Responding to criminal behavior is the biggest issue, watching one neighbor call the police while the other neighbor is trying to deal with their car being broken into and having their stereo taken out of it, and watching the police... Seeing people come together and watch out for crime being solved effectively and having something effective happen has been the best experience. The worst has been dealing with the PAGODA; the most frustrating was to not think, to be told how to think and how to feel about a situation and then to be put in the middle of a political hotbed that Becky and Eric want everyone else to join, whereas it was fighting the developer of this neighborhood and accusing him of all kinds of names. That’s the worst: being manipulated and used as a pawn, and then when daring to differ with any of those two individuals that run the PAGODA being told to basically shut up and sit down and I am not the only one has had that experience.

10) Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or agencies?
Overall it was a gratifying interaction with the police. There were some frustrations. We did get a lot of things solved through the prosecutor’s office, by just letting the prosecutor know what’s going on in the neighborhood, and learning the tools that we had available to us to fight things like loud music; landlords-tenant issues. In dealing with the police and the prosecutor’s office we succeeded to get people to behave themselves. There was a landlord who would justify all his tenants’ bad behavior. So by working with the prosecutor’s office we managed to keep bad people at bay.

11) What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst?
The best was when we got the police to finally solve the traffic problem in our street, blocking our entrance to our street in regards to the school kids and their parents, the minority of them, not all the parents. The worst refers to the same situation redefined in a very dishonest manner by a local politician on the city council named John Conty. He basically tried to shut us down. There are some people in the city, named city council, who want the neighborhood organizations to do their jobs for them. They’d say to us “you need to have a meeting with these people.” There are times for that, but there are times when you just need to say “you just need to enforce the existing laws.” The worst experience I had with government was dealing with John
Conty from city council as he tried to redefine the traffic situation into a cultural and ethnic and racial issue, like, say “people from other countries don’t know how to park their cars.”

12) What does ‘community’ mean to you?
To me it is a concept and it’s very fluid: it can mean a city, it can mean a neighborhood. But whichever way you define it, it is always people looking toward the common good, the general good. To me it means groups of people going after the common good and not just what goes on in my own backyard. It is groups of people who work for the common good, whether it is city wide, neighborhood wide or any other way.

13) Would you like to comment on anything else?
[Other experiences]: in working in both MIRAFLORES and PAGODA I learned who has honest agendas and who has dishonest agendas, and one needs to keep away from the PAGODA. They are answerable to nobody; they would make an accusation that is totally unfunded. They are essentially out there to fight and not be accountable. People need to be careful of who their leaders are; and if they are really leading and representing, or if they are dictating, operating in the eyes of a neighborhood organization while what they really are doing is political agendas or just bunch of people with mental health issues.

Eva
-What neighborhood group do you belong and for how long now?
I am a member of the MIRAFLORES and I have only been a member since this summer, earlier fall.

1) How did you become a member of this group?
The president, Jane Startzman is a real estate agent and I was using her to buy a property. My husband and I have rental properties in the Highland Square area, we do a lot of rehab work in the area, and she (Jane) wanted someone on the board that comes from landlord perspective of the group, so she invited me.

2) What usually happens at your meetings?
There is always an agenda drawn ahead of time by Jane that’s followed. The treasurer talks about treasury aspects of the organization. And then there are smaller groups: membership, housing and each committee talks about their specific issues. We talk about if anyone is gone to any of the city council meetings, any concerns of the neighborhood. The group is formed for the best interest of Highland Square as a neighborhood to make sure … One of the first things I was involved in when I came on: there is a landlord in HS that was illegally renting out apartments. He was taking something that was supposed to be two apartments and turning them into six. So we went to city council and took our concerns to them. And we ended up winning when the gentleman got fined and had to go back to a two apartment building. Just that type of thing. We like the parks, pointing out the beautiful things people do to their yards and their houses, so there are houses awards every year. We are more focused on keeping the neighborhood healthy and not falling apart essentially.

3) Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you describe what it’s been like working on that issue?
The biggest one that I have been involved is the one of the landlord who was illegally renting out apartments in the area. And it is a big concern for this area because many people break in houses and apartments. They [group members] have already researched the city laws and ordinances; they had a lawyer look over the case.

4) **Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an issue? How have you dealt with it?**

Yeah. I am new; I have been to a few meetings. Mostly when there are concerns that are brought up we talk about the issues and concerns in a nice open forum of discussion. If it needs to be tabled till the next meeting, it is tabled, or we just move forward depending on the situation. I am not going to say that people always agree; not at all. Right now they were trying to put in some housing codes for the neighborhood and they had a neighborhood meeting and a lot of people are not agreeing with some of the things that are in there. And essentially, at that point, in those meetings, the neighborhood decides not to get too out of control about this; let’s bring up these questions back in a month or two and discuss them with more information. So it’s definitely not something that everybody agrees constantly.

5) **How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your neighborhood?**

My husband and I have several properties in the neighborhood. And we decided years ago that it was going to be our little mission to take some of the dilapidated properties in the neighborhood, fix them up, and rent them out. We have fixed them up to our standards; we would never not live in anything we rent. Everything we rent out is something that we would be willing to live in. We always take pride in our neighborhood. Being part of this neighborhood group’s board has opened my eyes more to the neighborhood’s concerns and just more things I can do outside just beautify this one house or another. I love this neighborhood because it is eclectic; the houses are beautiful; it is very neighborly. I know that some pockets are not the best safety wise. We’ve raised our son; it is a nice place for my son to hang outside with his friends.

6) **Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?**

The executive board members are pretty strong. There is no way that we would be able to carry on without the knowledge that the president, vice-president, treasurer have. The top of the line would probably be lost without them.

7) **What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader?**

There is a minimum number of board members that they could have, I think 14. We are at max but I think they are planning on opening that number. You have to pay a due to be part of the group. To be a board member you have to voted on. To be a leader you have to have a strong desire to improve and make the neighborhood better. We have activities to beautify or lighten the neighborhood; having the right people that know how to get things together, organize them and get them done for the betterment of the community.

8) **If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your neighborhood group, what would you say?**

It’s us. It is nice to be able to give back to the neighbors and the neighborhood, to pull people together. To make people realize what a great kind of little niche in Akron we have in here.
9) For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you?
I don’t think I have a “worst” yet. The best, I have been involved in two activities in the summer, the concert, where we had a booth where we sold water and beer. It was nice to see the neighborhood come together and enjoy something that was put together with the city of Akron. The other activity was that one when my house was in the housing tour, a meteo housing tour, for neighborhoods right outside Akron. Our house was showcased. People come and appreciated the old houses and the neighborhood as a whole. It was nice to see the people appreciate this.

10) Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or agencies?
I don’t know that I know enough to talk about that. I know our president has a very good working relationship with the councilman, especially in the issue of the landlord I told you about. I haven’t been involved enough to say much about it.

11) What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst?
I haven’t had much involvement yet with agencies.

12) What does ‘community’ mean to you?
[Question not asked to this person as she was the first interviewee of all and this question came up at a later time]

13) Would you like to comment on anything else?
I feel kind of bad because I am so new that I am not sure I can contribute with a lot. But like I said, I have enjoyed it a lot and I am just looking forward to getting more involved. I have my little niche of what I have done in the neighborhood, but it’s just kind of nice to open up and find a group that really is interested in a broader prospective.

Eric
-What neighborhood group do you belong and for how long now?
I guess I belong to the PAGODA, which has been renamed throughout the years. Since 1993 it was named the Highland Square Development Association and it became the Neighborhood Association about 5 years ago. I was also the president and founding member of the HS Business Association, which went from 2000 until it was disbanded in 2004 or 2005. I get my dates mixed up. Do you want to know for how long and why I was involved? I’ll talk all night if you want to listen. I don’t think you do! I’ll start telling you what I know, and then feel free to tell me “this is not the direction I want this to go” or whatever. Why don’t I then start giving you a little bit of the background and history of the groups, how they came about and how and why I got involved?
The HS development association [came about] as a result of the Taco Bell issue in 1993 or 1994. What happened is that there used to be a gas station there in the corner of W. Market and Portage Path, you know? It’s where the grocery store isn’t. There is where it was supposed to be. There was public garden, like a neighborhood sponsored garden. The gas station was taken down in 1990 or 1989, so the lot remained vacant for a while. One of the problems was that the gas tanks were contaminated and contaminating the soil. So EPA came, had a look at the site and said, whoever comes in here to develop will have to put a certain amount of money to do an environmental fix-up. Ultimately what happened over the years, they dug out a huge whole, and it was huge deep pit, it was half way to
China and they kept trying to get out all the remaining of fuel. Finally they got it all set up. In 1992 BP was looking at putting a gas station there. There was some neighborhood reactions to it, but essentially BP decided not to go there. The rational there for the neighbors was that they didn’t want to have the whole corner green, with green neon all over that corner. That in the middle of the neighborhood is on the “fierce” side, for a lack of a better adjective. So it was vacant for a couple of years, and then it was announced that PepsiCo wanted to put a Taco Bell in there and that was going to be the type of Taco Bell which was going to be pre-fabricated. They would deliver it on two trailer buildings, with the seats in it and all! It was like a fast-food mobile home with a drive-up window. And that’s when I got involved with the neighborhood association; I thought that it was an offensive move because of the fact that they were going to put a really cheap building with a drive-up window to it. It bothered me because city planning, or neighborhood planning wise it’d be a disaster to do it right in the middle of the square. Because what the square is about is that you have a business strip going down W. Market Street surrounded by a residential area. And that may not sound terribly unique but it is the only place like it in Akron, where you have a relationship between the residential area outside the business strip and the business strip itself. And they work off of each other. They are very dependent, completely dependent of each other.

My involvement came about because I saw that a drive-through and painting of all of that corner turned into a fast-food restaurant would be catering drunken customers at two and three in the morning. It was not a really good idea for the center of a neighborhood. So what happened is I heard about some meetings that couple of the residents that were living close to the site were having. I went to those, got to know the neighbors, and everyone was ticked off about this issue. So we all made a big sting, and we wrote letters to the editor, signed petitions and we had all sorts of meetings, and we picketed. That was probably the best things we did. We had about 30 people; it was Friday afternoon, we did it for one hour between five and six. We were on the right side of the street so we blocked all the traffic coming out of the city. We brought signs, most of them were humorous, but basically we said “we don’t want a big corporation bringing a huge fast-food restaurant to the middle of this neighborhood!” and the people passing would hunk at us or give us the finger depending on what they thought about what we were doing. We got a lot of publicity. What the mayor always tries to do is come in and solve a problem that he’s essentially created, and make it appear that he is the hero. He brought these two guy from PepsiCo in talked to us as a neighborhood group, and that was at the convent—in Eleonora Hall—there is this convent right across the street from where they wanted to put the fast-food restaurant. Big meeting there, our council representative was there, everyone was there. He didn’t do anything, you know, politicians don’t do much of anything; they stand around trying to look that they haven’t made any mistakes. They don’t want to upset the PepsiCo people, because that’s money, and they don’t want the piss off the residents because those are votes. So they walk a fine line in between. This theme repeats itself in the square year after year, and probably everywhere else where you have a neighborhood situation like this. Sister Rafaela organized the whole meeting in the convent; she is in an electric power wheelchair, very nice and outgoing personality, and well spoken, very very well articulated person. She introduced the whole meeting; she was one of the key speakers. She got up and did this whole introduction and commented on the whole situation. And she really made these people from Taco Bell look like complete
idiots. It was kind of humorous, but perfect. She said to them: “do you really mean to set up a fast-food restaurant across the street of a convent? Is this really what you want to do? Have you thought this through?” And these guys couldn’t answer. She just slated them! Eventually what happened after a couple of more months, the city bought the property back from PepsiCo for a cheap price and they kept it all the time since, until they could sell it some time along the line. So we figured we won a big victory, so we were padding ourselves in the back and all happy.

We all got to know each other throughout that struggle. So we decided that we had accomplished something very big: we threw out a very big company and we prevented that something very bad happened here. So we thought that if we didn’t keep working together something bad would happen again. So we decided that if we got organized we could have some sort of say-so in the decisions of what would happen in the neighborhood. So I signed up, and we had a bunch of meetings. We organized ourselves and designed a park on that corner. And we did it, a big garden and we maintained for five years. We had this half an acre in this corner that we created and maintained as a garden, which means that we planted the whole thing, we went to the city and got 7500 dollars neighborhood partnership program grant, so for every dollar we spent they would match it, up to 7500 dollars. That was 15,000 dollars. And we kept the garden for five years! And it wasn’t just the residents but also the businesses which wanted to maintain a good relationship with the residents, which is a very important thing. Next thing that happened and this is when things started to get interesting. We knew that the city was planning to widen W. Market Street through the Highland Square. And wider streets mean faster traffic and more traffic, which is against a pedestrian friendly neighborhood, and that’s exactly what we have and you want here, what gives this neighborhood its reputation and ambience. You want people to know about the HS neighborhood as a gathering place; it is not the buildings, it’s not the historic preservation, it’s the people. And how you get people is a different issue. For the square to be successful you need people, but people and cars don’t mix especially fast ones and a lot of them. So we wanted to have a say in it. The city was not going to do anything about it, except they were putting street lights in. We had had a meeting with a high representative of city engineering, and we asked them whether they could put instead more residential type of public lighting rather than the big monster type of lights (35 feet tall with copper heads on). And they said “oh, yeah, we can do that for you.” We were thrilled; we figured that it would decrease the amount of light in the street which slows the flow of traffic. You don’t want to have very bright lights. We could not believe that they agreed on that! So right a month before they put the lights up I noticed that they were drilling wholes more frequently that made sense to have done. They put up their big lights and the small ones in between each of them. There are three times more lights than what it needed to be in place [according to the plan]. So we had a big complaint about that. Nothing got done to change the issue. The city refused to do anything about it. We antagonized the city officials. We had a lot of fun! We painted the poles with a message “take out the street lights.” We had a lot of fun, they were kind of humorous. But, oh boy! That really pissed off the mayor and ticked off city officials! We did it twice. One night we put all the signs there and by seven AM all the signs were taken down by city crews! They were on it right away! They didn’t want anybody see it! [laughs] But long story short, nothing happened.
After the year 2000 Steve Albrecht purchased what is the Stark Market and another store. I was at the time involved in another project with the Highland Theater; we were trying to develop it as an entertainment center, not just as a cinema, with a stage in the inside, with a bar, with all these other things to see if we could make a big profit. Terry Dean, the owner of the theater, put a whole lot of money there, like $7,000 with the assistance of the city. So, many people from the city and developers got together and they invited the neighbors and the mayor said: “Look. There is a lot of money we want to spend in the Highland Square. But last time we tried to spend money in the square we got thrown out; everyone got all outraged. So what we are gonna do is we need you to get a consensus. In other words, we need everyone on the same page, we don’t want to put a lot of effort and money into a plan and then have the neighborhood groups get up and tell us ‘we don’t want you.’” Great, look at that. What was really going on was, Steve Albrecht had talked to the mayor and said “look, I want to develop the HS, I bought all this property, I have a shit load of money, I need you to help me.” The problem here is between the developers who want to do whatever they want and everybody else who lives here. The general conflict is: does this guy have the right to do what he wants to do even though he would bring the property values of around the area down? which --if you know anything about urban planning-- if you do it wrong you can kill the whole neighborhood. And he came close to do it. But everyone got involved. So at that point Dave Lieberth and I started the Highland Square Business Association, in order to get the business and property owners agree with the plan, whatever the plan was. However, the problem is, that when you get someone like Steve Albrecht who knows nothing about urban design, he isn’t the brightest guy in the world, to have him impose a design on a neighborhood is a problem unless you bring all alone. So that’s why the mayor has said that about consensus. So in the HS area there are essentially three groups that you have to get on the same table: the residents, the business owners, and the property owners. The whole point of the Business Association was to get consensus, and we got everyone on the table except Albrecht. And he had all the money, and wanted to invest one or two million dollars. The problem with him is that we do it his way or we can’t do it. To me, the best way to bring everyone to the table was to hire a good urban designer and we did some research and we ended up with someone from Chicago, a mainstream program consultant. He was in charge of putting together this report, a physical plan for the area. That study was a compromise because they sent out a team that went everywhere and interviewed everybody: the business owners, residents, property owners and, of course, Albrecht. They took all that stuff along with taking a look to the physical structure of what was here and put it all together in one package – you know that’s what urban planners do, they put all the things together-- which was called “the comprehensive revitalization strategy.” That strategy outlined how development needed to occur. It didn’t specifically tell how to design a building, but it said: leave the business on the street; parking is on the side or the rear, leave on the sidewalks. That plan was almost accepted by the business association, we had a steering committee of eleven people including Steve Albrecht. Everybody on this committee agreed to this plan except for Albrecht. We finally got him to say that he agreed with the basic idea of the plan. So that was an enormous victory. And there was a vote taken which was unanimous. But later it all faded away. He torn everything into pieces, he didn’t agree later on, all of a sudden. Unbelievable! Politics! This guy was classic manipulation: you let everyone go off and do their own thing until they finally get
it done and then he stands up and sys “I don’t wanna do it! He totally manipulated the situation. It was unreal! So we had a beautiful plan that is now in a waste basket, like all the other plans in Akron. Albrecht vision for the HS was a strip mall, exactly what would kill a neighborhood like this one. All those meetings were full, and he was told by everyone who attended the meeting “do not put the parking on front, you can’t do that, if you do, it’s gonna wipe out the neighborhood.” But his idea of making money is to build big parking lots. But no, no, no! What you want to do is you want to build on street because you want people to come and feel that this is a place, that has an identity, that’s not like every single other highway intersection in this freaking country! It was promised that the grocery store would be re-built. But the mayor let him slip that. Albrecht is the bad guy, but this falls on the mayor’s shoulders. So now things stand like this: the grocery store is not there, we don’t have a grocery store, Albrecht never built in that corner, and the mayor is mad at Albrecht because he made him look bad, and I am mad at everybody! [Laughs] or everyone in the neighborhood is mad at everybody! Neighborhood politics!

1) How did you become a member of this group?
I am stubborn and it really pisses me off when people don’t tell the truth. I saw all these stuff developing, and that is how city operates: they don’t do their jobs and they allow things to happen that shouldn’t happen. Everything revolves around money rather than… there are some very good things about socialism, I think [laughs]. I love [person’s name] and the power of being selfish, greed is cool but if you are honest about it. I became a member by showing up at one meeting when the Taco Bell issue was going on.

2) What usually happens at your meetings?
A lot of bullshit [laughs] that’s hard to answer, because the group is so loose! It usually depends on what’s the crisis. We usually sit around and try to figure out how not to get stuff on and stand up for ourselves and piss of the mayor [laughs]. If you don’t step up you will get stepped on! And I think that if we didn’t oppose the strip mall that Albrecht wanted, we would now have a strip, and it would be ugly as hell and completely anti-pedestrian. And this is about people! So we respond to crises, that’s what we do.

3) Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you describe what it’s been like working on that issue?
[Answered above, in intro]

4) Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an issue? How have you dealt with it?
We argue. And that’s most of the time. Everyone has there own idea. Everyone thinks for themselves here. It is a unique neighborhood because the people that live here have decided to live here and put up with all the bullshit, the fact that it is very tied together, the houses are old, and the beauty of it is that people care about the houses, about the neighborhood. And this doesn’t happen in any other area of the city.

5) How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your neighborhood?
It’s made me feel much closer and much more part of the neighborhood. And the other aspect I tear my hair out, it drives me crazy! You can’t have everyone do what you want them to do. But that’s so cool about it. You have to figure out how to get a
bunch of no-like minded people on the same page. And you can tell the city “you can’t screw with us” or to Albrecht “you can’t do this to us just because you have a lot of money.”

6) Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?
Lisa Botswick. She has the energy to crack up all these things that are going on. We are basically a watchdog organization. Lisa goes and talks to everyone, and finds out who is telling the truth and who isn’t; she tries to find out who is pulling one over another one. And she is like gossip queen, but the dirt that she digs up is unbelievable! Jesus Christ! I wish I didn’t know all these things because then I would not be so pissed off all the time!

7) What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader?
Show up. To be a leader you need to know how to follow. To lead you have to follow. I have a story that a client told me once: “people are like ants, and they wander around endlessly in a group, and the leader is the guy who can figure out how to stay in front of where they are going. He is not telling them what to do, he’s just standing there. And somehow the leader knows where he needs to be and where they are going to go.” That’s why I said that in order to be a leader you need to know how to follow.

8) If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your neighborhood group, what would you say?
Oh Shit! It’s been incredible rewarding. And the reason that has been rewarding is not so much dealing with the issues we have dealt with, but rather just working with other people and doing things, whether they are successful or not, just being in a group and becoming involved with other people and getting to know other people. Shit! I don’t do this for the money! And all the things we do, we get yelled at, like the mayor and so forth, they hate us because we would not get in line. It sounds good at first, but it’s hard to keep doing this stuff, to having these higher-up people crashing you. That’s what they do. What they have to do is to minimize the perception of the power that we have because it encroaches on what they’ve got. And that’s the game, the political game they play.

9) For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you?
Best experience was the first planting day in the garden [we created]. It was pouring outside, we had many thousands of different plants and 77-80 volunteers on a cold, rainy, pouring and horrible day, everybody was out there for 7-8 hours. And we pulled this thing off! And that was so cool! I’ll never forget. Even the mayor stopped by and said to us” “you guys are doing a great thing. This is what a neighborhood should be about.” And I was so inspired by hearing that! --that was before I pissed him off. And that was a great feeling of getting that accomplished; you can’t believe how great that makes you feel. It was worth it. The worst thing was a phone call from a city representative who denied the consensus we had reached in that one meeting. I realized then that all this consensus business had never been taken seriously by the city. They have never taken us seriously.
10) Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or agencies?
We try to communicate with them based on laws. They ignore us, they won’t talk to us. They intentionally try to discredit us. The mayor is horrible. He knows he can get elected and he doesn’t give a dam. We should be working more with him. But that’s not gonna happen.

11) What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst?
It’s all the same thing. The worst was hilarious. When we brought in a Chicago planner to give a presentation on pedestrian accessibility and accessibility, the mayor showed up and got angry and very angry. He stormed out and called me and all my family “liars.” We tried to maintain a dialogue. It was unreal!

12) What does ‘community’ mean to you?
Boy! Community means that the power that a group of independent people, independent minded people that can get on the same page and trust each other has. That power is more powerful than any amount of money, any political will, any government. It goes beyond than power. You develop friendships, and good feelings with people. You feel that you are part of something. You are not on your own. You feel that outside your family and your household, there is a larger group or community that you can be part of. And that’s one of the most rewarding things you can possibly imagine. It is so cool when you participate in it! It’s great to know people that live in the same place. You watch each other’s backs, and you do stuff with them. You find out that people have the same interests, some do, and some don’t. It is like a big family in a way. That’s the best thing. The worst part of it is that you have to deal with a bunch of assholes.

Chris

-What neighborhood group do you belong and for how long now?
MIRAFLORES, where I have been in the board for five years or so. I am also active in the Campinha group for about a year and a half.

1) How did you become a member of this group?
Laura and I joined MIRAFLORES together. In 1999 –when we moved into the neighborhood- this group was having an annual fundraising and the woman gave us tickets to that fundraising as a housewarming gift. So we attended that and it was very unique. We wanted to live in a neighborhood with a sense of community. So this fulfilled our dream, I guess, it fueled as well. My wife was the first one to get started. And then I followed her along, and after attending some meetings I saw that there was deficiency in the way they were handling the membership portion, so I thought that I could help with that, and then I became a board member and then got more and more active. The Campinha group, since we live in Dodge, everyone living there is automatically a member because it is a block group by definition. I had some interest in the history of the place so I wanted to research that, as well as on beautifying it, so I led a small committee of beautification projects, promoting cleaning graffiti, cutting down some trees, planting flowers on each end of the street trying to give us designation. Not really difficult things, but that’s how I got involved in it.

2) What usually happens at your meetings?
MIRAFLORES meeting is monthly board meeting and monthly membership committee meetings, which I am still in charge of. The membership meetings we try to get them to half an hour to one hour, monthly, where we prepare for the next newsletter. Somehow it’s become membership’s job to handle the newsletter, because of the membership and communication committee. So we publish a quarterly newsletter. So membership is in charge of acquiring, writing the articles, getting the advertising, where we have something on the line of 35 advertisers. We compile all that, bring all that together, and keep everyone on track. Get these 1,500 newsletters physically printed, folded, mailed and all that stuff. We have outside partners help with that. But coordinating that takes a good amount of time in each meeting. We also talk about the website and how to improve that, it’s only a year old, so that it falls under our communication function. What messages are we trying to deliver? Trying to translate what the board wants. And basically trying to get the job done, because this is a volunteer organization. Also, annual request for membership any time where there is a neighborhood event and we can have a membership booth set up there. It has some good structure. We prepare the agenda, discuss the topics on the agenda and then break up. MIRAFLORES board meetings are even more structured. There are a lot more things to cover in much less time for discussion. We stay much more on topic. The Campinha meetings, we have quarterly block club meeting, which is a requirement under block group definition for the city. Those are like one and half hour long. And it is more a social event as well as just a real meeting, somehow of a challenge to keep it on track. But since everyone has their heart on the same place, it does go on. There is a lot of discussion, sometimes, with too much emphasis in things, in issues, that don’t belong. And I would contrast that with the way meetings are run in MIRAFLORES, which are run more professionally, where people have just a short amount of time to speak. It is much more regimented. The Campinha group is more a social event where we do bring food and drink and whatever and when we are done discussing it is just like an open party. So it’s harder to stay into a real strict schedule. When I was the beautification chair we would have meetings every other month. How to bring more recognition to the area? How to bring more pride out? So we used that as a driver to improve things. I wanted to make some deal about the old age of the houses. This is a group with large participation, maybe like 65% of the people of the street participate. We want to get more people out.

3) Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you describe what it’s been like working on that issue?

It looks like everything is an issue. MIRAFLORES issue: the website. It has some difficulty getting its message out. We have a newsletter but nowadays everyone wants to be on the website. We have a good partnership with some businesses. I could not take care of the task of maintaining the website. In any volunteer organization, if there is no one who is a driver, who is willing to get all these things together, it is very difficult to get all the information entered there. It was a real dilemma. Until one new member took it as a task. And she got it done; I was not the right champion, a real champion who could do the work. That is truth of any issue we address in these groups. If there is not a champion to address each task, it’s not gonna get done. Because it is all volunteer. You can’t assign, you can’t make people do things. We all have big ideas, big hearts, but we sometime run out of time. With these types of
groups what the leaders can vest to is to find project champions, get the projects in the champions’ hands and let them complete them. In doing that, you need to control the people with great opinions, that means, opinions that don’t become counterproductive or overbearing. And things don’t get done that way. The right approach is go one step further with these things, to bring in the people with focus and knowledge, but most important, with energy. These groups need to push forward and maintain the momentum and hopefully grow and fill in the missing pieces. It is not enough to just have enough people on the board saying ‘yes, let’s have a website.’ It takes having people genuinely committed to that and who can focus on that. I was trying to focus on other things, it wasn’t the right job for me, but no one could take it on.

4) Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an issue? How have you dealt with it?
On that website issue, when it wasn’t getting done by me, there was some discussion. I said “I need help because otherwise it will sit in forever.” Some people said “I have some desire” but I knew that that person was not gonna get it done, just as I couldn’t. In my mind I was thinking that these people were not gonna get it done. Some of the people said that had interest but they really needed to step up, not to be forced on. There was some underlying stress about getting that website done. I didn’t stop working on it. I worked with people behind the scene, coaching people, to just get it done. Each person had their own opinion on it. If you keep asking what to include on the website, everyone will have an opinion, and we would not be able to reach consensus, and that could also kill it. I told her to use her judgment and go ahead and do whatever she deemed appropriate --unless there was a real problem-- without consulting everyone.

5) How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your neighborhood?
I met more people through the group. It’s been like a social networking experience, which has been rewarding. You learn a lot more about people and the common interests with theirs and move it forward. It has been a positive change. The Campinha in particular has been really rewarding to see people who I know have lived in the block for 20 years and have not been active in any capacity with their neighbors recently until this group got going again. And people would say: “this is like it used to be 15 years ago, it’s even better.” It is very rewarding to hear that type of thing.

6) Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?
Absolutely. That’s where I think these types of groups are limited tremendously high, by experience, knowledge, interest of the board and the membership that comprises them. If the person or champion of a particular project is not there, it may not be anybody else to fill its shoes, to fill in that responsibility. And then that job may not get done because we have no knowledge to do it. I think of these neighborhood groups as little small companies, with human resources, you can turn in big companies and have the big support. You know who is absolutely key in a large company. In a neighborhood group there is so much to fill in! If you lose one of the key persons you may not be able to wait around forever to find a person to fill in that
position. Make people work in projects for which they have a specific aptitude or expertise for it regarding the key projects of the group. There is a key person behind each project. These small neighborhood groups take direction from the skills and desires of the people who are active in them.

7) What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader?

MIRAFLORES: it takes strong desire to want to do some project. Everyone wants to have things done and don’t want to have conflict. The people who work the best are the ones who say that they have the desire to get something done and want to fit in with the group, that’s the way MIRAFLORES works the best. In all these groups there is tremendous room to be tremendous leaders. Because there are so many things that can be addressed. If a particular person wants to be a champion, all s/he has to do is do it, as long as they have a positive idea that fits in with the mission of the group. They should not have any roadblock really. To be a leader takes to work on an issue and get people around to work in it too. That’s all it takes. That is the attitude of the leadership on the groups themselves (like in MIRAFLORES and Campinha).

Leadership varies at large within the MIRAFLORES and Campinha groups. Where the leadership is concentrated within a couple of people, and if you don’t want to go exactly with them, with what they say, you may not be able to be a leader. But I think with the groups I belong to, it is very easy to become leader if you want to put some time in doing something.

8) If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your neighborhood group, what would you say?

It’s been very positive. It is interesting that the only available neighborhood group in 1999 was MIRAFLORES, there was no alternative, rather than start something on your own. So we joined that. It is interesting that now it is developed to where our street has its own block group. I now want to focus more on the issues of my own street rather than in the bigger area of MIRAFLORES. I am surprised that even with all my experience in MIRAFLORES I want to make the Campinha experience the best it can be; it is great that the Campinha has developed. Someone else started it and then I joined it. Ideally we will have 50 small Campinha-like groups, and MIRAFLORES be the umbrella that kind of coordinates everything within these groups. D-P could be a model for other groups to form. MIRAFLORES is 10 years old now. I was trying to identify MIRAFLORES’s physical boundaries in the records, and this is another dilemma. What are the physical boundaries of MIRAFLORES? There is no exact delimitation. The city has neighborhood boundaries, they are zip code boundaries, boundaries by housing prices, but ever since I started to work on MIRAFLORES there’s been a conflict about its boundaries. We don’t to exclude anyone, so we kind of left them ambiguous. And I always wanted to say “we need to establish our sense of place” and even if it excludes people, sorry, but it’s just too open ended. So I went back through all the old records, back to the original boundaries of MIRAFLORES that the group had adopted. In reading that document they had already carved these neighborhoods out, these smaller areas within this boundary area, and they were trying to assign a local person in each one to represent, so they had much smaller block groups, so rather than make it develop organically, they were trying to force it. And ultimately it didn’t happen that way. But I thought
that it was amazing; that has always been my idea of the group: it should be this [big area] with all the little block groups underneath it. They are all concerned about each thing on their own. But there needs to be this umbrella that stitches them all together and can create synergies and some sort of scale that would bring them all together. My experience that what needs to be done happened at Campinha without me even doing it! So what I have tried to do is to push the MIRAFLORES president and staff. We should not force the original model, but we should let it happen. This is what we want. And when some people get their block club together, we try to hook in with the person and draw them in. And in 5 to 10 years MIRAFLORES should be a true umbrella group of all these block clubs. You don’t really care about what the exact boundaries of each group are, but you just know that you need people who are active, and got something going there. You can network people through the umbrella, hook people up with the right groups. That makes the whole area better. I understand better now how these things should work. I think the leadership of the group is important to fill in the skills, the categories, the positions of the functions of the MIRAFLORES group. You need to make the match not only of their skills but of their will to work, as this is a volunteer organization. It needs to run like a good company if you want to get things accomplished; that is, the strategic aspect.

9) **For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you?**

Worst: amount of time to get something accomplished. The MIRAFLORES goes through ebbs and flows as to how committed everyone is. That changes a lot over time. Very small changes were done lots of times. I say: “wow, I could be spending this time in something else”, but I rather spend time, hours and hours on something that is valuable for the group. The worst thing is realizing that it takes a lot of time to get something done. The best is when you can see the positive disposition of the group. Before, the MIRAFLORES had a negative connotation, like a black sheep. We worked very hard to change the reputation of the group. Now to hear that city officials recognize the presence and intentions of this group is very gratifying. Some small recognition is the best experience, knowing that we are going the right direction. We can go to them and ask them for help if we need. It is nice to know that they have a high opinion of the group.

10) **Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or agencies?**

I am not involved in interactions with officials.

11) **What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst?**

I have not worked at those levels in this group, like coordinating housing, crime, funding, or those things that are dealing with the government or other agencies. Because of its recent president, MIRAFLORES has been a tremendous learning. City council members need to know of MIRAFLORES, and that goes back to our positive reputation before the city officials. They appreciate what we are doing. We keep them informed, we invited them to meetings, and sometimes they show sometimes they don’t. It is nice to see as membership chair some of them donate money and time when they don’t need to, which leads me to think that they believe in what we are doing on a personal basis, which I would have not realized had I not seen the money
for the memberships come in or in coordinating with the police, through MIRAFLORES or Campinha. The best experience was with government in an issue was with Campinha, when we made a neighbors day in May. I was sick unfortunately. But I had coordinated everything. We had everyone out there, the Mayor came and spent more than one hour with our group. That was definitely a great experience; for them it was also a good experience, because they mentioned it in the next council meeting. The mayor came out and met with the neighbors.

12) What does ‘community’ mean to you?
Mi ideal community would be to have a functional team of active people who are really moving things forward, from government, to retirees, to college students, to home owners, and find the same interest, lessen the conflict. Sense of community is where there are active people concerned about what’s going on, whether I agree with them or not. Also because there is a sense of walking around, you see people that way. The physical fabric plus the people, you need a center, shops and density. You can’t have community otherwise. Dodge Avenue is not an expensive street but yet the turnover has been extremely low, people want to move in there. Some friends has just moved in there, and said that it was great to have neighbors and have friends. They came from a not faraway area, Aqueduct, and they moved in here because of the sense of community. The website gives us further sense of place. What she said summarizes what community means. She recognizes that even though she lives in a perfect house they want to move where there is a community and where she could be more involved. Campinha is enough of a community. I don’t need to think about the larger group, I now have the true sense of community. I want to make the block group the best it can be.
that has more choices for the disadvantaged people of the neighborhood, for people to have the opportunity to be able to have an education and to grow to be good citizens. That way I think we are going to bring crime down, so are we going to be reactive or proactive? And that led me to become the president of the PAGODA.

2) What usually happens at your meetings?
Most of our meetings have been about things that are going on in the neighborhood. When I became the president we met to discuss why we don’t have a grocery store. There was a contract between the city and the developer that was broken. So we had signs up in the neighborhood to complain about that, with signs like “where’s the beef?” we did a lot of research about why the city has not followed up with Albrecht about bringing the grocery store. We were meeting for that and then we had two planning meetings and then was when we decided that we wanted to become a non-profit organization, 501c3, tax exempt status so we could get grants to provide programs for community outreach, so that we could work with disadvantage neighborhood kids in arts and also maintain the Holydays and Arts in the Square, which are two events that PAGODA puts on and that the community does. The HS business association and the city of Akron paid 75,000 dollars for a study that said what the redevelopment of HS was supposed to be. And they trashed it, they paid no attention to any of the recommendations that were in there, like the traffic and parking issues. There was traffic calming, like not to increase the parking space. Steve Albrecht was going to put the parking lot in the front of the building, the grocery store, which cuts all the walkability. You wouldn’t wanna walk in an area like Montrose. You don’t want to walk in an atmosphere like that, it is not safe, it is not comfortable and local people would not spend money there. The meetings were very productive but we never made plans that really would help work with the city planners. We have a reputation for being trouble-makers. We are reacting to back-door deals that are not […] they are tax dollars. It’s like trading water; we are not making progressive steps to what citizens could get done.

3) Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you describe what it’s been like working on that issue?
The grocery store and the theater issues. Quite surprising! Both hurt the neighborhood. The grocery store is a way to keep an eye on our senior citizens because we can see them on a regular basis. Now we don’t see them much on a regular basis. We see them popping up into Walgreens to buy their food: all pre-packaged, high sodium, high cholesterol. Most of them do not own a vehicle. 16.6% of the people living here in HS --or a thousand households-- do not own a vehicle. That’s a lot of people relying on public transportation, pushing people to go to the corner to get your needs met. And the theater has a similar aspect to it: you don’t have to get into your car to go to the suburbs; you can walk down the street. And it helps the local economy to have entertainment that you can walk to. You might go to dinner to one of the neighborhood restaurants, and afterwards you might go to Mary Cole’s to get ice cream. So you are gonna drop your purse, like twenty bucks in one night that you are spending in the square, so that helps local merchants to employ more people. So the local economy is the whole life of the neighborhood: the school, the library, the grocery store, the theater, we need everything that allows us to stay local. The American suburban life style is not sustainable. Why do we have to get to the car
and pollute the air to go to the grocery store or the cinema when we can just walk to
the neighborhood places? But the biggest thing I learned is that even though this is
the right thing to do, it is the hardest thing to get done. Special interests, the profit of
the big money at play is more important than the people who make this money
happen [drop their purse in the Square]. I find this very disturbing.
4) **Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an
issue? How have you dealt with it?**
Yes, there has been. Most issues, most things in our neighborhood are so personal;
because this is where we raise our families! It is where we live; this is family, friends,
it’s where we exist. When you are a community organization it is finding the balance
between being professional, a professional organization, a professional approach to
deal with issues, rather than a personal, emotional, reaction. I waited, thought it out,
and tried to learn from what the disagreements are within the group. That has been a
big challenge, because there are so many opinions and so many different viewpoints
of what the most important things are. Everyone comes to some neighborhood
organization for their own reasons (civic, design issues social change, art) everyone
brings something different to the table. And I think the leader of that group needs to
consider all those opinions and disseminate it so that everyone understands the whole
scope. And see the whole to the part, rather than the part to the whole. Because when
you see the part you miss the whole. If we have more disadvantaged people in the
area, that leads to a higher crime. It’s that domino effect where everything is
connected; it is to get on the same page.
5) **How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your
neighborhood?**
I still love my neighborhood. I am very frustrated with the apathy of some people, the
people who were at first against the Taco Bell issue pulled away from the
neighborhood group because they started to see it as too antagonistic with the city.
And it was terrible the things that were being done. And it was done in a way that was
so aggressive. There is something to consider too: from the outside looking into the
group, what PAGODA is, there has been political self interest. The people originally
involved with the Taco Bell issue were very successful in getting the city to work
with them, from what they knew that was going on. In 1996, the HS development
association made a study about the people’s main concerns and the first thing they
wanted was a walkable, pedestrian-friendly neighborhood, with less traffic and better
city services toward crime. Those were the two biggest concerns. What I’ve come to
learn form a lot of research is that the city wanted the business association to take
away the leading role from the HS development association-- which was a citizen-
resident group working to get a garden in the corner of Market and Portage, where the
grocery store was supposed to go. The leaders of that were not the members of the HS
development association. And that started with the city mayor. The mayor said: “let’s
do this.” And the later $75,000 study was done strategically to take power away from
the residents, and said: “this is a business issue, this is a property issue and the
property and business owners should be leading us.” And that’s when the PAGODA
became a trouble making group, even though we do good things. We put together
many events, like “the Holydays in the Square.” Since I became the president we
started taking that from being just a role distant by the public, so we got into the
Battered Women Shelter. And we don’t tell anybody that, because we don’t want to publicize it. In Holydays in the Square, the kids come to meet Santa, and they get to make a craft, it is not mould, it is not consumer oriented, it’s community oriented. They get a picture taken with Santa. Then they go to... we have Christmas carols, and the rest of the community is involved as well. We do things discretely, so there is dignity for the people, for the disadvantaged. We don’t want to go and say: “look at us.” We just wanna do it. But like I said before, since I became the president, the neighborhood association got bad reputation from causing trouble. I work in things for the neighborhood and the entire city as an event planner because I believe in those things. You have to spread out from the neighborhood. And that led me to do other things. When we put together the Arts in the Square, there were in the meeting 18 people from the city, all saying: “what can we do to help you,” and they knew that it was the PAGODA. My first meeting with the city mayor was awful. He called me “a fucking bitch.” I was shocked, and I didn’t know he was a yeller. So after that initial meeting with the mayor we had this reputation so I worked really hard for a year to get back our reputation, and it was going beautifully well, we were gaining a fresh prospective and momentum. Then we found out about the theater. And that started it all again. The PAGODA got put kind of in the back burner, because we needed an entity that could be focused on the theater alone. A frustration for certain people who only see the part, what is gonna benefit them personally. We have a member of the school board down the street here and he is a big mayor player, he blasted me. We want to get all the neighborhood to talk and discuss and see how is that the whole neighborhood feels about the grocery store issue and bring it forth to the city council, even the people who agreed with Albrecht. If it’s not balanced, if it’s not a real prospective of what the whole neighborhood wants, they are not gonna listen because it is not what the whole neighborhood wants, although almost everyone wants a grocery store. And it was a political issue; he wanted to impress the mayor. It was so obvious what he was doing; if I pick on her, if I beat up the PAGODA I’d look good to the mayor’s eyes, because the mayor has been actively trying to dissemble the PAGODA, that’s why he had the whole business association in place in the first place. His whole thing is, too, that he doesn’t want anything around the neighborhoods, he wants all the people to go to downtown, he wants to do away with the Highland Square.

6) **Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?**

I think that everybody plays into it. If I am not there I feel that the social aspect would not be addressed. If Mark wasn’t there, then we wouldn’t have that voice of dissent. If we didn’t have Mike, we wouldn’t have a voice of reason. If we didn’t have Rosemary, we would not have the sagely advice of experience of someone who has been actively involved in the neighborhood for 20-30 years. In how a group functions or dysfunction everyone plays a role.

7) **What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader?**

Just caring about the neighborhood. We need to be more organized, to have a more official process. We take everybody who cares. We have never turned anyone away. We don’t have membership dues because, though it would help our group raise
money, we don’t want to not let anyone in because they don’t have cash. Even five bucks can hurt somebody. We want to be more inclusive, and especially get the disadvantaged people. The MIRAFLORES is really organized, they are on the ball, they are really well functioning. Their focus is different, on historic preservation and crime, they do a little bit of community outreach, but it’s not their main focus. So we don’t have a group right now that deals with the social disparities of the neighborhood, between the north and south from W. Market. The disparities are huge (north: well off, educated; south: poorer, more crime, but more spending power because they are the mass, they are more people). Who is robbing us? The local disadvantaged kids are robbing us and we are not gonna change that unless and until we make connection with them; until we provide them with the resources they need to pull out. We need to be more proactive. To be a leader sometimes takes to know how to lead. In this group the one who takes the lead is the one who is willing to show up and do the work, to take the time and get everything set up, a strategic plan, a very good legislation that we can get to city council. Albrecht is the only one with a pocket deep enough to buy property and tear it down. He wants to see the whole south side torn down, so the only people who would be able to afford the high rents are national food chains, which of the money they make 40% leaves the local economy. That’s a lot of money that could get pumped up into the local arena. They don’t use any local supportive retail systems.

8) If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your neighborhood group, what would you say?

It’s frustratingly rewarding. Sometimes it’s awesome. When you want to get things done it is rewarding, and sometimes it is so rewarding! Like the time when the battered women shelter kids made cookies. When all the right pieces are in place and the outcome is exactly what you planned for. The kids got outside their world. They said that they wanted their moms to be happy. When we saw the moms being relaxed, being able to breathe and to enjoy, these women who are always under a lot of stress, who don’t even leave in their own homes, and see them so happy… that was the most satisfying thing, that was the most rewarding thing to give to those mothers. That was the best Christmas that I have ever had. With my own kids it’s always great but that was more spiritual for me, it was connecting with community. I get frustrated when we have to fight at meetings; when we don’t have time to validate people’s inputs. It takes a lot to get rewarding experiences.

9) For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you?

The best were the kids. The worst is when we propose something and I copy new people, and someone totally blasted me, she said that I wasn’t making decisions with a full board. And I totally agree with her, with dissent. She questioned my credibility in front of other people, undermined so much of the work that I had done, that was the worst, because she is very important for the community. That was very detrimental. If you just wait things out, you will come to an understanding of the big picture.

10) Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or agencies?
It can be very confrontational. The mayor came to one of our meetings for the sole reason to tear the meeting apart. The mayor sabotaged the meeting. We are known for being confrontational. But we are not so confrontational because we have the right to request the city to fulfill its promise of a grocery store. Some people in the neighborhood say that we are very confrontational. But these people have met with the mayor in private for political personal careers. So I discredit them because they don’t work for the betterment of the whole neighborhood. It has been suggested that we keep our mouths shut, that we don’t exercise our freedom of speech and that we go along with anything the mayor wants. When you piece it all together, the mayor wants the NHNA not to speak up anything the city is doing, they want to take the theater; they want to take that whole block. They are the main people behind enabling Albrecht to do whatever he wants as he works hand in hand with the mayor. People don’t know all the facts and call us belligerent.

11) What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst?
The best was the Arts in the Square in 2006; I was working for Jeff Pasco. They city really helped us with extra police and safety. It was beautiful, it was great. The worst was when Jeff Pasco went to the MIRAFLORES to ask them to co-sponsor a free concert behind the Chipotle. He said that we were working to undermine the neighborhood. And that hurt a lot because of the relationship I had managed to build with him. I cried in that one. And also because the people from MIRAFLORES are my friends.

12) What does ‘community’ mean to you?
For me is what community should be, and that is every person has value, the property owner has the same value as the renter, the senior citizen, working together with all others, or being part of the community, where we are all valued, and where everybody, everyone is part of it, you can’t take one segment out. It is the whole to the part, and not the part to the whole. Without that single part the whole will collapse. Every part working together is needed in working together. Even the crazy old lady, she is part of the neighborhood. I can’t imagine our neighborhood without all the crazy people, without the youngster who everyone is afraid to let in their stores. They all have the potential to be good and the potential to be bad, whether they are good or bad. So, for the common good, reach out and bring them in so they don’t feel excluded, so that by bringing them in they feel part of the community and that just builds a stronger place to live.

Amelia
- What neighborhood group do you belong and for how long now?
I belong to the MIRAFLORES. We established it in 1999, nine or ten year ago.

1) How did you become a member of this group?
A group of us got together because we cared about our neighborhood, we loved living in the neighborhood, and we had common concerns. We decided to form this group so that we could work together to enhance what we liked about it and to better the things we thought that were problems. The reason we did that is that we got tired of just sort of sitting there and expecting the police, the city and everyone expecting them to solve problems. We should help, we could help and we were the ones living
there. So rather than complain and blame let’s get together and see what we can do together. I loved the older houses, I thought that it was a beautiful place to live and then I bought a house there. We were worried about crime, we wanted to improve the values of our homes, and we wanted to protect what was there. That’s how we got started, just wanted to get involved.

2) **What usually happens at your meetings?**

They usually last one hour and a half. We handle them. We have a board of trustees. Because we are a grassroots organization we are working on getting more public meetings that means meetings open to everyone. Now we operate as a board. We do most of our work through committees, that’s how we branch out. That’s the best way to get most of the work done. That’s how we work most efficiently. What happens in our meetings? We go by committees talking about each committee, like crime and safety, events; each committee would give a report and we would see what’s going on in each particular situation. During the month each committee has a meeting of their own. We have one annual meeting open to the entire neighborhood. And we are going to start doing quarterly meetings. If we see that people want more meetings, then we are going to have more.

3) **Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you describe what it’s been like working on that issue?**

Housing is a very big issue for us. We have learned a lot about how the city government works, what things are really important to us. And how to get things accomplished. When our group started, we knew very little about how to work with the city. Going through housing the city talks to us, takes us more seriously now, and we get a lot done now. Absentee landlords are a big issue here; many of them don’t care because they don’t live here. So criminals rent and move in. We had one particular fight like a month ago where the city council backed us in a very tough issue with a landlord, and we won. The zoning has all turned a bit into helping the citizens. If the city had not been so aware that we cared about it I don’t think they would have done so much to help. The crime and safety committee developed the pooch patrol which is very successful. People in this neighborhood has a common connection with dogs, they all have dogs. If people like dogs and like walking their dogs, we get together once a month as many people as want to, and we walk our dogs together in different parts of the neighborhood different months. The idea behind is to show solidarity, it is a great social event, and it also says something when you see 16 people walking together with their dogs down the street without being afraid. It is very positive. And people come out to the porch, and ask questions and see that we are out there. What it does is bringing people back out on the streets and taking ownership again of where they live and caring about it. And the idea that you are not gonna shut your door and let crime happen in the streets and not look. You are gonna come out and walk your dog, and say “this is my street. I have a right to be here.” This has been a very positive thing and that’s been an example of using something very simple that we didn’t think that would make a difference but we usually get anywhere 8-16 people in this pooch patrol walks.

4) **Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an issue? How have you dealt with it?**
Yes, yes. There has. Mostly where we run into trouble is in what to do. We had instances where people have been very upset about, say, crime. Everyone is in agreement about that. Some people want to go down the streets with bats, and that’s their attitude. Other people say: no we can’t do that, we are not the police. The argument has been how to go about a common concern, how do we do what we want to accomplish because everyone has their own idea. We all have passion about seeing a lot of things happen; that’s not a problem. When we began we had some people in the board who were more disagreeable. We’ve become a lot better in the way that we have become more structured. And the structure in and of itself has helped us weed out people that just want to sit there and complain. No one has time for that. We need to have action follow a complaint. We need to do something not just talk negative. So we have grown and learned a lot through the structure itself. We have to go beyond complaining, nobody cares about that. Government won’t listen, and neighbors get tired of that too. That’s been the biggest issue over the last 9-10 years. We talk disagreements through in the group. We have a rule in the group: we don’t come out and make a statement on an issue unless the entire board is in agreement with it. We take a vote. We are very careful with deciding which things are majority vote and which things are unanimous. We are very careful of what we say in the name of the organization; it can’t be what one person thinks. It has to be everybody together. You don’t make a statement in the name of the group, but as a resident of the neighborhood. We are very protective of the group, since it took 9-10 years to grow, and since we are all volunteers it is very hard to do on your own time. So we are very protective of that. So when we have disagreements, if we can’t all agree on one thing, we let it be. And we bring it back to discussion until we find a common ground, a point in the issue where we can all agree with. And then if we still have dissent we don’t move to action until we feel we have a consensus.

**5) How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your neighborhood?**

Mmmhh. I loved my neighborhood before, but it has increased it tenfold. In just ten years, the changes that have happened, the fights that we’ve fought, the things that we’ve worked on have strengthen my commitment by getting involved. I don’t anymore have the feeling of complaining about something only. I want to go to the action and make good things happen. There have been slow changes but I feel much more committed.

**6) Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?**

People like Holli and Greg are wonderful assets. Because not only their passion for their neighborhood and where they live they also have professional expertise that are assets to a neighborhood group. You know we all as neighbors have feelings, but making possible to put something in a way to get it done takes a lot. They have been great help. Greg has taken membership a step over. Holli was our past president. We learned with her how to do things; they helped bring professionalism and credibility to the organization. What’s a detriment are antagonistic people, when they lie on things that can’t back it up. You can’t get anything done with people like that. That people care very much about the neighborhood but they just don’t go about it the right way.
7) What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader?

Just wanting to be a member. Our dues are very small, pretty nominal. You pay dues, you get a newsletter. It takes caring about your neighborhood and wanting to get involved. I think that the trick to be a leader is to find people who are smarter than you and encourage the heck out of them. Open…feel passionate about what they do, encourage people who have different talents, encourage them to use their talents, and see if you can help people stay together and bring people together.

8) If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your neighborhood group, what would you say?

It’s been very rewarding to see the place where you live grow and change. We have the historic district. When you see people become proud of the place where they live, and want to become involved and do things, and you have an event where you have people come together and they feel good…it is very rewarding. It is different that just having a place where I go and come from my job and pay a mortgage. It is a real personal investment; there is a piece of you that stays in the neighborhood.

9) For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you?

The one I am proudest of is the historic district, so many of the events, the housing tours. We got a lot of people together. The worst is when you feel that people are arguing and not coming together on an issue. When we had a couple of people in the board in the beginning we had two people in the board very argumentative, they would not let anyone else talk. All they wanted is making problems and drama. It was so disheartening. I remember walking out of the meeting and quit for a week. That is very disheartening, when you have the negative. Somehow negative can quickly get in there and take over. And when it does, it is very disheartening. It is difficult to combat people who you know are not there for the general good of everyone. But the best are so much more rewarding and more things which have been best!

10) Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or agencies?

We work closely with our councilman. We keep him and other officials informed, we invite him to meetings. Staying in close contact with the city councilman helps the organization because he is the guy who can fight for you in city council. If you don’t have his ear you can’t get anything done. We try to listen too. So many times it is so much easier to blame the officials. We try to listen first to what’s going on; that way, they would be more willing to talk to us. If they talk to us we are more aware of the different pieces to the pie, and we are stronger. There may be more pieces to the puzzle that what we are just thinking. Maybe we need to modify what we think. We are open to relations. It makes for better governance, we can operate better, and we can be more effective the more communication with city government we have. Like the police have been more responsive since we have been more willing to listen.

11) What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst?

The best one was a couple of months ago with a landlord; a very hard and controversial issue, all the way up to the city council. They could rule in our favor or against us. The issue was the number of tenants he had in his property. He had six and
we wanted him to bring his unit down to two families, just like the zoning code says. If you let him have six then anyone else will have six and then you have the crime problem. We met with the city council before we went to the city council and he told us that he would fight for us. But he also said that a lot of the other city council members didn’t understand why we could not give the landlord four units, make a compromise. And we said, because a compromise of four units will set precedent that is negative. So our councilman was on our side, but the rest of the council members were not necessarily. So four or five of our neighbors stood up and spoke and literally because of what they said, they changed the councilmen’s minds. And they voted and voted in our favor. That was very big. That was a success story. The citizens stood up and the council listened to us. That was very big. The worst issue was the beginning, when the city council didn’t know who we were before they had gotten our city district. Nobody would listen; they didn’t want to listen to us. We went about it in another way; we did it in our own. We went to Columbus, raised the money, put in the application and we got the grant. Once we got it now they [city councilmen] felt different, and now they were with us. But we had to prove our case a little bit, to prove that we were serious, and that we were able to learn and understand what was going to take us what we wanted. Now, city government has changed over ten years to understand that neighborhoods are more important, that neighborhoods are people. There is a different mentality. But back then it was tough to get anybody to listen. That’s why it’s so important the “how” of how to do something. It’s basic human nature. So it’s a tricky business; it’s listening and knowing exactly what you want and a constant dialog, communicating what you want, even when you are on the same side of an issue.

12) **What does ‘community’ mean to you?**

It’s when you have people together who what they care about is the very fact that they are living together. They not only care about themselves but also of how they can affect others and it takes people who are proud of where they live, of what they have and don’t have, of their aspirations and goals. Wherever you have people willing to communicate and work together, and not just talk about it, you are community. You can have a negative community, I suppose, where you have all-like minds. [But community] It’s where you have neighbors that know each other’s name, who are interested in the other people’s feelings, and are interested in developing goals that would help everyone. We watch out for each other, that’s community.

13) **Would you like to comment on anything else?**

We want different opinions; we need that so we can figure out what people really want around the neighborhood. Most people don’t want to say anything, but let’s hear it all.

---

Emma

“You can’t buy people. You can’t buy this type of community, all this energy! You know, public officials spend tons of money on revitalization of business areas with the hope of bringing cities back to life. But this type of community is the only key, and you can’t buy this with money. Either you have it or you don’t. My husband and I decided to buy a house here after we had learned about how dynamic this neighborhood was and
after meeting wonderful people. People in their late 20s and early 30s have no places to
go in town, no ways to make friends. We thought this was a great way to make new
friends. People care for each other, relax, have fun. They are not just neighbors but
friends. This is great, we love it and that is why we bought a house here in this block. We
can’t wait to move in and be part of this fantastic group. I think that this is unique and I
have never been in anything as lively as this neighborhood group. Instead of spending so
much money in worthless means to stop people from leaving the cities, city officials need
to pay more attention to neighborhoods, to these groups and try to bring them in touch
with government. They ought to put their efforts in trying to connect government with
different neighborhoods rather than staying so far away from people’s lives in
community. They don’t connect with citizens, and that is the mistake. I wish we could all
be working together as a city, government and neighbors; that would bring a great deal of
diversity of voices and will get MUCH MORE good things done than what’s currently
accomplished by only government, working on their own and us, neighbors, working on
our own.”
APPENDIX D

FROM RAW NARRATIVES TO THEMES – AN EXAMPLE

Tracie
-What neighborhood group do you belong and for how long now?
MIRAFLORES, since august of 2007
  1) How did you become a member of this group?
     I purchased the house in this neighborhood and I immediately joined because they are known for cleaning up the streets, for historic preservation and for crime prevention of the West Hill neighborhood; they are bringing it back to being a well respected area like it used to be. I wanted to be part of it.

     [Joining the neighborhood group because they are bringing the neighborhood back from crime, old housing, bringing the neighborhood back to life]

  2) What usually happens at your meetings?
     We discuss the crime issues in our neighborhood; what is happening to stop crime in that area with the help of police.

     [Crime issues; collaborating to stop it]

  3) Can you give me an example of an issue that you have dealt with? Can you describe what it’s been like working on that issue?
     Like my house being broken into. The house which I have not moved into yet has been broken into seven times since Christmas time and I have been involved with the police and one detective who has a file on it. In the meantime two people have gone to court; probably two of the many people who have tried to break into my house, and the crime and safety committee chair, Joe Boyle, came to court with me when I went to speak against these people trying to break into my house. And he came to represent the WH neighborhood group. Also the neighbors since they know what’s going on they have been keeping an eye on my house. It is nice that they know what’s going on around them and also that they have helped me. But nobody should be breaking into my house.

     [Need for company of neighbors in hard times; lot of crime activity affecting neighbors]
4) Has there been a time when the group members had not agreed with an issue? How have you dealt with it?
I am so new to the group (I have only been to couple of meetings). We have had disagreements respect of how we view the way the city has been handling crime in this area and some of us feel that more is being done than other person feels, or some people feel that crime has been going up in an area more than others. It is more a disagreement about the approach. We all agree that there is a problem that there is crime. In the end we all learned something. We still all think that there is a problem with crime.

[Agreement in type of crime problem; disagreement in approach; agreement and disagreement]

5) How has your work in the group changed the way you feel about your neighborhood?
It is nice to know that there are people who do care about what’s going on around them. I wish more people cared about the neighborhood. Some people turn around if they see something wrong. That’s why I moved into the neighborhood because I knew that there were some people who cared and were doing something about the neighborhood.

[Nice that people care about others; caring is important to attract new people to the neighborhood; caring and doing things for the improvement of the neighborhood]

6) Is there any person in your group whose presence or absence would make a difference? If so, how?
Joe Boyle is the glue that brings things together

[Leader brings things together]

7) What is the trick to be a member of this group? What does it take to be a leader? You have to live in the WH neighborhood, and there is a fee. And then get involved in whatever committee interests you most, like I am involved with the crime and safety meeting. [Leader] you have to care and be able to stand up for your convictions and the ones of those who are in the group.

[Caring]

8) If you were to sum up your experiences of being involved in your neighborhood group, what would you say?
So far it’s been great. It is nice to see that people are watching out for my house and that in other areas people don’t do events together like we do here, getting together to do things.

[People watching out for you; doing things together; getting together to do things]
9) For you personally, what have been the best and the worst experiences that you have dealt with, whatever “best” and “worst” mean to you? Best is knowing that others want to approach crime. The worst is that there is still crime.

[Joint effort, caring]

10) Can you describe your group’s interactions with government officials or agencies? The police officer who comes to our crime and safety committee meetings is kind of the liaison between the neighborhood and the government. I don’t think that the city council, the county council or the mayor of the city address crime as it should be addressed. I think that we need more officers in the streets. That way there would be less crime. But we don’t have that. I think they should have a more proactive approach. I would like to see some of the officials come to our functions and events and meetings more often. I have not seen one of the officials whom I have invited to our meeting, so it’s frustrating.

[Need for more officers in the streets; a more proactive approach respect to crime; crime as a big preoccupation in the neighborhood; more interaction between neighborhood and officers; all that will contribute to less crime in the area]

11) What is the best experience you have had interacting with government in an issue of your neighborhood group? What is the worst? The best is that because we are group we are taken more seriously than a single person would. I think that the person alone isn’t considered as valuable as the group is. That’s why I think that in group we get more notice from the government or the police. Worst: each of us still has to look after our own things, like if I am broken in I would be the one that has to deal with the criminal on my own. It would be nicer to go to court with others from the group. When it comes to dealing with crime you are still alone.

[Group as a stronger force; group taken more seriously, getting more notice before government agencies, than the individual alone; group has more power than the single individual to fight crime, to face problems; group as more valuable than a single person acting alone]

12) What does ‘community’ mean to you? Community is a sense of feeling of togetherness where you live, that you know your neighbors, that you have a support system, something in the community that bonds you with others. It is a feeling of togetherness with other like-minded people. Kind of a family type feeling. I moved into this area knowing about the problems. But this area has come a long way. Five years ago I would have not driven through here, and now I am moving in. But I see what the WH group has done and their reputation of caring about their neighborhood. So that’s why I feel safe living in this neighborhood, it is because I know that I am not alone trying to solve crime.
problems. They have done a great deal of work in getting rid of a lot of crime in the area. So as an outsider looking inside --I haven’t moved in yet but I bought my house already-- I come from a neighborhood where my house has never been broken in, I have never had a problem there, BUT there I don’t have a community group. It’s a sensitive character that you have not seen since the 50s or 60s. People don’t know their neighbors anymore, and I want more of how things were when I was growing up, knowing my neighbors.

[Feeling of togetherness where you live; knowing your neighbors; having a support system; bonding you with others; togetherness with other like-minded people; family-type feeling; moved in the neighborhood because knowledge of the existence of such active group of people who cared for the neighborhood and its people; coming from a safer area, but trading in safety by sense of togetherness; wanting to get back to the good old times when people knew their neighbors; nostalgia when growing up of good old times, people being in the streets, walking and talking; interacting; socialization not to feel bound to die alone, to be alone and to die in life]

THEMES—ALL INTERVIEWEES

All themes per person

Paul
1. Activity that aims at bringing new people into the group while patrolling the streets + group’s endeavor to reach out to the people of the neighborhood. [Reach out--recruitment]
2. Enjoyable practices that bring the group together while allowing people to have fun in preparation of them and while they happen + unprecedented fun in being part of a group; surprising ways of relating to others and discovering new activities that fulfill us as human beings + informal meetings are as important as formal ones; decisions about the neighborhood’s fate are made in both scenarios [Group benefits]
3. Working together for the betterment of the whole + working with others makes possible what would seem impossible + the group as a synonym of new horizons, venues that open up before us + caring about others + connection to something beyond my own self; connected to something more secure or stable than myself, to a larger group. [Group benefits through working with others] [Caring] [Supra-Connection, stability] [otherness, togetherness]
4. Differences are and will be there; through humor we try to lessen people’s polarized–white or black—perceptions when it comes to differences or disagreements + we know what things we do disagree on; it’s harder to bring our agreements to a concrete structure of work. [Knowing each other makes agreement --or finding of a common-- ground possible] [The “in between” rather than the extremes]
5. The goal is to widen opportunities for all the neighbors to bring houses up to date; the opportunities have been worked out, the rest is a matter of personal choice. **[Opportunities]**

6. Non-ordinary, flat structure of the group; anyone can run it and will still be running effectively; it does not depend on any particular person showing up but rather it depends of the group as a whole + the group works by people taking the lead on activities and becoming responsible for their happening + being “drafted” into the group following the expression of an interest in some aspect or project of the group. **[Working together]**

7. It took the neighborhood to come together as One in order for people to realize the large number of kids living in the neighborhood and of the needs that such fact would entail. **[Expanding outwards as a process of discovery]**

8. The group’s activities bring life to a decayed area, to people’s lives+ a learning of working and relating with Others over a period of time + essential function of the neighborhood group: that of providing resources to live your life more fully, becoming aware of opportunities and possibilities that the larger environment provides and could potentially benefit you as a neighbor; coming out of the cave of the self to meet others as well as the larger and richer world + group as a venue or fountain of creation to help ourselves and others + the group as the sustain and livelihood of the neighborhood as a whole. **[Group as neighborhood leader]**

9. Government is very interested in the neighborhood as it recognizes that Highland Square has become a strong and organized political force within the larger city + the group is aware that in order to get things accomplished they need to work with government officials; therein lies the group’s “rational” outlook, and its opposition to the extremism of angry neighbors as representing the group before public officials. **[Playing the political game along with government]**

10. Living with others who are different means to be better prepared for the diverse world out there, to appreciate what lies in people who are different in some ways but similar in others; who care for different things but who share with us our love for this neighborhood; accepting others as they are means to be a stronger human being, knowing how to relate with people even when they don’t agree with us, or when they don’t share our same values or interests; learning in diversity to be more open minded to the world. **[Caring, process benefits]**

Tracie

1. **[BRINGING THE NEIGHBORHOOD BACK TO LIFE-- Joining the neighborhood group because they are bringing the neighborhood back from crime, old housing, bringing the neighborhood back to life]**

2. **[CRIME-- Crime issues; collaborating to stop it]**

3. **[COUNTING ON OTHERS IN TIMES OF HARDSHIP-- Need for company of neighbors in hard times; lot of crime activity affecting neighbors]**

4. **[DELIBERATION-- Agreement in type of crime problem; disagreement in approach; agreement and disagreement]**

5. **[CARING-- Nice that people care about others; caring is important to attract new people to the neighborhood; caring and doing things for the improvement of the neighborhood]**

6. **[LEADERSHIP-- Leader brings things together]**
7. [CARING-- Caring]
8. [TOGETHERNESS, CARING-- People watching out for you; doing things together; getting together to do things]
9. [JOINTNESS-- Joint effort, caring]
10. [Need for more officers in the streets; a more proactive approach respect to crime; crime as a big preoccupation in the neighborhood; more interaction between neighborhood and officers; all that will contribute to less crime in the area]
11. [EMPOWERMENT OF THE WHOLE-- Group as a stronger force; group taken more seriously, getting more notice before government agencies, than the individual alone; group has more power than the single individual to fight crime, to face problems; group as more valuable than a single person acting alone]
12. [BONDING—FAMILY-TYPE FEELING—NOSTALGIA OF GOOD OLD TIMES--Feeling of togetherness where you live; knowing your neighbors; having a support system; bonding you with others; togetherness with other like-minded people; family-type feeling; moved in the neighborhood because knowledge of the existence of such active group of people who cared for the neighborhood and its people; coming from a safer area, but trading in safety by sense of togetherness; wanting to get back to the good old times when people knew their neighbors; nostalgia when growing up of good old times, people being in the streets, walking and talking; interacting; socialization not to feel bound to die alone, to be alone and to die in life]

Kathy
1. [Previous relationships, new networking; caring; working to improve things]
2. [Organization, structure; strategies; committees; meetings; object: improve aspects of the neighborhood]
3. [Good success story: patrolling the neighborhood with dogs; making a presence, sending the message of no fear, of force in the group that can do away with evil in the place we care about; from a simple idea we had to a group activity that brings pride and practices to the group; presence vs. absence]
4. [Structure in place to deal with order and conflict in the group; majority rules; voting]
5. [It’s made me feel better; nice to know that others out there have similar interests and that they care about the neighborhood; looking out for each other; richness of the diversity of the people; new relationships; empowerment; knowing new people and new opportunities through the group]
6. [Everyone matters; everyone brings their unique expertise and experience to the group; without any of the members the group would not be the same; some projects or even committees would not be possible to bring about if it wasn’t for each person committed to those; important that we come together as a body, as One; important that we all have different experiences]
7. [Reach out to people who live there; be willing to be able to reach out to others]
8. [Very rewarding and beneficial for the individual and for the group; make the place a better place to live; real accomplishments; have taken on things that I would otherwise not have, having not become part of the group; knowing people and doing things together; starting new projects; taking the initiative; in the
process a lot of learning; doing things that genuinely enjoys doing with other people]

9. [Very gratifying experience on the personal and professional levels; chance to meet wonderful people, develop real friendships based on substance; common beliefs and work towards a common goal; some people are skeptical of our work and projects we do as a group; very enjoyable and gratifying experience]

10. [Interactions with government officials and agencies is very important to get the group’s projects accomplished; to really affect change you need the city’s cooperation; they benefit from our work and we do benefit from their cooperation; it works both ways; helping each other; mutual appreciation]

11. [Very encouraging to get the city’s acknowledgement of what we do as a group; it is good to know that we matter to them and that our work can make a difference]

12. [Fellowship with other human beings; sisterhood and brotherhood; most interactions with the people we live the closest with; relationships beneath the physical community; sense of empowerment, of being able to get people together to organize your group and its activities; people can make a difference, people can matter]

Stella

1. Planning things together; deliberating; agreeing, disagreeing; laughing with others

2. Being persistent in getting things done; knowing the channels to get things done and using them

3. Majority rules; no one is shy to express their opinions even when those may be in disagreement with those of the larger group; freedom

4. A feeling of deeper involvement and connectedness; knowing that with others things can get done

5. Uniqueness within diversity: unique personalities, unique contributions; hearing and feeling in the presence of uniqueness

6. Caring about the neighborhood projects, knowing people’s different strengths and best abilities and bringing them to the fore for the common use; physical distance is unimportant in joining the group

7. Great experience, a worthwhile experience

8. Questioning whether your heart is in the group and in the common action; uniqueness of the group -- repeated; adulthood (practical politics?) when dealing with controversial issues; recognition and sense of pride; wanting to get along with everybody, not to offend anyone; need to uphold a non-confrontational philosophy even when some in the group don’t agree

9. Respect and recognition of the group by city officials; our goal is the betterment of all; outside respect of those values and help to achieve them; that is wonderful, sense of awe; trying to get along with everyone—repeated

10. Need to know others; who is part and who is not part of the neighborhood as a basic crime prevention measure; need to cooperate with the police; to let others know the entrenched feeling, the noble cause, of the need for safety in our streets; trying to get back in our streets the safety of the good old times; deep desire to translate that to others

11. Community means people sticking together, working together, not being afraid to talk to each other in the streets – to interact-- people coming together to make of
their neighborhood --common place-- something special; everyone should care and take ownership of the place, realize the larger goals, make a difference; time constraints for the young and the elders; concerned that they may not be reaching out to the larger diversity of the neighborhood; need for that to happen and to keep the group moving forward.

Gary

1. [Preservation of our homes, safety of our neighborhood, combating crime in the neighborhood]
2. [Some people are terrible representatives of the neighborhood because they dictate the way people should feel and think; they thus turn off people; joined another, more legitimate, group; wanting to belong to a legitimate group with an upfront agenda]
3. [Government officials were unsympathetic to us and distorted the nature of our problems (from a traffic issue to a racial-political issue) until a ‘skilled’ government official came around and finally defined the issue as we did it, in our terms, rather than in theirs. It wasn’t until then that the situation with government officials calmed down]
4. [Difficulty to define a problem or issue; people not agreeing ended up wasting their energies in fighting one another until we sat down and talked, and together we defined what constitutes a neighborhood problem from what it doesn’t. Being steadfast and deciding to stand up by ourselves in defining our issues without letting other people tell us how to go about them]
5. [Being part of this group opened my eyes to the people who care for the neighborhood; it made me want to continue to belong, to be part of a neighborhood organization that watches after one another --opening of the self to others. Watching that occur --watching, opening of the eyes—taught me that people can take back their neighborhoods from criminal activity—people working together can turn around a bad situation into a good one’]
6. [Feeling of deep need for others to join —“we would love to have more people”— every single person would make a difference, their only presence would make things different, they would contribute with something new —unique. Need for people to belong.]
7. [Wanting to belong, to be part of a larger endeavor; openness]
8. [Gratifying and frustrating experience at once; gratifying to see each people come together, work together with government officials, and to make a difference; listening is more important than talking; being a good listener as the key to bring people together and pull their strengths to the fore]
9. [The best experience has been to work together and solve issues we didn’t think we could solve --until we got together--, seeing people come together and solve the crime problem. The most frustrating experience has been to be manipulated and used as a pawn; asked not to think, to shut up, or to be told how to think and how to feel]
10. [Great gain in working together with government officials as we learned about the tools we could count on to fight crime or zoning violations. They also learned from us what was going on in the neighborhood]
11. [The best experience is when we work together along with different agencies or officials; the worse is when someone attempts to shut us down, to manipulate us or to get us to do their job]

12. [Community is a very fluid concept that, no matter its boundaries, it is always about the people looking for each other toward the general good rather than just my backyard; unselfishness, altruism]

13. [Leader as an important actor in the neighborhood organization upon which the group’s well being may depend on]

Jennifer

1. [All that matters is that one cares for the neighborhood; no race, education, gender or age are important]

2. [Honored to be part of a group constituted by such great people, and even more to become a board member]

3. [Friendships in the neighborhood and the goal of saving the theater prompted her to join the group]

4. [Information about opportunities and possibilities; discussions on improving the neighborhood; seeking to draft passionate people]

5. [Involvement with battered women shelter associations; protection of women’s rights; giving, offering, sharing to and with others, even when a neighbor lacks resources for her own self; selflessness, altruism; pursuit of a noble cause to help others, the disadvantaged from my position as a care-giver]

6. [Being part of the group makes her feel that she belongs and she is part of a larger goal; feels that has more to offer to the neighborhood; it should be about caring for others and for the neighborhood rather than looking into people’s physical characteristics]

7. [There are key people in the group without whom there would be a gap in the group]

8. [Interest and passion for life and wanting to make your neighborhood the best in town as the key aspects to become involved in a group; offering your best; be careful for interest foreign to the neighborhood because they could ruin its nature and dynamics]

9. [A really rewarding experience, making the person feel ‘better’, feel human in her humanity, without stereotypes; the ways that the group has changed her and how she's become truly 'human' (being able to be herself) when she joined the group; the group lets you be yourself without compromising your inner nature, your past or ideas; people respect you and accept you the way you are without prejudices; what nucleates people is not the larger goals that pertain to the single members, but rather the larger neighborhood, the neighbors, the ‘whole’; a ‘growing’ process of integration of others that happens inside you through the group; as a way to keep the group moving forward, to make it grow bringing new people, new viewpoints, ‘diversity’, and make it change as its members may envision; altruism]

10. [Great experience of being part of the group; awe and amaze when helping others, when caring for others more disadvantaged neighbors; hates stereotypes and labels; human beingness rather than categories “I am not a thing, I am a human being”]
11. [Neighbors as caretakers, watching for each other, “offering to take us in”; caring for others, really belonging, interacting with others without feeling scared; taking pride in your neighborhood; leave a mark, your mark, in the group to help others, the future generations—spatiality]

12. [Thankful for being able to speak, to share her experiences; referring to other active neighbors]

Chris

1. [UNIQUENESS— uniqueness of the group event drew their attention and interest; they saw ‘uniqueness’; they wanted to live in a neighborhood with sense of community so this fulfilled their dreams and make them fuel as well; seeing of a deficiency in the way of handling one specific issue and thought he could help to improve it; interest in the history of the place and in beautifying the place; taking on some project of his interest and drawing people into it; the point is not to work on difficult things but just in some projects in order to get involved in larger endeavors]

2. [ORGANIZATION-- coordination; structure and organization of one group versus the more laid-back aspect of the block group; having the hear in the same place helps things to get going and the job get done; questioning the real values of the group: “what message are we trying to deliver?” and “how to bring more recognition to the area?”]

3. [DIFFICULTIES-- difficulty of these groups: volunteer organizations; finding the right person, the champion to commit and do the task; “a real champion,” “driver”; you can’t assign or make people do things; all with big hearts and good intentions but not enough time to dedicate to the neighborhood groups; the right approach is bring people with focus, knowledge and especially with energy; genuine commitment]

4. [TRIGGER--DRIVERS -- having desire; wanting to help others get something done; having the inner need to take upon tasks in the group; you can’t force people do something; working together is easier and more doable than by oneself; use your judgment, make decisions that you deem appropriate so that things can keep moving on]

5. [NETWORKING-- great social networking experience, you get to know the people more intimately, more deeply; a very rewarding experience “to meet others” to see that happen” “to hear”; thrill of the people for having the good old times back in their neighborhood]

6. [CHAMPIONS-- Certainty in the conviction that these groups are highly affected and influenced by the particular persons who constitute them; if the champion of a project is not there then nobody may take upon it; the projects and whether they may get done or carried on depends on the presence of the specific persons who have taken the responsibility; that things get done depends on the specific skills and knowledge of specific person; if they are not there, those projects can’t get done; great need to fill slots to get different projects done; you can’t afford losing people, each one counts, each person is very important; key people behind each project; group’s life and health depend on the people who belong to it]

7. [PASSION-- anyone can be a leader; all it take is to have an idea that fits the group’s mission and get other people to work in it with you; there is tremendous
room to be a tremendous leader; desire, attitude and will to work on projects is all it’s needed

8. [BOUNDARIES--very positive experience; conflict between the need for boundaries in the neighborhood group or the need and reality to let the group go in its own natural direction; confusion; it is better to let the group evolve naturally rather than forcing its development in the direction sketched in the original model; need for smaller, more tangible block groups –where people live their lives, their blocks-- with a larger one that stitches them all together, networking people among different groups, hooking people up to the right groups, and matching them according to their interests, wills, and skills; a larger, umbrella-type group that networks all the smaller ones]

9. [TIME—DYNAMISM—RECOGNITION-- large amounts of time to get things done and accomplished; changes, ebbs and flows in the commitment of the people; transformation --from black sheep to highly recognized and reputed; external recognition brings strength and commitment to the group’s goals and endeavors; I’d rather spend time in something valuable to the group as a whole than in my own self; I could be using time differently, but this way I make a difference]

10. [APPRECIATION—tremendous learning; leads one to think, guessing, hunch that others appreciate the group’s doings; city officials believe in the group; confidence and belief of right-doing]

11. [BEING INVOLVED—BEING ABLE TO BELONG—Dynamic and all-encompassing (participatory) growth; lessen conflict; BUT what makes community is common concern for issues even when one does not agree (contradiction, no conflict vs. accepting differences); a sense of walking around; physical fabric, density, center where people can meet are essential for community; looking for neighbors and friends brings new people into the neighborhood; what matters is people, not money or safety; community is about the people and about wanting and having the opportunity to get involved, rather than about housing prices or location only; website gives further sense of place; wanting to make the place one relates the most the best it can be; caring about the area one is more in touch with]

Eva

1. [Landlord perspective]

2. [Organization in committees; group formed for the best interest of the neighborhood as a whole; group focused on the good health of the neighborhood and preventing it from falling apart]

3. [Problems of absentee landlords and illegal rentals]

4. [Disagreements and giving time in between meetings to think issues through; nice open forum of discussion]

5. [Mission of improving dilapidated housing in the neighborhood to a livable standard; pride in the place; openness of the eyes toward the neighborhood’s concerns; deeper needs than beautification; love for the neighborhood; eclecticism; neighborliness]

6. [Knowledge and experience of leaders is essential to run the group]
7. [Become a member formally; leader takes pride in the neighborhood and has a strong desire to improve it and make it better; having the right people – knowledgeable, experienced in to carry out specific tasks to improve the neighborhood]

8. [Experience of group involvement is us; being able to give back to the neighbors and neighborhood; pull people together; uniqueness]

9. [Feeling of joy when people come together as a whole; appreciation]

10. [Knowing]

11. [Greater good, broader goals besides one’s little niche]

Laura

1. [FAITH IN COMMUNITY BUILDING--Personal interest in non profit and community building; joined without great expectations, just to have ‘something to do’; a community that interacts and talks on a daily basis is stronger than not having those aspects]

2. [COMMON CONCERNS-- People bring up common concerns: crime issues, vacant houses, absent landlords; organization of special events; how to get people involved and working in different projects]

3. [DEMORALIZATION--COLLABORATION— THE BRINING TOGETHER OF ALL INTO THE ONE-- In face of a problem the neighbors contact others, ask for suggestions on how to proceed; contacted some city officials –lucky to have contacts—to make sure of the group’s obligations and that of the city; worked out great as they collaborated: the city and the neighbors worked together to clean out the graffiti; advantage in being known as a ‘good’ neighborhood group by the city; get immediate attention and support; people regained trust in city government while they learned to work together as a group in a time of crisis –‘it brought us closer together as a group’—it reaffirmed the values of the group, what to tolerate and what not to put up with; working with the city made the people feel better; common interest in preserving and improving different aspects of the neighborhood, such as old housing, safety, walkable streets; need for the neighborhood as a whole to approve the housing guidelines or any other improvement project before it goes for approval with the city council; need to make sure that all the people are on the same page; make sure that what people approve is what the city ought to follow through; help from the city to come up with realistic guidelines—real partnership in some aspects at least, like housing, zoning]

4. [OPEN AND INCLUSIVE DELIBERATION--Disagreements are dealt by analyzing the causes, by sitting down and talking with the group members to re-orient the direction of the project at hand and/or of the group as a whole, its mission and its goals; having an in-depth discussion as a board to straighten the issues out, ‘rather than making some people’s opinions prevail over others’; decision or resolution was the full board resolution, not mine or the other people’s; this made everybody feel better; a leader ought to bring this type of issues to discussion]

5. [LEARNING WITH TIME & EXPERIENCE TO WORK WITH OTHERS— UNDERSTANDING OTHERS—PUTTING ONESELF IN THE OTHER PERSON’S SHOES-- Different perceptions of involvement and degree of
compromise expected from others and herself, when first getting involved in the group and after a while of being part of it; realization of how things work; she has gotten better with time and experience of being part of the group; things are not as they appear to be in the surface; reality may be perceived differently by different people; putting oneself in the other person’s shoes; have come to know something new about other people; realization of difference and diversity and of those can bring to the group; learning what other people’s needs are when putting oneself in the other person’s situation; [passion and commitment about the group and the betterment of the neighborhood; long lasting passion for the area and its people; love; would do anything to help another person; humanity; strong advocacy for the area and its people]

6. [POSITIVE vs. NEGATIVE ENERGY--Divisive personalities are not a good for a working group; the center of work becomes the distraction being disturbed by a bellicose person, and the tension the person brings to the fore becomes the center of discussion, waste of energy and of time; the goal of the group is lost in that energy and time consuming deliberations; style of the person joining the group needs to match the objectives and goals of the group, that is, the basic tenets of the group, its mission and its raison d’être as the improvement of the area rather than cat fighting; seeking to be more positive, have a positive outlook and proactive agenda for the neighbors]

7. [COMMITMENT TO THE WHOLE--Take on tasks, responsibilities, as a group member and follow through; commitment to the neighborhood and willingness to follow up on that desire to help; growing interest with time in the group; leader brings the important issues to the table for discussion—‘the right issues’—the big picture issues; make sure that not only your opinions should be heard but also the other people’s; partnerships with other groups and with the city; delegate tasks to others and help people grow in their roles; strengthening of the organization]

8. [LEARNING TO RELATE TO OTHERS—GROWING AS A PERSON-- Very positive experience; changed her way of thinking; realized that it is not about her but about relationships, it is beyond one’s ego; it’s helped her grow as a person and to learn about relationships, of the ways people and groups work together]

9. [CARING—UNDERSTANDING—TOLERATING—DISAGREEING—LEARNING- IMPACT--Disagreements with other group members; learned that it was not about her, that all the members care about the neighborhood in a genuine way; could see other people getting enriched, growing and enthusiastic from being part of the group; pride of all the work done in common; hard beginning, lot of learning, great impact of works with others; happiness in the realization that the work of the group will probably outlive the members and leave a good mark in the neighborhood]

10. [GROWN INTERACTION—BUILT TRUST--Great group interactions with government; good relationship throughout the years; improving relationship through the years by being strategic about the approach and relationship with the officials; rather than attacking government, they opted for discussing disagreements in private rather than scratching them on the local newspaper; relationship that no one wants to ruin; mutual help and reliance on each other; trust built throughout the years; keep a fluid communication]
11. [TRUST--Trust in the group; it is great that the city keeps the group in its good side; greatness, sense of awe]

12. [SHARED SENSE OF CARE--Shared interest of keeping the neighborhood nice, and genuinely interested in one another as a people; coming together of people who have similar interests; community then grows beyond that to a different, deeper, level; most basic level it’s shared interests; it then goes deeper as you grow into the group]

Amelia

1. [Temporality]

2. [Love; worries; caring; common concerns; work together; tired of just complaining; decided to start working to improve different aspects of the neighborhood] CARING; TURNING NEGATIVE INTO POSITIVE ENERGY

3. [Board-like group; organized by committees; structured; organization; what do people want?] ORGANIZATION

4. [Learning process to work with the city, how to go about them to get things accomplished; crime, zoning issues; constant communication with city officials makes for better and more shared governance; common connections; solidarity; fearless to crime; stick up together against crime; more communication with neighbors; bringing the people back out on the streets; taking ownership again of the place one lives and caring about it; from simple idea to a great success that brought people to care about each other and the neighborhood] COLLABORATION

5. [Common concerns but different ways of approaching problems; the structure in itself has kept away the people who solely wanted to complain; think and talk positive; turn the negative ideas into deliberation, into solutions; learning and growing from the structure in place; deliberation of disagreements; organization’s statements ought to depict the organization’s ideas not one person’s; togetherness; protective of the unity, of the group after a long learning process and recognizing its hard beginning along with its purely volunteer character; we let the differences be there when we can’t agree] DELIBERATION

6. [Love for neighborhood has grown tenfold; through thick and thin, through its progressing the group has learnt to strengthen the commitment of its participants by getting involved; action has outlived complaint and blame; make good things happen; small changes but great commitment] LEARNING TO BE/GROW TOGETHER

7. [Passion and commitment; skills and knowledge; being able to put things in a way to get it done; rhetoric; sharing; learning together; professionalism and credibility; right vs. wrong way of going about issues; argumentative vs. deliberative] MAKING THINGS HAPPEN

8. [Caring about your neighborhood, wanting to get involved; sharing your passion and bring passion onto others; encourage people through their talents; show them that you care about them and that what they have to say is important for the group; bring people together] ENCOURAGE OTHERS

9. [Grow and change in the neighborhood; pride on the neighborhood; want to become involved, do things; people come together and feel good; a real personal
investment; a piece of you stays in the neighborhood] PRIDE IN WORKING TOGETHER
10. [Argumentative vs. collaborative people; selfish vs. altruistic; disheartening vs. heart fulfilling actions and practices; negative vs. positive; selfish goals vs; the general good; overall more rewarding experiences than bad ones] AN OVERALL POSITIVE PROCESS
11. [Staying in close contact with city officials helps the organization; listening is more important than taking; open mindness, flexibility; there may be more than just our own version of the pieces to the puzzle; nurture relationships: better work within the group, more effective and more responsive feedbacks from the city] COLLABORATION
12. [Compromising would have resulted in a bad precedent; neighbors spoke and changed the councilmen’s minds; great success story: ‘citizens stood up and councilmen listened’; government listens and gives importance to what the ordinary person has to say, that is very rewarding, that was ‘big’; the group is more respected ever since by the city officials; they had to prove themselves first, with no support or ear from government; all by itself at first; human nature; a tricky business; it’s listening and knowing; constant dialog; communication at all times, even when you agree with others] STICKING UP FOR THE WHOLE
13. [Caring about the very fact that they live with—or in close proximity with—others; caring of how people can affect others; pride of the place where they live; of their have and have nots, of their aspirations and goals; people willing to work together; having different minds; genuinely interested in the well-being of others; interested in developing goals together that would help the whole; watching out for each other] GENUINELY CARING FOR OTHERS, A COMING TOGETHER; A REJOINER
14. [Wanting and needing different opinions, diversity] DIFFERENCE BRINGS RICHNESS

Melanie
1. [Temporality]
2. [People getting together and wanting to do good things for the whole neighborhood; started from the interests and concerns of a few –‘a small group’—and it grew from there; being part of it]
3. [Smaller groups spinning off of the larger groups; structure and organization]
4. [Crime issues, prostitution; the group got together to fight specific problems; it is easier with the backing of the group]
5. [Disagreements as part of group’s routine; voting and consensus; majority rules]
6. [Awareness; frustrating feeling; more prompt to do something when organized; backing of the whole group]
7. [Heart and soul of the group; clear partnership between local police officer and group]
8. [Keen interest in an issue of the neighborhood that needs to be improved; intense interest and being proactive as keys for a leader; trust, respect, recognition, admiration; follow through]
9. [Young blood; new and fresh ideas; take the organization one step further; good people follow good ideas; good ideas attract good people to the group; different ideas of different people; new leadership; dynamism and change]

10. [Mutual support and trust, even when you disagree; respect for each other; work differences out]

11. [From a reactionary group to getting along with the city officials well; city respects group; proactive rather than reactionary; being in the background]

12. [Grant to build own house; problems like prostitution; city does not work hard enough to eliminate that problem]

13. [Close proximity of people; interactions; for better or for worse everyone is a part of it; process of adjusting to be part of it; being accepting of others and tolerant to live in this neighborhood]

Nick

1. [Socialization at block party; commonalities; common concerns and needs; singularity of the neighborhood; non-traditional families, elderly, single folks; different, unique, dynamic; agreed on forming a group that would meet frequently; intense communication; crime, areas of wealth and areas of poverty in the neighborhood compels the neighbors to be even more communicated and has made them come together]

2. [Meetings are opportunities to get together and touch base; see how everyone is doing; check on each other especially in winter time — when you don’t see the neighbors in the street as much; caring for others; deliberate about concerns, activities, interests, disagreements; opportunity to voice our concerns and find solutions to problems; nourish friendships— ‘strengthen our bonds of friendship’]

3. [Turning a problem (the cats invasion) into a solution (program of neutering & releasing) as a group working together— ‘the group got together…’— taking through disagreements, deliberation; solution: being humane about a situation of power-over animals]

4. [Frequent disagreements; trusting others like ‘newcomers’; found a solution to a situation that put some neighbors at unease; deliberation, discussion]

5. [Love for the neighborhood and its people; the people make the place livable and ‘lovable’, looking forward to seeing the neighbors, the others; group is like a secondary family; watching out for you; humane need for that, for having others and interaction with others; no intention or capability of living in isolation; valuable group, valuable connections, life makes sense]

6. [Everyone matters, everybody is important, critical to the functioning of the group; everyone brings something; everyone notices the presence or absence of all people; expectation that these relationships last a long time]

7. [Being involved, talking to folks, interacting, as key aspects of being a group member; there is no leader in the hierarchical way; no hierarchies but rather flat structure; commune-like arrangement; great amount of personal responsibility; what matters is what each person bring to the table; success comes along with no one leader or hierarchy, but rather success comes with what each ‘personality’ brings to the table— ‘I don’t know if we would be successful if there was only one leader; we are successful because there is not just one leader. We have 40-50 very different personalities that happen to live in the same area’]
8. [Home rather than a house: a feeling rather than just a physical structure; networks and interactions is a home; neighborhood group is my home; intuition, hunch, good feeling from the get-go, from the day he saw the house, that it was the right place to live; genuine life to the neighborhood and the people who live there; that makes a difference; people and interactions make a whole difference, make the place different, a place as lived practices rather than just a physical construct]

9. [Best time is every time we get together and have a great time; disagreements, not reaching a decision or resolution; talking out of differences; follow what we feel stronger about; most horrible feeling is related to the violation of a neighbor’s loved dogs; group pulled together after that traumatic experience] Best

10. [Being part of a much larger group; giving in to the group and taking from it a bit; it’s a give and take; common recognition of the shared value of having a rich neighborhood with great people; holding neighbors accountable; acting collectively; common recognition of the benefit of interacting; caring about the neighborhood to be what it is, to be proud of it; high level of strength and pride of whom we are; celebration of diversity, of uniqueness, of who we are; great feeling; great place to be; sad feeling when anyone of the group decides to move out, something is being lost]

Martha

1. [Temporality]
2. [Interest in pertaining to a neighborhood group]
3. [Fundraising and community events; committee-based organization; structure]
4. [Crime and safety issues are the most noteworthy; people care about crime issues; housing issues, caring about the elderly, caring for the ones who can’t maintain the old historic houses; volunteering to repair elderly people’s housing has an impact in your neighborhood; my action can affect others, can improve other people’s lives]
5. [Meetings; compromise in particular issues]
6. [Fundamental rights of citizens; having a hard time as a society dealing with that; consensus in face of conflict; only proceed with whatever resolution everyone has agreed on; hard work done in committees; language toned down in larger group meetings; greater discussions and disagreements in smaller committee]
7. [Recognition of living in a non-traditional neighborhood; having an understanding of the neighborhood; it is were she wants to be, where she belongs; the neighborhood provides her with the kind of dynamic that she enjoys; diversity and difference; doing things, interacting with others rather than sitting down; she found in the neighborhood what she was looking for in life; group members are not easily offended—act maturely; more stable age group—less turmoil in their lives]
8. [Crucial energy level that is necessary to pursue the different tasks]
9. [Willingness to do things; high energy levels; being able to lead and guide others; strong leadership]
10. [Really positive experience; made new friends, got to meet her neighbors who she would not had under normal circumstances; different avenues to donate her time; enjoys working with different agencies]
11. [Working with and for the elderly, very gratifying; the most fulfilling; all you need is donate your time and enthusiasm; no need to have a lot of money to be involved; donation of time and enthusiasm; difficulty in getting new programs started; bureaucracy]

12. [Good relationships with the city and agencies; consensus; try to find solutions together rather than pointing fingers]

13. [Working with the local police department was very positive; honesty, straightforwardness with the neighbors about crime and safety issues and how to go about it; working together; helping each other; lack of communication with agencies would be a disadvantage]

14. [Living in similar circumstances, liking old houses, living in urban areas; putting oneself in the other person’s shoes; altruism]

Matthew

1. [Initiator –with some others-- of the group; interested in getting started a group; everyone kept talking about it so he finally it together; general interest before forming group; getting everybody together and setting a meeting]

2. [Dividing of the tasks; one person facilitates the meeting; division of the tasks upon specific interests of the block, committees; representative of each committee; a person responsible for each area, reporting on it]

3. [Controversial issue, disclosing personal information to newcomers in the neighborhood; discrimination; everyone has the same rights; reached an agreement by sitting down and talking through the problem; feelings-- wait and see how the group felt about it]

4. [Controversial issue of a conflicting scheduling, different opinions; worry that changing things will provoke mess, quite contrary result; it wasn’t such a big deal; people switched easily and were able to attend both events; solution found through taking and considering all parts to the whole, to the puzzle; compromise and conversation]

5. [Wishing that he didn’t know so much about his neighbors; knowing the neighbors in depth is more difficult than just saying ‘hi’ and ‘bye’; irritation with some neighbors; opposite effect of what anyone would anticipate of this kind of relationships; very positive beginning to get to know each other better; overall very positive relationships; knowing much more about one another than before the group got in place; along with the good stuff you get to know the bad sides of people; some people are very nitpicking, driving one crazy; we really have to work through issues in the meetings; not an easy task at all; a mixed bag about your neighbors, good and bad; mixed feelings]

6. [Everyone matters, otherwise some tasks would not get done; everyone matters, no one is so crucial that the group will fall apart if they were not present]

7. [Wanting to be active to be part of the group; the more people coming together, the better; organization, reflection before and after the meetings; thoughts and beliefs; very time consuming but felt that I needed to give my time to get things going in the beginning; being a leader is also about genuinely considering other people’s ideas, rather than coming to the meeting with your mind made up already; fairness issues; importance of having all at the table and all people’s thoughts and takes on issues; more democratic that way, people having more of a
say in the issue at hand, a better process than having one sole person making the decision]

8. [Very empowering experience; the getting together and start solving issues as a group, it was much easier and more fun than doing it by yourself; having an idea, sharing it, buying into it, having others be part of it; learning—when conversing—that others had similar ideas in mind; all of us coming together; empowering to do it with the group; fun experience; pulled the block together in ways that we considered each other friends; favors that would otherwise would have never asked the other person to help with; friends rather than just neighbors; neighborhood is much more a social group than a neighborhood; looking out for each other; every person’s idiosyncrasy; good and bad, but overall very positive]

9. [The fun exceeded our expectations; it’s all about the people; diversity and mixture of people; wanting to have a similar experience –wanting to live in your neighborhood; fun with local firefighters; extreme success in event; yelling at neighbors as a bad situation; being burnt out, not wanting to be part of a project or collaborate; preoccupation, giving up; feelings]

10. [Showing off the success of working together as a group to public officials; ‘our’ street, ‘our’ block’, representing the whole group]

11. [Decided that beautifying the block was something he wanted to see happen; seeing it happening and working towards it; having an idea and sharing with the group, having the group buy into it; taking the initiative and persuading others to join in; good relationship with city officials; feelings—being mad; officers responded because the cause was a group cause rather than an individual cause; more power to the group than to the individual]

12. [Community as the wholeness of your life, what makes your life possible; deep connection to the place; wanting to positively impact the area he cares for, the are he feels connected to; getting in touch; feelings –love; love for the place; wanting to make the place a better place that is more tied together; tying people together; consequence of bringing people together is that people care for the place and for others and therefore people do not want to see graffiti or crime; the more people unite, the more they care about the whole]

George

1. [Knowing my neighbors all around where I live; knowing everybody; talking to everyone; interacting with others constantly attracts him to the neighborhood]

2. [Tackling issues by committees; division of the tasks; uniqueness of the neighborhood]

3. [Prostitution as a problem; getting rid or minimizing problems; active in wanting to clean up crime; active in going to city council and asking them to free funds for police work in the area; frequent interactions with city officials; it is a give and take, that’s politics; concessions, exchanges, we learned to play the game; new blood in the board; you scratch by back I’ll scratch yours when dealing with government; presence in council meetings; city council realized that the issue was happening all around the city; mutual learning process; sitting down and talking through things, discussing; give and take to get things done in the neighborhood]

4. [Discussion of disagreements; minor disagreements; voting to make decision; mission is to improve he neighborhood; need for more public meetings; working
in stable committees and ad hoc committees; working together in one issue; following through all the different steps; getting things done by being persistent and working as a whole; need for people to know, and to decide whether a plan is of their liking; city should implement whatever the neighbors agree on]

5. [Sense of ownership in the neighborhood; own personal investments; own projects]

6. [Strong relationships between group and city officials; people are afraid of calling police; wanting to get police back to the streets, closer to people day to day; good old times of American urban history]

7. [Volunteer one’s own time is what is most valuable; donation of people’s time is a challenge; still minority of people doing the majority of the work; being a leader means taking up on an idea, run with it, follow through and make it happen, get people to agree to help you out and work with you; having an idea and being able to explain it, communicate it]

8. [Great group experiences; fun, easy and hard times; sometime feeling like blowing up; at the end he loves the work, you enjoy it; like work but more fun; most joy when putting your heart into it]

9. [Activities for different populations of the neighborhood; city helps out with neighborhood events; people get burnt out; resentment; people not getting along; people regaining the joy of working together for a common purpose besides disagreements; fighting; becoming friends; regaining friendships]

10. [More attention form city officials due to current group’s president; group developed strong relationships with the city government over time; forging relationships is a give and take over time; you don’t disagree in public, you don’t scratch the other person publicly; keep it to the good attitude; give and take game]

11. [Great experience that government ruled in favor of neighborhood group; mutual learning of working together over time; mutual trust gained over time]

12. [Group of people that comes together with the common interest of watching for each other; no need to agree, simply work together; interacting, talking with others; ironing out differences informally; people coming together; enjoying each other’s company]

13. [Idea of extending the successful experience of one block group to other streets; taking care of themselves; the larger group can do so much; can become umbrella of all the smaller groups, coordinating entity; burning out; taking ownership of your little corner and working together for its improvement; having success example as source material to help constitute other groups; having done it already, having the experience and knowledge, take those to form another street block; momentum, expand the idea, benefit from the dynamics and ongoing energy; burning bridges will not get the group anywhere; being mature—being able to settle—before we talk to them; a give and take with the city and the neighborhood group]

Becky

1. [Long process of personalities; gap in activism in age]

2. [Temporality]

3. [Group emerged from a catalyst, an issue-crisis; still defining itself; people started meeting regularly; still waiting for grocery store promised to neighborhood;]
meeting a lot of people; starting to do things together, like Arts in the Square; went to city council meetings, spoke with different people; wrong approach to the issue of crime, need to refocus the approach; helping the community by including all the people to solve problems, especially the disadvantaged groups; the value of education to fight bad habits and grow to be good citizens; focus of being proactive, taking the lead of the group]

4. [Issues that are going on in the neighborhood; promise not followed through by the city and developer; researching reasons; wanting to become a non profit organization to apply for grants and provide resources to disadvantaged people in the neighborhood, community outreach programs as main goal of the group; expensive study sponsored by the city was trashed; the city ignored what people wanted for the betterment of the neighborhood; government ignores people’s voices unless people are aligned to the city’s projects; paid no attention to the recommendations that the people suggested in that study, such as keeping the parking lots in the back of the stores, prioritizing the walkability of the neighborhood, etc.; group with reputation of trouble-makers; really complaining to back-door deals with people’s tax money]

5. [Genuine concerns for the elderly in the neighborhood; not having a grocery store hurts the neighborhood as a whole and especially this disadvantaged group; caring for the survival of the people and of the neighborhood; keep neighborhood businesses running while providing services to the people who don’t have cars to go to the suburbs to buy their groceries; needing things and services within the neighborhood; caring for the poor and disadvantaged; sustainability and lack of it; the right thing to do is the toughest because of special interests and because the loudest voice is the one whose pocket is the deepest; the profit making crave of the big money holders seems to be more important than the people of the neighborhood; she finds this a very disturbing situation]

6. [Most things in the neighborhood are personal; we react to them personally because it impacts our lives directly; in the neighborhood is where we exist, where our families live; personal and emotional reaction; everyone has a reason to join the group; everyone brings something unique to the table; seeing the whole to the part]

7. [Still loves the neighborhood despite the apathy of certain neighbors; rewarding but frustrating; antagonism, aggression; from outside the group looking in; political self-interest; different version of a story—the Taco Bell issue; the people wanted a safe and pedestrian friendly neighborhood; from doing a lot of research she discovered the city’s ulterior motives or running away the neighborhood oriented group in benefit of the business association; determination of the city mayor to let the neighborhood be guided by business owners rather than by the neighbors; group gained reputation of trouble making group; community oriented activities as opposed as consumerism activities; doing things as a group discretely to keep the dignity of the disadvantaged people; believing in the neighborhood and spreading out from the neighborhood outwards to larger projects within the city; contradictory responses from city officials, some of them were willing to help even after knowing this person’s group while the city mayor disrespected her and yelled at her; certain issues raise momentum for the group and others against]
it; frustration for those who can only see the part rather than the whole; get all the neighborhood together to discuss the grocery store issue and then take it to city council; get a balanced, realistic opinion of what the neighborhood as a whole ants; that’s the only way for the city to listen; city mayor consistently attempting to disassemble the group]

8. [Everyone plays a role in the group; each person brings an essential aspect to the group’s life]

9. [Caring about the neighborhood; needing to be more organized; MIRAFLORES is really well organized, they are a very well functioning group; each group has a different focus; lack of a group in the neighborhood that deals with social disparities in the neighborhood; unless the groups connect with the disadvantaged kids they will continue to commit crime in the neighborhood]

10. [Frustratingly rewarding; the most satisfying experience was spiritual one, from seeing the battered women shelter kids happy and their mothers relaxed in a Christmas celebration that the group had organized; spiritual connection with the community; rewarding experiences require hard work]

11. [Questioning a group member’s credibility; very detrimental; thinking through things will lead you to an understanding of the big picture, of the whole]

12. [Confrontational encounters with city officials; government suggesting that people in the group don’t exercise their right to freedom of speech, to disagreement; some people aligned with the mayor do not want the betterment of the whole neighborhood]

13. [Some good experiences of working with officials; heartbreaking when the group was made aside by city government and chose instead another group; hard because the people of the other group are friends with interviewee; even though groups have different focuses and may disagree in the style of handling things r approaching problems, they get along, they may be friends]

14. [Normative meaning of community—what it should be; every person has value; working together with others; everyone is part of the whole, you can’t take one segment out; it is the whole to the part; without the single part the whole will collapse; every part working together is necessary for the working of the whole; having the potential to be both good and bad; for the common good include all so they feel part of the community and that would make a better place to live]

Eric

1. [Need to talk, to be listened, to tell his story; assumption that the listener would not be willing to listen to all his story; willingness and need to tell; willing to share his past, how he got involved in the group and the history of the group; succession of events in the history of the group, in his story]

2. [Emerging of the group as a result of a crisis, of a disagreement with local government and developers; problems and reactions; something that should be there, that has been promised; it just isn’t there; neighbors’ reactions to unwanted projects in the neighborhood; attacking or undermining the harmony and peace of the neighborhood; green neon signs imposing ugliness in the beauty of a neighborhood]

3. [Exaggeration of the event; got involved in the neighborhood group when outrageous event was being planned; cheap, fast food mobile, trailer with drive
thru window in the middle of the Square; offensive move of developers toward the neighbors; disaster from any planning or design viewpoint; bothering move; what the square is about: harmony between a large residential area with a commercial strip in its middle artery; relationship between the two areas, feeding from each other; unique situation in Akron; two dependents areas of each other; wanting to maintain that uniqueness rather than becoming like the norm of mall strips around the country and places with no singularity; fast food restaurant was not a good idea for the center of a neighborhood; drunken people in the neighborhood in the morning; altering the neighborhood]

4. [Making a big sting, protesting in group, writing letters to the editor, stopping traffic, putting signs up; people standing up and talking to developers and city officials against fast food place; feeling of great group accomplishment, of a battled won by the neighbors against a big economic power]

5. [Getting to know others through the struggle; recognition that it was better to stick together to prevent bad things to happen to the neighborhood; need to keep working together; need to become organized in order to have a say in local decision making] [Made him feel much closer to the people and more part of the neighborhood; while it drives him crazy; having to figure out how to get no-like minded people on the same page; it takes creativity, imagination and deliberation; differences is a very positive thing; you can then tell the city not to mess with you because you are powerful now as a whole, as a group]

6. [Formed group and created a garden in the area where fast food place was going to go; applied for city grant funds, got them, maintained the park collectively with other residents and business owners for five years; good relationship between residents and business owners]

7. [Another problem: city planned widening of the main street in the HS; project anti- the pedestrian-friendly spirit of the neighborhood; it is about the people, about the people walking, not about the buildings or about the historic district, you want people to know that the HS as a gathering place; people and cars don’t mix; plan that attempted to undermine the essence, the characteristic sense of the HS neighborhood, a death sentence for the neighborhood]

8. [Mayor appears to be a problem-solver while he really is the person who creates the problems to begin with; classic manipulation of city mayor and developer to get the neighbors to approve the developer’s plans of building a strip in the neighborhood; asking the people to reach consensus; problem: developer trying to do with the neighborhood what he wants with no concern of people’s plans and wishes; that project could kill the neighborhood, it is a substantial change in the neighborhood, and that would impose a crucial change in its dynamics; neighborhood politics; trashing people’s recommendations arrived at through consultant’s aid; temporary success for the neighbors, it then faded away; main mayor’ and developer’s philosophy: money speaks, people shut up; do they have the right to impose their ideas over the neighbors’ who live there?; people wanting to preserve the uniqueness of the place and ultimately their feelings and lives attached to the place] [Bad relationship with mayor; public discredit of the group by mayor, public official with bad temper, can’t stand disagreement or people thinking different]
9. [Decisions revolve around the money not about what the people want; cool to be selfish; not liking liars]

10. [Watchdog organization; leader digs up dirt in deals that involve the neighborhood; wishing he didn’t know so much about the neighborhood so he would not be so pissed off all the time; loosely organized group, around crisis; need not to get stepped on by the mayor and developers; thanks to the group working together opposing an issue anti-pedestrian friendly the group achieved something very powerful and prevented that the neighborhood became deeply and negatively transformed; group that responds to crises putting the people before anything—this is about people!]

11. [Arguments all the time, how to bring different ideas to fruition, from conflicting and opposing ideas to getting all on the same page; very unique neighborhood, people chose to live there and put up with all the troubles; ties among the people living in the place; that doesn’t happen anywhere else in the city]

12. [Leader knows how to follow where the mass is going; knows how to place him/herself before all the others and knows —by a hunch, intuition, presentment—what their path is and where the mass is going in order to place him/ herself ahead of them]

13. [Incredibly rewarding experience because of working with others, doing things with other people, together, just being in a group; becoming involved with other people, getting to know others; city officials hate us because our power may encroach theirs, we don’t get in line] [Gratifying and best experience of being outside with many people in a cold rainy day for eight hours planting plants and flowers for the neighborhood garden, for all; great feeling; inspirational to hear compliments from mayor; great communal accomplishment; completely worth the effort and being out in the cold; consensus building thing is a scam]

14. [Power of group of independent minded people; mutual trust; power of the group is more powerful than any amount of money, political will or government; it goes beyond power; developing of friendships and good feelings with other people; feel a part of something larger, bigger, nobler; most rewarding than any invention of the imagination, it is a discovery; great to know the people who live in the same place as you; who share some things and don’t share others; it’s like a big family]

Jerry

1. [Temporality; same people who show up and same people who don’t show up]

2. [Feeling that some of the responsibility to keep up the neighborhood lays within the neighbors themselves; block party to get all together; decision that no one should have to clean up and do other activities by themselves, decided to break up in committees; wanting to be involved in what pertains, changes and happens in his own street, taking responsibility, ownership; sense of community]

3. [Specific problems, discussions around who to go about their solutions; making sure that all the sides are considered in the decision, everyone’s opinion in counted in]

4. [Scrapping off stickers, and cleaning up graffiti from the street; taking the initiative; to make the street look a lot better; did work on cleaning nearby streets]
as well—we figured that while we were at it we might as well take care of it; selflessness]

5. [Disagreement he did let go because it was over a small thing; other projects he could get involved in; you have to be patient, easy going and realistic because people may not like or want the same as you; knowing when to step down and let most people decide; picking the battles, what are the important issues and what are the least important ones; judgment and put oneself in the other person’s shoes by stepping down or understanding where the other person comes from in life]

6. [Feeling of ownership in the place; personal investment; seeing the things we have done as a group; bothered when sees something bad happening to any aspect of the neighborhood, like more graffiti and stuff, hard work, lot of common effort, vested interests in improving the common place, in the whole; wondering why more people do not do the same; really caring for the neighborhood and the neighbors; making a difference; making improvements in the neighborhood; not looking for perfection but for a better place where to live; each of us make up the city--the city is us, it’s not just some entity there to clean up after you; need to take responsibility and ownership of your street; connected to the place and to the people]

7. [Importance of a bigger area that nucleates smaller ones, and bring people together, keep them up to date with what’s going on in the larger area; making a difference; knowing that you are part of a bigger group—a larger, common, aim; very motivating; helps you a lot as an individual and as a group to keep working together; motivation]

8. [Pride, motivation, wanting to make things better; realizing that it’s up to you to make a difference; fortunate to have so many people in the neighborhood who care for the neighborhood and make an effort; leader needs to communicate to others, and stay motivated, organized, and keep everyone going and moving; no rules or overhead checks or deadlines in a group like this; it takes a good leader to keep the ball rolling; make up some rules and set deadlines for things to get done in the group]

9. [Improvement of our street; things that seem little or insignificant to a passer-by, but they are big to a person who lives there, paying attention because of your ownership of the place-- magnitude of the issue changes whether you inhabit the place or just pass by; changes and improvement do make a difference when you live in the place, invested feelings and practices, relationships; added bonus of getting to know and interact with the people around you, watching out for each other, noticing what’s normal from what is not—what belongs to the place and what doesn’t; getting organized and knowing each other helps protect the whole, the harmony of the neighborhood; working with others—shared practices over time—make people more patient and tolerant with each other, more approachable; being fortunate and spoiled for doing things together all the time-- making sure neighbors don’t take those practices for granted]

10. [Being together with your neighbors, enjoyable experience, doing things together and taking common pride; feeling good; pride; the best part is spending time with your neighbors, sharing the community feeling; neighbors become friends-- not just next door ‘neighbors’; development of friendships; doing things together]
because we care—sharing the sentiment of care for the place and for others; some days feeling like not doing a scheduled group activity but after doing it anyways the feeling is awesome, end up enjoying much more than what you originally thought; digging out trash, cleaning up (yaky activities) filled with joy and a good time—it’s never as bad as you think; spending time with great people and accomplish things together and take pride on those things; worthy experiences

11. [Good feeling that higher-up city officials recognize and acknowledge the neighbors’ activities, projects and effort; good feeling that the officials came to our houses, to our neighborhood unofficially; good that someone else besides neighbors and friends notice what we do]

12. [Extra protection and response from government officials because they know that we care for our neighborhood, we stand up for the neighbors and our activities; more responsive to us than other areas because they know that we are always watching, we care; if you don’t care, don’t expect resolutions to problems; protection of the neighbors and the neighborhood by police; its downside to that: too much intervention]

13. [People working together, taking pride on that and being genuinely happy of being together; community is a fuzzy area, not a black and white line; it is caring about other people and communicating; common concerns; hard to do work by yourself; being lucky to have found neighbors and friends who, like me, cared to make things better in the neighborhood; people like that are all over, you don’t need to seek them, I came across them accidentally; take the initiative, someone has to get started, you can’t wait always for the city or other to do work; makes people so much happier; enjoys seeing neighbors; he may not agree or may not go on a vacation with them, but they can work together and enjoy each other’s company, what matter is that people get involved in common tasks; being part of the group has benefited him in ways he would have never imagined having he not gotten involved; branching out of projects in many directions, all positive; learning experience over time; unless you get involved you will never know--knowing in the doing, practical knowledge of community; fulfilled person’s life; natural for him to interact with neighbors as he would do with friends or family]

Kevin
1. [Temporality; being involved in several groups]
2. [Desire to be active in an organization, wanting to work with others; previous knowledge of some group members]
3. [Organization, structure, agenda; encouraging people to be more active; projects, strategy; trying to work with different city officials and other organizations; community efforts to work with other groups and people; reflecting on successes and failures of the projects and their reasons]
4. [Issues: arts in the square grocery store; education campaign; up to whoever develops the business—money speaks over people’s wishes]
5. [Constantly disagreeing; voting; majority rules; small democracy]
6. [Frustrating at times; thought of moving out; has invested in the neighborhood; not knowing whether to stay or to leave; priority should be to sustain the nature of the neighborhood, its defining aspects: walkable, pedestrian-friendly, businesses]
8. [Energy, opportunity, time, experience, wisdom are the life of the group; everyone is essential in a volunteer organization; welcoming aspect of a group; any new person brings something new: new skills and ideas; working together from the grounds-up; people may not get along—rub each other the wrong way]

9. [Defining the mission of the group; show up and be willing to work; be able to listen makes a good leader]

10. [Great experience of being active in the neighborhood; internally and externally rewarding; rewarding by the whole experience]

11. [Looks in kids faces at event organized by the group was the most rewarding experience; fun, joy, freedom, art, painting; arguing, fighting, not listening enough, not moving forward enough]

12. [President of the group does most the interacting with government officials]

13. [Lack of good communication with government officials regarding the grocery store issue]

14. [Sense of happiness, sense of belonging; it makes you feel good; sense of being home, Highland Square as home]

15. [Some truths about these organizations: organization and structure are conductive to the group to function well, to grow and to survive; business-like organization; groups are personality driven, so you need people with vision to bring people together and make things happen; need for a structure, to plan, for a mission beyond crises; community center would help the group flourish; great organizations in the area because people put their hearts in what they believe; having no money does not mean not caring, not being in love with the area, and not having any weight within the city; looking for and wanting a community]

Grant

1. [Temporality]

2. [Having more time to give—giving; functional versus dysfunctional groups; wanting to belong to a functional, legitimate and well-organized group; documents, legitimate roles; willing to listen vs. not willing to accept dissent]

3. [Seeking for an organized structure: agenda, timing, organized discussions, efficiency, professionalism]

4. [Brainstorming idea brought to the table; willing to offer support; sharing, trusting; listening to others; respect for the individual and his/her ideas]

5. [Shoot you down, not willing to hear dissent, adversarial people—do not deal well with disagreements or politics; democracy vs. dictatorship brought to a group; open vs. closed; not positive working environment; not legitimately elected leaders vs. legitimate process; more like governing body—bureaucracy]

6. [Always loved the neighborhood; nice to see that groups are dedicated to improve the neighborhood, openness in terms of boundaries; inside vs. outside; connections with other people outside the group itself; mature and professional people—political; people coming together for the sake of the common good; success in following through and getting things done and projects accomplished; determination and dedication; caring]

338
7. [Having the soul and heart in the organization; charisma, decency and energy; get people to trust themselves in undertaking projects; smooth over problems among members; being a great person]

8. [Legitimacy of the group and its processes, like public recognition, informing the public, having an office, etc.—bureaucracy; being able to listen, be open to diversity and different opinions; representing the neighborhood; being able to delegate to other people; recognize that other people may do the job better than you; burnt out; micromanagement; being an administrator; sharing]

9. [Optimistic, positive, enthusiastic cannot be underestimated— the life of the group; vitality]

10. [Integrity, honesty, commitment of the group; follow through with actions; professional and optimistic; inconsistency and outright lies; racism and pompousness; bad impression of the neighborhood vs. the opposite]

11. [Burning bridges in the long run doesn’t pay off; achieving something unheard off before as a group, great effect in the neighborhood; presence; public acknowledgement of the group]

12. [Community as anything that makes you feel connected and a part of something larger, a bigger community, a bigger cause, a group of people with common interests; a question of identity; between yourself and the outside world—inside vs. outside yourself; connections; emotionally and psychologically connected; main aim of group is to get people together through different projects—means; everlasting changes]

Peter

1. [Temporality]

2. [Concerns about neighborhood issues: crime, health, housing; needing some clout within the city to get things accomplished; make citizens aware of the different neighborhood issues; need to have meetings, a formal organizational structure; forming a non-profit organization.]

3. [Discussion actions to undertake in order to solve the problems]

4. [Problems: lot of litter, junk, trash in the neighborhood; worked in collaboration with the City’s health department and got help from them to clean-up; maintained by the neighbors for many years; nowadays non-sponsored clean-ups: the neighbors take upon the task of cleaning up without any type of help; help among neighbors to get trash removed, transported and taken to dumpster sites; solidarity with those who don’t have trucks to transport all the trash; lack of neighborhood funds; what is bringing the neighborhood down?; other projects: run down sidewalks; run-down housing, violation of zoning violations; absentee owners; historic preservation issues]

5. [Always times when people don’t agree; trying to be democratic, majority rules, decisions that way; problem of explosive, uncontrollable, personalities which don’t deal well with dissent; unfortunate; difficult to control those; right to disagree]

6. [Very discouraging that people don’t want to get involved and just complain; by joining the neighborhood organization realization of the ways that things can get done]
7. [Organization motivators: active leaders who get along well with government officials; other people are also crucial like his wife, because she is in charge of the beautification site]
8. [Belonging to the group is a matter of interest; freedom of speech; leader motivates and persuades people to do the tasks they are undertaking; kind of a salesperson]
9. [Very rewarding and interesting experience; meeting a lot of good people and people that he does not enjoy being around; being able to get other people involved in the organization—it’s about people]
10. [Weekend clean-ups as the best experience; litter is followed by general neighborhood decay; tough working with people, that’s why he stepped down from the board; rather than dealing with people he would instead do physical work in the beautification site; cyclical preparation and maintenance of the site]
11. [Collaboration with different city departments, good relationships forged throughout the time; would like to have more police presence; help from city to get concerts and other events going]
12. [Working in the park and beautification projects with other people has been the best experience; not good relation with city councilperson of the ward, very defensive person, belligerent, doesn’t like dissent; he takes credit for things that the different city departments have helped the group]
13. [People who care about each other and work for the benefit of all; goal is to make a better place to live]

Mary
1. [Survey questions make her feel uncomfortable]
2. [Involved in different HS neighborhood improvement projects for a long time; trying to save the neighborhood’s inner characteristics; principle of bringing people together through a social event; knowing each other and interrelating]
3. [Politically active people; rezoning issue brought them together; unified their efforts, common concerns]
4. [Informal meetings; discussions of the issue sat hand; facing the city planning department and asking for the logic of their impositions onto the neighborhood; impractical and senseless projects; lack of cooperation among people—business owners and neighbors]
5. [Issues: expansion of main thoroughfare, theater, grocery store; developer not understanding where the neighbors come from, refuses to listen to them; neighbors trying to reach an agreement, to compromise; between the developer and the city the neighbors are having a hard time to make their place what they wish it to be, hard to deal with; she is becoming more disenchanted and started not to attend the meetings as often, she sees the leader pulling out her hair over the lack of cooperation and understanding of city officials and developer; city stands up for developer and business owners rather than for the neighbors; impractical and senseless project of widening the street]
Recognizing that doing things her way was not the best for the neighborhood; stepping down from leading position, letting others take over and run festival, it worked out just fine.

Convinced that cities need to operate through smaller units—neighborhoods—than the centralized government that treats all the places as if they were the same; distinctive neighborhoods in Akron that attract specific people; HS: over concentration of people with great needs; need for a people support-system and that you can find in the neighborhoods; cities work better when understood from the smaller units up because people know each other, look after one another and knows who belongs and who doesn’t; but you need people to know each other first, the people coming together; better than having the police patrol the area.

[Organization depends on the current leaders for their existence; awful weight in leader’s shoulders; burn out; city is not playing fair with the group and the neighborhood at large; city does not welcome neighbors’ active involvement in the making of their areas; city does not welcome disagreements]

Showing up and willing to spend time; dealing with politicians takes a really strong stomach; having enough faith; to be a leader takes to listen to people, have energy and enthusiasm, be able to recognize that it’s about the neighborhood and not about you—not egoistic.

One of the most rewarding things that she did in her life; be able to get people involved in your ideas and work together; joy in doing things with others.

[Getting people together and being able to affect the neighborhood and outside's perception of the neighborhood; bad feeling when people through their power at you]

Some friendly relationships within the city; overall experiences of officials to just wanting to have people’s input to fulfill formal process not because they were going to use people’s ideas or because they cared.

Rewarding experience related to the festival; devastating racial practices for the neighborhood; someone wanting to kill a neighborhood initiative or idea- the festival- was a bad experience.

[Shared value of diversity, sense of identity, a place where you belong; value of neighborhoods to keep human beingness alive, personal relationships, break down the big areas into smaller units; neighborhoods enable people and relationships to become the center; a sense of belonging]

Juliet

Since the beginning of the group; melting of organizations; threat from Taco Bell prompted the group to come to existence; involved in many neighborhood associations since the 1970s.

Interest in history and preservation; exhibited leadership skills, people invited her to be part of groups.

[Not too many meetings in the last time of the PAGODA; discussions on the negative things happening in the neighborhood; goal is to present the problem and gather support; negative thing: tearing down of neighborhood grocery store and the unfulfilled promise of a new one—betrayal; healthy neighborhood needs to be merged in body and soul; grocery store is thus important; gathering and sharing of information; protesting, public expression of disapproval and anger of the]
neighbors; attempting to bring this element back to the neighborhood to make it healthier, active and preserve its walking community aspect—pedestrian friendly; unique area within the city defined by its people, clearly active and aiming at doing things within the neighborhood, contributing to the works of the neighborhood; not everybody thinks the same; conflict; different opinions on the directions the group should be taking; existence of many needs]

4. [Neighborhood grocery store; Highland theater as landmark of the neighborhood needs to be preserved; threatened; grassroots organization with no big money behind; big hearts and souls; work toward building; putting all the pieces together; landmark owner has no interest in talking; hiring attorneys to represent the neighbors; speaking from a position of power may make things happen; being able to get people behind a project, get people to buy into a good idea; neighborhood theater and grocery stores as main concerns for the neighbors]

5. [People disagree most definitely, most times in the meetings; dropping out from the meetings and the group; people have different ideas of how to handle the neighborhood problems; lack of people coming together on an issue, which makes things fade away rather than making them—people and ideas—stronger; group gets stuck in the disagreement without moving forward; meetings fade away, people get frustrated, and drop out; crisis in the organization: it has not been meeting, people dropping out, leader not being followed, burnt out of a couple of people doing all the work in the name of the whole; need to get more people involved; changes, moving to a different leadership, new board, new meeting times and locations, and a new group status—nonprofit; great effort and interest to improve the bad situation of the group; leader seeks help in others; need for people to sit at the decision making table and getting their ideas validated; one person can’t be a group, need for breaking up of tasks to get them done, sharing chores]

6. [Love for the neighborhood, its people and its dynamics, knowledge, realization in the doing-with-others—the more I get involved, the more I know, the more I realized the value of this place; diverse neighborhood, open-minded people; privilege of knowing all kinds of people, artists, intellectuals, different-minded people; realization of how incredible this neighborhood is; frustration is to try to get all the people on the same page; great value in diversity, extreme power that we could use to pull the neighborhood together, it is a pity to see that it’s not being done]

7. [Powerful force but unfortunately no followers; recognizing negative outlook of leader and working in restructuring the whole organization including a more likeable, popular—‘with universal draw’—leader; knowing when to introduce changes, when to step down and let others take the lead, knowing from inside what is hurting and what is benefiting the group; assessing from knowing in practice the strengths and weaknesses of the whole; being able to express ideas well, to lead well, to have a conducive style to bring the organization together]

8. [Showing up, expressing an interest; hopefully people will be utilized according to their interests and skills and what they can bring to the group; leader needs to be knowledgeable of the issues happening, non combative, and keep the people involved, the real trick; not about winning or losing it is about listening and
including the whole in the process of going about problems and issues; everyone has a role in the group]
9. [Positive change in the group; frustration that the group is not working at its fullest potential; diversity; pride; the arts; potential of the people, in diversity; better things could be done with such immense potential of the people who inhabit it, not being used; knowing the history of the neighborhood, why the general situation has been decaying in the last 30 years; she knows what’s behind each building, she knows the people in the neighborhood and the reasons of why some things are happening; antagonism of the mayor toward the neighborhood; negative, non-supportive attitude of the city toward the group and the neighborhood; need for a group leader who would bring all the things together and pull the group back together; frustration of knowing the potential of this community while witnessing its wasting away]
10. [Festival –Arts in the Square—a demonstration of who we are; could be much better; has not reached its full potential; it could be much better; having the right to determine the fate of the community; not being allowed to do so by the current local administration, not democratic; extremely frustrating aspect; being tied up and not being able to make the decisions we want for our neighborhood; ‘put your mouth where your money is’—people don’t count as money does]
11. [Previous mayor was much more open to cooperation with the people, to listen to them; this mayor is more authoritarian, money-driven—put your mouth where your money is—lack of collaboration with the neighbors; very frustrating; mayor makes her feel very uncomfortable; money that you’ve got to invest defines whether we can sit down at the table with the mayor or not; sit down and shut up; temporality]
12. [Housing rehabilitation project was positive; frustrating to work with the business district association; city ignores recommendation from neighbors and from a formal planning study –Main Street type; walking community, need to preserve that; city should respect and support the neighborhood—walking community—character with theater and pedestrian friendly layout rather than boycott it; not real collaboration between neighborhood and city; it is the mayor’s way or the hard way; no respect for the human being, for s/he who lives in the neighborhood]
13. [Pulling people together rather than dividing people; taking pride on working together and on the neighborhood; gathering place where people in need may find help, may find others; ‘seeing’ a situation, having an idea, running with it, make it happen; coming together as a whole to help others—the needy; sense of place that draws people together, communicating; having a program and projects that people create and follow through—like the Main Street program—would tie the whole neighborhood together; a project of their own; would be a wonderful thing for people to take ownership in the activities that would impact the whole; community as a family: not thinking alike but caring for each other]
14. [Unlike the suburbs, people living here choose to have a community—choosing to have a community, knowing your neighbors and interacting with them –talking, seeing, and doing things together]
Major themes per person

Paul
1. Reach out—recruitment; Group as a neighborhood leader
2. Working with others; group & process benefits; caring; knowing each other; Agreements—Disagreements; Opportunities; Practical politics
3. Interactions, connections beyond oneself; Otherness—Togetherness—In-between; Expanding outwards—process of discovering; stability

Tracie
1. Bringing life to neighborhood
2. Collaboration; Common concerns: Crime activity; Hardships; Need for proactive approach toward crime; Deliberation
3. Counting on others, company—otherness; Caring; Togetherness; Watching out for each other, joint effort; Empowerment of the whole; Bonding; friendships; family-type feelings
4. Leadership: glue that brings people and ideas together

Kathy
1. Relationships, networking; force of the group to deal with evil; empowerment of the whole; collaboration with agencies and groups to get things done; cooperation; mutual benefit; improving things; make the place a better place to live; taking the initiative; making a difference; looking out for each other; reach out to others; fellowship; knowing others, new relationships, knowing of opportunities—through the group
2. Organization, strategies to improve various aspects of the neighborhood; success stories; from a person’s idea to a group activity; patrolling the neighborhood, making a presence, fearlessness, attachment to the place; structure to deal with order and conflict in the group: majority rules, voting
3. Everyone matters; uniqueness; fullness of the group and individual experiences through diversity; come together as one body; real accomplishments as a group; learning together; becoming a part of a larger aim; rewarding and irreplaceable experience; genuine joy of sharing with others; developing real friendships based on substance
4. External skepticisms

Stella
1. Planning things together; deliberating; “maturity” when dealing with controversy; External skepticisms; internal and external non-confrontational philosophy; Knowing the channels to get things done and using them; need to cooperate with agencies, to know others to keep neighborhood safe;
2. Feeling of deeper involvement and connectedness; knowing that with others change is possible; need to reach out to others and recruit people to preserve and nurture the livelihood and presence of the group; Worthwhile experience; your heart is in the group, in the common action; People coming together, sticking together; togetherness
3. Uniqueness within diversity; knowing people’s strengths and abilities and putting them to good use
4. Caring for the neighborhood; goal is the betterment of all; take ownership of the place; make a difference; Sense of shared pride; external respect and recognition

Gary
1. Preservation and safety of our place; sense of ownership; work together and accomplishing what would be impossible by oneself; Being part of a larger endeavor; need to belong; realizations, caring for each other; watching out for each other; opening of the eyes; learning to work with others; opening of the self to others; people working together can turn around a pernicious situation in the neighborhood, like crime; Define the issues in neighbors’ terms rather than in the external agents’; on that depends the type of external relationships; Internal and external disagreements until sitting down and deliberating; mutual learning; benefits of coming together; Community is a very fluid concept; has no boundaries, it is always people looking for each other toward the general good rather than just my backyard; selflessness
2. Democracy vs. dictatorship; legitimacy of the group vs. manipulation; be a good listener to lead and create democracy; Gratifying and frustrating experiences; antagonisms
3. Everyone counts, makes a difference; need to recruit new people who could bring new skills to the group

Jennifer
1. Caring about the people as the sole requisite to be part of a neighborhood group; opposition to the foreclosing of categories and labels such as gender, race, age, etc.; it should be about caring for others and for the neighborhood rather than looking into people’s physical characteristics; hates stereotypes and labels; being a human, not a thing; Thankful for being able to speak and share experiences; need of speaking up
2. Belonging to a larger goal; Protection; care for others; the pursuit of a noble cause; selflessness, altruism; offering your best, giving; neighborliness; Interest and passion for life; improving neighborhood’s living conditions; rewarding experience; being able to be oneself; respect and acceptance; caring for the whole brings people together; changes that happen inside you through the group; grow and expand by bringing new people, new viewpoints, diversity, and make it change as its members may envision; Honor and pride to be part of a great group; Friendships; Benefits of being part of a group: information, knowledge, opportunities and possibilities; interacting with others without feeling scared; taking pride in your neighborhood; leave a mark, your mark, in the group to help others, the future generations
3. Seek to draft passionate people; neighbors as caretakers, neighborhood group as neighborhood leaders

Chris
1. Being involved—being able to belong; having desire; wanting to help others; inner need to take upon tasks; Passion; altruism, make a difference; common concerns even when disagreeing in how to approach them

2. Difficulties of volunteer organizations, find committed people, real champions, drivers who take upon tasks and make things happen; personality driven organizations; good intentions but no time

3. Organization, communication with larger community; Great social networking experience; working together is easier than by oneself; tremendous learning; External appreciation; recognition;

4. Uniqueness of the place and its people; Fuzzy Boundaries; dynamism; growth, change; problems like crime; it all boils down to the people; people is all that matters

Eva
1. Opening of the eyes toward neighborhood’s deeper needs --beyond beautification--; love for the neighborhood; eclecticism; neighborliness; joint learning; experience; Being able to give back to the neighbors and neighborhood; pull people together; uniqueness; Greater good, broader goals besides one’s little niche; Feeling of joy when people come together as a whole; appreciation

2. Open forum, discussion; agreements and disagreements

Laura
1. Common concerns; Demoralization--collaboration— the bringing together of all into the one; Shared sense of care--; Commitment to the whole; Faith in community building

2. Open and inclusive deliberation; Learning to relate to others—growing as a person; Learning with time & experience to work with others—understanding others—putting oneself in the other person’s shoes; Grown interaction—built trust; understanding—tolerating—disagreeing—learning- impact; Positive vs. Negative energy

Amelia
1. Caring; turning negative into positive energy; Making things happen; Sticking up for the whole; Genuinely caring for others, a coming together; a rejoinder

2. Organization; internal and external collaboration; deliberation; encourage others

3. Learning to be/grow together; Pride in working together; An overall positive process; Difference brings richness

Melanie
1. Aim: Wanting to do good things for the whole neighborhood;

2. Process: Mutual support and trust, even when you disagree; respect for each other; work differences out; for better or for worse everyone is a part of it; process of adjusting to be part of it; being accepting of others and tolerant to live in this neighborhood; Disagreements as part of group’s routine; voting and consensus; majority rules; from reactionary group to partnering with others, evolution, growth; Young blood; new and fresh ideas
Nick
1. Socialization; common concerns and needs; singularity and dynamism of the neighborhood; Meetings are opportunities to get together and touch base; no intention or capability of living in isolation;
2. Love for the neighborhood; secondary family; everyone matters and is critical to the functioning of the group; home rather than a house, a feeling rather than just a physical structure; valuable connections, life makes sense; best time is when sharing with others; Being part of a much larger group, endeavor
3. Turning a problem into a solution; giving in to the group and taking from it a bit; it’s a give and take; personal responsibility; success comes with what each ‘personality’ brings to the table;

Martha
1. Pertaining to; she found in neighborhood group what she was looking for in life; group members are not easily offended—act maturely; more stable age group; got to meet her neighbors who she would not had under normal circumstances; donate her time; volunteering, caring for the disadvantaged, impact in your neighborhood; improve other people’s lives; the kind of dynamic that she enjoys; diversity; Working with and for the others, very gratifying, most fulfilling; all you need is donate your time and enthusiasm; Willingness to do things; high energy levels; a non-traditional neighborhood; people care about crime issues;
2. Compromise in particular issues; consensus in face of conflict
3. Honesty, straightforwardness with public agencies (crime); working together; helping each other; lack of communication with agencies would be a disadvantage; Fundamental rights of citizens; having a hard time as a society dealing with that

Matthew
1. Controversial issue solved by sitting down and talking through the problem; solution found through taking and considering all parts to the whole, to the puzzle; compromise and conversation; feelings of the group; a better process than having one sole person making the decision; importance of having all at the table and all people’s thoughts and takes on issues; genuinely considering other people’s ideas
2. Needed to give my time to get things going; Very empowering experience; the getting together and start solving issues as a group, it was much easier and more fun than doing it by yourself; having an idea, sharing it, buying into it, having others be part of it; learning along with others; all of us coming together; empowering to do it with the group; fun experience; pulled the block together in ways that we considered each other friends; fun exceeded our expectations; it’s all about the people; diversity and mixture of people; seeing things happening; having an idea and sharing with the group; officers responded because the cause was a group cause rather than an individual cause; more power to the group than to the individual; more tied together; love for the place; wanting to make the place a better place; Community as the wholeness of your life, what makes your life
possible; deep connection to the place; Everyone matters, more people coming together, the better; division of the tasks upon specific interests.

George
1. Knowing my neighbors all around where I live; knowing everybody; talking to everyone; interacting with others constantly; uniqueness of the neighborhood; active in wanting to clean up crime; mission is to improve the neighborhood; working together in one issue; being persistent and working as a whole; Sense of ownership in the neighborhood; own personal investments; own projects; Volunteer one’s own time is what is most valuable; Great group experience; most joy when putting your heart into it; burn out; resentment; regaining friendships; common interest of watching for each other; no need to agree, simply work together; interacting, talking with others; ironing out differences informally; people coming together; enjoying each other’s company; extending the successful experience; taking ownership of your little corner and working together for its improvement

2. Active in going to city council; mutual learning; sitting down and talking through things, discussing; give and take to get things done in the neighborhood; frequent interactions with city officials; it is a give and take, that’s politics; concessions, exchanges, we learned to play the game; new blood in the board; you scratch by back I’ll scratch yours when dealing with government; city should implement whatever the neighbors agree on; mutual trust gained over time with government

Becky
1. Wholeness: Most things in the neighborhood are personal; we react to them personally because it impacts our lives directly; everyone brings something unique to the table; seeing the whole to the part; personal and emotional reaction; Neighborhood is a long process of personalities; Beginning: catalyst, crisis prompted beginning of group; need to become more organized; learn from another well functioning and structured neighborhood group; groups with different focuses; lack of a group in the neighborhood that deals with social disparities in the neighborhood; need to connect with the disadvantaged to fight problems; Being proactive, taking the lead; community outreach programs as main goal of the group; get all the neighborhood together to discuss the grocery store issue; thinking through things will lead you to an understanding of the big picture, of the whole

2. Caring: Genuine concerns for the elderly in the neighborhood, Caring about the neighborhood; caring for the poor and disadvantaged; sustainability; spreading from the neighborhood outwards to larger projects within the city; Helping the community by including all the people; disadvantaged groups; value of education to fight bad habits and grow to be good citizens; each person brings an essential aspect to the group’s life; spiritual connection with the community; Normative meaning of community—what it should be; every person has value; working together with others; everyone is part of the whole, you can’t take one segment out; it is the whole to the part; without the single part the whole will collapse; every part working together is necessary for the working of the whole; having the
potential to be both good and bad; for the common good include all so they feel part of the community and that would make a better place to live.

3. Disagreements and relationships: the city ignored what people wanted for the betterment of the neighborhood; government ignores people’s voices unless; special interests external to the neighborhood; from outside the group looking in: political self-interest; disturbing situation; frustration for those who can only see the part rather than the whole; heartbreaking when the group was made aside by city government and chose instead another group; hard because the people of the other group were her friends; even though groups have different focuses and may disagree in the style of handling things and approaching problems, they get along, developing of friendships outside the group in “opposing” group; Frustratingly rewarding experience; Confrontational encounters with city officials; government suggesting that people in the group don’t exercise their right to freedom of speech and disagreement; interests foreign to the neighborhood itself

Eric
1. A crisis, disagreements with local government and developers, unfulfilled promise; problems and reactions; protesting; attacking or undermining the harmony and peace of the neighborhood; wanting to preserve the uniqueness of the place and ultimately their feelings and lives attached to the place; this is about people; Foreign attempt to undermine the essence of the neighborhood as a gathering place: crucial change in its dynamics; neighborhood politics; trashing people’s recommendations; classic manipulation of city mayor and developer to get the neighbors to approve their development plans; does an external force have the right to determine the neighborhood’s fate?

2. Getting to know others through the struggle; stick together to prevent bad things to happen to all; feels much closer to the people and more part of the neighborhood; get no-like minded people on the same page takes creativity, imagination and deliberation; differences is a very positive thing; powerful as a whole, as a group; Incredibly rewarding and inspirational experience of working with others; our power may encroach theirs; mutual trust; power of the group is more powerful than any amount of money, political will or government, it goes beyond power; friendships and good feelings for other people; part of something larger, bigger, nobler; most rewarding than any invention of the imagination; a discovery; like a big family; Need to talk, to be listened, to tell his story; to share his past

Jerry
1. Showing up vs. not showing up (presence vs. absence); taking responsibility for improvement of neighborhood; taking the initiative; putting yourself in the other person’s shoes; selflessness; make an effort; communication; organization; no rules or overhead checks or deadlines; it takes a good leader to keep the ball rolling

2. Sense of community and ownership; everyone’s opinion counts; making a difference; knowing that you are part of a bigger group—a larger, common, aim;
motivation; pride, will to improve; fortunate to have others; invested feelings and
practices; shared dignity of the place, pride; relationships; interact with people
around you, watching out for each other, noticing what’s normal from what is
not—what belongs to the place and what doesn’t; disagreements; picking your
battles; taking for granted relationships; Being together; neighbors become
friends; shared care for the place and for others; motivated-unmotivated, cycle;
unexpected joy; worthy experiences; external recognition and police over-
protection; genuine happiness of being together; fulfillment of life’s desires
through the group; community is that fuzzy area with no extremes; neighbors are
like friends or family.

Kevin
1. Frustrating and satisfying at once; problems in the area; personal investment;
sustain neighborhood’s essence; pride in area; watching people enjoy as the most
rewarding experience because for them it meant fun, joy, freedom, art, painting;
Energy and wisdom are the life of the group; everyone is essential; welcoming;
working together from the ground up; people may not get along—rub each other
the wrong way; Happiness, belonging; sense of being home
2. Groups are personality driven, you need people with vision to bring people
together and make things happen; need for a plan and a mission beyond crises;
need for a community center; people put their hearts in what they believe; having
no money does not mean not caring, not being in love with the area, and not
having any weight within the city; Desire to be active and work with others;
Organization, structure, agenda to grow and to survive; business-like
organization; collaboration with external entities and other groups; disagreeing—
voting; listening to others

Grant
1. Legitimacy of the group and its processes, public recognition, informing the
public, having an office, being an administrator; seeking for agenda, timing,
organized discussions, efficiency, professionalism; organization, documents,
legitimate roles; electing leaders; governing body; (bureaucracy)
2. Dichotomies functional versus dysfunctional; legitimate vs. illegitimate; willing
to listen vs. not willing to accept dissent, adversarial people; democracy vs.
dictatorship, burn out, micromanagement; Optimistic, positive, enthusiastic—life
of the group, vitality; Integrity, honesty, commitment (bureaucracy vs. democracy
cohabit in group)
3. Caring to improve the neighborhood, openness; connections with outside people;
mature and professional people—political; people coming together for the sake of
the common good; determination and dedication; Listen to others, be open to
dissent; representing the neighborhood; being able to delegate to other people and
recognizing that they may do a better job than you -humbling oneself- sharing;
giving to others; Brainstorming ideas together; support, trust; listening; respect for
the individual and his/her ideas; leader has: soul and heart in the organization,
charisma, decency and energy, encouraging self-trust; smooth over problems
members; being a great person; larger cause, a group of people with common
interests; a question of identity; between yourself and the outside world—inside vs. outside yourself; connections; emotionally and psychologically connected; main aim of group is to get people together through different projects—means; everlasting changes (democracy)

**Peter**

1. Common concerns; make people aware of neighborhood problems; People who care about each other and work for the benefit of all; goal is to make a better place to live; Belonging to the group is a matter of interest; freedom of speech; leader motivates and persuades people, kind of a salesperson; meeting new people: joy when meeting some, grief when meeting others; it is all about the people; collaboration with outside agencies—needing clout in the city to get things accomplished, take upon tasks with or without external help; collaboration between neighbors and business people

2. Majority rules; explosive, uncontrollable, personalities which don’t deal well with dissent; unfortunate; difficult to control; right to disagree; learning of opportunities and benefits of working with others.

**Mary**

1. Impositions onto the neighborhood; impractical and senseless projects; lack of cooperation among people—business owners and neighbors; developer refuses to deliberate with neighbors; need for an agreement, for compromise; hard time to make of their place what they want it to be, hard to deal with; disenchantment; city officials and developer; city stands up for developer and business owners rather than for the neighbors; impractical and senseless project; stepping down to let others lead; city is not playing fair with the group and the neighborhood at large; city does not welcome neighbors’ active involvement in the making of their areas; city does not welcome disagreements; devastating racial practices for the neighborhood; someone wanting to kill a neighborhood initiative or idea- the festival

2. Labeling, categorizing is pernicious for speaking up; cities need to operate through smaller units—neighborhoods; save the neighborhood; politically active; look after one another; knowing who belongs and who doesn’t; need of people first coming together; really strong stomach to deal with politicians; having enough faith; listen to people, have energy and enthusiasm, be able to recognize that it’s about the neighborhood and not about you—not egoistic, selflessness; Shared value of diversity, sense of identity, a place where you belong; value of neighborhoods to keep human beingness alive, personal relationships, break down the big areas into smaller units; neighborhoods enable people and relationships to become the center

3. One of the most rewarding things that she did in her life; be able to get people involved in your ideas and work together; joy in doing things with others; Getting people together and being able to affect the neighborhood and outside’s perception of the neighborhood; bad feeling when people throw their power at you
Juliet

1. Gathering and sharing of information; protesting, public expression of disapproval and anger of the neighbors; unique area within the city defined by its people, clearly active and aiming at doing things within the neighborhood, contributing to the works of the neighborhood; not everybody thinks the same; conflict; different opinions on the directions the group should be taking; existence of many needs; landmarks of the neighborhood need to be preserved; grassroots organization with no big money behind; big hearts and souls; work toward building; putting all the pieces together; need to speak from a position of power in order to be listened; get people behind a project; People disagree; dropping out from the meetings and the group; lack of people coming together; makes things fade away rather than strengthening them; group in crisis, making changes to improve situation; need for people to sit at the decision making table and getting their ideas validated; Love for the neighborhood; great value in diversity, extreme power that we could use to pull the neighborhood together; negative outlook of group; great potential of the group

2. Betrayal of city officials—unfulfilled promise of a grocery store; healthy neighborhood needs to be merged in body and soul; active and preserve its essence; current local administration, not democratic, for whom people don’t count as money does, authoritarian, money-driven mayor that makes neighbors feel very uncomfortable; city ignores recommendation from neighbors; city should respect and support the neighborhood; no respect for the human being,

3. Pulling people together rather than dividing people; taking pride on working together; gathering place; coming together as a whole to help others—the needy; sense of place that draws people together, communicating; take ownership in activities that impact the whole; community as a family: not thinking alike but caring for each other; keep the people involved, the real trick; not about winning or losing it is about listening and including the whole in the process of going about problems and issues; everyone has a role in the group

All Themes – all quotes

1) Reaching in—reaching out: group as neighborhood leader, pulling people together

“My best experience with the group was the first planting day in the garden [that we had created]. It was pouring outside, we had many thousands of different plants and 77 to 80 volunteers on a cold, rainy, pouring and horrible day; everybody was out there for 7 to 8 hours. And we pulled this thing off! And that was so cool! I’ll never forget. Even the mayor stopped by and said to us ‘you guys are doing a great thing. This is what a neighborhood should be about.’ And I was so inspired by hearing that! And that was a great feeling of getting that accomplished; you can’t believe how great that makes you feel. It was worth it, even though we all had a cold after that for a couple of weeks [laughs].” (Eric)
“We thought not of patrolling the neighborhood so much but just making a presence and sending a message when we are out…that we are not afraid to be outside, that we are not staying inside. One or two police officers would come with us and we’d just walk the dogs through the different parts of the neighborhood. Some people have had safety problems so we just made a presence in the neighborhood.” (Kathy)

“We decided that we wanted to become a non-profit organization, 501c3, tax exempt status so we could get grants to provide programs for community outreach so that we could work with disadvantaged neighborhood kids in arts and also maintain the Holydays and Arts in the Square” (Becky)

“The president of the city council comes to our neighborhood meetings to listen to our concerns and take them back to the council, so they can hopefully act on them. That’s the best thing, just getting that acknowledgement from the city that they think that we matter, that our work is making a difference enough that they would pay attention to us when we ask for their help or their attention.” (Kathy)

“I think that the trick to be a leader is to find people who are smarter than you and encourage the heck out of them. Open…feel passionate about what they do, encourage people who have different talents, encourage them to use their talents, and see if you can help people stay together and bring people together.” (Amelia)

“The best was getting people together and being able to affect not only things that happened here in the neighborhood but also how people perceived the neighborhood from outside and even how the city perceives it.” (Mary)

“What I feel about Highland Square. There is a place where you belong. And when I say ‘a shared sense of values’ it’s not even political values, it is the value of diversity. Look around here; this is a great neighborhood.” (Mary)

“It is an opportunity for us to get together and touch base. We get together and see how everyone is doing, especially during winter months. In the summer months there is no one day when you don’t see many of the people just out walking their dogs or working on their yards. But in the winter months we see each other less. The weather is too cold. We talk about our concerns, our interests, where we would like to see the neighborhood go; and sometimes we disagree. It’s a chance for us to voice our concerns and try to get solutions. That’s what we achieve, in addition to trying to strengthen our bonds of friendship.” (Nick)

2) **Empowering of the whole—working together and accomplishing what would be impossible by oneself alone—force of the group to deal with evil**

“A community that is involved or interacts on a somewhat regular basis, I think, is stronger than where people don’t talk or get involved with each other.” (Laura)

“The crime and safety committee developed the pooch patrol which is very successful. We get together once a month as many people as want to and we walk our dogs together in different parts of the neighborhood different months. The idea behind is to show solidarity, it is a great social event, and it also says something when you see sixteen people walking together with their dogs down the street without being afraid. It is very positive. And people come out to the porch, and ask questions and see that we are out there.” (Amelia)
“I purchased the house in this neighborhood and I immediately joined the group MIRAFLORES because they are known for cleaning up the streets, for historic preservation and for crime prevention of the West Hill neighborhood. They are bringing it back to being a well respected area like it used to be. I wanted to be part of it.” (Tracie)

“The neighbors --since they know what’s going on [breaking into my house seven times since Christmas] they have been keeping an eye on my house. It is nice that they know what’s going on around them and also that they have helped me.” (Tracie)

“Because we are a group we are taken more seriously than a single person would. I think that the person alone isn’t considered as valuable as the group. That’s why I think that in group we get more notice from the government or the police.” (Tracie)

“We’ve done protesting at the site where the grocery store is supposed to go, we have written letters to the mayor and to our council member and people in the planning department encouraging them to bring this element back to our neighborhood to make it a healthy, walking, active community” (Juliet)

“I think it was very positive and very very empowering, because when I moved into the neighborhood we used to handle all these cats by ourselves and all these little kittens were getting killed in the road every week! And I was like ‘I just want to catch all these cats and get them fixed so that they can’t have kittens.’ So it was an idea I had and then talking to my neighbor I learnt that he had the same idea. So all of us coming together… like if I would have tried to do that by myself I would have spent hundreds and hundreds of dollars, and I would probably have not gotten so much done, I would have not lasted. But doing it with the group it was empowering that all that happened… like this last year we captured 33 cats and took care of them and did what we needed to do, and that fixed our problem [with all the cats on the loose] in the neighborhood.” (Matthew)

“I think that you need the people support-system. I do believe that cities work better when neighborhoods receive the support they need because then you have people watching out for each other, but for that you need to have a neighborhoods where the neighbors know each other first. It’s like crime watch programs. It’s a whole lot better than having police patrolling in the streets because they don’t know what’s normal and what’s not; unless you have the community policing and that’s only as good as their ability to spend lots of time in the streets in one-on-one relationships with the neighbors, knowing who is unusual, who belongs and who doesn’t belong to the neighborhood.” (Mary)

“I think that everybody matters, everybody brings something to the table. And when somebody is not there, people always ask where is so and so. If anybody leaves or is not there everyone notices it. I could not say ‘if Benita wasn’t there the meeting would fall apart;’ but it just would not be the same.” (Nick)

3) Practical politics: “a give and take”

“We had an in-depth discussion [about discontinuing the annual jazz concert event]; it wasn’t just my decision of ‘no we are not gonna do it’ and it wasn’t the two other people’s idea who wanted to do it. It was a full board decision. Some people in the board thought that I was trying to kill it. So I talked to them and I told them that it is important that we discussed this in depth. We needed to talk about all the details, and be on the same page of what we were doing. This made everyone feel better. So after a full board
meeting we decided that it is a great event but at this time we were not going to continue and that we would focus on something a bit more cost-effective.” (Laura)

“We have a good relationship with the city. Before I got involved, MIRAFLORES didn’t get along well with the city. For a couple of years the relationship was tense. You shouldn’t need to kiss ass in order to get government to work for you. It wasn’t a fair situation. People used to attack the mayor. We got a lot better about dealing with the city; we now use more discretion when we approach the city. We don’t go to them for every little thing but when we think that we need help we go to them and they are very receptive to us. They can’t do everything for us. They get back in touch with us right away, like with the graffiti. We are strategic about how we talk to them, we are nice to them. We don’t always agree with everything they say. But if they do stuff that we don’t agree with we would talk one on one, and we tell them how we feel about the issue. But we don’t attack them in the paper. It is a relationship and we don’t want to ruin it. Then when you need them they’d be there. Our relationship with the city is very good, and we continue to nurture that. People go to council meetings. We make sure that we are in touch with them, just to let them know what we are working on. Trying to keep them updated without taking too much of their time.” (Laura)

“We are very protective of the group since it took nine to ten years to grow, and since we are all volunteers it is very hard to do on your own time. So we are very protective of that. So when we have disagreements, if we can’t all agree on one thing, we let it be. And we bring it back to discussion until we find a common ground, a point in the issue where we can all agree with. And then if we still have dissent we don’t move to action until we feel we have a consensus.” (Amelia)

“We try to listen first to what’s going on; that way, they would be more willing to talk to us. If they talk to us we are more aware of the different pieces to the pie, and we are stronger. There may be more pieces to the puzzle that what we are just thinking. Maybe we need to modify what we think. We are open to relations. It makes for better governance, we can operate better, and we can be more effective the more communication with city government we have. Like the police have been more responsive since we have been more willing to listen.” (Amelia)

“We’ve learned that to work with your city government is a give and take issue. You can’t get all you want. You have to give and take concessions; it is like politics. Like you scratch my back I scratch yours. It is nothing bad. You go there wanting ten things and you come out with three, and you still are ahead of the game more than you were before.” (George)

“It’s kind of a give and take. We sat down as a group and discussed the whole thing, some of us wanted a grocery store, and some of us didn’t care. The point is that what is there now is better than what was there before.” (George)

“When it comes down to how do you get things done, you know, do I personally like the Mayor? Not really. I think he is a bigot and a blowhard. Do I like all the council members? No! But because I don’t like them doesn’t mean that they are not doing a good job. So you have to choose your battles wisely. When it comes to politics it’s a give and take. I look at downtown and I think the city did a great job revitalizing downtown even though it put the city in great debt. That is the game we are trying to play here. We are a neighborhood and there are many things we want but only a certain things that we are
gonna get. We can have the cake and eat a little piece of it; you can’t have the whole thing!” (George)

“That’s how you forge relationships. We don’t take an attitude in the newspaper and trash the mayor. If the mayor does something that you don’t like, don’t vote him! That’s politics!” (George)

“Sense of community is where there are active people concerned about what’s going on, whether I agree with them or not.” (Chris)

“We have raised money to hire attorneys to represent us, and they are from the largest law firm in town, and they should speak from that position of power. And hopefully we will be able to get more people behind us working toward the goal of convincing the owner of the theater that we are genuine and serious and that we are able to step forward and purchase the theater because that’s a major concern for us.” (Juliet)

“People have to have their say, feel that their opinions are appreciated. You are not going to be the winner in an issue but at least you know that your point of view has been heard and that the consensus would come to the best approach hopefully. So I think that people feel that they haven’t been able to contribute because some people go off in their own direction without listening to the whole and without being inclusive.” (Juliet)

“I truly believe that people who live in a community have the right to contribute to the ideas of how that community should be formed. And the idea of design guidelines respect to the type of businesses that we want, for example, I think we have the right to do that. But the mayor of our city always says: ‘put your mouth where your money is.’ So in other words he is saying that he is not going to listen unless we have a million dollars to buy a building and renovate it. With saying that, he is saying that we don’t have the right to say anything; that we don’t have the right to say what our community should look like, and what should go into our community. And he only wants to talk to people who are putting their money where their mouth is, as he says again, and again and again, that is extremely frustrating to me.” (Juliet)

“Community is what a good family should be: you don’t always think alike but you always care about each other.” (Juliet)

“We would send a delegation of folks to talk to the planning department and we would ask them, ‘do you realize that this doesn’t make sense for this neighborhood and that all these big houses, it’s impractical to turn them back to all single houses.’ Not that it made any difference.” (Mary)

“The city has not been known for being particularly welcoming to people who want to be active and involved in their neighborhoods. It seems that people in downtown have an idea of what they want to do with the city, and if you along with that, great! And if you don’t, it’s not fun. And I think that we are just getting pretty tired of that.” (Mary)

“Especially when you get really involved you find out the behind the scenes politics and that takes a really strong stomach [laughs].” (Mary)

“I don’t deal well with people who lie, with people who throw their power at you because they can. I hated that part.” (Mary)

“There were people especially in the planning department --this was under a different planning director—who needed to have proof that they talked and had interaction with the neighbors for these programs but after a while it became clear that it was just so that they could check off, not that they really wanted to have an interaction with the neighborhood.” (Mary)
“I think that it is just the nature of a group this large, is that we sometimes don’t agree, and I am opinionated, and we all have opinions… and that makes difficult to come up to a decision or resolution, but ultimately I would say “ok, I don’t care, I agree” or whatever.” (Nick)

“I enjoy seeing and talking to my neighbors, I enjoy saying ‘hi.’ It may not be the people you would want to go on vacation with, but I am happy that they care also and that they are involved, and that’s what really matters. We don’t have to agree on everything but at least help participating, and that’s great! I hope that you find a way to spread this everywhere.” (Jerry)

“After five years of running the summer festival there were disagreements about the way I was running it because I guess I was doing things my way, kind of unilaterally, just because I was used to do things that way. So I just stepped down. And other people took it over and took on for another 10 years and they did run it. Later it became a much more formal and structured organization.” (Mary)

“There is no one leader; there is a kind of commune-like arrangement or community where everybody accepts a good amount of responsibility of what happens. So it doesn’t matter who is chairing the meeting; what matters is what everyone brings to the table. I don’t know if we would be successful if there was only one leader; we are successful because there is not just one leader. We have 40-50 very different personalities that happen to live in the same area.” (Nick)

4) Learning/knowing as a whole: new – group knowledge means power

“I realized that we have a great array of people in the neighborhood and I realized how rich we are. We have senior citizens who are architects or were in the war. Or from people who have kids you learn what other people’s needs are. As a group we need to do something about it. So being involved in the group has really opened my eyes to what the various issues are in the different constituencies. And it has made me very passionate about the neighborhood, I really love this neighborhood. If someone would contact me and say ‘I live in this area and I need help with such and such’ I would do anything I could to help them get in touch to whoever they need to. Being involved in the neighborhood has made me a stronger advocate for the area and for the people living in it.” (Laura)

“What we are looking for in people is a commitment to the neighborhood beyond the desire to make things better but an actual willingness to follow through on that desire, to help. And it doesn’t mean that you have to take on the committee all by yourself, but you need to take the responsibility to do some tasks, to follow through, to get things done. Helping each person grow on their role I think is key to strengthen the group. (Laura)

“We have learned a lot about how the city government works, what things are really important to us. And how to get things accomplished. When our group started, we knew very little about how to work with the city. Going through housing guidelines the city talks to us, takes us more seriously now, and we get a lot done now.” (Amelia)

“We have had disagreements respect of how we view the way the city has been handling crime in this area and some of us feel that more is being done than other person feels, or some people feel that crime has been going up in an area more than others. It is more a disagreement about the approach. We all agree that there is a crime problem. In the end we all learned something.” (Tracie)
“I know my neighbors probably two to three blocks out in every direction, with the exception of a few who are more introversive. You know everybody. I call it a small community. It’s not just a neighborhood. I went from living in a neighborhood where I barely knew three to four neighbors to coming here and talking to everyone, walking your dog and having to stop to talk to people. And that’s what attracts me to the neighborhood.” (George)

“A community would talk to each other when there is a major issue going on. At least the neighbor on the street, if you don’t agree you can talk informally about the problem over a glass of beer, and how to deal with it, sit in the porch and deal with it.” (George)

“The people who work the best are the ones who say that they have the desire to get something done and want to fit in with the group, that’s the way MIRAFLORES works the best. In all these groups there is tremendous room to be tremendous leaders, because there are so many things that can be addressed. If a particular person wants to be a champion, all s/he has to do is do it, as long as they have a positive idea that fits in with the mission of the group.” (Chris)

“I live in one street where there are international artists, people involved in bands, in the theater, so many artists…and so many people involved in academia choose this neighborhood because of the diversity. I just think that if we can use all this power that we have to pull the neighborhood together in some way, we’ll all be better.” (Juliet)

“You need to take other people’s opinions into mind and make sure that you really consider them; that you don’t just come in to the meeting with your mind made up about something.” (Matthew)

“After five years of running the summer festival there were disagreements about the way I was running it, because I guess I was doing things my way, kind of unilaterally, just because I was used to do things that way. So I just stepped down. And other people took it over and took on for another 10 years and they did run it. Later it became a much more formal and structured organization.” (Mary)

“There is no one leader; there is a kind of commune-like arrangement or community where everybody accepts a good amount of responsibility of what happens. So it doesn’t matter who is chairing the meeting; what matters is what everyone brings to the table. I don’t know if we would be successful if there was only one leader; we are successful because there is not just one leader. We have 40-50 very different personalities that happen to live in the same area.” (Nick)

“If you don’t live there you don’t even pay attention to it or notice it, but if you do live there, it does make a difference. Not to mention, just the added bonus that you get to know everyone who lives around you and I think because of that it has helped us also with crime and communicating. I think because of getting organized and knowing each other and knowing about each other, we knew that those neighbors go out of town for weeks at the time, and I wasn’t home. And that’s a benefit of knowing and being involved is that it is not just about cleaning up the neighborhood but that is also helping crime. It is so beneficial in so many other ways than just cleaning, beautifying or organizing, that it’s helped in a lot of other ways. And I think people are more patient with each other, and that if stuff were going on instead of calling the police on your neighbors, if you know them and you are friendly with them, you just go and talk to them rather than complaining. And I always tell my neighbors how spoiled and fortunate we
are, because we like each other, we do things together...In so many streets you hear so many stuff happening...” (Jerry)

5) Finding freedom in/through the group: the whole as more than the sum of its parts—person becomes a human being in being-with-others

“For me is what community should be, and that is every person has value, the property owner has the same value as the renter, the senior citizen, working together with all others, or being part of the community, where we are all valued, and where everybody, everyone is part of it, you can’t take one segment out. It is the whole to the part, and not the part to the whole. Without that single part the whole will collapse. Every part working together is needed in working together. Even the crazy old lady, she is part of the neighborhood. I can’t imagine our neighborhood without all the crazy people, without the youngster who everyone is afraid to let in their stores. They all have the potential to be good and the potential to be bad, whether they are good or bad. So, for the common good, reach out and bring them in so they don’t feel excluded, so that by bringing them in they feel part of the community and that just builds a stronger place to live.” (Becky)

“I moved into this area knowing about the problems. But this area has come a long way. I see what the WH group has done and their reputation of caring about their neighborhood. So that’s why I feel safe living in this neighborhood: it is because I know that I am not alone trying to solve crime problems. As an outsider looking inside --I haven’t moved in yet but I bought my house already-- I come from a neighborhood where my house has never been broken in, I have never had a problem there, BUT there I don’t have a community group. It’s a sensitive character that you have not seen since the 50s or 60s. People don’t know their neighbors anymore, and I want more of how things were when I was growing up, knowing my neighbors.” (Tracie)

“These types of groups are limited tremendously high by experience, knowledge, interest of the people that comprises them. If the person or champion of a particular project is not there, it may not be anybody else to fill its shoes, to fill in that responsibility. And then that job may not get done because we have no knowledge to do it. There is a key person behind each project. These small neighborhood groups take direction from the skills and desires of the people who are active in them.” (Chris)

“We believe that for a neighborhood to be healthy that we need to be merged in body and soul and a grocery store is a very central element of the neighborhood.” (Juliet)

“Community is where people work together; take pride in where they live and in their neighbors, work toward pulling people together rather than dividing people. To have central accord is an important part of community, where people know they can find their friends; to have a place where people can express themselves; a place where if a neighbor is in need other neighbors might find out about it. There is a person that comes in here, her name is Jennifer. She is not working right now but she waited until her check came in at Christmas time in order to help a family that came to the neighborhood festival without proper clothing, and had babies and they didn’t have all the things they needed to exist. And Jennifer saw that and she was spending her own money to help them. And so I though “gosh, if Jennifer is doing this…”, so I gave her some money, and then Mike gave her some money, and Jennifer then gave her some money, and someone else gave her a dollar, and so forth.
So Jennifer had this idea, she expressed it either here or over across the street where we had the holyday festival, and people came together to help others in their community.” (Juliet)

“By being involved in the group I actually feel that I really belong to more than I ever had. And I've lived in this neighborhood for over 20 years! Akron is the longest place I have lived in. I've lived in many other places. I feel more part of the neighborhood being part of the group. I feel that I have more to offer now that I am involved. I can bring out other people in the neighborhood and get them more involved. It is nice to have more diversity.” (Jennifer)

“It has been really rewarding for me, it just makes me feel a lot better because I grew up very different. And I always had many people make fun of the way I talk, the way my family lived, what we had… In the group nobody stereotypes me, everyone knows that I am my own person and I live my own way. They don’t compromise me. Because this is about the neighborhood, and not about the different personalities, but it shouldn’t be about what I just mentioned. It should be about the neighborhood and making it the best place. Because when you have that growing on you can draw so many outside people to the town, to the neighborhood that can add a lot, and who can make it even a stronger place.” (Jennifer)

“I was very angry at first because my yard was always full of cats and I wanted to go ahead and kill them all. But I think that Jodi and Sarah provided a nice bounce to… they said, let’s be humane about this.” (Nick)

“I love my neighborhood. I think that if it wasn’t for the neighborhood group I would have sold my house and moved out a long time ago. But people make our environment nice. So I look forward to see Terry and Jane across the street, and Ken and Joe, so we do a lot of things together. For a lot of us it is like a secondary family because many of us live alone.” (Nick)

6) **Uniqueness within diversity: ownership and shared pride of the place and its people**

“This past week we woke up before the snow came and someone had gone and graffiti the blocks on our neighborhood; it looked like they were like all over the neighborhood one night doing graffiti. When I got to work one of the persons who lives on Campinha sends out an e-mail and said: ‘the graffiti are all over the place; what are we going to do?’ Within fifteen minutes the whole neighborhood knew about it. People were saying, ‘I am available on Saturday to help clean up the graffiti if we need to’ and the city got back with us right away. It was an issue that would have demoralized the neighborhood. But because we were proactive about it and the city said that could help us, it ended up helping the people of the neighborhood in two ways: believe a little bit more in city government and what they will do, and it also brought us together as a group, like this is something that we are going to stand for. We decided that we were going to be very strong against this type of stuff, and we were going to be very proactive and that we were not gonna let that kind of thing happen in our neighborhood.” (Laura)

“What the pooh patrol does is bringing people back out on the streets and taking ownership again of where they live and caring about it, and the idea that you are not gonna shut your door and let crime happen in the streets and not look. You are gonna
come out and walk your dog, and say ‘this is my street. I have a right to be here.’”
(Amelia)
“It’s been very rewarding to see the place where you live grow and change. We have the historic district. When you see people become proud of the place where they live, and want to become involved and do things, and you have an event where you have people come together and they feel good…it is very rewarding. It is different that just having a place where I go and come from my job and pay a mortgage. It is a real personal investment; there is a piece of you that stays in the neighborhood.” (Amelia)
“We need more streets that take ownership of their little corner of the neighborhood and work for its improvements. MIRAFLORES should be the umbrella for all the other little groups. We should use Campinha as a success example, as a source material to help other groups form by themselves. They have done it already; let’s use their experience and knowledge to form another street group. Things start to gain momentum: we have two successful street groups, let’s form a third one. We are helping improve our city and we bring this to city council. That is how you play the game.” (George)
“The Campinha meetings are more a social event as well as just a real meeting, somehow of a challenge to keep it on track. But since everyone has their heart on the same place, it does go on.” (Chris)
“I met more people through the group. It’s been like a social networking experience, which has been rewarding. You learn a lot more about people and the common interests with yours and move it forward. It has been a positive change. The Campinha in particular has been really rewarding to see people who I know have lived in the block for 20 years and have not been active in any capacity with their neighbors recently until this group got going again. And people would say: ‘this is like it used to be 15 years ago, it’s even better.’ It is very rewarding to hear that type of thing.” (Chris)
“The physical fabric plus the people --you need a center, shops and density-- you can’t have community otherwise. Dodge Avenue is not an expensive street but yet the turnover has been extremely low, people want to move in there. Some friends have just moved in there and they said that it was great to have neighbors and have friends. They came from a not faraway area, Aqueduct, and they moved in here because of the sense of community. The website gives us further sense of place. What she said summarizes what community means: she recognizes that even though she lives in a perfect house they want to move where there is a community and where she could be more involved. Campinha is enough of a community. I don’t need to think about the larger group, I now have the true sense of community. I want to make the block group the best it can be.”
“I’ve always loved my neighborhood, but the more I work on projects and the more people I get to know the more I realize the incredible neighborhood we live in.” (Juliet)
“I almost --in a way-- wish that I didn’t know so much about my neighbors because I am more irritated with some of them that if I would just say ‘hi’ to them. It’s kind of strange. The opposite effect of what you would anticipate because in the beginning we didn’t know much about each other, and then we started really getting close, and it was very positive. And I think overall our relationships have been very very positive, we know much more about each other. But along with the good stuff that we know about each other we now know all the bad stuff about each other. You know what? I hate my neighbors! [Laughs] I really don’t, but couple of them are so nitpicking on everything that drives me crazy! But I never knew that about them until…, like in a meeting, we
have to really work through issues, I would have never known that had not we not had the … it is kind of a mixed bag of what you know about your neighbors, good and bad.” (Matthew)

“I think the word ‘minority’ should not be used any more. When it came out, it served its purpose. Now we need to take negative terms off of people’s culture. It is more of a hinder. I just tell people ‘call me Jennifer, don’t call me minority, I am not a thing, I am a woman and a human being.” (Jennifer)

“I have become more convinced that cities need neighborhoods; they need to operate through smaller units than just a centralized civic government and treating every place of the city as the same and doing kind of a boiling plate in each area. Especially in Akron, neighborhoods have distinctive personalities and people kind of gravitate there.” (Mary)

“My neighborhood group makes my home feel like home; otherwise it would just be a house. When I bought the house it just felt right from the get-go; there is a genuine life to those two blocks and the people who live there, and that makes a difference. I have lived in many different places, Pittsburg, Manhattan, and now Highland Square in Akron is by far my favorite area, and I attribute that to the place I live in and the people who live around me.” (Nick)

“Being a part of a much larger group, giving in to that group and taking from it a little bit… I think that there is a give and take we all partake in, in order to get the added benefit of being a part of this larger group.” (Nick)

“I feel that I have more ownership because I see the things that we’ve done, the things we’ve improved. When there is something bad that happens it really bothers me because I know that we put a lot of work to do it. And it makes me wonder why more people don’t do the same. And we really care; I know that we make a difference. We make improvements; it is not perfect, but that’s ok. I drive on other streets and I see houses and the streets that could be beautiful with a little work, and I say: ‘Gosh, why don’t spend two hours a week? It would just be beautiful!’ It’s a little frustrating because many people think that the city is some entity that has unlimited wealth and that is there to clean up after you. And each of us make up the city, so it’s not like the city is somebody else that is going to come and clean the street signs and scrape the sidewalks. It is your street, you know? You pay the taxes to get the streets repaired and the lights up so I think that you really have to take ownership. When doing part of this with the neighborhood I feel like it is very important to me what happens because I really feel connected with the ownership, you feel a strong sense of ownership, because you know that most things that are going to get done is because the group is going to do it, otherwise it won’t get done.” (Jerry)

“I do believe that if cities are going to survive and especially big cities, you got to break it down into small units; you gotta be able to deliver service on a small scale. Otherwise cities become too big and too inhuman and too impersonal and that’s when people say ‘why should I live here?’ You want people to live in the city, give them a reason to do it. Houses are great, but it’s really about people, about relationships, and that’s what neighborhoods enable: people to have relationships with each other within a smaller area so that they can feel that sense of community and sense of belonging.” (Mary)

7) **The larger good: pursued noble cause of the group**
“Ted and I butted head like crazy. We had a really hard time. He ended up moving away. I learnt then that it was not about me, that we all wanted to make the neighborhood better. I could see people growing, engaged and enthusiastic, and that made me feel great about it. I am very proud of all the work we have done; this will help stabilize our neighborhood and will be a great thing for it. With this very hard beginning I am happy to know that what I do will impact the neighborhood for longer than what I will be around.” (Laura)

“A group of us got together because we cared about our neighborhood, we loved living in the neighborhood, and we had common concerns. We decided to form this group so that we could work together to enhance what we liked about it and to better the things we thought that were problems. The reason we did that is that we got tired of just sort of sitting there and expecting the police, the city and everyone expecting them to solve problems. We should help, we could help and we were the ones living there. So rather than complain and blame let’s get together and see what we can do together. I loved the older houses, I thought that it was a beautiful place to live and then I bought a house there. We were worried about crime, we wanted to improve the values of our homes, and we wanted to protect what was there.” (Amelia)

“Community is when you have people together who what they care about is the very fact that they are living together. They not only care about themselves but also of how they can affect others and it takes people who are proud of where they live, of what they have and don’t have, of their aspirations and goals. It’s where you have neighbors that know each other’s name, who are interested in the other people’s feelings and are interested in developing goals that would help everyone. We watch out for each other, that’s community.” (Amelia)

“Community is a group of people that comes together with a common interest, basically watching out for each other. You don’t have to be friends, buddy-buddy, but keep each other safe. People coming together form community. We need people like the one in Campinha. We come together in parties and meetings. I enjoy the neighbors I live close to. You know more than your immediate neighbors.” (George)

“You don’t really care about what the exact boundaries of each group are, but you just know that you need people who are active, and got something going there. You can network people through the umbrella, hook people up with the right groups. That makes the whole area better. I understand better now how these things should work. I think the leadership of the group is important to fill in the skills, the categories, the positions of the functions of the MIRAFLORES group. You need to make the match not only of their skills but of their will to work, as this is a volunteer organization. It needs to run like a good company if you want to get things accomplished; that is, the strategic aspect.” (Chris)

“I usually say ‘wow, I could be spending this time in something else’, but I rather spend time, hours and hours on something that is valuable for the group.” (Chris)

“We are a grassroots organization with no big money behind. We have a lot of big hearts and souls and drive and lots of wonderful ideas and we work toward building a business plan and putting all the pieces together.” (Juliet)

“Community means not only where you live, where you work, but means everything: your grocery store, your bank. I feel very connected to the Highland Square area. I live here, my friends are here, and I work here. For me it’s every aspect of your life; who you
get in touch with. I love my square, and I hope that we can make it a better community that’s more tied together. Because I think when people feel that way you don’t want to see graffiti, you want it to get cleaned up; you don’t want to see that happen.” (Matthew) “Community is when you have the feeling that you really belong, you take pride in your neighborhood and that you left your mark there and made it better for other people.” (Jennifer) “It takes to listen to people, especially in neighborhoods like this because there a lot of different people; this is a very smart neighborhood, with a lot of highly educated people who already know a lot about what it takes. There are certain qualities for leadership that you need to have because ultimately what you want is the neighborhood to work for itself, you know. It’s not that’s about you; it’s about the neighborhood, so at certain point you have to be able to step back, and say ‘ok, go, do!’” (Mary) “The neighborhood does that. We all have the benefit of interaction. If we all didn’t care about the neighborhood, it would look quite different, especially in the spring, when there are flowers out there. Because people are out there and there is a level of strength and pride of who we are and we celebrate that. Every so often I sit back and reflect how fortunate I am. I don’t have a beautiful house: it is old, and sits in an old neighborhood. But it is great to live there. It is a great feeling. You know? Betty would call and say ‘hey, do you know that there is someone out there in your porch?’ We are all very lucky to be there and it is a very sad day when anyone decides to move out.” (Nick) “Few of us felt that we could not wait for the city to do everything. So some of us decided that we would break up into little committees to clean up things, and we decided that no one should have to do that by themselves, so we formed the beautification committee that I was part of. I just wanted to participate. I don’t want to have someone else do what happens at our street. It is important to help out.” (Jerry) “We spend time scrapping stickers off the street signs and scrapping paints off of utility boxes and mailboxes and light polls. I remember that when I moved into my house there was graffiti in a light poll in front of my house and since I happened to have paint of the same color, I just painted it over so just that I thought that it’d look better than the graffiti. So, many times me and about four other neighbors would come out with buckets, scrapers and gloves to scrape the paint or stickers off the signs. I took spray paint and spray painted the utility box that was covered with graffiti and it looked a lot better. Actually it wasn’t even in our street it was on the corner, but we figured that while we were at it we might as well take care of it.” (Jerry) “Just knowing that you are part of a bigger group, that you have a common goal… that’s very motivating and that helps you a lot.” (Jerry)

8) **Personal changes through the group and interpersonal benefits: friendships, bonding**

“In our community we are a group of people who are interested in keeping our neighborhood nice, keeping the property values up, and genuinely interested in one another as a people. Community is the coming together of people who have a similar interest but then I think it grows beyond that, and then it becomes personal relationships as well, that’s community building. We are not just concerned about the neighborhood but about the neighbors as well. I think there are different depths of layers of community. At the most basic it’s just a shared interest about our houses and making our
neighboring look nice but then it goes deeper than that, as you grow with the group.” (Laura)

“It was a very positive experience. It’s made me think in a different way. Being a leader is different than being a member of a group. It made me think more about relationships, of consider things; realize that it is beyond my ego. If we are having a problem I pick up the phone and I say: “Is everything ok? I didn’t mean for the discussion to become tense, I hope there is no hard feeling.” It’s really helped me grow as a person, to learn about relationships, of how people and groups work together. It was a great experience but it also was a very intense year so I was glad that was over.” (Laura)

“Community is a sense of feeling of togetherness where you live, that you know your neighbors, that you have a support system, something in the community that bonds you with others. It is a feeling of togetherness with other like-minded people. Kind of a family type feeling.” (Tracie)

“My experiences have all been great. There have been fun, easy, and hard times. Some days I feel like raising my hands and telling all the board members where to go. In a way it’s like work but more fun. You enjoy neighborhood organizations more if you put your heart into it.” (George)

“It was fun, it wasn’t like work, and it wasn’t definitely one person doing everything by himself. It pulled our block together so that we considered each other friends. Then I asked my neighbor to help me with something not related to the neighborhood at all, like my friend’s car broke down in my driveway, so I couldn’t get my car out, and he couldn’t get his car out, and I called my neighbor who drove this person on the way to work; he never met my friend before and yet he drove him all the way to Canton to get his car keys, that was what he actually needed. I would have never asked a neighbor to do something like that had I not know him more personally right now because of all the work that we have done together. So it has just turned our neighborhood into much more social group so that we look out for each other and they are also our friends, not just as neighbors. And even though I said that negative aspect of each person, their idiosyncrasies, it has been very very positive for our block and personally and in so many different ways.” (Matthew)

“At the tree lighting in the Legion, I was amazed how other people have it worse than me, even though I’m unemployed.” (Jennifer)

“Community means… I’ll give you a quick example: I grew up in Iowa, in a small town. We had a fire in the dead of winter. I was nine years old. And I remember our neighbors, watching our house, offering us to take us in, to care for our dog because my dad’s family lived across town. We had our home remodeled. But our neighborhood where we lived was like the UN and I grew up like that, my dad’s friends were from all parts of the world. My father lived in Paris after the war, so he came back pretty cool thinking about lots of things. So that has always stayed with me, because these people cared about us. Because some people would not have done anything. So community means to me that you really belong, that you really know the people in your neighborhood, that there are people with whom you can just interact without feeling scared, and that you are not going to get robbed, raped, and abused. You have to be careful, too. But if you belong to a group like this, you get the chance to see how things work, and to get involved more and more.” (Jennifer)
“[Being part of the neighborhood group] is probably one of the most rewarding things that I did in my whole life. Learning that you can take up on an idea and make it happen, even when everybody is looking at you and say ‘you want to do what?’ and just being persistent and say ‘yeah,’ and enlisting people and getting them engaged in the idea. Those are skills that translate anywhere. And it was probably my first experience as an adult, because I was in my mid-20s then. You know, really having that kind of a success . . . what was really cool is that it didn’t really get attributed to me, at least for the first couple of years. It was like everybody showed up, did their part, had a really good time, and sat back afterwards and said ‘wasn’t that fun?! Let’s do it again!’ And that—in as small scale- is what makes the neighborhood work: it is people doing their work and saying ‘it worked, that was fun, let’s do it again.’” (Mary)

“I would say the best has been doing chores with my neighbors, like --it may not sound so much fun-- planting flowers, or I don’t really enjoy scrapping stickers out of signs, but being together with your neighbors, and doing things together so that when you are done you feel proud, it makes you feel good. And I think that’s the best part of it. It is sharing the community feeling. I don’t even think as them being neighbors but as being friends that we are doing it because we care.” (Jerry)

“You sometimes don’t feel like doing some things. And so you do it anyway, and you always end up enjoying it more than what you thought you would, and it is always something . . . like we had to dig out the trash from planters, and it was like “yak, this is gross” but it’s never as bad as you think. So the worst thing is doing things that you don’t want to be doing then, but the best part is that you get to spend time with some great people and accomplish things together and take great pride on these things. So it’s worth it by far.” (Jerry)

“Community means to me people that work together and are genuinely happy to be together; that they take pride of the area where they live. Community isn’t a black and white line; it is just caring and communicating with people who you live close by and working together and caring about each other. All you have to do is put in some labor, which is not even as bad as you think, because people get together, have a good time, somebody makes doughnuts, it is a very enjoyable thing and you just have to care and it’s been very rewarding. This neighborhood has the feeling of a little town. I think that people need to understand that you are the city; it is not some magical entity that’s there to do whatever you want; that’s you, so if you don’t make an effort, why would anybody else? Someone has to get started, take the initiative. Unless you get involved you will never know! It makes people so much happier. Being part of this group has benefited us in ways that we never imagined when we started. Everything we have done has branched out in many other good things. What else could you ask for?” (Jerry)

“In just ten years, the changes that have happened, the fights that we’ve fought, the things that we’ve worked on have strengthen my commitment by getting involved.” (Amelia)

All Themes: Selected quotes

9) Reaching in—reaching out: group as neighborhood leader, pulling people together
“We decided that we wanted to become a non-profit organization, 501c3, tax exempt status so we could get grants to provide programs for community outreach so that we could work with disadvantaged neighborhood kids in arts and also maintain the Holydays and Arts in the Square” (Becky)

“We thought not of patrolling the neighborhood so much but just making a presence and sending a message when we are out…that we are not afraid to be outside, that we are not staying inside. One or two police officers would come with us and we’d just walk the dogs through the different parts of the neighborhood. Some people have had safety problems so we just made a presence in the neighborhood.” (Kathy)

“My best experience with the group was the first planting day in the garden [that we had created]. It was pouring outside, we had many thousands of different plants and 77 to 80 volunteers on a cold, rainy, pouring and horrible day; everybody was out there for 7 to 8 hours. And we pulled this thing off! And that was so cool! I’ll never forget. Even the mayor stopped by and said to us ‘you guys are doing a great thing. This is what a neighborhood should be about.’ And I was so inspired by hearing that! And that was a great feeling of getting that accomplished; you can’t believe how great that makes you feel. It was worth it, even though we all caught a cold after that for a couple of weeks [laughs].” (Eric)

10) Empowering of the whole—working together and accomplishing what would be impossible by oneself alone—force of the group to deal with evil

“The crime and safety committee developed the pooch patrol which is very successful. We get together once a month as many people as want to and we walk our dogs together in different parts of the neighborhood different months. The idea behind is to show solidarity, it is a great social event, and it also says something when you see sixteen people walking together with their dogs down the street without being afraid. It is very positive. And people come out to the porch, and ask questions and see that we are out there.” (Amelia)

“Because we are a group we are taken more seriously than a single person would. I think that the person alone isn’t considered as valuable as the group. That’s why I think that in group we get more notice from the government or the police.” (Tracie)

“I think that you need the people support-system. I do believe that cities work better when neighborhoods receive the support they need because then you have people watching out for each other, but for that you need to have a neighborhoods where the neighbors know each other first. It’s like crime watch programs. It’s a whole lot better than having police patrolling in the streets because they don’t know what’s normal and what’s not; unless you have the community policing and that’s only as good as their ability to spend lots of time in the streets in one-on-one relationships with the neighbors, knowing who is unusual, who belongs and who doesn’t belong to the neighborhood.” (Mary)

11) Practical politics: “a give and take”

“We are very protective of the group since it took nine to ten years to grow, and since we are all volunteers it is very hard to do on your own time. So we are very protective of that. So when we have disagreements, if we can’t all agree on one thing, we let it be. And we bring it back to discussion until we find a common ground, a point in the issue where
we can all agree with. And then if we still have dissent we don’t move to action until we feel we have a consensus.” (Amelia)

“We’ve learned that to work with your city government is a give and take issue. You can’t get all you want. You have to give and take concessions; it is like politics. Like you scratch my back I scratch yours. It is nothing bad. You go there wanting ten things and you come out with three, and you still are ahead of the game more than you were before.” (George)

“I enjoy seeing and talking to my neighbors, I enjoy saying ‘hi.’ It may not be the people you would want to go on vacation with, but I am happy that they care also and that they are involved, and that’s what really matters. We don’t have to agree on everything but at least help participating, and that’s great! I hope that you find a way to spread this everywhere.” (Jerry)

12) Learning/knowing as a whole: new – group – knowledge means power

“I realized that we have a great array of people in the neighborhood and I realized how rich we are. We have senior citizens who are architects or were in the war. Or from people who have kids you learn what other people’s needs are. As a group we need to do something about it. So being involved in the group has really opened my eyes to what the various issues are in the different constituencies. And it has made me very passionate about the neighborhood. Being involved in the neighborhood has made me a stronger advocate for the area and for the people living in it.” (Laura)

“We have learned a lot about how the city government works, what things are really important to us. And how to get things accomplished. When our group started, we knew very little about how to work with the city. Going through housing guidelines the city talks to us, takes us more seriously now, and we get a lot done now.” (Amelia)

“I live in one street where there are international artists, people involved in bands, in the theater, so many artists…and so many people involved in academia choose this neighborhood because of the diversity. I just think that if we can use all this power that we have to pull the neighborhood together in some way, we’ll all be better.” (Juliet)

13) Finding freedom in/through the group: the whole as more than the sum of its parts—person becomes a human being in being-with-others

“Every person has value, the property owner has the same value as the renter, the senior citizen, working together with all others, or being part of the community, where we are all valued, and where everybody, everyone is part of it, you can’t take one segment out. It is the whole to the part, and not the part to the whole. Without that single part the whole will collapse. Every part working together is needed in working together. Even the crazy old lady, she is part of the neighborhood. I can’t imagine our neighborhood without all the crazy people, without the youngster who everyone is afraid to let in their stores. They all have the potential to be good and the potential to be bad, whether they are good or bad. So, for the common good, reach out and bring them in so they don’t feel excluded, so that by bringing them in they feel part of the community and that just builds a stronger place to live.” (Becky)

“We believe that for a neighborhood to be healthy that we need to be merged in body and soul and a grocery store is a very central element of the neighborhood.” (Juliet)
“It has been really rewarding for me, it just makes me feel a lot better because I grew up very different. And I always had many people make fun of the way I talk, the way my family lived, what we had... In the group nobody stereotypes me, everyone knows that I am my own person and I live my own way. They don’t compromise me. It should be about the neighborhood and making it the best place. Because when you have that growing on, you can draw so many outside people to the town, to the neighborhood that can add a lot, and who can make it even a stronger place.” (Jennifer)

14) **Uniqueness within diversity: ownership and shared pride of the place and its people**

“What the pooch patrol does is bringing people back out on the streets and taking ownership again of where they live and caring about it, and the idea that you are not gonna shut your door and let crime happen in the streets and not look. You are gonna come out and walk your dog, and say ‘this is my street. I have a right to be here.’” (Amelia)

“It’s been very rewarding to see the place where you live grow and change. We have the historic district. When you see people become proud of the place where they live, and want to become involved and do things, and you have an event where you have people come together and they feel good…it is very rewarding. It is different that just having a place where I go and come from my job and pay a mortgage. It is a real personal investment; there is a piece of you that stays in the neighborhood.” (Amelia)

“I almost --in a way-- wish that I didn’t know so much about my neighbors because I am more irritated with some of them that if I would just say ‘hi’ to them. It’s kind of strange. The opposite effect of what you would anticipate because in the beginning we didn’t know much about each other, and then we started really getting close, and it was very positive. And I think overall our relationships have been very very positive, we know much more about each other. But along with the good stuff that we know about each other we now know all the bad stuff about each other. You know what? I hate my neighbors! [Laughs] I really don’t, but couple of them are so nitpicking on everything that drives me crazy! But I never knew that about them until…, like in a meeting, we have to really work through issues, I would have never known that had not we not had the… it is kind of a mixed bag of what you know about your neighbors, good and bad.” (Matthew)

“I do believe that if cities are going to survive and especially big cities, you got to break it down into small units; you gotta be able to deliver service on a small scale. Otherwise cities become too big and too inhuman and too impersonal and that’s when people say ‘why should I live here?’ You want people to live in the city, give them a reason to do it. Houses are great, but it’s really about people, about relationships, and that’s what neighborhoods enable: people to have relationships with each other within a smaller area so that they can feel that sense of community and sense of belonging.” (Mary)

15) **The larger good: pursued noble cause of the group**

“Ted and I butted head like crazy. We had a really hard time. He ended up moving away. I learnt then that it was not about me, that we all wanted to make the neighborhood better.
I could see people growing, engaged and enthusiastic, and that made me feel great about it. I am very proud of all the work we have done; this will help stabilize our neighborhood and will be a great thing for it. With this very hard beginning I am happy to know that what I do will impact the neighborhood for longer than what I will be around.” (Laura)

“Community is a group of people that comes together with a common interest: basically watching out for each other. You don’t have to be friends, buddy-buddy, but keep each other safe. People coming together form community.” (George)

“Just knowing that you are part of a bigger group, that you have a common goal… that’s very motivating and that helps you a lot.” (Jerry)

“The neighborhood does that. We all have the benefit of interaction. If we all didn’t care about the neighborhood, it would look quite different, especially in the spring, when there are flowers out there. Because people are out there and there is a level of strength and pride of who we are and we celebrate that. Every so often I sit back and reflect how fortunate I am. I don’t have a beautiful house: it is old, and sits in an old neighborhood. But it is great to live there. It is a great feeling. You know? Betty would call and say ‘hey, do you know that there is someone out there in your porch?’ We are all very lucky to be there and it is a very sad day when anyone decides to move out.” (Nick)

16) Personal changes through the group and interpersonal benefits: friendships, bonding

“It was a very positive experience. It’s made me think more about relationships, of consider things; realize that it is beyond my ego. If we are having a problem I pick up the phone ad I say: “Is everything ok? I didn’t mean for the discussion to become tense, I hope there is no hard feeling.” It’s really helped me grow as a person, to learn about relationships, of how people and groups work together. It was a great experience but it also was a very intense year so I was glad that was over.” (Laura)

“Community is a sense of feeling of togetherness where you live, that you know your neighbors, that you have a support system, something in the community that bonds you with others. It is a feeling of togetherness with other like-minded people. Kind of a family type feeling.” (Tracie)

“Community means… I’ll give you a quick example: I grew up in Iowa, in a small town. We had a fire in the dead of winter. I was nine years old. And I remember our neighbors, watching our house, offering us to take us in, to care for our dog because my dad’s family lived across town. We had our home remodeled. But our neighborhood where we lived was like the UN and I grew up like that, my dad’s friends were from all parts of the world. My father lived in Paris after the war, so he came back pretty cool thinking about lots of things. So that has always stayed with me, because these people cared about us. Because some people would not have done anything. So community means to me that you really belong, that you really know the people in your neighborhood, that there are people with whom you can just interact without feeling scared, and that you are not going to get robbed, raped, and abused. You have to be careful, too. But if you belong to a group like this, you get the chance to see how things work, and to get involved more and more.” (Jennifer)

“Community means to me people that work together and are genuinely happy to be together; that they take pride of the area where they live. All you have to do is put in
some labor, which is not even as bad as you think, because people get together, have a good time, somebody makes doughnuts, it is a very enjoyable thing and you just have to care and it’s been very rewarding. This neighborhood has the feeling of a little town. I think that people need to understand that you are the city; it is not some magical entity that’s there to do whatever you want; that’s you, so if you don’t make an effort, why would anybody else? Someone has to get started, take the initiative. Unless you get involved you will never know! It makes people so much happier. Being part of this group has benefited us in ways that we never imagined when we started. Everything we have done has branched out in many other good things. What else could you ask for?” (Jerry) “[Being part of the neighborhood group] is probably one of the most rewarding things that I did in my whole life. Learning that you can take up on an idea and make it happen, even when everybody is looking at you and say ‘you want to do what?’ and just being persistent and say ‘yeah,’ and enlisting people and getting them engaged in the idea. Those are skills that translate anywhere. And it was probably my first experience as an adult, because I was in my mid-20s then. You know, really having that kind of a success…what was really cool is that it didn’t really get attributed to me, at least for the first couple of years. It was like everybody showed up, did their part, had a really good time, and sat back afterwards and said ‘wasn’t that fun?! Let’s do it again!’ And that—in as small scale— is what makes the neighborhood work: it is people doing their work and saying ‘it worked, that was fun, let’s do it again.’” (Mary)

**All themes- clusters**

1. Reach out, group as neigh leader, recruitment
   - Bringing life to neigh—group as neigh leader
   - Community outreach;
   - Expanding outwards
   - Leave your mark, in the group; future generations; neighbors as caretakers; group as neigh leader
   - Real champions make things happen
   - Betterment of all; opening of the self to others

2. Force of the group to deal with evil; making neigh a better place to live
   - With others change is possible; reach out; worthwhile experience
   - Work together and accomplish what would be impossible by oneself
   - Learning to work with others; define issues in neighbors’ terms; legitimacy; democracy
   - Diversity, honor and pride; information, knowledge, opportunities and possibilities
- Organization, communication; tremendous learning; External appreciation; recognition; disagreements
- Common concerns; working together is easier than by oneself;
- Learning to relate to others; Grown interaction; selflessness
- Learning to be/grow together; Pride in working together
- Working together; helping each other; honesty
- Empowering experience; learning together, caring
- Getting together and start solving issues as a group, much easier and more fun than doing it by yourself; having an idea, sharing it, buying into it, having others be part of it
- Listen to others; humbling oneself; sharing; giving; brainstorming together; support, trust; listening; respect for the individual and his/her ideas; soul and heart in the organization
- Getting to know others through the struggle; stick together; differences is very positive

3. Agreements- disagreements
- Collaboration, deliberation, networking
- Organization, strategies, majority rules
- Practical politics, non-confrontational philosophy; respect and recognition
- Open forum, discussion; agreements, disagreements
- From reaction to partnership w/others
- Turning a problem into a solution; give and take; responsibility
- Mutual support and trust, even when you disagree; respect, tolerance and acceptance of differences
- Sitting down and talking through problems; considering all parts to the whole, to the puzzle; compromise and conversation
- Politics: a give and take to get things done
- Picking your battles; taking for granted relationships
- Majority rules; explosive, uncontrollable, personalities which don’t deal well with dissent, unfortunate
- Leader as group’s glue
- Internal and external collaboration; deliberation; encourage others
- Act maturely; consensus in face of conflict; compromise
- Burn out; resentment; regaining friendships; common interest of watching for each other; no need to agree, simply work together
- Legitimacy; public recognition; bureaucracy, dichotomies
- Frustrating and satisfying at once
- Personality driven org;
- Business-like organization; collaboration
- Frustratingly rewarding experience
- Positive vs. Negative energy
- Good intentions but no time
- City does not welcome disagreements; devastating racial practices for the neighborhood; wanting to kill a neighborhood initiative or idea
- Impositions onto the neighborhood; impractical and senseless projects; lack of cooperation among people; disenchantment; strong stomach to deal with politicians
- Conflict; different opinions; need to speak from a position of power to be listened; betrayal of city officials, undemocratic
- Undermining of harmony of neighborhood; manipulation of officials
- External discredit of group; gvt ignores people's voices
- Hard time to make of their place what they want it to be; Labeling, categorizing is pernicious
- Labeling, categorizing is pernicious for speaking; keep human beingness alive
- People don’t count as money does; money-driven mayor that makes neighbors feel very uncomfortable; city ignores recommendation from neighbors; city should respect and support the neighborhood; no respect for the human being,
- Being a human, not a thing

4. Opportunities, benefits
   - Knowing-learning opportunities through group
   - Sitting down and deliberating; mutual learning; benefits of coming together
   - Opportunities and benefits of working with others
   - Opening of the eyes toward neighborhood’s deeper needs; give back to the neighborhood;

5. Being able to be oneself; freedom, acceptance, respect, no prejudices or stereotypes, no fear
   - Sense of being home
   - Belonging to the group is a matter of interest; freedom of speech
   - Watching people enjoy, freedom, laughing
   - Fundamental rights of citizens

6. Uniqueness within diversity
   - Uniqueness of the place and its people; fuzzy boundaries; dynamism; growth, change; problems; people is all that matters
   - Eclecticism; neighborliness; joint learning; pull people together; uniqueness
   - Socialization; common concerns and needs; singularity and dynamism of the neighborhood
   - Preserve uniqueness of the place as a gathering nucleus; right of neighbors to decide the fate of their place; power of the group mightiest force
   - Unique area within the city defined by its people; landmarks of the neighborhood need to be preserved;
   - Cities need to operate through smaller units—neighborhoods; first coming together; most rewarding things that she did in her life; be able to get
people involved in your ideas and work together; joy in doing things with others
- Gathering and sharing; getting their ideas validated; Love for the neighborhood; great value in diversity, extreme power that we could use to pull the neighborhood together; negative outlook of group; great potential of the group
- Sense of place that draws people together
- Ownership of the place; make a difference

7. Larger goal; protection; pursuit of a noble cause; neighborliness; passion for life; caring for the whole brings people together
- Opening of the eyes toward neighborhood’s deeper needs; give back to the neighborhood; Greater good
- Shared sense of care, commitment to the whole; Faith in community building
- Sticking up for the whole; difference brings richness
- Being part of a much larger group, endeavor
- Pertaining; looking for this in life; donate time, volunteer; impact in your neighborhood; improve other people’s lives, caring for the disadvantaged
- Mission is to improve the neighborhood; being persistent and working as a whole
- Wholeness: Most things in the neighborhood are personal; caring: genuine concerns for disadvantaged
- Presence vs. Absence); taking responsibility for improvement of the whole; selflessness; ownership of the place; will to improve
- People coming together for the sake of the common good; determination and dedication
- Having enough faith. Listening to others, energy and enthusiasm, be able to recognize that it’s about the neighborhood and not about you—not egoistic, selflessness
- It is about listening and including the whole; together as a whole to help others--the needy;
- Grassroots organization with no big money behind; big hearts and souls; work toward building; putting all the pieces together
- People put their hearts in what they believe; having no money does not mean not caring;
- Understanding of the big picture, of the whole;
- Attachment; uniqueness of place & people;
- Need to belong, caring; being part of a larger endeavor, watching out

8. Pulling people together
- Inside vs. Outside yourself; everlasting changes
- Fortunate to have others; invested feelings and practices; shared dignity for the place, pride
- Beyond power: friendships, part of something larger, nobler; most rewarding than any invention of the imagination; a discovery; a big family;
- Joy when meeting others, collaboration, it's all about people
- Energy and wisdom are the life of the group; everyone is essential
- Most joy when putting your heart
- Wholeness of your life; deep connection to the place
- Knowing others; interacting; ownership in the neighborhood, personal investments, uniqueness of the neighborhood
- Genuine internal care, process of personalities; friendships with opposing group--different focuses
- Feelings and lives attached to the place & people; powerful as a whole, as a group; Incredibly rewarding and inspirational experience
- Neighbors become friends, family; motivated-unmotivated cycle; unexpected joy; worthy experience; fulfillment of own life’s desires; genuine happiness of being together
- Love, secondary family; everyone matters; feelings rather than structure
- Life makes sense; best time is when sharing with others;
- Joy when people come together as a whole; appreciation
- Genuinely caring for others, a coming together; a rejoinder
- Togetherness, Caring
- Counting on others, caring, togetherness
- People coming & sticking together; Caring
- Coming together as a body; Empowerment of the whole
- Belonging; selflessness' offering, giving
- Passion; altruism; help others; inner need; desire
- In-betweens, friendships
- Bonding; friendships; family-type feelings
- Relationships; learning together; genuine joy, friendships; substance; external skepticisms
- Deeper involvement & connectedness; heart in common action; shared pride
- It's about people, relationships; selflessness; fluidity; everyone counts, can make a difference
- Joy when people come together as a whole; appreciation
- Personal changes through the group