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Justice, Democratic Inclusion, and Empowered Governance in Richmond’s Development Policy

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Cover Page Footnote
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Introduction

In recent years, Richmond, Virginia’s neighborhoods have experienced rapid changes that have significantly affected their residents. These changes have been spurred on by recent population growth with nearly 10,000 new residents moving into Richmond over the last four years alone (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). This influx of people has led to substantial increases in investment throughout the city including the establishing of new businesses, renovating of homes, restoring of vacant property, and building of apartments across the city. While services such as grocery stores, restaurants, art studios, and craft breweries have opened in the city, this development has not been inclusive to all residents. Differences in class, whose distinctions manifest themselves through a lack of access to financial resources, capital, as well as business and legal acumen, intersect closely with race due to the historic periods of economic and political exclusion faced by the African American community in this city. These broad challenges of inequality and continuing injustices continue to affect Richmond’s neighborhoods.

My own experience investigating these challenges started as a student at the University of Richmond through a series of volunteer and internship experiences working primarily in the development sphere. These experiences as an outside observer and a student gave me a glimpse of these challenges and a means to begin investigating them. During one particular experience working on a Community Safety Initiative for a visibly dilapidated business district in a lower-middle class
African American community, I began to observe how class and race continue to challenge Richmond’s development. While talking with storeowners, I learned of the challenges many of the African American owners were facing. One store owner, having recently been discharged from the hospital after a terrible car crash, returned to find her fried fish market in disrepair. With little capital available and a pressing need to continue supporting herself, she set up fryers under a tent in front of her store until she could save enough money to pay for the cleaning of her store. Another business owner a few blocks down the road ran a flower shop that sold primarily fake flowers because he lacked refrigerators to store real flowers. He had connections to local flower distributors, but without access to capital, he could not expand his business further and offer real flowers in his store. Both business owners lacked the resources to expand and improve their businesses, holding back not only themselves but the whole neighborhood that would benefit from their success. These two examples are emblematic of the stark contrast between rapid development occurring in some parts of the city and the lack of investment in others. The current efforts by both the private and public sectors to tackle these challenges have been inadequate for the scale of the problem.

My research primarily focused on the effects of recent development on residents and small business owners in the Church Hill neighborhood. This neighborhood has become the scene of some of the most rapid changes occurring in the city. For this reason, I used this neighborhood as a focal point to understand
the broader development landscape in the city of Richmond. Interviews with nonprofit organization leaders and city government officials provided insight into the challenges of economic development in Richmond and the priorities of those who are working to promote equitable development in the city. These perspectives, gathered in interviews, reveal the processes of institutional decision-making and cross-sector cooperation in current development practice, and the challenge of creating just outcomes from current systems. As this research progressed, it became clear that improving these processes might require a change to the current system of governance so as to institutionalize more just, democratic forms of decision-making. While considering ways to improve the processes of economic development through enhanced democratic governance, important questions need to be asked, such as: How to get the right people to the table? How to govern in a way that accords with a specific idea of justice? How to make decisions that produce just results? Understanding the ways in which scholars have viewed these questions and other aspects of city development, government, and democratic participation can provide context to the discussion moving forward.

**Literature Review: Governance and Justice**

I believe that there needs to be an empowerment of government through a radical rethinking of public authority to include robust, democratic inclusion of neighborhood members and marginalized residents in the city development process with the goal of producing just outcomes. This assertion has a component focused
on the structure of city governance as it pertains to development and a theoretical component focused on justice and its importance as a standard for evaluating development and governance. Both components have been debated by scholars, activists, and writers and have received renewed attention as the debates over issues such as gentrification, inequality, and the role of cities have gained prominence in recent years. As rapid changes continue to occur in Richmond and other American cities, these debates will intensify as cities grapple with new challenges and look for solutions to pressing problems.

The structure of city governance, particularly who controls the levers of power, significantly determines who benefits from city policy. Political scientists differ, however, on their understanding of the political dynamics that shape and create policy. Pluralism, as a theory, asserts that people are divided into political and apolitical groups with the apolitical, as the largest group, being the source for popular values and opinions that get taken up by the political and incorporated into policy (Dahl, 1961, p. 91-92). In this way, as political values shift and different groups become the majority, their views are reflected in government policy. Elections further constrain political leaders and ensure that citizens’ demands are met (Dahl, 1961, p. 89-90). Anti-pluralists criticize this conception of politics as downplaying the ways in which inequalities of power are developed and maintained in cities. Dominant groups in cities “defend and promote their preferred position” and prevent those who do not benefit from the system from adequately politicizing
their concerns or needs (Bachrach, 1970, p. 104-105). This system functionally excludes marginalized citizens and residents from effectively participating in the political process and benefitting from government policy. The anti-pluralists push us to think about city governance as an arena where exclusion can be a real possibility. The goals of those who lead city government do not always match the needs and goals of a plurality of the people. Pushing city leaders to move closer to their constituents’ priorities might require a re-working of how citizens participate in government and how their interests and desires are translated into concrete, policy decisions. Another potential barrier to more broad democratic participation can be the receptiveness of planning professionals to citizen input.

City planners have a prominent role in development decision-making that empowers them to make decisions that can greatly affect residents. Their responsiveness to citizen input can either act as a barrier or a boon to resident desires being translated into development policy. The consequential nature of such a position that arbitrates between citizens’ desires and broader city goals can be seen in the long-lasting effects of past city planning decisions. The fateful top-down decision to clear slums in the 1940s and concentrate public housing in predominantly African American communities would later have adverse consequences for the city and these communities due to concentrated poverty (Silver, 1995, p. 135). To preempt some of the more negative consequences of poor planning decisions, some scholars, such as Susan Fainstein, believe democratic
processes should play a more significant role in development. Specifically, citizens should be consulted on the development that would either affect them or be relevant to them, and in some cases, brought into the decision-making process (2010, p. 175). Fainstein asserts though that it is the duty of planners to push for egalitarian solutions that produce broad benefits for the city and its residents as a whole (2010, p. 172). For this reason, Fainstein prioritizes equity over democracy as means to achieving justice (2010, p. 175). This emphasis on equitable development driven by planning professionals as a means to achieve justice relies on the particular planner having a sense of duty toward achieving justice through the policies they develop (2010, p 36). Building a foundation for just development on the goodwill of those who are in positions of power may not truly institutionalize justice as the central driving goal of development policy. Beyond the leadership of government, achieving justice through policy or democratic governance has been widely discussed by theorists.

When discussing justice in policy, theorists often define justice in terms of a framework to achieving a set of distinct goals through specific or general policy prescriptions. Amartya Sen focuses his ideas of justice around the goal of improving the capabilities of individuals. He contends that development for development’s sake will not necessarily have any measureable benefit to the wider public, nor improve their lives in ways that they actually need. Policy should not just seek to remedy material deprivation, but work to enhance capabilities of those
who lack it due to their economic or political position in society (Sen, 1999, p. 20). The chief goal of policy should be the enhancing of the public’s ability to participate economically, socially, and politically (Sen, 1999, p. 18-19). Participation in all aspects of life requires the ability to participate and the venues in which to participate. Justice, in the form of enhanced, individual capabilities, lays out an inclusive vision of policy that encourages policymakers to consider the development of people when creating policy.

Achieving participatory parity among disparate groups can prove more challenging, particularly in the case of historically marginalized groups. Nancy Fraser proposes participatory parity as an important goal in the construction of policy that seeks to rectify injustices. To achieve participatory parity, a group must achieve recognition and the redistribution of benefits, with the former being the social respect and standing in society on par with everyone else, and the latter being the resources to resolve the material deprivation that result from historical inequities or structural conditions. Nancy Fraser contends that only through the achievement of both of these goals can social justice be achieved. By focusing on both recognition and redistribution, policymaking can be more effective at achieving goals of justice and the righting of wrongs experienced by marginalized groups (Fraser, 1994). Fraser does express doubts as to the role that the average person can play in constructing policy that produces participatory parity because of their everyday involvement within the systems that should be changed (1994).
weariness and concern for the full participation of the average person in policymaking can be found in the ideas of Sen, Fraser, and Fainstein who are wary of significant involvement by the general populace. Some theorists have challenged this idea and have advocated for greater democratic involvement in policy decision-making.

Increased democratic participation among a greater number of people has the capacity to move society towards greater degrees of justice. Iris Marion Young sees disagreement and conflict in society as opportunities to solve problems collectively in a way that takes into consideration both normative and practical concerns (2000, p. 28). She believes that when people are engaged in dialogue over issues important to the group as a whole, then they will take into account “principles and values of justice” in their decision-making (2000, p. 29). Creating a democracy that allows for this type of deliberation, and then actually follows through with implementing just proposals requires a system where one group does not dominate another and all people have the equal ability to participate in deliberations toward a collective solution. The results of such a collaboration among all people will very likely be just and also realistic in their likelihood to be accomplished (Young, 2000, p. 30-31). Democracy, however, has the tendency to reinforce structural inequalities in wealth and power when one group dominates or restricts the voice of other groups, but conversely, the wider the debate and greater the participation, the more a democracy can produce just results (Young, 2000, p. 34-35). This type
of justice in democracy occurs as changes that come about incrementally move institutions toward becoming more inclusive and democratic (Young, 2000, p. 35). Young, however, is skeptical of such a system existing that gives everyone a voice in government decision-making. For this reason, Young criticizes moving democracy toward the two extremes of a purely direct democracy where people represent themselves or a representative democracy that does not include citizens beyond voting every few years (2000, p. 124-125). For Young, “in large-scale mass society, representation and participation mutually require each other for politics to be deeply democratic” (2000, p. 124). The structure of democratic government, particularly when considering the role of residents in government decision-making, can have a profound effect on the policies passed and implemented, and for this reason, must be a consideration when seeking to make policy that will produce just outcomes.

Justice in policy outcomes and democratic inclusion of residents have been discussed at length by the above authors as well as by many others who seek to infuse government policy with concerns of justice. These discussions create the basis for actionable policies that can be established in democratic political systems. The effects of policy or institutional change that comes about as a result of theories should not be discounted. In this sense, democracy has the power to bring the will and collective energy of the people together to build a society that benefits everyone, protects the most vulnerable, and creates prosperity and stability for all.
Democracy has not always produced a track record of just outcomes in Richmond’s past history with challenges such as concentrated poverty in African American communities (Silver, 1995, p.135), and a disinterested business elite that often refused to collaborate with city officials (J. V. Moeser, personal communication, February 6, 2015). These past challenges do not have to be Richmond’s future and many in Richmond are working to change these historical injustices. This paper makes a contribution to this effort by proposing a justice-based approach to development and then examines the current development landscape and its participating actors to see where such an approach could have a major effect.

**Normative Framework**

There needs to be an empowerment of government through a radical rethinking of public authority to include robust, democratic inclusion of neighborhood members and marginalized residents in the development process with the goal of producing just outcomes. This alternative conception of development politics would allow the public to drive the priorities of their neighborhoods, to organize development under the guidance of the government, and to create more effective partnerships with nonprofit and corporate partners to solve social problems. Public authority, meaning the people’s will as expressed through government, would expand to encompass all aspects of development and policymaking. This authority would be achieved through a framework that calls for new democratic processes where residents and marginalized groups have a say in
development decision-making and where an institutional mechanism exists that turns resident concerns into concrete proposals and just projects. Justice in this system comes from the equitable distribution of the benefits of new development across neighborhoods. In a city like Richmond, equitable development in particular can be significantly constrained by competing priorities, limited resources, and institutional ineffectiveness. To achieve these goals, there must be a new collaboration between the government, residents, and private actors mediated through a democratic and inclusive decision-making process that brings the needs of neighborhoods to the table and creates a plan for meeting those needs. This change in the role of government when coupled with an institutional mechanism to ensure effective democratic participation of neighborhood residents could change the development landscape in Richmond.

A new system that favors democratic participation should ensure that all voices are considered, everyone affected by a project ought to have a say in its development whether through advocates or representatives and development projects should benefit residents equitably. These broader goals should be the basis for an mechanism that institutionalizes these new democratic processes. The physical components of this mechanism, broadly speaking, would include organizations on the neighborhood level and representation on the city government level embedded in the development decision-making process. Neighborhood-based organizations who have the capacity to represent the interests and needs of their
neighborhood residents would help to make broad and inclusive development decisions possible. To ensure that marginalized neighborhood members are not excluded from these organizations, advocates would be identified to speak for the interests of marginalized or uninvolved groups that for various reasons participate little in formal processes of decision-making. These groups could include students, persons with felony convictions, those living in severe poverty, or single parents. An institutional mechanism needs to be established that includes representatives from these neighborhood-based organizations and identified advocates into the process of development decision-making. These representatives and advocates would ensure that new development adheres to standards of justice and produces just outcomes.

The benefits of such an approach would increase citizen involvement and focus development efforts on the neighborhood level. The political playing field would be leveled in the city with residents having a more direct role in decision-making to counter the access that other groups, such as business, have traditionally had. New and innovative solutions could be devised and tested using government, neighborhood, and private/nonprofit resources to achieve resident goals. A neighborhood plan can be explored, and the necessary steps to achieve specific goals articulated. The chance for neighborhood buy-in would increase as a community forms, shapes its own priorities, and sees action being taken to achieve desired outcomes. Such a system would empower residents to work toward a
broader vision for their neighborhood and city. Developing and then strengthening these processes would help to ensure that broad-based development is achieved in Richmond’s neighborhoods and among its most vulnerable residents.

Justice in development, for the purpose of this paper, requires that the benefits of development are distributed equitably among all residents. A just development project would ensure that all residents, regardless of race, class, or circumstance would receive some benefit from a new development with no one group receiving significantly more than another. A development would be unjust if only a few benefited from the development and the affected neighborhood received little or no benefit. An institutional mechanism that brings neighborhoods and advocates into development decision-making would move projects closer to this conception of justice. This process could have the effect of weighting development decisions in favor of neighborhood-based projects that have a greater direct benefit to residents and can more readily produce just outcomes.

Residents’ preferences toward neighborhood-based projects that produce just outcomes would almost certainly be translated into policy in a system that institutionalizes effective democratic participation. The current system provides far fewer incentives to take justice into consideration when choosing development projects. The current development trajectory can be moved toward normative concerns of justice. The need for such a system becomes apparent when examining current development in Richmond’s neighborhoods. Through interviews with
residents, government officials, and private actors, the gaps between social justice
goals and the ability for actors to actually achieve these goals become apparent.
The reality of the development landscape in Richmond requires a rethinking of the
governance of development projects to include greater democratic participation,
which would enhance the system to better accomplish just ends.

**Methodology**

Interviews with nonprofit leaders, residents, and government officials involved in or affected by the current development process were conducted to collect evidence and create a snapshot of the development landscape in the Church Hill neighborhood of Richmond. These individuals were asked to weigh in on the opportunities and problems of current development and ways to make the system better. The demographic information for residents and small business owners is provided when discussing neighborhood dynamics for further context.

**Persons Interviewed:**

- **Kim Chen:** 30+ year resident of Church Hill. **Demographic Information:** white, older, middle-aged woman

- **Christine Haines Greenberg:** Owner of “Urban Set Bride” a bridal boutique located in Church Hill. **Demographic Information:** Mixed race, woman, and young business owner

- **Candice Streett:** CEO of the Virginia Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)
• **Dr. David Belde:** Senior Vice President of Mission Services for Bon Secours Richmond Health System

• **Dr. John Moeser:** Senior Fellow at the University of Richmond Bonner Center for Civic Engagement and Professor Emeritus of Urban Studies and Planning at Virginia Commonwealth University

• **Robert O. Holmes, Jr.:** Economic Development Program Administrator of the Minority Business Development Office

• **Lee Downey:** Interim Deputy Chief Administrative Officer for Planning and Economic Development. A position that oversees the offices of Economic Development, Planning and Development Review, and the Minority Business Development.

Further data was collected from interviews that were conducted for a separate project by Dr. Herrera and Dr. Browder of the University of Richmond. Their project focused on the telling of personal stories of long-term residents of Church Hill. Some of the stories that were collected were relevant to this paper.

**Interview used:**

• **John Taylor III:** Lifelong resident of Church Hill. **Demographic Information:** Born in 1955, black, and male

One project in particular has a prominent place in this research with many of the interviewees having some connection to the initiative. This particular program
in the Church Hill Neighborhood is called the Supporting East End Development (SEED) Grant Initiative. A description of the project is below:

**Supporting East End Development (SEED) Grant Initiative:** Small business grant program funded by Bon Secours Health Systems and administered by LISC. This program gives grants to small businesses that open or relocate to the Church Hill neighborhood of the city. **General Characteristics:** Small-scale, privately driven, focused on individual grants, and focused around one neighborhood.

Other projects studied in the course of this research are identified below:

**Redskins Training Camp:** Large-scale development partially financed by the city and Bon Secours Health Systems as part of a wider expansion plan. Goal was to bring the Redskins Football Team to the city promoting economic development and further investment in the city.

**Shockoe Bottom Stadium:** A proposed large-scale project by Richmond Mayor Dwight C. Jones to build a new baseball stadium in Shockoe Bottom. Opposition to its location near the site of historic slave markets and other criticisms ultimately stymied the project with a majority of the city council opposing it.

Each of the persons interviewed and projects analyzed tells a story of Richmond’s development landscape. When analyzed together they create a narrative that reveals the ways in which various actors interact, understand each
other and development, and are affected by ongoing development in the city. Understanding these interactions and the institutional processes that go into developing these projects can help to reveal how a normative framework of justice based in democratic participation and equitable development can improve this system.

**Empirical Observations**

**A changing neighborhood.** The Church Hill neighborhood, as one of the oldest neighborhoods in Richmond located immediately east of the historic downtown, features historic homes, access to services and restaurants, and closeness to jobs and other urban amenities. These qualities have led many new residents to move into the neighborhood in recent years. This movement has caused a flurry of development and the inhabiting of once blighted and vacant houses. This development has begun changing the demographics of the neighborhood from majority black to increasingly white. A particular concern has been the pricing out of African American residents and minority-owned businesses as property values and their associated taxes rise, storefront rents rise, and consumer tastes change as new residents move into the neighborhood.

These changes, however, have been fairly recent. Kim Chen has lived in Church Hill for 31 years. When she first moved into the neighborhood much of the homes surrounding her were uninhabited and slowly falling apart. The rising profile and popularity of the neighborhood has encouraged new residents from other parts
of the region to move into newly renovated homes. She believes that much of the commercial development has happened as a result of the influx of new residents with restaurants and other services coming in as the market continues to mature (K. Chen, personal communication, 2015). Her experience reveals how much the neighborhood has changed in the 30 years since she moved there.

All of these new residents along with Church Hill’s other qualities of diversity, low storefront rents, and its status as an up-and-coming neighborhood has made it attractive for many small business to open. One of the recent business owners is Christine Haines Greenberg, a mixed race, young professional, who opened her bridal boutique *Urban Set Bride* about a year ago at the time of this interview. Christine and her fiancé had both lived in the neighborhood before she opened her store, and they knew they wanted to live there. The lack of competitors in the area, the residential nature of the neighborhood, and the prominence and popularity of the neighborhood were all reasons to locate the shop in Church Hill (personal communication, February 5, 2015). This process of locating and establishing a business in Church Hill was facilitated by SEED (Supporting East End Development), which has funded other new businesses in the area. Other private developers and businesses have similarly been investing in the neighborhood with gentrification being the result. This rapid development has had a profound effect on long-time residents who have seen the character of their neighborhoods change dramatically in recent years.
John Taylor III explains the challenges of recent gentrification through his own experiences. He describes a recent situation where four new neighbors, who were white, moved in nearby. Soon after, he received a notice from the city inspector that a repair needed to be made on his house and that without action the city would criminalize the situation (Browder, Herrera, & Taylor, 2014). This situation was unusual for Mr. Taylor, and reveals the ways in which his new neighbors, whom he suspects of calling code enforcement, are not just moving-in but disregarding the needs and vulnerabilities of long-time residents in their efforts to shape the neighborhood as they desire. He questions whether the city knows that “they are allowing themselves to be used to displace people” (Browder et al., 2014). John Taylor prefers working with neighbors one-on-one instead of getting an outside force involved like the city (Browder et al., 2014). His neighbors often take different approaches. He expands on his concerns further by describing the aggressive effort by developers to acquire property from African American homeowners. He describes how his brothers have received cold calls asking them to sell their house under less than clear terms (Browder et al., 2014). These situations cause concern, discomfort, and worry over the changes that are being imposed at times by their new neighbors.

In spite of these conflicts among some residents, the community aspects of Church Hill have been a significant draw for many young people moving to the neighborhood. The diversity that characterizes Church Hill certainly drew
Christine Haines Greenberg to the neighborhood when she opened up her bridal boutique. Her desire to maintain that diversity and community drives many of her interactions now. It was this desire to be a part of the community that led her to help the daughter of the family living in the apartment above the store to pick out a prom dress at wholesale price, and her willingness to sell at wholesale price wedding dresses to low-income community members. This desire to be an active member of a community is important to Christine and important to many individuals who move or open businesses in Church Hill. How to maintain this diversity and ensure that everyone benefits from this development is a question for which Christine hopes there will soon be answers (personal communication, February 5, 2015). Maintaining diversity in a community often requires the work of larger groups or organizations who can help shape the direction of the neighborhood as a whole. Current efforts in small business development have tried to accomplish this goal with limited success.

**Small business development in Church Hill.** Small business development can be a source of economic dynamism, wealth building, and job creation. Small business development in Church Hill has not been equitable with many new businesses being set up by those outside of the neighborhood and many local, neighborhood-based African American businesses shutting down (L. Browder & P. Herrera, personal communication, January 26, 2015). An example of such a change occurred in the retail space next to *Urban Set Bride* where a barber shop was
replaced by a craft chocolatier (C. H. Greenberg, personal communication, February 5, 2015). Many of the new restaurants and services coming in are catering towards more affluent residents with customers from all over the city coming to dine and shop. African American-owned businesses often cannot compete effectively with new businesses, while at the same time they lose their clientele. Robust efforts to ensure equity for small business owners has been fairly absent on a government level with the most significant of these efforts being the supporting of minority-owned contractors working on government-funded development projects (R. O. Holmes Jr., personal communication, February 18, 2015). With the absence of major government initiatives, nonprofits have created programs to support small business development.

The SEED grant program has sought to bridge this gap between white-owned businesses and black-owned businesses. The SEED program has gone through four funding cycles and is currently on its fifth with grants ranging from a few thousand dollars to ten thousand dollars. One of the greatest challenges of the SEED program so far has been the lack of diversity in the initial applicants applying for and being awarded grants. The initial interests of many African American residents to start a business was not reflected in those who eventually applied. Upon further investigation, LISC found that “the reality of what it would take to open a business is daunting to people” (C. Streett, personal communication, January 20, 2015). Many of these potential applicants did not have the expertise,
connections, nor the sense of security that would allow them to take the risk and start a business. LISC has begun taking steps in future cycles to remedy this situation. LISC wants to reach people who are further in the process, provide them with a cabinet of advisors such as a lawyer and accountant to support them through the process, and ultimately create role models in the community that can mentor others (C. Streett, personal communication, January 20, 2015). This intentional effort to make the program more equitable and fill in the gaps created by inequalities of skills, resources, and experience has the potential to broaden the benefits of the program and bring in a more diverse group of small business owners as applicants and recipients. However, with the number of grants hovering around eight per round, the maximum impact from such a program is limited even when focused on one particular neighborhood.

This effort to promote small business development in Church Hill is one program among many providing services, encouraging development, and pursuing social justice in Church Hill. These programs, however, have little connection with one another and were not conceived under one central, unifying plan for the Church Hill neighborhood. Due to the nature of nonprofit work, these organizations often lack the capacity to create and maintain large-scale support systems that encourage long-term, just outcomes. This circumstance is partially the result of the divergent missions of the various organizations involved, but also a lack of resources to undertake a broad and expansive development effort that would benefit all
residents. The SEED grant clearly seeks to fulfill a particular social mission and resolve some of the inequalities in small business development in Church Hill, but the challenge is too great for a few private actors to solve on their own.

**Narrow missions and limited resources: the private sector in development.** The private sector plays a substantial role in the development of Church Hill, but the fragmented nature of this role prevents the achievement of goals centered in justice. Although partnerships do form between the various actors, they are often only pursued because the missions of the participating organizations happen to overlap. This system creates uneven development through narrow missions that solve one aspect of human needs without addressing broader challenges. Limited resources and a fragmented environment make it difficult for even the biggest private players to effectively achieve justice in development through broad-based and equitable development that benefits all residents.

Outside of its partnership with LISC on the SEED grant program, Bon Secours maintains a hospital in Church Hill that employs many residents and engages in charitable causes within the neighborhood on a wide range of issues. David Belde describes this role as an “obligation as a faith-based health care provider to bring health and wholeness to the communities we serve” (personal communication, March 5, 2015). Bon Secours’s community outreach efforts reflect this goal. Bon Secours relies on an expansive view of community health which has led them to be involved in issues ranging from graduation rates to
economic development projects (D. Belde, personal communication, March 5, 2015). Bon Secours’s strategies to reach these goals include lending money through community development corporations (CDCs), actively partnering with community partners and nonprofit organizations, and providing cash outlays to not-for-profit organizations to build their capacity and address community health needs that Bon Secours cannot address itself. Bon Secours hopes to create a walkable and bike-able neighborhood with access to services, jobs, and community gathering places all of which are ingredients to improve the health of the residents in the neighborhood. Although these projects are diverse, the primary focus for all of these initiatives centers on health-related goals due to the nature of Bon Secours as a healthcare provider. The specific mission of Bon Secours does not necessarily reflect a broader vision of the neighborhood beyond its key focus of health nor one that is necessarily derived from its residents. In an effort to make projects more democratic, organizations like Bon Secours do incorporate some democratic elements when determining which projects to pursue within their particular areas of focus.

Community organizing and partnerships with neighborhood organizations are an essential part of the work LISC and Bon Secours do. These efforts help to increase the democratic nature of their projects, while encouraging buy-in from neighborhood residents. LISC has been intentional about expanding the role of the Church Hill neighborhood in the SEED grant process by seeking out their input into
how the program should be conducted and focused. For example, LISC has been asking residents what services they want in their neighborhood in order to better target grants in a way that encourages those desired businesses to open (C. Streett, personal communication, January 20, 2015). By adding this democratic component, LISC can better fulfill its mission and improve the effectiveness of the SEED program.

Bon Secours interacts with a much broader section of the neighborhood and consequently is aware of the tensions in the community, and the ways in which development could adversely affect certain residents. As part of this ongoing process of gaining neighborhood feedback, Bon Secours is convening a meeting of six to seven nonprofits in order to help encourage community dialogues. However, there is a balance that Dr. Belde believes Bon Secours has to find; in particular, “[Bon Secours] has to balance an agenda of a business and healthcare ministry with being a good community citizen and advocate” (personal communication, March 5, 2015). Bon Secours does not have the capacity as a business to make decisions only after they know what everyone wants. In spite of these clear limits of what Bon Secours can accomplish, Dr. Belde emphasizes that Bon Secours’s style of engagement has changed overtime and become more collaborative. In 2010, Bon Secours convened a neighborhood gathering where nearly 1,500 people participated and shared community needs along with their vision for the future of the neighborhood (D. Belde, personal communication, March 5, 2015). This style
of engagement allows Bon Secours to fulfill its mission and goals, while ensuring some level of democratic participation in the decision-making process.

This level of engagement does not reach everyone. The limited mission and resources of these organizations makes reaching vulnerable populations particularly difficult. Organizations like LISC and Bon Secours are not equipped and often unable to manage change for an entire neighborhood and protect vulnerable populations from the potential negative effects of current development. These various groups focus their concerns on particular aspects of a neighborhood’s needs that are most suited toward their mission and capabilities. As a result, these efforts can be disjointed and reflect the competing interests, priorities, and goals of the various actors involved. In such an environment, these organizations grapple with the challenges of gentrification with no clear path on how to resolve the displacement and exclusion that can result from rapid change in a neighborhood and no authority in which to coordinate available resources from a variety of sources to ensure that the benefits of development reach more people. For this reason, institutions such as businesses, nonprofits, and even neighborhood organizations on their own are not able to achieve fully equitable outcomes that take into account the needs of all residents.

**Gentrification: what should be done?** Residents and small business owners of Church Hill see the effects of gentrification and rapid development play out in their neighborhood every day. For long-term residents such as Mr. Taylor,
it is not a question of whether multi-culturalism is desirable, but whether all share in the benefits of the change that is occurring or one group pushes out the other groups who are different from them (Browder et al., 2014). For new small business owners such as Christine Haines Greenberg, the diversity is what originally attracted her to the neighborhood. She has since come to know many of the local businesses and neighbors and interacts with them on a regular basis. She expresses a level of uncertainty over the future diversity of the neighborhood. She worries about future affordability for young families and long-term residents even as she hopes that development brings more commercial spaces for a possible future expansion of her store (personal communication, February 5, 2015). These challenges have been on the minds of nonprofit leaders working in this neighborhood too.

For Candice Streett, “Gentrification is not a light switch. It doesn’t just happen. Gentrification is like a thermometer… at what temperature are you comfortable” (personal communication, January 20, 2015). Gentrification itself is not a bad thing. Increased access to services, use of blighted properties, and the appreciation of home values on the surface bring many benefits to new and old residents alike. Without policies to protect long-term residents who want to stay and maintain affordable housing, the diversity of the neighborhood will eventually come to an end. Ms. Streett offers the idea of city policies or mandates that require a percentage of units to remain affordable in new developments, which would
ensure affordability in the neighborhood for long-term residents and their kids. Although it has invested in contract-enforced affordable housing in the East End, the need is much greater than LISC and similar nonprofits are able to supply. Neighborhood leaders and policymakers could play a much larger role in ensuring affordability into the future (C. Streett, personal communication, January 20, 2015).

David Belde expresses similar sentiments. These concerns should not be ideologically driven, but instead should focus on solutions. Restricting growth would not produce the desired results as many changes have brought significant benefits to neighborhood residents. If the development appears unjust then “some policy mechanism adjustments… need to change to stem that tide” (D. Belde, personal communication, March 5, 2015). Dr. Belde, however, clearly states that Bon Secours cannot do everything and must focus on its mission of encouraging healthy neighborhoods. Candice Streett and David Belde each identified the city government as an entity that can do more in Richmond’s neighborhoods to help address some of these issues that their respective organizations are constrained in addressing. The city government has many advantages to private organizations with the authority to act broadly as a law-making body, the flexibility in using its resources as they are not tied down by donor demands and the type of budget constraints that private organizations experience, and the legitimacy of a democratic form of government that can speak to the needs of residents.

A need for government involvement.
An inadequate government response on a neighborhood level. The city government’s current efforts and possible future role in development has not been discussed thus far in the interest of focusing on the efforts of private actors, which represent much of the current development landscape. The Richmond city government has a surprisingly narrow role in the neighborhood development arena. The primary interactions that many residents have with government consists of paying taxes, attending public schools, and basic service delivery. Government has the potential to play a larger role in neighborhood development and in fact, for many, this involvement is desirable. The current focus of government can be expanded beyond these core functions already listed to include other goals such as democratic participation in planning and the empowerment of government to take a more active role in neighborhood development. Currently, the government does neither of these well.

Neighborhood residents and small business owners have limited interactions with the government, and what interactions they do have are not always good. John Taylor III and his confrontation with code enforcement is an example of the way in which government action can seem more of a means of punishment than support (Browder et al., 2014). Christine Haines Greenberg, a small business owner, voices frustrations with zoning changes, and the difficulties that government can place on small businesses. She sees the zoning process as incredibly difficult and bureaucratic, with requests often taking months in order to adjudicate and a
final decision to be made (personal communication, February 5, 2015). Focusing on neighborhood service delivery and governance may go a long way in improving resident and government interactions. Interacting with the development decision-making and approval process as currently constituted can often be even more difficult and require resources, power, and education in order to effectively navigate.

Kim Chen and her neighbors have had difficulty interacting with the system as well, particularly when opposing new development. In a recent effort to prevent a local business from acquiring a special use permit to serve alcohol, Ms. Chen, 150 neighbors, and the local civic association banded together to prevent it. They felt the business as constituted was good and they would continue to support it, but they disapproved of the changes that the owner wanted to make and wanted the current prohibition on serving alcohol to stay in place. After a massive lobbying and legal effort that required gaining support of other council members and the planning commission, the business owner’s request was not approved. The process to get to this point became extremely difficult, especially once it reached the city council and became highly political. The other side became extremely aggressive in its efforts, yelled very loudly, and used high cost attorneys in their efforts to sway the city council to their side (K. Chen, personal communication, 2015). With the help of the local civic association, Kim Chen and her neighbors ultimately prevailed after a significant amount of hard work, dedication, and persistence. The biggest
takeaway for Ms. Chen was that the system can be very intimidating, especially when fighting businesses and other powerful interests (personal communication, 2015). It takes a significant level of organization and dedication in order to advocate a community’s interests, which marginalized or poorer communities may not be able to muster. Encouraging resident participation in the current system would be nearly impossible to achieve as it seems the process contains significant barriers that would prevent effective involvement by the average resident.

The city government can do much more to address the concerns of residents and produce just outcomes through policy. Lobbying government through the current governing structure takes time, money, and organization to be done effectively. A better system could be established to make the development approval and adjudication process easier and more responsive to ordinary residents. An institutional mechanism that incorporated neighborhood representatives and advocates for marginalized populations into the development process could directly address these harms while taking residents’ concerns into consideration from the beginning. Such a system would more likely produce just outcomes that spread out the benefits of development across more residents. As the only institution with the capacity, authority, and resources to achieve this level of democratic participation, city government has the potential to greatly enhance citizen participation by incorporating an institutional mechanism into its governing structure that effectively institutionalizes participation. This change will have the likely effect of
shifting the emphasis of development from large-scale projects toward neighborhood development.

**Large-scale economic development.** The balance between development, citizen input, and fiscal realities creates a challenging policy environment that the Richmond planning department grapples with on a regular basis. The translation of the desires of citizens and political leaders into actionable ideas is a task that often requires making compromises and not entirely meeting the objectives of every group. Many barriers exist in the status quo that can prevent urban planners from achieving just outcomes in urban development. These challenges can be particularly problematic when it comes to large-scale development, which can trade-off with other development priorities.

In recent years, large-scale economic development projects like the Redskins Training Camp and the proposed but now tabled Shockoe Bottom Ballpark have been a big focus for the city. These projects and others have been described as opportunities to bring jobs and economic development to a city with a high poverty rate. In spite of current financial challenges of the project, Lee Downey, the Interim Director of Planning and Economic Development, is upbeat about the benefits that the Redskins Training Camp and other large-scale commercial development projects can bring (Oliver 2014). The Redskins Training Camp was part of a larger deal that included the expansion of the Richmond Community Hospital in the East End and millions of dollars in private investment.
Other benefits of the Training Camp include the media publicity, the spending by coaches, staff, players, and the visitors to the city, and the increased prestige that can draw other businesses to invest in Richmond (L. Downey, personal communication, February 9, 2015). For Mr. Downey, the benefits of these projects are clear with the economic impact to the city ultimately being far greater than the initial outlay. One of the explicit benefits of these large-scale developments are the ways in which the city leverages them to promote minority business development.

The Minority Business Office ensures that minority businesses are represented as contractors with projects that are fully or partially paid for with government funds. In the case of the Redskins Training Camp, about 33% of the project was completed through minority-owned subcontractors for a three million dollar economic impact (R. O. Holmes Jr., personal communication, February 18, 2015). The nature of these development projects means that most of the businesses being supported are construction-related businesses who hire locals and are often based in the city of Richmond. Beyond this primary focus, the Minority Business Office can provide guidance to potential entrepreneurs who wish to open businesses, but the office does not run any grant programs and is constrained by limited budgets in expanding its outreach efforts (R. O. Holmes Jr., personal communication, February 18, 2015). These constraints reveal a lack of resources to accomplish all the city’s priorities, but also, it could be argued, a lack of real will to make small business development a top priority, especially vis-à-vis large-scale
development. As a result, the private sector, through programs like the SEED grant, steps in to fill a need currently not adequately met by city government. Large-scale development, while tending to shift the focus away from small business and neighborhood development, has the added concern of often being undemocratic in its creation and initial planning.

Democratic participation in large-scale developments can be difficult if not impossible to achieve. These projects often require closed door negotiations for their original planning which leaves few opportunities for the public to debate their merits until after a plan is proposed. Lee Downey describes this careful balancing act between confidentiality and public input as an area “that everyone in the field struggles with. Not wanting to disclose [developers’] intentions until they have a better idea of whether it is going to work or not” (personal communication, February 9, 2015). This concern has practical implications because disclosing plans can cause price speculation on land and other problems that may delay or prevent the project from being finalized. With economic development being a central focus of the city’s efforts to reduce poverty, city officials often make large-scale development a priority. This focus may be off-base as large-scale development may detract from other efforts at poverty alleviation. Fainstein makes an excellent point when she states, “It is way too easy to follow the lead of developers and politicians who make economic competitiveness the highest priority and give little consideration to questions of justice” (2010, p. 181). With the wide range of
challenges that Richmond faces, other economic development strategies should be considered to determine the best and most just course for the city of Richmond.

Richmond’s challenges range from crumbling schools to concentrated poverty, all of which create a challenging policy environment. In such conditions, adding more voices into the process as this paper has proposed may seem to be counterintuitive at best and chaotic at worst. However, such a system could potentially work more effectively, more equitably, and more democratically than the current system. Giving residents a voice in a process that they are currently separate from could yield many benefits. It would encourage active participation in government, and tap into the wealth of knowledge, experience, and talents of the residents of the city thus unleashing the city’s potential (J. V. Moeser, personal communication, February 6, 2015). This effort to use the available talents and abilities of residents is something Dr. Moeser says has not been the focus of the city to the extent that it should be (personal communication, February 6, 2015). The normative framework proposed in this paper would empower residents through the catalyst of democratic participation to pursue just outcomes.

Discussion: Democratic Processes and Just Outcomes in City Initiatives

The creation of a political mechanism that allows citizens a direct say in the development process could address development concerns directly and tap into the energy and talent of the residents themselves. This mechanism could potentially respond to current problems such as conflict between old residents and their new
neighbors in Church Hill, the desire for the continuance of a neighborhood that provides affordability for all income levels, the frustration over the slow movement of policy to address the issues surrounding gentrification, or the limitations of current resources to meet department objectives. The challenges facing Richmond require innovative solutions in order to address them. A new system that encourages participation, empowers government, and develops actionable bottom-up solutions to Richmond’s development challenges could shift the development sphere from city-focused to neighborhood-focused development.

This system contrasts sharply with current city policy that to some extent considers justice in its policymaking but often struggles to achieve just results. The existence of a Minority Business Office that addresses minority business development needs directly as well as the Mayor’s highly regarded Anti-Poverty Initiative demonstrates a will to address the needs of the marginalized and vulnerable in society. There may need to be concrete, structural changes to Richmond’s government in order to take this current progress a step further. The rapid changes occurring in Richmond’s neighborhoods coupled with the influence that affluent persons or organizations have over development choices make for circumstances that can easily produce unjust outcomes. The evidence suggests that the inequitable spread of the benefits of recent development has affected residents in the Church Hill neighborhood. Government has not been able to act effectively to correct these wrongs with the general inaccessibility of government for the
average resident and the lack of focus on effectively pursuing equitable development on a neighborhood level. Reorienting city development policy towards normative concerns of justice and establishing a formal mechanism that institutionalizes resident participation in the process would move the system toward new processes that can correct these injustices.

Democracy, in spite of its representative nature, can produce imbalances in power where certain interests can be and often are valued above others. Policy choices that reinforce these kind of systems cannot be just. The benefit of development cannot be distributed equitably across a neighborhood or group of people if one group’s desired policy choice takes immediate precedence over another. The development of policy should be a democratic project where people of different races, classes, and circumstances can come together to determine the greatest priorities of the neighborhood to be addressed by the limited resources available. When decisions are made with all residents’ input and with consideration toward the neighborhood’s most vulnerable members, then just outcomes are more likely to arise. A process that incorporates neighborhood representatives and advocates for marginalized populations into the development process could achieve this objective.

When more people take part in the process of policymaking and their collective ideas and choices are used by representatives to produce policy, then just outcomes are more likely to result. The interests of groups or individuals who have
currently little say in the process either as a result of economic conditions (persons living in poverty), exclusion (persons with felony convictions), or are unable to participate due to age or disability can have more influence in such a system. Their interests would be considered to a greater extent when someone dedicated to representing their interests is present and can vote. Limited resources would be redirected from projects that have little connection to the people and their needs toward projects that are beneficial to their neighborhoods. The development of the residents themselves would become the primary objective of a government whose policy is managed closely by the people that are affected by that policy.

These just development outcomes have the potential to produce concrete improvements in the lives of residents. The orientation of policymaking toward a central goal of justice can produce policy that strengthens public services, improves the lives of residents, and lifts families and individuals out of poverty. By identifying the projects of greatest benefit to the neighborhood as a whole, a policy can strengthen all parts of the neighborhood and support the residents who have the most need. Greater attention will be paid to those marginalized under the current system because of the ability for their desires to be made into actionable policy.

**Conclusion**

The surge of recent development in Richmond presents challenges and opportunities for just outcomes to be realized. The evidence presented in the Empirical Observations section suggests that although there is an interest in
development that takes considerations of justice into account, there are few effective means to achieve these goals under the current development regime. Organizations such as Bon Secours and LISC make valiant strides toward just outcomes in their development initiatives but lack the resources or authority to implement widespread and concrete changes that ensure justice. The city government holds this ability, but is focused elsewhere with many pressing problems and a continued emphasis on large-scale development which uses time and resources. At the same time, gentrification continues to accelerate with no clear sign that these changes will benefit all the residents of neighborhoods like Church Hill. These conditions merit a rethinking of the development process. This paper proposes the establishment of a political mechanism that allows neighborhood representatives, chosen by residents, and advocates for marginalized populations to make decisions on city priorities in regards to development projects, particularly ones that affect their neighborhoods.

By embedding neighborhood-based representatives and advocates within systems of development governance, pressure can be put on governments and private actors to focus on projects that produce outcomes that benefit all members of a neighborhood. The increased responsiveness of government coupled with active neighborhood associations and representatives with a stake in their individual neighborhoods would increase the effectiveness of government action. Citizen involvement from the beginning would encourage necessary, equitable
development, and a clearer vision of what the neighborhood can and should become. This system has the potential to reestablish a link between the government and its constituents.

This link can empower government through its residents to reshape their interactions with the business and nonprofit sectors. The process of governing provides a forum for residents to debate the merits of proposals that will affect the whole neighborhood. By having a political mechanism whereby residents have an ability to share their concerns and priorities on a regular basis, an ongoing blueprint can be created for government, nonprofits, and other private actors to use in identifying and solving neighborhood challenges. This system differs from the status quo where the current nonprofit landscape has many different organizations working on their own projects based primarily on the needs they identify in a particular area. These collaborations between engaged residents and the private sector could greatly enhance the effectiveness of their work, and in turn spread the benefits of development across a greater number of people. Just outcomes become more possible and frequent in a system that starts with all residents’ needs and priorities and ends with a concerted effort from all potential stakeholders to achieve those goals.

Cooperation between residents, government, and private actors on such a scale will require a rethinking of democracy and the role that the public plays in the development decision-making process. It requires seeing policy as a means to
justice and development as something that should be driven by a truly democratic system in a way that seeks just outcomes from the beginning. Government should make the development of its residents its first priority and work to facilitate the progress of its neighborhoods. By establishing a new level of participation, cooperation, and shared goals through institutions that control development decision-making, just outcomes that benefit all residents can be achieved and public authority can be reinvigorated to serve the public’s ends.
References


