

Affordable Housing and the Zoning Code: Policy-Changing Campaigns in Seattle and
Minneapolis

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On my honor,
I have neither given nor received
Unauthorized aid on this assignment.

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ABSTRACT

This study uses case study research to examine the conditions of successful zoning policy changes meant to address housing affordability crises in Seattle and Minneapolis. Research revealed that existing political windows – due to the presence of progressive councilmembers and city staff – became the impetus for advocacy engagement. Grassroots activists then crafted framings tailored to their contexts to gain the support of environmental groups, city officials, and racial justice groups. A sense of conflict with Not-In-My-Backyard (NIMBY) opponents in turn mobilized coalition stakeholders to provide the political cover necessary for councilmembers to defend proposed changes. These findings provide a blueprint for affordable housing advocacy across the country, contributing to the cascade of campaigns that have emerged in recent years.

The United States is facing an affordable housing crisis. As of 2019, 38 million households – and nearly half of all renters – were housing cost-burdened, meaning they spent more than 30% of their incomes on housing. A significant percentage of them spend more than 50% of their income on housing. These households are left with “significantly less” for food, health care, transportation, and retirement savings compared to families who can afford their housing, leaving them in a position of precarity and disadvantage (Hickey 2019). To make matters worse, home prices are rising at twice the rate of wage growth, rendering homeownership far outside the reach of current renters (Sisson, Andrews, and Bazeley 2017). And the historical legacy of redlining¹ has left a wide black-white homeownership gap, limiting wealth-building opportunities throughout the country. Thus, as housing costs continue to burden low-income families and exacerbate existing inequalities, it is essential to develop policy solutions to alleviate this crisis.

A combination of factors has fueled this crisis, including a lack of housing supply, high construction costs, decrepit public housing, public disinvestment, and slow wage growth. With little federal assistance, cities have developed a variety of tools to spur affordable construction. Affordable housing trust funds, density bonuses, and looser zoning policies have been implemented across the country. But these changes did not occur without a fight; organized coalitions of diverse stakeholder groups were needed to generate policy transformation.

As such, I zero in on the case studies of Seattle and Minneapolis to better understand the conditions of zoning policy changes that address housing unaffordability. Specifically, how did advocates and activists effectively navigate their contexts to make these changes possible? This paper examines the combination of tactics, framings, coalition partnerships, and political

¹ A practice, still ongoing, in which black families are systematically denied loans for mortgages.

opportunities that resulted in aggressive zoning reform in each city. Ultimately, I find that crucial political windows were present in both municipalities. Advocates then emphasized both the environmental and racial equity benefits of zoning change to build broad coalitions of support. Finally, when confronted with renter-stigmatic opponents, supporters were mobilized to provide direct political cover for progressive councilmembers. Thus, existing political opportunities were the impetus for coalition-building, which in turn became particularly active in order to counter the perspectives of largely white, wealthy homeowners. Ultimately, these findings will contribute to the broader struggle to alleviate our affordable housing crisis.

I begin with a review of the literature on social movements and campaigns to better understand the factors that account for policy impact. Next, I chart the history of housing struggles, single-family zoning, and current efforts to address its detrimental impacts. Third, I outline my methods and data, followed by a discussion of my findings. Finally, I highlight opportunities for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on social movements grapples with three overarching questions: What characteristics define a social movement? What factors lead to a movement's emergence, and later sustainability? And which elements determine a movement's ability to effect change? The answers to these questions provide an important theoretical foundation for movement actors.

Definitions of Social Movements

While definitions of social movements abound, scholars and theorists agree that they fundamentally challenge socio-political structures of the status quo (Marcuse 1999; Giugni,

McAdam, and Tilly 1999). Many academics emphasize the political nature of social movements. For example, scholar Charles Tilly defines a social movement as “a sustained challenge to power holders in the name of a population living under the jurisdiction of those power holders by means of repeated public displays” (Giugni et al. 1999:257). In other words, social movements are defined by a central political tension. Movement participants engage in sustained public performance – campaigns – to challenge power holders on behalf of a subject population.

While Tilly centers the political aspects of social movements, others prioritize the importance of identity (Melucci 1989; Whittier 1995). Alberto Melucci, for instance, “suggests that the construction of collective identity is the most central task of ‘new’ social movements” (Morris and Mueller 1992:56). In order to generate collective action, movements craft a sense of solidarity and collective self-interest, a foundational identity that allows for political mobilization. To this end, movement actors “lay down coherent histories within their boundaries,” creating a shared experiential narrative (Giugni et al. 1999:257). The “political deployment” of these collective identities then directly challenges authority figures (Giugni et al. 1999:262). Thus, collective identities, political tensions, and public tactics all form core components of social movements. The question then becomes: under what circumstances do these elements coalesce into a robust social movement?

Emergence of Social Movements

To account for the emergence of social movements, scholars have generated three complementary-but-distinct schools of thought: *Political Opportunities*, *Resource Mobilization*, and *Framing Processes* (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1999). *Political Opportunities* theorists center the political structure as the primary determinant of movement emergence. In contrast,

Resource Mobilization theory identifies organizational structures and social networks as the foundation of social movements. Lastly, *Framing Processes* closely examines the rhetorical strategies – the narratives and logics – of social movements, arguing that this element in fact constitutes the fundamental driver of social struggles. While distinct, these theories are not incompatible with one another. Rather, they identify the combination of key elements necessary for the emergence of social movements, which exist at the nexus of all three dimensions.

Political Opportunities. *Political Opportunities* theorists argue that movements are driven by the opening of a political window, and thus become principally shaped by the political context within which they operate. In the 1970s, theorists of this tradition – namely Tilly, Doug McAdam, and Sidney Tarrow – began to “examine political structures as incentives to the formation of social movements” (McAdam et al. 1999:41). In other words, political institutions signal potential actors to “either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements” (McAdam et al. 1999:54). Social movements thus form when a shift in the political realm provides a window for advocacy. For instance, influential allies in positions of power can suddenly emerge, or a new constituency can gain the right to vote (Kingdon 1984). In these ways, the political landscape can influence the potential for social movements to emerge.

Social movements can also *create* political opportunities. The theory outlined in the previous paragraph implies a certain passivity amongst movement actors; they must wait for a political opening to take action. Political opportunities, however, do not appear randomly. Rather, they are often the product of social movements that challenge the political status quo through forms of collective action (McAdam et al. 1999). Thus, the relationship between

political structures and social movements is a dynamic one, in which movement actors both create and respond to political opportunities.

Resource Mobilization. Towards the end of the 1970s, social movement theorists began to shift their focus to the organizational resources of social movements. Until this point, scholars had formulated “grievance-based conceptions of social movements,” where stakeholder groups identified a grievance, and then waited for a political opportunity (McAdam et al. 1999:3).

Resource Mobilization theorists, however, sought to “focus instead on the *mobilization processes* and the formal organizational manifestations of these processes” (McAdam et al. 1999:3). In this way, rather than conceive of movements as exclusively limited by surrounding political structures, scholars began to understand the organizational agency of movements.

Across the literature, common organizational forms, known as Social Movement Organizations (SMOs) are identified as the resource-mobilizing infrastructure of social movements. SMOs mobilize funding, volunteers, and organizing spaces to more effectively coordinate movement actors as they challenge political powerholders. Most importantly, these organizations rely on people-based resources – social networks and shared identities – to mobilize a movement. Recently, Social Constructionists have begun to analyze this micro-level of social movements, understanding that social networks are the locus of movement emergence (Morris and Mueller 1992; Giugni et al. 1999; McAdam et al. 1999; Diani and McAdam 2003). Networks of relationships oriented around shared experiences allow people to build a sense of solidarity and collective identity, providing fertile ground for movement recruitment, participation, and action (Morris and Mueller 1992; Giugni et al. 1999; McAdam et al. 1999). As stated before, this dynamic in many ways defines a social movement. Without the presence of

strong social networks, the formation of SMOs – and therefore the creation of political opportunity – would be impossible. Thus, by examining these organizational forms, scholars better understand the internal infrastructure necessary to mobilize movement-building resources.

Framing Processes. Adding to the political and organizational dimensions of social movement literature, scholars have also emphasized the importance of rhetorical strategies – frames – in generating a movement. As the *Resource Mobilization* perspective rose to prominence in the mid-1970s, “ideological factors figured... less prominently in movement analyses. Indeed, the tendency [was] to ignore or gloss over mobilizing beliefs and ideas” (Morris and Mueller 1992:135). Given this vacuum of theoretical understanding, in the 1980s scholars David Snow and Robert Benford developed a discourse on the “cognitive, or ideational dimensions of collective action” (McAdam et al. 1999:5). Fundamentally, this strain of thinking recognizes that SMOs shape meanings, helping movement participants identify an existing injustice and subsequent mode of action. Institutional resources, social networks, and political opportunities create the necessary conditions for social movement emergence, but the final step is to craft a coherent narrative to mobilize action. Snow and his colleagues label such narratives as ‘frames’: “the conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action” (McAdam et al. 1999:6). Importantly, movement actors leverage existing cultural discourses to create an effective “collective action frame,” which identify injustices, assign blame, and suggest modes of action (Morris and Mueller 1992:137). The greater the frame resonance – alignment with group identities and cultural norms – the more likely it will have the intended mobilizing impact

(Morris and Mueller 1992). In this way, frames constitute an essential dimension of social movements, determining the ultimate ability of movement actors to generate political change.

Intersection of social movement theories. While these three theoretical traditions are often discussed separately, movements emerge due to a combination of political opportunity, resource mobilization, and effective framing. At their core, collective action frames deny the immutability of the world, and instead employ an optimistic “rhetoric of change” that emphasizes urgency, agency, and possibility (McAdam et al. 1999:285). As such, political opportunities can only emerge when defined as such by a group of actors using this rhetoric of change. However, this framed political opportunity can only be effective under conditions of strong organization; the SMO must be well-established to disseminate the frame across social networks (McAdam et al. 1999). Finally, to determine tactical action, another round of framing occurs – movement actors shape an understanding of what is logistically possible and practically impactful (Morris and Mueller 1992). Thus, movements emerge at the intersection of political opportunity, resource mobilization, and collective action frames. It is how movement actors tactfully leverage and combine these dimensions that ultimately predicts impact.

Determining Movement Impact

Movement emergence, however, is not inherently correlated with movement impact. Thus, this question constitutes the third key preoccupation of social movement literature: what factors determine a movement’s ability to realize its demands? Historically, most scholars have used policy change as the core measure of movement impact, as many social struggles target the political realm to achieve their goals. Others, however, emphasize the importance of cultural

change, where the target of transformation is “diffused through the whole civil society” (Morris and Mueller 1992:59). Regardless of the targeted change, a variety of key elements are necessary for success, including strong collective identities, sway on public opinion, and disruptive tactics.

In order to impact public policy, movements must establish diverse coalitions that heighten issue salience for the general public. Across the board, “research has demonstrated that social movement organizations that engage in coalition activity are more likely to achieve their goals in the policy arena” (Penney and Drake 2005:6; Post 2015). Thus, coalitions – shared identities and interests across organizations – amplify movement messages and increase access to social networks and policymakers. With this platform, movement actors can more effectively change the public’s “policy preferences” and “intensity of concern” about specific issues (Giugni et al. 1999:4). Because of this, coalitions can have an indirect effect on legislative action by helping the target population understand the importance of an issue (Giugni et al. 1999).

In order to change public opinion, most scholars agree that disruptive, or extra-institutional, strategies typically yield the highest impact. Many studies have compared the effects of “conflict” versus “consensus” movements (Morris and Mueller 1992; McAdam et al. 1999; Giugni et al. 1999). Consensus movements, which enjoy high rates of “public approval, institutional nurturance, and meager opposition” often fail to mobilize a rank-and-file base because they operate solely within the halls of power (Morris and Mueller 1992:215). In contrast, conflict movements leverage strong collective identities to effect change. These SMOs expect each individual to contribute action, understanding that the use of “disruptive tactics... improves their chances of reaching their goals” (Giugni et al. 1999:xvii). Without many institutional constraints, they can effectively adapt to changing socio-political contexts, and unabashedly engage in visible, disruptive strategies, including protests, strikes, and sit-ins, amongst others.

Finally, the more the collective action is publicized in the media, the greater the opportunity to shape public opinion, and therefore influence both policy and cultural change (McAdam et al. 1999). Thus, once a movement has emerged, diverse coalitions, collective identities, and disruptive tactics are the key to high impact.

Relationship Between Campaigns and Social Movements

To ensure movement success, tactics must be organized into intentional campaigns that directly build towards the movement's aims. In general, campaigns constitute subsidiary units of movements, and are typically more targeted, intense, and span shorter periods of time. Within Tilly's definition of social movements, campaigns represent the public performances. In other words: "A cluster of campaigns related to a theme becomes a movement, like the fight for a living wage or against pipelines" (Lakey 2016). For example, while the struggle to end dependence on fossil fuels constitutes a movement, the fight to stop the construction of a specific oil pipeline qualifies as a campaign within that movement. In general, movements can only succeed when individual campaigns generate sufficient momentum and foster collective identities (Staggenborg and Lecomte 2009). Thus, in order to concretize the social movement theory previously outlined, it is important to examine some of the literature around campaigns to better understand how tangible socio-political changes happen.

Like broader movements, individual campaigns are most effective when diverse coalitions identify specific goals and utilize visible, disruptive tactics. Across many campaign case studies, some of the most successful outcomes are predicated on "unlikely working coalitions" (Griggs and Howarth 2002; Penney and Drake 2005; Lakey 2018). To mobilize an effective campaign, these distinct stakeholder groups must settle on people within specific

institutions to target -- decision-makers that can yield a demand (Lakey 2018). This process distinguishes campaigns from movements, as they specify a singular target and goal. To achieve their goals, campaign actors then must engage in visible tactics – teach-ins, plays, sit-ins, picketing, and occupying space (Lawrence 2016). These disruptive tactics require the participation of “vocal working class” people as part of a “cross-class activist leadership” (Lakey 2018:166). White, upper class-led campaigns often do not become as agitational as needed to make an impact, and this diverse representation ensures a willingness to engage in “rebel” activity. As such, sustained, escalating public performances – more than a single protest – yield the most powerful results (Lakey 2018). Ultimately, the sense of collective sacrifice for a greater cause creates “bonds that form the basis for subsequent campaigns” (Staggenborg and Lecomte 2009:1). In this way, campaigns inherently perpetuate themselves, often cascading into a coherent social movement.

Situated within the broader social movement theory, this study examines the organizational structures, campaign tactics, mobilizing resources, and political opportunities that made housing policy changes possible in both Minneapolis and Seattle. As such, I examine the following questions in each locale: how did campaign actors effectively frame issues of zoning and affordable housing to mobilize support? What types of tactics did activists use, and what influence did they have on decision-makers? Which stakeholder groups became actively involved in the advocacy coalition, and how did they influence the framings utilized? And finally, how did existing political opportunities shape policy potential and campaign tactics? In addressing these questions, I develop an explanatory richness for campaign success to further the emergence of a broader social movement.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In this section, I highlight some of the history necessary to contextualize current campaigns to change zoning policies. First, I chart the long history of housing-related activism, from the turn of the 20th century until the present day. Second, background is provided on the origins and evolution of single-family zoning, and its relation to residential segregation. Finally, I discuss some of the current efforts to address the racist impact of zoning policies, adding to the long history of housing struggles in the United States

History of Housing Struggles in the United States

For many centuries, housing activists have defended their right to home as a “key constitutive part of the life world of people” (Marcuse 1999:82). As Engels wrote, housing inequality is a question of capitalism. Capitalist forces have neoliberalized the home, turning it into a profit-making endeavor, today known as ‘real estate’ (Madden and Marcuse 2016). To date, homeownership constitutes one of the biggest wealth-building drivers in America (Hecht 2017). As resisters, housing activists have for decades challenged this monetization of housing, mobilizing on behalf of “all those who *inhabit*” (Madden and Marcuse 2016:146). And because the housing system is a clear manifestation of capitalist injustice, they understand that the struggle for housing equity is inherently part of a broader fight for economic justice.

While housing has historically been the focus of much social struggle, these struggles do not constitute a coherent social movement. Peter Marcuse, one of the pre-eminent housing scholars in the United States, writes:

the history of housing movements in the USA demonstrates that housing alone is unlikely to be the fulcrum of a social movement, but that it can indeed be a critical component of a movement aimed not merely at improving the quality of shelter but more generally at changing the quality of life for the majority of the users of housing (Marcuse 1999:77).

In other words, housing-related campaigns abound, but the broader movement toward economic justice is not specific to housing. Thus, residents can highlight housing issues to confront systemic problems that affect them as not only “users of housing,” but also workers and people of color (Marcuse 1999:83). The inherent intersectionality of housing issues renders them impossible to disentangle from issues of class and race. In the last century, three distinct phases of housing struggles – centered within broader social movements – have emerged.

In the early 1900s, housing struggles were defined by tenants engaging in confrontational tactics to protest conditions and rent increases. Tenant organizations used “militant street-level actions” to do so (Marcuse 1999:73). Rent strikes – in which tenants withheld rent to protest conditions and evictions – became the central tactic, and they would often directly confront landlords (Lawson 1983; Marcuse 1999; Bratt, Stone, and Hartman 2006; Madden and Marcuse 2016). These disruptive rebel tactics ultimately proved effective, as they generated some of the first legal tenant protections in the country (Bratt et al. 2006).

The nature of the housing struggle, however, would change following the Great Depression, when “affordable housing activism... comprised not just national organizations and tenant groups, but also liberal and progressive public officials” (American Sociological Association 2006:6). In other words, activists benefited from the presence of influential allies in public office, taking advantage of this important political opportunity. This trend continued during the Civil Rights Movement, which included a housing struggle as a core component in the movement for racial justice (Marcuse 1999; American Sociological Association 2006). Black residents engaged in “more direct, visible, and articulate action, than any other sequence of events revolving around housing in US history,” culminating in the 1968 Fair Housing Act to combat housing discrimination (Marcuse 1999:78). In this way, protest tactics targeted public

officials, opening a political window and yielding increased institutional resources to address housing unaffordability (American Sociological Association 2006). Robust political support for affordable housing funding, however, would be short-lived.

The association of affordable housing with activist communities of color resulted in a great reduction in political backing – and thus fewer institutional resources – in the late 1960s (Bratt et al. 2006). Forced to adapt to a new political context, this prompted a change in housing advocacy. Following the housing funding cuts under Nixon, many housing activists shifted their efforts from policy advocacy to service provision, attempting to directly transform localities through the construction of affordable units (Marcuse 1999; American Sociological Association 2006; Bratt et al. 2006). Community Development Corporations (CDCs), which were heavily funded by the Johnson Administration, became the locus of housing work. They operated mainly under a “service provision logic,” in which private funding and tax credits became the drivers of localized affordable unit construction (American Sociological Association 2006:14-5). Policy advocacy and direct, disruptive tactics were no longer the focus of housing efforts. In this way, the lack of political opportunity, coupled with the organizational structure of CDCs, greatly influenced this shift in tactical logic.

More recently, housing struggles have become increasingly localized. Since the 1960s, federal funding for subsidized housing and community development has continued to plummet (American Sociological Association 2006). This perpetual de-funding has placed the burden of addressing housing affordability on cities, municipalities, and non-profits. Thus, housing struggles must now target local governments through direct action campaigns. For instance, a campaign in LA during the early 2000s demanded the creation of an affordable housing trust fund to confront the growing crisis (Penney and Drake 2005). Its success came from the

mobilization of a powerful coalition of unions and non-profits, further demonstrating the importance of coalition-building. Today, many housing activists have identified exclusionary zoning policies – and the city councils that have the power to change them -- as the target of their campaign efforts.

History and Impacts of Single-Family Zoning

Historically, zoning policies were weaponized by cities to institutionalize race- and class-based residential segregation throughout the country. In the early 1900s, many cities “adopted zoning rules decreeing separate living areas for black and white families” (Rothstein 2017:44). In the 1917 *Buchanan v. Wharley* case, however, the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed such racial zoning (Capps 2017). In order to get around this legal constraint, local and federal officials – many of whom were outward segregationists – began “to promote zoning ordinances to reserve middle-class neighborhoods for single-family homes that lower-income families of all races could not afford” (Rothstein 2017:48). The invention of single-family zoning was therefore motivated by the intent to exclude, as municipalities uncovered an acceptable work-around to the banning of racial zoning (Downs 2004). Furthermore, many municipalities then zoned black residential neighborhoods as industrial - or even toxic waste - greatly reducing property values and heightening exposure to health hazards (Rothstein 2017). Today, cities with more restrictive zoning laws have higher rates of residential segregation (Rothwell and Massey 2009). In this way, local governments have actively weaponized zoning codes as a tool to exclude black families from wealth-building opportunities. Thus, like Marcuse emphasizes, the battle over single-family zoning is part of a broader movement to address historic racial and economic injustices.

Due to its exclusionary nature, single-family zoning directly and indirectly increases the cost of urban housing, contributing greatly to the affordability crisis. By sectioning off parts of the city for homeowners, it ensures that much of the city's housing is cost-prohibitive for a large slice of the population. Even worse, single-family zoning indirectly inflates housing costs across the board. By limiting the growth in housing stock, study after study show that land-use restrictions raise home prices and rents (Dowall 1984; Downs 2004; Glaeser and Gyourko 2008; Calder 2017). As families continue to flock to cities in the United States, exclusionary zoning makes it difficult to generate the housing development necessary to meet demand. This dynamic then increases competition for low-income housing, resulting in rent increases (Downs 2004; Rothwell and Massey 2009). These families are then forced to the outskirts of the city, exacerbating urban sprawl and carbon footprints (Downs 2004; Kahlenberg 2019b). In these ways, the preponderance of single-family zoning has resulted in unaffordable, unsustainable, and inaccessible cities across the United States.

Current Efforts to Address Exclusionary Zoning

To address the challenge of exclusionary zoning, much of the literature encourages a loosening of restrictive zoning policies to mitigate effects on housing costs, residential segregation, and urban sprawl (Dowall 1984; Downs 2004; Glaeser and Gyourko 2008; Calder 2017). Fundamentally, cities must promote housing density to re-balance supply and demand, integrate neighborhoods, and reduce suburban growth. To do so, the development of a “mix of housing types” must be allowed in all residential areas throughout the city (Downs 2004:9). A group called “Missing Middle Housing” identifies a diverse range of housing – duplexes, granny flats, and bungalow courts – that can collectively meet the demand for “walkable urban living”

and combat residential segregation (Missing Middle Housing 2020). Zoning policies must be changed, however, to legalize these housing types in single-family zones (Downs 2004).

In light of this growing body of evidence, many cities and states have already taken steps to address the challenge of single-family zoning. Municipalities across the country have eased restrictions on Accessory Dwelling Units, or ADUs (Efficient Gov 2017).² Minneapolis, Seattle, Portland, and San Francisco have all “upzoned” large swathes of the city, allowing for more development in residential areas. And the states of Oregon and California have both loosened building restrictions in single-family zones, making them the first states to do it (Bliss 2019; Dillon 2019). Ultimately, none of these changes occurred without a hyper-localized struggle. While housing advocates focused their efforts on service provision in the 1990s, the present day has seen an uptick in campaign organizing and policy advocacy.

METHODS

I selected the specific case studies of Minneapolis and Seattle because they constitute two of the first major cities to implement substantial zoning reform in the country. I utilized historical-comparative case study research to develop grounded theory that identifies the causal mechanisms of these progressive policy outcomes. Fundamentally, case study analysis allows one to discern policy-relevant lessons from historical instances (George and Bennet 2004; Neuman 2011). It does so through the selection of a small number of cases. Rather than creating a representative data set with a large “n”, I identified cases with particular outcomes – aggressive changes to the city’s zoning code to address a shortage of affordable housing. This methodology allowed me to develop an “explanatory richness” for these outcomes, as I homed in on the

² ADUs are smaller rental units – a backyard cottage, converted attic/basement, etc. – connected to the main property on a single lot.

complex conditions of social change in each context. Furthermore, I engaged in both cross-case comparison and within-case analysis, the most effective way to generate cohesive explanation (George and Bennet 2004). Similarities across Minneapolis and Seattle strongly suggested necessary conditions for change, while differences illustrated contextual distinctions in each locale. Ultimately, I began this research without a hypothesis; instead, I developed “grounded theory”, an inductive process of data collection and analysis that highlighted the determining factors of policy change.

To gather data, I both conducted interviews and analyzed primary documents. I interviewed sixteen people – nine in Seattle, and seven in Minneapolis. I spoke with city planners, academics, housing advocates, and environmental activists to develop a holistic picture of each context. To identify these participants, I utilized convenience and snowball sampling. Because direct action campaigns are built upon social networks, my shared identity as an organizer made it easy to connect with the broader advocacy community once I initially gained access. Methodologically, all interviewees first participated in an informal phone call, thus establishing a rapport and providing important background information. I then conducted in-person, semi-structured interviews in each city, encouraging participants to share their experiences within or perceptions of the zoning-related campaigns (Neuman 2011). Furthermore, I gathered additional data through primary documents – local news articles, organizational newsletters, city reports, and social media posts – to provide a holistic picture of each campaign. These documents provided further insight into the real-time evolution of framings, policy proposals and campaign tactics, providing additional context of the political environment.

POLICY OUTCOMES

Minneapolis

In 2018, the Minneapolis city council voted to end single-family zoning, becoming the first major city in the United States to do so. They enacted this change through the city's comprehensive plan, called "Minneapolis 2040," which is updated every ten years and shapes the city's long-term growth. The wide-ranging plan entailed an extensive public engagement process to collect input on issues including transportation, public health, housing, and land use. Ultimately, the city's planning department condensed all of the public input into 100 policy sets. One of those policies – to "increase the supply of housing and its diversity of location and types" – includes a provision to allow "small-scale residential structures with up to three dwelling units on an individual lot" in neighborhoods that "today contain primarily single-family homes" (Minneapolis 2040 2019). In other words, the policy would eliminate single-family zoning citywide. Of the hundreds of other provisions within Minneapolis 2040, the "triplexes" received by far the most attention, generating vicious backlash from homeowners in single-family neighborhoods. Nonetheless, in December of 2018, council voted 12-1 to adopt the entirety of the plan (Mervosh 2018). Thus, I center Minneapolis in this study due to its successful policy outcome – a zoning change meant to address both issues of housing affordability and exclusivity.

Seattle

Like Minneapolis, in the last year Seattle has implemented zoning policy changes to increase affordable housing options throughout the city. Unlike Minneapolis, Seattle enacted these changes through separate legislation that both increased supply and mandated affordability. The process began in 2015, when the city convened a housing task force to put together a series

of policy recommendations to address the affordable housing crisis. Driven by council input, the Planning Department ultimately decided to go forward with two of these recommendations: Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) and backyard cottages. Both were delayed by legal appeals for about two years before being adopted (Kroman and Cohen 2018). In March of 2019, the MHA bill was passed, allowing for more development in the city’s urban villages – 27 neighborhoods near transit corridors (Beekman 2019). In exchange for the increased allowances, developers are required to either build a percentage of affordable units or pay into an affordable housing trust fund. MHA is projected to generate as many as 10,000 additional units, along with 3,000 low-income apartments in the next ten years (Beekman 2019). Shortly after the passage of MHA, council also loosened restrictions for backyard cottages, creating the “most progressive ADU policy in the U.S.” (Bertolet and Morales 2019). The legislation now allows for two ADUs per lot in single-family zones and places a size limit on new houses, further incentivizing backyard cottage construction. With the elimination of these restrictions, the legislation is expected to produce 3,330 ADUs – most of which will be more affordable than single-family homes – in the next ten years (Bicknell 2019). Through these two pieces of legislation, Seattle de facto eliminated single-family zoning *and* mandated increased affordability in parts of the city. Thus, the policy-making process in Seattle was distinct from that of Minneapolis, but resulted in a similar outcome: increased housing supply through looser zoning. I compare and contrast the conditions and actions necessary for these changes to occur in each city.

DATA

This section outlines observations based on data collection from both interviews and documents. I categorize the data into five sections: coalition makeup, opponent dynamics,

political context, framing, and campaign tactics. These constitute the core elements that shaped the nature of zoning policy change in each city.

Coalition Makeup

In both Minneapolis and Seattle, upzoning advocacy was largely driven by grassroots, volunteer-led groups. In Minneapolis, Neighbors for More Neighbors (N4MN) was the most prominent group pushing to eliminate single-family zoning in the 2040 plan. They operate as a grassroots, volunteer-led organization, with a 501(c)(3) fiscal sponsor. A few dozen core volunteers organize events, handle communications, and manage finance, and the group has hundreds of people on their email lists and social media.³ Similarly, in Seattle, More Options for Accessory Residences (MOAR) emerged as the main proponent of backyard cottage reform. They also operate as a volunteer-led, grassroots group, but without a fiscal sponsor.⁴ Moreover, Mandatory Housing Affordability was largely driven by Seattle for Everyone, a more formalized group of both for- and non-profit housing developers, labor, and advocacy groups that worked directly with the city through a staff person. Nonetheless, there was also a lot of “really diffuse and grassroots organizing going on” to push for MHA.⁵ Thus, zoning policy changes were largely spearheaded by informal SMOs of concerned citizens in both cities.

Amongst these concerned citizens, proponents of zoning reform were affiliated with many different progressive organizations, including urbanist, environmental, and labor groups. MOAR and Seattle for Everyone in particular enjoyed “tremendous buy-in from Sierra Club and 350 Seattle,” as they played a prominent role in galvanizing support for zoning changes.⁶ N4MN

³ Anna Nelson (N4MN Organizer), phone call with author, December 11, 2019.

⁴ Matt Hutchins (MOAR Organizer), e-mail with author, February 20, 2020.

⁵ Ethan Goodman (Tech 4 Housing Organizer), phone call with author, December 10, 2019.

⁶ Laura Loe (MOAR Organizer), phone call with author, December 26, 2019.

also leveraged support from environmental groups like Our Streets – a local bike advocacy coalition – and the local Sierra Club, along with the Service Employees International Union. In addition to labor, urbanist, and environmental groups, tech workers became an integral part of the progressive coalition in Seattle.⁷ Moreover, Seattle housing advocacy groups leveraged support across the political spectrum. Laura Loe, a prominent housing advocate, said that many backyard cottage proponents “are more conservative. Some of them are more libertarian.”⁸ Thus, while both cities developed a core progressive coalition of support, Seattle’s grassroots advocacy also included more conservative voices and interests.

Racial and housing justice groups in both cities, however, largely remained on the sidelines. In Minneapolis, multiple groups expressed skepticism about the ultimate impact of zoning changes on housing affordability; they instead prioritized their efforts to push the city to develop a local, dedicated source of funding for affordable housing.⁹ In other words, they neither mobilized for or against the 2040 Plan. Ed Goetz, a housing scholar at the University of Minnesota, said “I don’t think they’ve taken their eye off the ball of affordable housing, it’s just that I don’t think they thought the upzoning was the best way to go about it.”¹⁰ In Seattle, communities of color-led organizations were similarly “not against [MHA and ADU reform], but they were not going to spend a lot of time trying to promote it.”¹¹ According to Loe, then, groups like MOAR “needed to have good enough relationships with communities of color that [even if] they didn’t show up to hearings... they mobilized a tiny, tiny bit. Like the executive director of an organization wrote a favorable letter.”¹² Thus, established racial justice organizations, while at

⁷ Calvin Jones (Tech 4 Housing Organizer), interview with author, January 21, 2020.

⁸ Loe, interview with author, January 21, 2020.

⁹ Tabitha Montgomery (Powderhorn Park Neighborhood Association Director), interview with author, January 16, 2020; Caitlin Magistad (Make Homes Happen Advocate), interview with author, January 14, 2020.

¹⁰ Edward Goetz (Director of Center for Urban and Regional Affairs), phone-call with author, December 17, 2020.

¹¹ Amy Gore (Legislative Aide for Councilman Rob Johnson), interview with author, January 22, 2020.

¹² Loe, phone-call with author, December 26, 2019.

times nominally supportive, were not an integral part of the progressive coalitions pushing for zoning changes in either Seattle or Minneapolis.

Opponent Dynamics

In both cities, opponents utilized fearmongering and delay-inducing tactics to push back against zoning policy changes. In Minneapolis, some of the more prominent conservative voices in the city formed an organization called Minneapolis for Everyone to argue that the zoning changes would irreparably damage the character of their neighborhoods. Not-In-My-Backyard (NIMBY) homeowners made red lawn signs equating the 2040 plan with a “secretive scheme to ‘BULLDOZE’ entire neighborhoods” (Edwards 2018a). They held press conferences communicating this message, and even sued the city to delay the implementation of the 2040 plan.¹³ In Seattle, wealthy community councils delayed both MHA and backyard cottages for two years through legal appeals. Plaintiffs leveraged Washington’s State Environmental Protection Act to force the city to conduct an Environmental Impact Study for both pieces of legislation. Additionally, like in Minneapolis, lawn signs with large bulldozers destroying homes appeared in neighborhoods throughout the city.¹⁴ Thus, opponents in both cities utilized similar narratives and tactics in attempts to stall the implementation of these changes.

Political Contexts

In both municipalities, younger, more progressive city councilmembers had recently assumed power. Lisa Bender, an urbanist proponent of zoning changes, was elected in

¹³ Heather Worthington (Director of Long-Range Planning), interview with author, January 14, 2020.

¹⁴ Loc, January 21, 2020.

Minneapolis in 2013, and immediately became a champion of such policies.¹⁵ Her positions were buttressed by the 2017 elections, when a few “old school Democratic politicians... got defeated,” further shifting the median vote on council to the left.¹⁶ Similarly, in Seattle, some of the “NIMBY” councilmembers “got absolutely destroyed citywide” in 2015, propelling candidates like MHA champion Rob Johnson into office.¹⁷ The progressive wave continued in 2017, leaving a council that fundamentally “viewed things differently” with regards to single-family zoning and housing affordability.¹⁸ Thus, the local political contexts had shifted dramatically in the years leading up to attempted zoning policy changes.

In addition to council makeup, city staffs in Seattle and Minneapolis also facilitated public engagement processes that accessed a diverse range of voices. Historically, whiter, wealthier homeowners provide disproportionate input on proposed policy changes. Understanding the historic underrepresentation of low-income people in civic processes, both cities’ planning departments facilitated innovative, proactive outreach to access new voices. To gather input for the 2040 Plan, Minneapolis “held meetings over three years in neighborhoods across the city; did proactive outreach at community institutions and street festivals to reach different audiences; and solicited feedback online in addition to each in-person engagement opportunity” (Berkowitz 2019). For MHA, Seattle did “broader outreach to folks that were more representative of [the city’s residents].”¹⁹ Both cities even promoted the so-called “Meeting in a Box,” in which residents were encouraged to host their own neighborhood meetings to collectively gather feedback on their own time (Berkowitz 2019). Utilizing all of these strategies,

¹⁵ John Edwards (N4MN Organizer), phone-call with author, January 6, 2020.

¹⁶ Evan Roberts (Professor of Sociology), interview with author, January 15, 2020.

¹⁷ Alex Broner (Organizer), interview with author, January 19, 2020.

¹⁸ Gore, January 22, 2020.

¹⁹ Gore, January 22, 2020.

each planning department provided opportunities for a much more diverse and representative range of perspectives to shape policies.

Framing

Both N4MN and MOAR promoted positive, story-based narratives, emphasizing a vision of abundant housing choices and complete neighborhoods. Neighbors for More Neighbors' name itself embodied the type of framings they promoted: emphasizing the benefits of zoning changes for Minneapolis residents, rather than negotiating “the technical side of things.”²⁰ They centered much of the conversation around abundant homes in the “neighborhoods we choose,” complete neighborhoods that include “great transit, a community where family and friends are neighbors... [and] walkable errands and jobs” (Neighbors for More Neighbors 2018). In a similar vein, Seattle's grassroots coalition – rather than talk about eliminating zoning categories – emphasized the importance of making it “legal for residents to live with the people they want, in the places they want” (Anderson 2019b). Sightline, a local think tank, compiled anecdotes of neighbors living in different housing types across the city, highlighting the benefits of vibrant, diverse communities (Sightline 2019). Thus, grassroots advocacy groups humanized the positive impact of zoning policy changes, offering a vision of more welcoming, abundant cities.

Proponents also emphasized that these changes were not nearly enough, making them sound like common-sense compromises. While opponents framed zoning changes as radical transformations of neighborhood character, MOAR and N4MN did the opposite. In Minneapolis, they emphasized the triplexes as an inadequate-but-necessary first step, a change that was “tried and true” across many residential zones throughout the city.²¹ In Seattle, Loe acknowledged that

²⁰ Roberts, January 15, 2020.

²¹ Ibid.

neither MHA nor backyard cottages were “going to do much to help people that are suffering right now,” and instead would help mitigate future housing crises.²² Others acknowledged that the zoning changes were not perfect, but would nonetheless add much-needed housing.²³ In these ways, proponents framed zoning changes as far-from-radical, partial solutions to a much more complicated problem.

There were key differences between the primary framings in each city. Seattle housing advocates predominantly emphasized the environmental benefits of the zoning changes; Minneapolis activists more prominently utilized a racial justice framing. To be clear, *both* types of framings were present in both cities. However, in Seattle the data shows that there was greater emphasis on the climate change impacts of upzoning – the denser the city, the lesser the carbon footprint per capita. For instance, backyard cottage advocate Ethan Goodman urged proponents to emphasize the “environmental costs of sprawl and our commutes versus multifamily-living close to jobs, education centers and transit.”²⁴ Demonstrating the active involvement of environmentalist organizations, an op-ed written by 350 organizer Alice Lockhart reads: “a sustainable future requires us to build more and smaller homes, closer together, which will also make improved transit more economically rational, and will facilitate walking and cycling” (Lockhart and Bengtsson 2018). In other words, “housing policy is climate policy” (Anderson 2019a). On the other hand, N4MN primarily discussed housing-related zoning changes in terms of racial justice; one of their core values states, “we work towards racial justice within the context of housing justice” (Neighbors for More Neighbors 2018). Heather Worthington, the Director of Long-Range Planning, articulated a similar emphasis on this framing amongst city

²² Loe, January 21, 2020.

²³ Gore, January 22, 2020.

²⁴ Goodman, January 23, 2020.

staff, saying that “when we talk about other issues now, we’re frequently talking about them through a racial lens.”²⁵ Thus, in contrast with Seattle, the grassroots coalition in Minneapolis “put racial justice front and center” more than environmental justice (Kahlenberg 2019a).

Campaign Tactics

Throughout their advocacy efforts, MOAR and N4MN leveraged social media to both build a base of support and lower barriers to political engagement. Fundamentally, social media allows people “who might not be physically close to one another to assemble in groups.”²⁶ As such, Neighbors for More Neighbors largely began on Twitter, with John Edwards and Ryan Johnson creating humorous posts mocking NIMBY opponents. After their informal following coalesced into a grassroots SMO, they leveraged their social media platform to break down the implications of proposed policy changes, making important information more accessible to supporters.²⁷ Similarly, grassroots advocates in Seattle utilized their online presence to make it as easy as possible for supporters to make their voices heard. Organizers distributed form letters on social media, walking residents through the language and process necessary to communicate their views to city council.²⁸ In these ways, grassroots organizations in both cities leveraged social media as a powerful base-building and mobilizing platform.

Furthermore, advocates from each stakeholder group maintained a strong presence at public hearings. Given the persistence of NIMBY voices in such settings, MOAR aimed to exceed the turnout of opponents, amplifying the visibility of their campaign and demonstrating

²⁵ Worthington, January 14, 2020.

²⁶ Jones, January 21, 2020.

²⁷ Nelson, January 16, 2020.

²⁸ Goodman, January 23, 2020.

wide support for these changes.²⁹ They repeatedly reached their goal; at one public hearing, the “pro-housing group MOAR Seattle tallied 61 testifiers in favor of fully lifting the city’s existing ban on double ADUs. That was more than three-quarters of who spoke” (Anderson 2019b). Neighbors for More Neighbors similarly emphasized the importance of showing up at public hearings; Edwards felt that ensuring at least half of the turnout were in support of upzoning “was an accomplishment.”³⁰ Like Seattle, this accomplishment in turn forced a shift in news coverage, as it demonstrated that there are “people in the community who want this, who think it's important that we do this. So it's not just the big bad city council against the neighborhood.”³¹ Thus, housing advocates in both cities emphasized public hearings as an opportunity to be visible and directly show support for zoning changes.

In Minneapolis specifically, lawn signs became an important tactic to visibilize the issue of zoning and escalate its importance. After NIMBY “Don’t Bulldoze Our Neighborhoods” signs appeared, Neighbors for More Neighbors created its own lawn signs expressing sentiments like “Share Our Cities” and “More Homes Now.” The lawn sign strategy, according to organizer Anna Nelson, “became a pivotal way that people heard about us and recognized us.”³² It both raised the profile of the organization and the issue, while undermining the notion that there was a unanimity of opinion in single-family neighborhoods.³³ In contrast, while MOAR also commissioned lawn signs, it did not serve the same movement-building purpose as in Minneapolis.

²⁹ Loe, December 26, 2019.

³⁰ Edwards, January 15, 2020.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Nelson, January 16, 2020.

³³ Goetz, December 17, 2019.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Three dynamics were essential to successful policy change in Seattle and Minneapolis. First, progressive city councils and planning departments opened the window for advocacy groups to make their voices heard. Second, tailored framings allowed N4MN and MOAR to build broad coalitions that nominally included communities of color. And finally, fearmongering opponents created a sense of conflict, mobilizing supporters to provide the necessary political cover for councilmembers to remain resolute in their proposed changes.

A Political Window: Progressive City Councils and Planning Departments Signaled Opportunity for Advocacy Groups

According to political opportunity theory, political contexts can signal a window for advocacy groups, encouraging them to mobilize resources towards a political aim (McAdam et al. 1999). The existing opportunity structure in turn “channels collective action” (McAdam et al. 1999:42). In Seattle and Minneapolis, city council and city staff signaled support for zoning policy changes, both encouraging and shaping the avenues for tactical strategy.

One important sign of political opportunity is the presence of “influential allies” – authority figures who act as “acceptable negotiators on behalf of constituencies” (McAdam et al. 1999:55). In Seattle, following the progressive wave in the last two election cycles, “all of the political players on city council *wanted* [zoning reform] to happen.”³⁴ In Minneapolis, many members of the 2018 council centered affordable housing in their campaign platforms, demonstrating support for these changes even before they were elected.³⁵ Thus, in both cities,

³⁴ Goodman, January 23, 2020.

³⁵ Magistad, January 14, 2020.

progressive councilmembers signaled their willingness to champion issues of housing affordability and zoning, acting as key influential allies. Their presence, in turn, shaped advocacy tactics. Goodman summarizes this dynamic: “I view our entire advocacy community... as just giving cover to the elected [officials] to do what they already wanted to do, and we already wanted them to do. What they needed was to not face a room full of angry people.”³⁶ As such, activists in both cities were visible at public hearings, providing further ammunition for progressive councilmembers to champion zoning change on their behalf.³⁷ In this way, grassroots advocates and city council maintained a symbiotic relationship; councilmembers signaled political opportunity, while advocates directly demonstrated the support necessary to take advantage of that window.

In addition to influential allies, the level of access to policymaking procedures can also encourage grassroots organizing (McAdam et al. 1999). City staff in both Seattle and Minneapolis “opened the door” to traditionally under-represented voices, using creative vehicles like the “meeting in the box” to make it easy for all residents to share their experiences and visions (Flisrand 2018). Ultimately, “people could not have organized in support of or opposition to the [2040] plan” if the planning department had not provided so many obvious opportunities to do so (Flisrand 2018). The increased political access prompted advocates to organize “comment parties,” in which they provided direct feedback on the proposed policy changes.³⁸ Once again, the type of political opportunity pointed towards a clear avenue for advocacy. In this way, the transparency and extensive engagement of the planning departments was crucial in developing supported policies rooted in the experiences and needs of residents. The same was

³⁶ Goodman, January 23, 2020.

³⁷ Worthington, January 14, 2020.

³⁸ Loe, January 21, 2020.

not true in cities like Austin, where miscommunication and a lack of transparency led to distrust in the resultant zoning policies.³⁹ Thus, councilmembers and city staff in Seattle and Minneapolis combined to signal a wide-open political window; advocates needed to then follow-through with resonant framings and mobilizing tactics to leverage the existing opportunity.

Resonant Frames Built a Shared Identity & Broad Coalition

In order to take advantage of the political window, grassroots advocates in Seattle and Minneapolis crafted accessible narratives to develop shared understandings of zoning-related injustices. In general, the more a frame draws upon existing cultural discourses, the higher the degree of resonance with potential supporters, making it more likely to have the “intended mobilizing impact” (Morris and Mueller 1992:140-41). Such a resonant frame instills a shared understanding amongst campaign actors, and in turn builds the relationships necessary for strong coalitions. In Seattle and Minneapolis, activists had to tailor their framings to the specific discourses of each locale, appealing to key players to build such a coalition. In doing so, they garnered support from politically influential constituencies, and developed nominal relationships with people of color-led groups.

The predominantly environmental framing in Seattle appealed to the powerful environmentalist community, building a critical arm of the coalition. These environmentalist organizations have strong ties to city officials and councilmembers. The local Sierra Club, described as an “influential group in Seattle politics,” doles out coveted city council endorsements during each election cycle (McNamara 2019), and even boasts councilmember Mike O’Brien as a former volunteer. Similarly, the local 350.org chapter has strong grassroots

³⁹ Samantha Tedford (City Planner), phone-call with author, January 31, 2020.

support and works closely with local politicians to lobby for environmentally friendly policies.⁴⁰ Thus, housing advocates needed to appeal to environmentalist organizations to generate the coalition power necessary for zoning policy change. As such, Loe describes her reasoning for creating green lawn signs: “I pushed for a green sign because really the climate argument is going to ring true for more people than the housing affordability argument.”⁴¹ Importantly, the climate argument would “ring true” for the already-established environmentalist bases of support. Such framings successfully galvanized the support of those organizations; 350 advocates wrote letters to the editor arguing that backyard cottages “will result in smaller, greener, and more affordable units, as opposed to the teardowns followed by high-carbon McMansions currently prevalent in our single-family neighborhoods” (Lockhart 2018), and Sierra Club representatives testified in support of backyard cottages and MHA at public hearings. Thus, the environmental framing of zoning issues tapped into a powerful environmentalist discourse, successfully leveraging the active support of white-led environmental groups.

Moreover, situating zoning changes within a broader discourse of climate justice helped build working relationships between zoning reform advocates and communities of color. Research participants commonly referenced two POC-led social justice groups, Got Green and Puget Sound Sage, both of which center climate justice in their missions (Got Green 2016; Puget Sound Sage 2018). The environmental framing of zoning policy, therefore, aligns with the values of these groups. Loe explains:

Especially when you’re trying to build coalitions with housing activists from communities of color, the environmental angle tends to be more of a common place to start with those groups that are also doing climate justice work, and talking about anti-sprawl... and lessening commute times for poor folks through housing choice.⁴²

⁴⁰ Alice Lockhart (350 Organizer), interview with author, January 23, 2020.

⁴¹ Loe, January 21, 2020.

⁴² Ibid.

However, many people in communities of color were skeptical that zoning changes would address some of the immediate housing injustices they faced.⁴³ At least one “prominent voice of communities of color” even left the coalition advocating for MHA, uncomfortable with the proposed policy change (Durning 2020). Nonetheless, by framing such zoning changes in terms of climate justice, housing advocates were able to build nominal relationships with such groups, ensuring they did not mobilize in opposition.⁴⁴ With Got Green and Puget Sound Sage somewhat supportive, “a new political coalition overcame the longstanding housing-obstructionist alliance of homeowners and the anti-developer left” (Durning 2020). Thus, the environmental framing of zoning changes built crucial support from both powerful white-led organizations *and* some buy-in from POC-led organizations, generating the broad coalition necessary to successfully leverage the political opportunity.

In Minneapolis, advocates’ racial justice framing importantly appealed to prominent discourses amongst city officials, affirming and holding them accountable to their policy proposals. According to Worthington, Director of Long-Range Planning, her department’s initial proposal to alter single-family zones was “primarily driven by a greater awareness on the part of our elected officials and staff about the deep and persistent racial disparities in the community,” a view informed by recent studies on displacement and housing discrimination.⁴⁵ Accordingly, the primary policy goal of the 2040 plan states, “Eliminate disparities: in 2040, Minneapolis will see all communities fully thrive regardless of race... having eliminated deep-rooted disparities in wealth, opportunity, housing, safety, and health” (Minneapolis 2040). As such, when N4MN activists framed zoning changes as a way to address historic injustices, they echoed and

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Worthington, January 14, 2020.

amplified the predominant discourse amongst city staff. Throughout the comprehensive plan process, advocacy groups “were using information from [the city’s] website and public meetings and other data sources... to start conversations about these issues. And their advocacy was ultimately very important in getting the comprehensive plan passed.”⁴⁶ In other words, N4MN directly mirrored the language used by city officials, visibilizing their data to hold them accountable. Like Seattle, their racial justice framing appealed to a pre-existing discourse amongst a powerful constituency, city agencies, garnering the insider support necessary for the implementation of the plan.

Furthermore, by emphasizing their allyship with racial justice efforts, N4MN attempted to build active relationships with housing justice groups, ensuring a lack of opposition. Their mission reads: “we amplify and show up for the housing justice efforts by the people most affected” (Neighbors for More Neighbors 2018). While this framing demonstrated shared values, as a white-led group, N4MN did not prioritize policies that would immediately and directly benefit communities of color. As such, they were unable to build deeply collaborative relationships with POC-led tenants’ rights groups. Tabitha Montgomery, the executive director of Powderhorn Park Neighborhood Association – N4MN’s fiscal sponsor – expressed that their relationship did not go beyond administrative bookkeeping.⁴⁷ In addition, Janne Flisrand, a N4MN organizer, lamented the lack of collaboration with POC-led groups. Nonetheless, a comprehensive analysis on Minneapolis’ zoning policy change argued that they avoided the fate of other cities by “bringing community groups and civil rights advocates into the fight early on and putting racial justice front and center” (Kahlenberg 2019a). Thus, while unable to build strong relationships with housing justice groups, N4MN’s racial justice framing ensured the

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Montgomery, interview with author, January 16, 2020.

nominal support of said groups. In this way, the emphasis on racial justice both affirmed influential insider support *and* built a coalition that minimized opposition, keys to the ultimate elimination of single-family zoning.

Clearly, housing advocates must utilize framings that appeal to the dominant discourses of powerful constituencies in order to build the relationships necessary for policy change. Furthermore, to avoid oppositional coalitions of NIMBY homeowners and anti-development, anti-gentrification activists, advocates must demonstrate shared values and solidarity with communities of color. MOAR and N4MN successfully tailored their framings to both build influential support *and* limit opposition, shaping broad coalitions that could then be mobilized to provide necessary political cover.

A Sense of Conflict: Fearmongering, Renter-Hating NIMBYs Mobilized Supporters

While resonant framings build shared identities and broad coalitions, visible, mobilizing tactics – driven by a sense of conflict – have the greatest policy impact. As outlined earlier, “conflict movements” mobilize committed members and generate greater media visibility, effectively communicating power and urgency to policymakers (McAdam et al. 1999). Thus, once N4MN and MOAR developed a relational foundation through resonant framings, they needed to heighten the sense of conflict to leverage and mobilize those relationships. Only then could they propel the committed, collective action necessary to provide political cover. Zoning reform opponents proved to be the perfect foil.

In Minneapolis, Minneapolis for Everyone’s “all-caps fear mongering” actually played into the hands of Neighbors for More Neighbors, as they were able to portray themselves as the

tolerant counterpart to the NIMBY homeowners.⁴⁸ N4MN directly confronted these opponents in the front lawns of single-family lots, using their blue signs to establish a progressive contrast to the red signs. Importantly, the lawn signs also heightened the profile of the issue in the media, further amplifying the sense of urgency across the city. With “some of the most conservative people in the city... out in front fighting” the 2040 plan, it provided an obvious choice for many residents, who in turn showed up in droves at public hearings and comment parties to communicate the need for zoning change.⁴⁹ Ultimately, according to Edwards, “If you had asked Minneapolis 2040 supporters to draw up the ideal cast of characters to contrast their arguments against, ‘Minneapolis for Everyone’ is the crew they would have invented” (Edwards 2018b). In other words, they provided a common mobilizing enemy.

Similarly, in Seattle, the leaders of the legal appeals efforts were seen as villains representative of “rich people that hated renters.”⁵⁰ Even more, the legal challenges afforded MOAR and Seattle for Everyone two more years of organizing space. During this time, activists corrected opponents’ half-truths, wrote op-eds in single-family neighborhoods’ local publications, and created their own lawn signs to counter the house-eating bulldozers.⁵¹ In these ways, they too engaged in tactics that heightened the visibility of the intra-city conflict. This in turn helped people understand the stakes of their involvement; if they did not show up at public hearings, the villainous NIMBYs would dominate the conversation. Importantly, unlike other cities in which anti-growth and anti-gentrification groups formed powerful coalitions,⁵² the NIMBY groups were isolated in Seattle and Minneapolis, generating beneficial optics for the

⁴⁸ Nelson, January 16, 2020; Edwards, January 15, 2020.

⁴⁹ Edwards, January 15, 2020.

⁵⁰ Loe, January 21, 2020.

⁵¹ Matt Hutchins (MOAR Organizer), interview with author, January 22, 2020; Loe, January 21, 2020.

⁵² Susan Somers (Organizer), phone-call with author, February 21, 2020.

supportive coalitions. Thus, in both cities, the presence of semi-organized opponents played into the hands of housing advocates, effectively mobilizing upzoning proponents.

CONCLUSION

As the social movement theory suggests, successful campaigns to change zoning policies in Seattle and Minneapolis required a combination of political opportunity, effective framing, and mobilizing tactics. Councilmembers in each locale acted as progressive champions of zoning reform, while city staff facilitated extensive public engagement to build trust in the policymaking process. This political window fundamentally shaped the strategies of grassroots advocates. Using both environmental and racial justice framings, advocates echoed the resonant language of city officials, influential environmentalist organizations, and communities of color, building diverse coalitions of support for the championed policy changes. However, while diverse, such coalitions were largely white-led, and thus did not champion some of the priority policies of POC-led groups. Nonetheless, supporters were mobilized when confronted with the conservative values of NIMBY opponents, providing a critical mass of political cover for their influential allies in the planning departments and on city council. Thus, a political window – driven by *both* council and city staff – provided the opportunity necessary for resonant framings and mobilizing tactics to propel zoning policy change in Seattle and Minneapolis.

While this research has allowed me to develop an explanatory richness for the conditions of zoning reform in Seattle and Minneapolis, it is largely limited to the research participants from these two cases. I was unable to speak with many POC-led groups in each city, and instead was forced to rely on housing advocates' assessment of their perspectives. Furthermore, to develop a broader theory of zoning policy change to address housing unaffordability, it is necessary to

research other cases of both success and failure. Since Seattle and Minneapolis constitute progressive political contexts with wide-open political opportunities, future research should examine less progressive political environments, with an eye towards how they change tactical strategies and framings. Additionally, while much of the literature suggests that looser zoning codes should ease housing costs, minimal data exists to corroborate it. As new policies take effect in Seattle and Minneapolis, it is imperative to understand *how* new construction – both market-rate and affordable – impacts the housing market overall. And finally, I examine these two cases as examples of specific campaigns – bursts of public performances with targeted outcomes. But as such campaigns diffuse across the country, scholars must determine whether they will coalesce into a broader upzoning/affordable housing movement. Or will, as Marcuse suggests, they remain isolated housing struggles within a movement for economic and racial justice?

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