

PROMOTING THE COMMUNITY FUTURE IN THE CONTEST WITH PRESENT INDIVIDUALISM

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Dowell Myers

Interest in addressing the future as a focus of urban planning has increased markedly in the past several years. At one time it appeared that planning had abandoned the future (Isserman 1985). For various reasons, both practitioners and academics became preoccupied with the present to the exclusion of the future (Myers and Kitsuse 2000). However, among practitioners, rapid increase in the use of visioning as a tool for planning has certainly made attention to the future more common. The academics still lag severely in considering techniques for creating futures, a failure that is likely attributed to the legacy of the 1970s, when planning academics embraced the social sciences. (No facts are known in the future, and no hypotheses can be tested.) However, even in academia fragments of interest are emerging that support the mission of planning to shape the future.

This chapter addresses the public relations of future shaping, the daily political discourse of challenging and justifying coordinated foresight about the course of future development. Planning theorists have begun to emphasize the communication of beliefs about the future as a basis for persuasion or consensus building. Meanwhile, practitioners engaged in shaping futures encounter steady resistance from some parties, who challenge any conclusions that would alter the status quo. The public relations of future shaping become most politicized when visions are considered for implementation through policies that could restrict current behavior. Cries of property rights and individual freedom have a strong personal identification and easy appeal in local political dialogue. Even strong planning states such as Oregon have seen plans for the future crumble under this force.

Organized technical efforts of forecasting, scenario building, or visioning of futures are crucial to long-term planning, and yet these efforts are not sufficient if they cannot hold up in local political debate. These efforts need to be deployed in

ways that maximize persuasiveness for shared decision making. In essence, planners need to think more strategically and politically about how to frame the future. How will they fend off opponents who would undermine their efforts to shape the future? How will they draw sufficient public attention to future concerns of the community at the same time that many citizens are preoccupied by self-interests in the present?

Planners require basic, strategic skills for representing and promoting emphasis on the future. More basic than just skills used to discover or create particular future outcomes, planners need the ability to justify an emphasis on the future relative to individual self-interests in the present. The future is inherently uncertain and difficult to defend against other facts that are observable in the present. Moreover, community goals related to the future (such as preserving open space and encouraging villages of denser housing) may not be as aggressively embraced as other goals or principles pertaining to the present (such as preserving property rights and minimizing taxes). Planners who hope to lead community efforts at shaping the future will need to adopt a political stance of campaigning for the future to complement their technical roles as analysts; they will need to become Howe and Kaufman's (1979) "hybrid" planners. In this case the political role may be largely rhetorical—how they present the problem of planning for the future relative to the present. Planning practitioners often discover key phrases that seem to work, but that practical knowledge needs to be made more systematic and broadly shared.

Any argument for a better future will need to rely on the merits of specific proposals in a given community. However, much of the case in favor of shaping this better future will rest on appeals to more general principles. At a time when free-market advocates often field the most compelling story of what is good and desirable, planners will need to sharpen their narrative and become much more adept at *framing* the problem that justifies creating futures (Lakoff 2003). The challenge is how to get the planners' story, or stories, of the future to become the best-accepted narrative for local governance.

The first objective of this chapter is to propose a simple, two-dimensional space for conceptualizing the role of planning. This space is constructed from long-recognized dimensions. One dimension is the polarity of the individual and the broader community, or communities, to which he belongs; the other is the present versus the future, or the multiple futures that could possibly come to exist. I argue that the two dimensions are linked in practice, with a large number of actors emphasizing self-interest in the present, while planners typically emphasize the community's collective future. The essential task of planning, its heroic challenge, is *to build a bridge from present individualism to the community future*.

The chapter's second objective is to review simple techniques planners can use to keep public attention fixed on goals of the community future rather than present individualism. Many of these techniques do not require the sustained, organized efforts of visioning exercises, or the like; rather, they constitute basic skills that are of use to individual planners in daily practice or in public debate.

A third objective is to suggest ways of defending against political attack by critics who would emphasize goals of present individualism above all else. These defenses should not dismiss the validity of those concerns, because they are legitimate; rather, the defensive response is to keep goals of present individualism in proper perspective so that community futures can receive a fair consideration. For lack of such advocacy for notions of community futures, local citizens often fall prey to arguments that appeal to baser self-interests of the here and now.

The conclusion stresses that planners need to stay “on message” about the importance of the community future. The overall purpose of this chapter is to encourage planners to be more self-conscious about the elementary skills needed to achieve their purpose of bridging between present individualism and the community future.

THE HEROIC CHALLENGE OF PLANNING

The planning field is focused on community betterment, often coordinating or restricting the activities of individuals so that the public good may be enhanced. It is also widely said that planning is about creating better communities in the future, although that is not always made an explicit end. However, some, such as Michael Brooks (2002, 9), go so far as to state the definition of planning as simply “the process by which we attempt to shape the future.” Planning faces a heroic challenge in this endeavor because, as important as are the future and community, these concepts are much less urgent and have much lower priority in most voters’ eyes than the present and the individual.

Individualism has long been identified as a prominent theme in American political culture. Early in the nineteenth century, Alexis de Tocqueville noted that Americans managed to cooperate successfully, despite this emphasis, by relying heavily on appeals to “self-interest rightly understood.” This concept was so important that he made it a chapter title in *Democracy in America* (Tocqueville 1840). In essence, Americans have often been amenable to expressions of enlightened self-interest when they have learned to appreciate the benefits that would accrue from community-oriented, longer-term actions. Nonetheless, it does seem to take *learning* to overcome the base desires for satisfaction of immediate self-interest, and the first response to new situations or new proposals is often pronouncements of immediate self-interest. Planners need to develop a more concerted focus on these concerns of present individualism and how they can be bridged to create better appreciation for concerns of community futures.

Emphasis of Community Versus Individual

Planning is frequently conceptualized as a collective enterprise that challenges the freedom of individuals. Given the primacy of respect for individual freedom in American culture, the concept of planning often finds it difficult to win popular support. Even in intellectual arenas, many scholars would argue that individuals have ample opportunity to express themselves collectively through our capitalist and democratic system. Ever since Adam Smith (1776) first proposed the notion

of the “invisible hand” of individual action guiding the public good, the market has been said to represent an aggregation of individual choices that sum to the best aggregate outcome. Similarly, political elections aggregate the choices of individual voters. In this view, there is no polarity between community and individual. The former is merely the aggregation of the latter, and anything that maximizes the free choice of individuals is good for the community.

Certainly every individual belongs to one or more communities, and communities comprise individuals. Nonetheless, the interests often diverge at opposite ends of this polarity. As so famously illustrated decades ago by game theorist Thomas Schelling (1971), individuals acting in their own immediate interests often arrive at outcomes that are contrary to the interest of the community as a whole (and even contrary to the individual’s own self-interest in the near future). His everyday examples drawn from traffic experiences (e.g., the ten-second peek at an accident scene that aggregates to a one-hour traffic delay) dramatize the disparities between individual motives and community outcomes. Ironically, individuals’ own incremental choices in the face of present incentives may aggregate to an outcome that is not preferred by any of the same individuals. Schelling’s illustrative examples may be taken as an allegory for the propensity for market failure, and he suggests how a number of technical fixes involving communication and pricing incentives may help individuals to cooperate and align their self-interests better with those of the community.

The perennial challenge of planning is to help individuals see and accept that their immediate, self-serving choices should be curtailed in order to achieve a better outcome for the community. However, when there is disagreement about what is “better” for the community, the challenge is all the harder. In such instances, the primacy of individual freedom is often the default choice.

The Future Versus the Present

The simple polarity between community and individual is hardly adequate to describe the challenge of planning. Perhaps that is sufficient for encompassing the generic notion of government and citizens, but planning has more specific aims, which face added obstacles. Planning can also be described as negotiating a tension between the future and the present.

Of course, human nature in so many cultures has an immense bias toward the present, because the here and now is most knowable and most salient. Countless experiments have shown that some benefit (money or pleasure) is substantially more valued today than it will be in a month or a year.¹ Perhaps “a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush” says it best: Why gamble on the uncertainties of gaining two birds when one is already safely held? The urgency of needs also is more acute in the present because right now is where our perception exists.

Not only may the present be valued more highly, and more urgently, but it also holds an enormous strategic advantage over the future. The present is where our needs are perceived and where they can be addressed. What makes the struggle between future and present especially one-sided is that the present is our locus for

deliberation and decision making, the time when we assess the value of the future. As suggested in chapter 1 (figure 1.1), perception about the present is relatively unitary in comparison to the proliferation of alternatives imagined for the future. Despite these unfavorable circumstances, planning is directed toward the future and seeks to subordinate the satisfaction of present desires in favor of addressing future needs, which are less clear cut and have so many competing alternatives.

Addressing the Combined Political Space

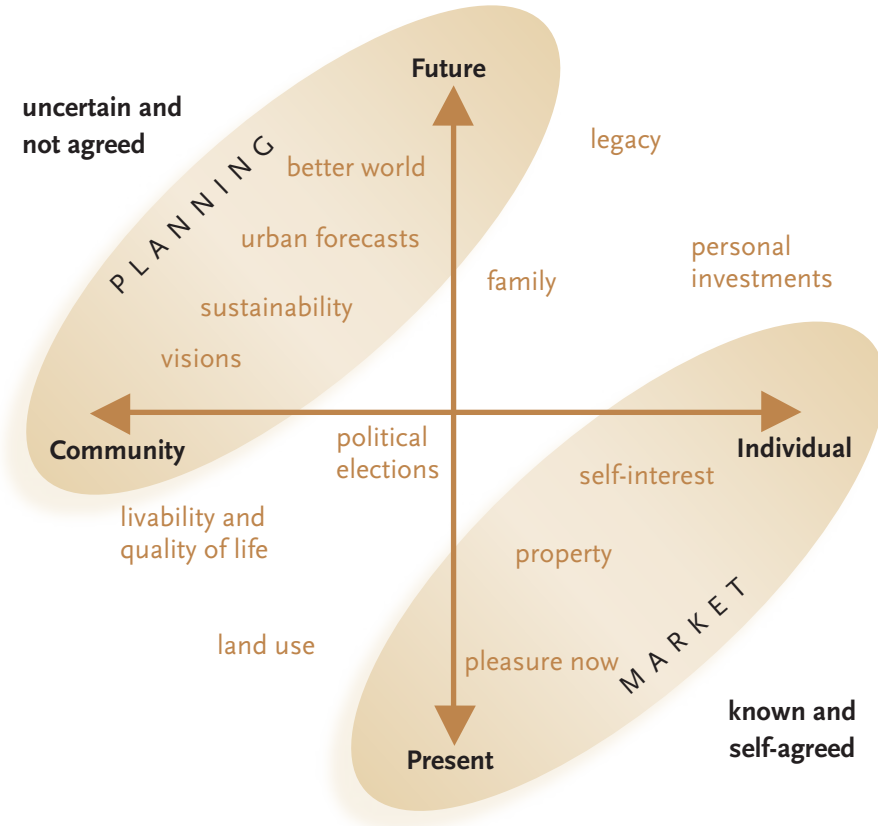
When these concepts are combined, we can better grasp the enormous challenge faced by planning. As portrayed in figure 4.1, we can think of the political space in which planning struggles to be heard as having two dimensions, each of which is a polarity. One dimension is the tension between individual and community. The other is the tension between present and future. It is truly a heroic challenge to get people to subordinate *both* the concept of the individual *and* the present to the uncertain and widely disagreed-upon variations on the future and the community.

Debates about individual choice and community are so often presented as primarily a dispute over current preferences. Yet the time dimension may be essential to any resolution. In fact, implicit in most of Schelling's examples is a second dimension, the polarity between present and future. Schelling's "ecology of micromotives" involves not simply individuals blindly pursuing self-interest, but an incremental self-interest in the present (as in markets). Added up over the long run, the eventual outcome in his examples is counter to the self-interest of all the individuals involved.

Familiar concepts can be located in this two-dimensional space. Self-interest and property are located in the present–individual quadrant. Urban forecasts and desire to make a better world are located in community–future. Between these two clusters are combinations of individual and future, or community and present. Important examples that form a link from individual to future are personal investments and family (the future generations of the individual). Examples of community–present are livability and quality of life. In the middle of this space are political elections. Although voters express their current self-interest, some electoral rhetoric suggests community and future considerations may be involved as well. Accordingly, we may locate political elections near the middle of the two dimensions even though they are more often slanted toward the present individual.

When the two dimensions, present–future and individual–community, are combined, we find planning located on lofty heights but on less popular ground. The combined position of future–community is precarious because of what I have termed the "twin hazards of uncertainty and disagreement" (Myers 2001, 365). In political debate, it is far easier to cast doubt and discredit positions taken about future–community than positions about present–individuals. The former are simply unknowable with certainty and are inherently vulnerable to attack by skeptics. Moreover, there is often disagreement about desired future directions as

FIGURE 4.1
Diagram of Future Community Versus Present Individualism



well as about the costs that will be tolerated to reach those ends. In contrast, the status quo is much better known and, even if there are many perceived disadvantages or areas for improvement, disrupting cherished values of individualism and freedom may seem a threat not worth accepting in order to achieve those uncertain improvements. Thus, the twin hazards of uncertainty and disagreement often tilt the political balance in favor of present individualism.

Although political favoritism so often supports present individualism, this is fundamentally at odds with the logic of urban development. The simple assumption that individuals today know best about how to grow a community incrementally tomorrow has been severely challenged by Lewis Hopkins (2001b, 25–26):

Interdependence, Indivisibility, and Irreversibility of decisions in face of Imperfect foresight—the “Four I’s”—are the four characteristics that defeat the process of costless, rapid adjustment of decisions to equilibrium on which the arguments of neoclassical economics are based. Thus in these circumstances markets fail for reasons more fundamental than the usual focus on externalities and collective goods.

Hopkins spells out in incisive detail how planning responds to the inherent need for community coordination in shaping the future by employing agendas, policies, visions, designs, and strategies.

Despite all logic, when in doubt, the tendency of community members is to procrastinate and to resort to incremental adjustments that stray as little from present individualism as possible. The challenge is how to overcome this self-defeating tendency. Said differently, how can we situate the future–community on more equal footing with present individualism? *The essential task of planning is to build a bridge from present individualism to community–future by promoting an enlightened self-interest of future benefits to be appreciated by individuals today.*

FIXING ATTENTION ON THE COMMUNITY FUTURE

If the problem diagnosis is that too much attention is given to the present, to the exclusion of the future, the solution is to increase attention to the future. Given that the present surrounds every citizen and decision maker on a daily basis, the task is to increase awareness of the future by using more symbolic and abstract means. Although this can never have the salience of everyday experience, it still may be possible to increase the salience of the future. Indeed, raising attention about the community future could be seen as a central task for every planner. As argued by John Forester (1989), *attention shaping* about needs and possible courses of action is at the core of planning practice. How well do planners execute that task with regard to community futures?

Graphic Communication

One of the best means for communicating abstract concepts not immediately felt is through graphics. Maps, charts, and diagrams can all be useful. The goal is not simply to present information, but to present this information in a manner that helps the viewer locate his or her own perception of the facts and see better how they relate to the future. Without this connection any subsequent narrative will have much less compelling effect. In fact, some graphics actually have the unintended effect of undermining messages about the future community.

The widespread use of geographic information systems (GIS) is such an example. What is the attention focused by such displays? Rarely are these maps constructed to show changes over time.² More often they focus on the present (or at least fairly recent data, up to 10 years old) and, by their design, GIS maps emphasize spatial differences between subareas. The message of these colorful and attention-getting maps is the comparison of places in the present, which reinforces the viewer's attention to the present. If GIS maps make up the bulk of graphic communication in most planning departments, then the main practice of these departments directs attention to the present, not the future. No effort is made to build a bridge from the present to the future; if anything, the data are often backward looking. Viewed in this perspective, GIS is an expensive distraction that is off message for planning the future.

Only in recent years has more sophisticated use of GIS begun to emphasize representation of the future such as the portfolio of large-scale visioning exercises conducted by Fregonese Calthorpe Associates³ or the analysis by Deal and Pallathucheril (chapter 11). Such applications are of immense value, but they often require extensive resource inputs. My point is that the common applications of GIS are not future oriented and in fact direct attention to the present or recent past.

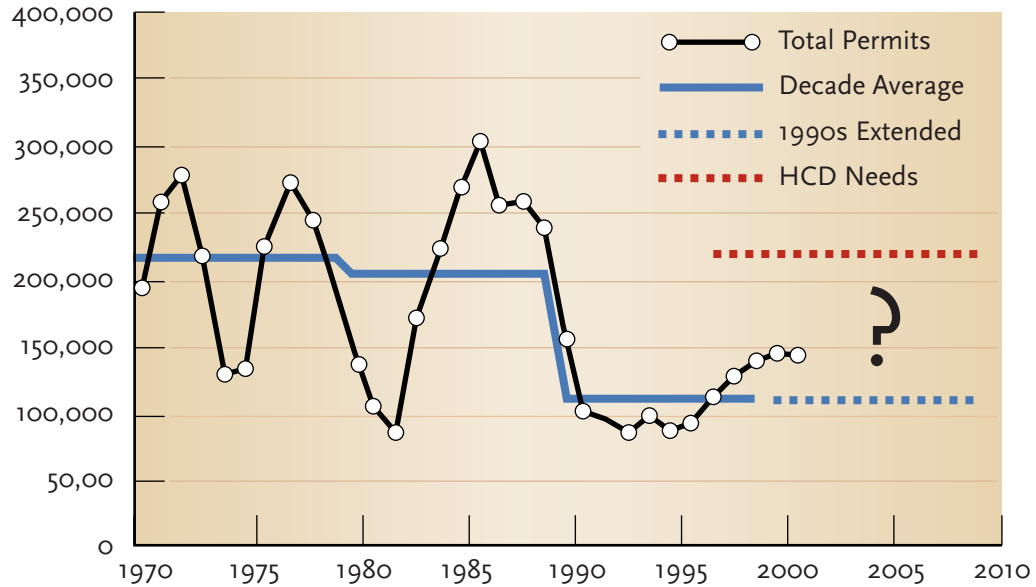
The major graphic communication alternative for data about the future is the time graph, typically with historical dates along the horizontal axis. Time graphs help viewers see how current values relate to those known before, and the slope of the line in different time periods represents the rate of change as it varies over time. Multiple lines can be plotted on the same graph to portray the different levels and rates of change in two or more spatial areas. Alternatively, the different lines may pertain to different subgroups of the population, or they may pertain to different facets of the community, such as a comparison of the rates of growth in population, housing, and employment.

Most time graphs fail in shaping attention about the future in that they stop in the present. Why should that be? The junior staff who typically prepare these graphs wish to include only time points for which they have data values, and historical data series stop in the recent past. To leave a wide blank space in the chart, where there are no data, would seem to be incomplete and show a lack of data; thus an editor might judge it to be wasteful. Yet that blank space represents the future still to be decided upon. Explicitly including this space directs the viewers' attention to the future. Cutting it off directs attention back to the recent past.

If it seems naked to leave blank white space for future dates in time graphs, other elements may be substituted. One option is a large question mark placed in the plot area over the future dates. Another is to impose a horizontal line that covers the future dates and is set at the level of the annual average for the last 10 years. Even better, several different averages could be shown as a series of alternative horizontal lines in this future space. The advantage is that it directs the viewer to compare alternatives for the future and to see them in the context of the historical data series that precedes them. Whatever option is selected, the goal should be not to cut off the future at the present.

An example of this graphic depiction is shown in figure 4.2, which compares annual permits for housing construction to estimates of future housing needs. The California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) has estimated that 212,000 housing units need to be constructed every year from 1997 to 2020 in order to accommodate housing needs anticipated from projected population growth. This is contrasted to an annual average construction during the 1990s of roughly 110,000 units per year, barely half of that needed in the future. The actual construction trend, although rising, is situated midway between these two levels. Figure 4.2 provides a better context for discussing and deciding future housing policy when extended into future years.

FIGURE 4.2
 Projected Housing Needs in Relation to Recent Construction, California



If GIS may be an expensive distraction that misdirects attention from the future, the vast majority of time graphs used in planning—those that fail to show any future dates—also misdirects attention to the present. Judged by the most common use of graphics, attention shaping about the future community has not been the priority among planners that it should be.

How Long a Time Horizon?

Which time horizon is best for shaping attention about the future? Planners frequently grapple with a basic dilemma. On the one hand, they know that longer-term futures are more dramatic because of the amount of change that may occur over several decades. In general these big numbers seem more attention-getting. On the other hand, near-term futures, although of smaller magnitude, often seem more certain, plausible, and salient to local citizens and decision makers.

The consensus seems to be that use of overly long time horizons can be counterproductive because local actors may brush off far-off futures, even those with impressive numbers, as too remote for worry. The limit for serious consideration may be only 20 years. In some cases, such as in the politics of budget planning for future infrastructure, it has been said that five years is the longest practical horizon for attention (Neuman and Whittington 2000). Planning issues with particularly long lead times are thus at a substantial disadvantage.

Two practical solutions to this problem are available. To reduce reliance on big numbers drawn from growth over longer time horizons, an alternative is to

compute average annual growth or average growth over each five-year period, comparatively a more simplistic task. By this means, the growth in the future five years can be compared to growth in the last five years. This makes the future more salient without requiring dramatic totals from forty years hence.

The second practical solution is related to the use of time graphs. Rather than leap from the present to a far-off future date, the time graph depicts a time path of annual growth that connects the present not only to the far-off future, but also to intermediate dates. Thus, use of the time graph offers flexible options for attention shaping: Big numbers in the distant future can gain attention, and smaller near-term numbers can be used to establish stronger salience for immediate planning.

Seizing Moments When the Future Comes Near

The future is undervalued most often because it seems distant and remote. Periodically, however, the future may appear more proximate. The most common example of this is with regard to natural disasters that, although long expected, have a very low annual probability of occurrence. The events' low risk is what makes them a concern of the long run, not of the present. Whether an earthquake in San Francisco or a hurricane in New Orleans, the need to plan for these future events is evident, but such planning is also put off as a distant concern. More pressing matters focus attention on present needs and today's budget restrictions.

In New Orleans, ample public warnings were issued concerning the damage that could be wrought by a hurricane of Category 3 or stronger. Not two years before the August 2005 strike by Hurricane Katrina, local authorities conducted a full-scale disaster preparation–simulation exercise of just such a hurricane event. And in 2002 the major newspaper of New Orleans, the *Times Picayune*, ran a five-day, splashy color series describing a likely hurricane disaster very similar to what in fact unfolded.⁴ Yet, despite this foresight and the wide publicity, the likelihood of the event did not seem high enough to precipitate any concerted public actions to prepare for the eventuality. When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, it was as if no one had ever thought about its occurrence before. After the experience of the actual event, however, planning for disaster avoidance has taken on a new salience, and the *Times Picayune* continues to publicize its earlier series, this time to a much wider and more receptive audience.

Once the long-feared future event does eventuate, it becomes a matter of present concern. At such moments, the future touches the present with a certain and salient impact, and for a brief period it is possible to gain agreement on necessary actions to guard against future recurrences. The good that can come out of a disaster is that it is a shared experience that can galvanize a community with new resolve about shared purpose for the future. California has more experience than any state with such disasters (although Florida's resurgent episodes of hurricane damage since 1992 may challenge that claim), yet the lessons gained are disappointing. Despite repeated disasters in the same locale, rebuilding in harm's way is virtually always permitted and even aided with public funding support. One urban critic's highly public exhortation to, instead, "let Malibu burn" drew vehement

reaction, including concerted personal attacks on the well-known author (Davis 1998). The urge to rebuild seems so paramount, but it is tantamount to a desperate quest of re-creating the past in defiance of the probable future threats. Making matters worse, public attention toward revisions of public policies to avoid future damages has a very short half-life, probably less than six months, and after a year it is difficult to organize any collective support for changes.

Thus, the future touches the present only fleetingly, and if planners wish to capture this moment they must be prepared before the moment occurs. To begin deliberations after the event is to stretch out the analysis and planning for such a long time that public decision making will be prolonged until after the window of attention has already closed. The conclusion to be drawn is that planners should plan ahead by preparing the background for necessary decision making in anticipation of that fleeting moment when the future touches the present. Only in this way can the lessons of present disaster be turned into future protections for the community.

Metaphors for Commonality

Political scientists and policy analysts have developed a rich, abstract language for reasoning about decision making with regard to “common pool resources.”⁵ However convincing this academic conversation may be to experts employed in government agencies, such language may not work well with voters, who must approve major decisions. In the public arena, people more often use metaphors that speak to familiar life situations.

Metaphors for shared resources often invoke the family context. For example, “too many hands in the cookie jar,” implies that a shared resource of goodies is subject to depletion from raiding by various family members. The implication is to regulate access to the cookie jar. In debates over financial matters, the metaphor used so often is the need to “balance the checkbook,” implying that expenditures and revenues need to be balanced, as they do in every family.

Metaphors abound particularly to represent the ill effects of cumulative and undesirable change over time. These include the “downward spiral” and the “snowball out of control.” Also of note is the moral caution expressed in “walking on a slippery slope,” or the warning of incremental danger stemming from benign beginnings: “the thin edge of the wedge” or “the camel’s nose under the tent” (after which comes the “whole hump”).

The most famous metaphor may be Garrett Hardin’s (1968) “Tragedy of the Commons,” published in *Science* magazine. His essay opened with the fear of a nuclear arms race before turning to population growth and an attack on Adam Smith’s preference for aggregation of individual self-interest in a laissez-faire manner. Then Hardin invoked the metaphor of the common pasture land that is overgrazed and destroyed through exercise of rational, individual self-interest. Some mutual enforcement of restraint is required for collective survival.

As a final category of metaphor, in the urban planning context, certain city-specific metaphors are used to accent the horrors of sprawl, density, or undesir-

able development. Appealing to clichés and negative stereotypes, other cities are used as cases to avoid. An advocacy group for less dense new development in west Los Angeles was named “Not Yet New York.” In the rest of California, even nationwide, the cry is “not another Los Angeles,” and in Texas the fear is of “creeping Houstonization.” This metaphoric use of other cities appeals to widespread knowledge of this larger “other,” as if the local city could turn overnight into the much larger city.

All of these metaphors are devices to call attention to the broader issues of shared resources and future outcomes. They are means used by political actors to persuade citizens to see beyond the limits of present individualism. Could planners benefit from consciously making use of the same devices?

The Community Narrative—A Scenario of Past and Future

Majority opinion in local debates is often predicated on shared perceptions and understandings. One reason that the present is so powerful is that all the local residents live here now. Both the shared past and shared future require more expert thought, embedding this with residents’ perceptions and valuations.

The recent past of the community affords a similar commonality of experience, but distant events are likely to have been experienced by many fewer of today’s residents, and thus have less persuasive power. Not all residents in a community share the same experiences or have the same fond memories. Nonetheless, every periodic revision of a community’s comprehensive plan begins with a synopsis of the community’s history, its heritage, and often the implied legacy. For the most part, planners treat that as a perfunctory preamble, mere boilerplate, or sometimes as a canonization of accepted mythology of the community’s past. This deserves much more careful treatment because, in fact, the statement of community history constructs an essential shared background to the plan for the future. Successful plans often garner broad support by invoking widely shared sentiments, such as preference for low traffic, clean air, and water like the good old days, or a reverence for timeless mountain views. For example, Calthorpe and Fulton (2001) describe how preservation of the Wasatch Mountains in undeveloped form was a widely respected value that aided consensus for planning in the Envision Utah project.

In the matter of future experience, there is even less shared familiarity than is the case of the distant past. Instead, that experience must be created out of group processes that use shared imagination. The intent of using the city metaphors cited above is to borrow shared perceptions of other cities as a guide (or antithesis) for imaging the future of the present place. Of course, the richest result is obtained through the group exercises designed to vision future scenarios. By constructing these scenarios, and then talking about them throughout the community afterward, a shared understanding is created of the future possibilities. In the example of California’s Great Valley, scenarios were built consistent with broad trends, both feared and longed for (Smith chapter 5). In turn, current indicators could then be interpreted as indicating progress toward one scenario or another (Cum-

mings chapter 12). Thus, the residents could better link the current realities to the future outcomes experienced in their shared imagination.

Certainly there can be many different understandings of a community's past and future, and it would be wrong to suppress the voices of distinct subgroups within the community (Zapata chapter 13). Nonetheless, a majority storyline will command disproportionate weight in community decisions that affect all the residents (Neuman chapter 8). Thus one hopes this dominant narrative embraces diversity and makes room for numerous substories.

Quantitative forecasts and graphic displays help direct attention to the future using objective data. However, by themselves, these isolated bits of information may not fundamentally affect community thinking. These elements are far more effective when embedded in a community narrative, a story that plots the community's transformation from past to present and on into the future. As in the Great Valley example, that future consists of multiple scenarios that describe outcomes to be selected by current choice. Thus the community narrative is not passive; it carefully filters the evidence to distill a particular view of past and present, and it then calls upon the audience to participate in writing the desired future.

Erik Smith (chapter 5) provides an essential guide to the construction of scenarios and their multiple uses. These examples offer an extremely flexible means of making sense of the future. In addition, according to planning scholars of rhetoric and narrative, effective stories require recognizable actors as protagonists (and antagonists), a series of facts and presentations that serve as tropes, and a use of metaphors and the like to invoke familiarity and sympathy for the story line (Eckstein 2003; Eckstein and Throgmorton 2003; Throgmorton 1996). The effective story for planning purposes should project a clear normative message of good and bad; it should define roles that are attractive for the audience to adopt; and, to call for a consensual purpose, the narrative should convey a compelling, heroic message.

George Lakoff (2003) has recently brought attention to the use of rhetoric in building support for political positions by *framing* problems in particular ways. He proclaims the Republican Party to be masters of this craft and faults the Democrats for failure to communicate. The examples Lakoff cites include simple word choices that invoke deeply held values and are not as richly structured as community narratives should be. Nonetheless, in the sound-bite world of electoral politics, the word choices become handles that invite adoption of the deeper story. His favorite example is "tax relief," a term representing tax reduction. Deliberately used by some politicians, and unwittingly adopted by even their opponents, the term *tax relief* conveys a meaning of saving the struggling voter from a burden that has been imposed by an oppressor, namely big government. The politician favoring tax reduction uses the richer term to invoke a deeper story, where he is the savior on the white horse fighting the bad guys. As long as the debate over taxes remains within the frame of tax relief, to argue in favor of taxes is to play into this story, strengthening the antitax savior's image even more.

To be effective in debate, Lakoff argues that the language frame first must be shifted, and the true political battle is over whose frame will dominate the debate.

Fortunately, most voters hold ambivalent positions because they hold internally conflicting values. They want to pay lower taxes and they also want more services. They want to be free to act as they choose, but they also want to be free from impacts by their neighbors, who are also unrestricted. They believe in the sanctity of individualism and they are also strongly patriotic. They live for the present and they also want a sense of meaning and lasting contribution from their lives. Lakoff suggests that strategic use of language can help to invoke and emphasize one of these values or another, that it can bring to the foreground a particular preference and give it greater voice and stronger priority.

The lesson to be drawn here is that, rather than think of scenarios as relatively dispassionate tools for simply representing “possibilities,” they also can be infused with political advocacy. Within planning departments, the effort is to maintain the dispassionate, unbiased approach, but on the streets of political debate, characters are invented to demonize some points of view while treating others as the heroic saviors. Planning professionals may not wish to engage in such practice if they hope to maintain professional credibility. However, they need to build defenses against attack by others.

DEFENDING AGAINST THE UNDERTOW OF PRESENT INDIVIDUALISM

No matter the convincing quality of future-oriented exercises, there are local actors who would seek to discredit and undermine the efforts. Present individualism is a powerful force that political actors will invoke in order to undermine efforts related to community futures. The future is so highly contestable, especially when any sacrifice is required by some individuals in the present. The twin hazards of uncertainty and disagreement loom large and create a constant downward tug, pulling unwary planners from the lofty heights.

Under conditions of political contest, when uncertainty and disagreement are used to threaten future community, how can planners gain the consensus needed to move forward? I postulate five necessary action elements, some of which are already employed today in piecemeal fashion:

1. envisioning the future, not by government, but by a bottom-up process of citizens;
2. focusing on generalities, not particulars, of forecasts and goals;
3. including mitigation strategies for individual loss;
4. turning the tables of uncertainty and disagreement against present individualism; and
5. developing a shared narrative of community futures that defends against present individualism.

These five elements include some actions that may be well recognized, but the set of action elements proposed here is designed to defend more consciously and

efficiently against the powerful force of present individualism while promoting the community future. Without that defense, political opponents will undermine support for the community future by invoking deeply felt issues of present individualism. In essence, *this defense must be built into the structure of the community future from the beginning.*

Visioning by Citizens—A Bottom-up Process

Distrust or fear of government is a dominant factor in contemporary political discourse. Any vision of the future or set of goals that is proposed by government, including planners, is vulnerable to a political attack centered on distrust of big government. The defense against this is to develop a vision based on the input of a large cross section of citizens. This grassroots participation underlies the design for the majority of visioning exercises that have been completed in the United States. The sponsors know well the importance of community outreach. Perhaps they have also perceived the advantage that flows from breaking the dichotomy separating individual and community. *When community is constructed from an aggregation of individual citizens, rather than construed as “government,” or even presented as elected officials for whom citizens voted as representatives, it is more easily defended against accusations that the community is doing something opposed to individuals.* Many planning practitioners have discovered the importance of this first action element and it is being widely employed today.

Focus on Generalities, Not Specifics

Negotiators know that consensus is often most achievable in generalities. Broad principles should be agreed upon before delving into specifics. This has several specific applications when creating community futures. First, it may be desirable to establish some desired relationships relative to external places before addressing the community itself. For example, one could focus on how the community should fare relative to its neighbors, how it should benchmark against the region, or how the region should benchmark against others.

A second consideration is that longer-range objectives for the future should be established relative to the present before focusing on shorter-range objectives. The latter are best appreciated when seen in the context of the former. Third, it is better to focus first on the community as a whole before considering its component subareas. Spatially specific forecasts or plans are more likely to be divisive if the general agreement is not first achieved. In this regard, premature use of GIS displays may be unwise.

Finally, when reviewing forecasts with the public, it is useful to break down the assumption that the future is unknowable (and hence anything goes) by dealing with the most general and knowable factors first: For example, in 10 years we will all be 10 years older, and so will our children, so that tells us something about changing lifestyles we need to accommodate. Here, time graphs are useful for showing trends in average relationships from past to present to future. Lacking such general benchmarks, local officials are prone to call for much greater employ-

ment growth than justified by past shares of the region, and total desired housing units often fail to sum to totals matched to the expected employment totals. Establishing the generalities of forecasts provides a better envelope within which more specific details will be confined (Isserman chapter 9). This serves to narrow the range of disputes that ultimately need to be confronted. But the generalities are also more understandable than detailed forecasts and, even when simplistic, this transparency is essential to maintaining broad participation.

It bears attention that opponents who would undermine agreements about the future often will pursue *the opposite strategy* of emphasizing specifics in place of generalities. They will seek to capitalize on the strength of present individualism by invoking the most specific instances to discredit any community future. Opponents will not draw attention to external comparisons but instead highlight neighbor against neighbor, or subarea against subarea. They will also focus on the nearest-term instances in the data so that the credibility can be visually checked by laypeople and then contested. Opponents will imply favoritism that cannot be trusted, and they will find specific instances where forecasts seem inconsistent with popular understanding—that one anomalous census tract, or that one property owner who will be so unfairly aggrieved. Creative opponents may even propose alternative community futures that afford their own favorite treatment to particular community subgroups or subareas, if not making these explicit, then disguising them in alternative ratio trends or the like. It goes without saying that consensus for a community future can rapidly unravel if others perceive such departures as a descent into favoritism. At this point it is essential that the community participants revisit the generalities and reconfirm their understandings and commitment.

Mitigate Extreme Individual Loss

Near-term constraints imposed as part of futures often imply losses (relative to their previously expected gains) for individual property owners or specific subareas. To dismiss these losses or sidestep their discussion is to leave a grand opening for the present individualists who would overturn the whole plan. Some program of grandfathering or compensation might be established as part of the community futures effort. Rather than a blanket exemption for every case, a community review board might be established to hear cases and award a portion of mitigation benefits set aside in a pool for such use. To provide no escape clause or compensation for the most extreme cases is to invite voter backlash such as we have seen in Oregon's Measure 37, which repealed land use controls across the board in response to a couple of well-advertised examples of perceived injustice. For obvious reasons, mitigation measures are closely tied to the legal proceedings related to "takings," and legal considerations may be paramount. The thrust of my recommendation is that planners must acknowledge possible inconvenience to individuals and they should incorporate an effort to address some of the more extreme instances, at least partially. In essence, greater respect must be shown for individual rights if planners are to win broader and stronger support for community futures.

Turn Uncertainty and Disagreement Against Present Individualism

Uncertainty pertains to all actions with regard to the future. Opponents of community futures, however, usually seek to cast the choice as preference for a well-known today versus an uncertain tomorrow. In reality, the choice is between *two* uncertain tomorrows, the deliberate community futures effort and an accidental or incremental alternative. Rather than let uncertainty be focused only on the community futures effort, equal attention needs to be directed to uncertainty surrounding the accidental future. Proponents of community futures should challenge their detractors to spell out the alternative future they imagine as both realistic and desirable. The opponents typically will resist this reframing and not respond, instead resorting to more verbiage extolling present individualism. The battle here is over how the matter is to be framed: Is it a question of support for individual rights, or is it a question of which future is preferred? The framing of this debate is crucial and the present individualists will strenuously resist debating alternative futures. Instead, they may co-opt the word *future* and use it as a smokescreen for refocusing on the personal and property freedom of present individuals.

In one of the best-organized and most professional examples, the Reason Foundation operates a program they call Urban Futures with the following mission of framing:

The Urban Futures Program strives to change the climate and terms of the debate over urban policy by developing and promoting voluntary, private-sector, and market-oriented solutions to urban problems. The program's principal activities focus on urban economic development policy and land-use planning at the local, regional, state, and national levels.

The content of the organization's program of research—as listed on the Web site—does not explore alternative futures but rather critiques current policies and recent trends from a perspective of present individualism.⁶

The planners' task is to maintain the focus of discussion on choices among alternative futures. If opponents strongly resist making any true ventures into the future, it may be necessary to help them by extrapolating the status quo trends (just more of the same). These trends often lead to extreme outcomes that are clearly undesirable and they can be critiqued as representing the opponents' future. If the opponents ultimately do respond with their own version of the future, this can be critiqued and then made a topic of discussion with regard to both its merits and its plausibility. The opponents' version of the future can then be compared to other proposed alternatives.

To reiterate, the thrust here is to reframe the debate away from a contest between present individualism and an uncertain, disagreed-upon future. The former is surely more definite, but that is not the true comparison. Rather, the choice is *between two different* futures—one accidental, with undesirable consequences, and one planned with fewer undesirable consequences—and the debate needs to be consistently framed that way. This effort will expose the opponents to the same

criticism of uncertainty and disagreement as the community futures proposal. The aim is to make publicly evident the foolishness of trying to escape the twin hazards of uncertainty and disagreement by focusing only in the present. The questions to ask are why are opponents hiding from the future? And is there something they are trying to avoid? Some future will arrive, whether planned or not. The choice is about which future is preferred, and what can be done today. As some have said, the ultimate aim of planning is the responsible quest to reduce uncertainty about the future and the risk of undesirable outcomes (Hoch 1993).

Develop a Shared Narrative of Community Future

In building a consensus for a community future, it is essential to develop a shared narrative of the past, present, and future. There may be good reasons for cultivating a diverse set of alternative community visions and narratives. However, at some level it is desirable to find a commonality. The alternative of inviting many discordant narratives of the future invites competition from narratives that support present individualism. Without some consensus about the importance of planning the future, indecision could lead to inaction, which, in effect, supports the present individualist viewpoint and trumps all the alternative community futures.

The shared narrative of community future needs to describe convincingly the better future that can be achieved, anchoring this future in cherished features in the present or recent past that can be carried forward in time. This narrative should be as inclusive as possible so as to embrace a variety of subthemes that speak to particular subgroups among local residents. The narrative needs to lay out a persuasive strategy for achieving future goals that are widely shared by citizens. An essential element of the story is what will happen if present trends continue to run amok. The alternative to a planned, better future is the accidental future. That scenario would entail free rein for incrementalism and market individualism, examples of which can be highlighted to spotlight the risks of neighbors abusing neighbors, of greedy businesses or landowners selling out the community and leaving town.

The community narrative needs to be crafted not only to extol the virtues of working together for a better future, but also to protect against potential oversights and weaknesses that would support a counternarrative. The narrative could call for better and more efficient government, beginning with a celebration of broader public involvement as demonstrated in the visioning process. The narrative also can promote smart growth strategies that will protect taxpayer investments by making more efficient use of public monies than allowed under the accidental alternative. And the narrative needs to incorporate assurances of stamping out the excesses of mindless and oppressive government authority.

The narrative should promote the heroes who are wisely anticipating the future and who are resisting the temptations of self-satisfactions limited to the present. These heroes include both the leaders and the citizens who are community stakeholders. Villains are unnamed purveyors of shortsightedness, who settle for the self-serving pleasures of present individualism. They do not seek to leave a

lasting legacy of betterment for the community and, worse, they would undermine those who are so selflessly striving.

STAYING ON MESSAGE ABOUT THE FUTURE

Planners have not handled the future with sufficient professional care. Too often they take the future for granted as a desired social goal, just as they have taken for granted that it is an important part of planning practice. These assumptions deserve to be challenged so that planners are forced to sharpen up their skills and articulation on behalf of the future. The public relations of promoting the future should not be neglected.

Solving problems to create better urban futures may be the special mission of the planning profession, and yet I have argued that too much of the communication impact of planners has the effect of reinforcing the present. That is the net result of so many reports and graphic presentations issued by planning agencies. The present and present individualism already are amply underscored in our public discourse. What is missing is sufficient attention directed to community futures. If planners will not fill that void, who will?

Planners need to stay on message. They need to recognize the profession's inherent struggle with present individualism, and they should direct as much of the public's attention to the future as possible. I have identified the innocent ways in which planning graphics so commonly steer attention to the present and how those graphics might be modified to redirect attention to the future.

Planners also have much to learn from Lakoff's (2003) messages about problem framing in political discourse. They need to learn to use simple words to frame issues so that values underscoring the future are emphasized. Rather than let the choice become one of present versus future, or my property against public restriction, we must instead use the problem framing to keep attention focused on choices among alternative futures, including the accidental future implicitly recommended by the present individualists.

In addition, planners need to learn how to construct community narratives that are persuasive of consensual and collaborative behavior. The narratives cannot simply focus on better futures; they must also defend against the counternarratives of the present individualists. The undertow of present individualism is a weakness to be overcome in the community narrative. And those who promote present individualism can be integrated into the narratives as antagonists against whom the citizens, who are the heroes of community futures, must struggle.

Above all, we planners need to take seriously the power of present individualism. We need to recognize it and learn to talk about it in ways that are framed by the community future agenda. Competing dialogue about alternative community futures is healthy, but it is always best not to be blindsided. If planners can help draw out and articulate all the relevant views, then political leaders will be able to stake out a "high-ground" position that is defensible for leading their communities to a better future. We all are prone to present individualism, and we all have a lot to overcome if we seek a better future.

ENDNOTES

1. An excellent overview is provided by Colin Price (1993).
2. Only very occasionally are GIS maps used to display different points in time. Even when such exist, it is often difficult to see the differences over time in each spatial area. Perhaps the best use of GIS for addressing change is in the context of vision exercises, in which citizens are asked to place on a map chips that represent new construction at different development densities. In this case they are interactively using the map as a base for distributing increments of growth. An alternative, less interactive approach to viewing spatial change is a series of animated gif files, as demonstrated for the growing, shrinking, and relocating African American population in Los Angeles county from 1940 to 2000: http://www.usc.edu/schools/sppd/research/census2000/race_census/racecontours/ethington/ethington_maps4.htm.
3. The extensive portfolio of Fregonese Calthorpe Associates is summarized at <http://www.fregonese.com/portfolio.html>.
4. The five-part series was titled "Washing Away," and it ran with the subheadline: "It's only a matter of time before South Louisiana takes a direct hit from a major hurricane. Billions have been spent to protect us, but we grow more vulnerable every day." *Times-Picayune* (June 23–27, 2002).
5. For example, see the work associated with Elinor Ostrom (1990).
6. The Reason Foundation Urban Futures program, www.urbanfutures.org.