

Citizens' District Councils in Detroit: The Promise and Limits of Using Planning Advisory Boards to Promote Citizen Participation

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This article examines the promise and limits of using planning advisory boards to augment citizen participation. Specifically, a case study of citizens' district councils in Detroit, Michigan, is examined. Citizens' district councils are local planning advisory boards composed of elected and appointed members that were formed in response to inequities growing out of urban renewal and resulting inequities and civil unrest in the city and the nation. Citizens' district councils were created in the state of Michigan in 1969 through a series of amendments to Public Acts 344 and 189, which initiated urban renewal in the state. The role of citizens' district councils was further defined in a series of Detroit's city ordinances adopted in 1968 and 1971. Initially, citizens' district councils were created to function as planning advisory boards for model neighborhoods established under the Model Cities program. When the Model Cities program was phased out and replaced with community development block grants (CDBGs) and other policies under the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, citizens' district councils continued to function as planning advisory boards in Detroit's designated urban renewal areas. Citizens' district councils were consulted about design elements, land use decisions, and the financing of pro-

posed development projects. As a result, citizens' district councils have been institutionalized as a mechanism to augment citizen participation in the city of Detroit for more than three decades.

Given the historical role of citizens' district councils as a mechanism to promote citizen participation in Detroit, this research was conducted with two purposes in mind. First, data from interviews with the chairpersons of Detroit's citizens' district councils are presented. These data indicate that the degree to which citizens' district councils function as mechanisms to augment citizen participation depends on local political support and adequate resources to build organizational capacity. Second, the findings from this research were used to forward policy recommendations aimed at strengthening the capacity of planning advisory boards and other community-based organizations in a manner that promotes grassroots decision making and local community development.

Before discussing the findings of this research, it is important to consider the issues raised in the study in the context of past scholarship that examines advisory boards and citizen participation. The most widely cited research in this area has been Sherry Arnstein's study of citizen participation in the Model Cities program.¹ In this study she develops a *ladder of citizen participation* with eight levels of participation. Each level reflects an increased degree of control that residents have over local policymaking. Using this ladder, Arnstein indicates that advisory

boards typically represent a form of tokenism in which local residents are consulted by elected officials and public administrators about policy issues but have no direct control over the local decision-making process. At the core of her argument is the notion that citizen participation is reduced to various degrees of tokenism and manipulation in the absence of direct citizen control.

In their discussion of citizen participation in the municipal budgeting process, Simonsen and Robbins indicate that advisory boards have traditionally been used by local government to inform decision makers of the views of local experts.² This is a tendency particularly of advisory boards to which members are appointed rather than elected. Moreover, advisory boards are considered to have a low level of political power, because decision makers are not required to act on their recommendations. The willingness of local elected officials to listen to the recommendations of advisory boards is a key factor in the success of such boards as a mechanism for augmenting citizen participation. Other researchers point out that the scope of citizen participation is strongly influenced by the level of support for citizen involvement coming from elected officials and local administrators.³

While the more affluent members of a community can serve as a source of support for broadening participation, they can also dominate the policy process when the interests of the working class and the poor are not incorporated into a citizen participation strategy.⁴ Moreover, the poor can be blocked out of the citizen participation process because they lack the material resources and technical expertise necessary to participate fully in local decision making.⁵ In a similar vein, studies of citizen participation at the organizational level indicate that citizen participation is limited in local community development because of resource constraints faced by community-based organizations and weak mandates for citizen participation coming from governmental sources.⁶ At the individual and organizational levels the scope

of citizen participation remains underdeveloped, particularly in economically distressed urban communities. To address obstacles to citizen participation, reforms need to incorporate mechanisms for infusing resources into community-based organizations that focus on the interests of working-class and poor residents.

In the absence of reform, the ability of advisory boards to promote grassroots decision making is lessened. For instance, arguments that advisory boards can produce consensus and advance the broader community interest are weakened when the level of support for citizen participation coming from governmental actors and from the political economy of poor communities is considered.⁷ On a broader scale, expanded grassroots action and community organizing require that citizen participation be considered in the context of broad institutional structures.⁸ In part this means that stronger mandates for citizen participation and community input in local decision making are needed. In particular, community-based organizations in economically distressed communities should have a broader role in the local public policy process. In addition, the scope of citizen participation and access to local decision making depends on the degree to which citizens have control of stable and autonomous resources.

Stronger mandates for citizen participation and community input in local decision making are needed.

Data and Methods

The data for this article come from a series of telephone interviews with the chairpersons of citizens' district councils in Detroit. These chairpersons were interviewed because they had detailed knowledge of the activities of citizens' district councils. Also, they were the most accessible members of

these organizations, given the voluntary nature of this type of advisory board. The interviews were conducted between June 2002 and April 2003. During the interviews, the respondents were asked a series of open-ended questions about the role of citizen participation in citizens' district councils. The research instrument focused on a core set of questions related to the issues under examination. Of particular interest to this article were elements of the research instrument that focused on the role of citizen participation in these organizations and in their decision-making processes. In addition to this information, data were collected on the demographic characteristics of the membership of each citizens' district council. The interviews ranged from twenty minutes to one hour in length. In addition, archival materials, census data, and documents from the city of Detroit related to citizens' district councils were collected during the course of the research for later analysis.

Efforts were made to conduct interviews with the chairpersons from all of the citizens' district councils in the city. To accomplish this, a systematic methodology employing grounded theory and theoretical sampling techniques was used during data collection and analysis to ensure representativeness.⁹ Seventeen citizens' district councils were identified in Detroit. Of these councils, three did not have chairpersons during the time that data were being collected, and contact information for other members of these councils was not available. The chairpersons from the remaining fourteen councils were approached for interviews, and eleven of these individuals agreed to be interviewed. Several attempts were made to schedule interviews with the chairpersons of the three remaining councils, but they were unavailable. As a result, only secondary data related to these organizations and to those without chairpersons were obtainable for analysis. Upon examination of this information, it was determined that the characteristics of these six organizations paralleled those of the eleven others whose chairpersons were interviewed. As a result, it was concluded that

a point of theoretical saturation had been reached and data analysis could continue.

Citizens' District Councils in Detroit

Detroit's citizens' district councils have been shaped by the environment in which they are embedded. They were originally created to address inequities that grew out of the urban renewal process of the mid-1900s. Although the urban renewal and Model Cities eras technically ended by the mid-1970s, citizens' district councils continued to function as planning advisory boards as redevelopment continued in Detroit's old urban renewal areas. This continuation was justified under state law and municipal ordinances that remained in place after the remnants of the Model Cities program were folded into the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974. The continuation of citizens' district councils was also justified by the persistent threat of displacement due to redevelopment efforts in the old urban renewal areas, and because of the socioeconomic distress these areas faced. The depth of distress faced by communities located within the boundaries of citizens' district councils is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1 highlights the degree to which the citizens' district councils examined in this research faced barriers to redevelopment and entrenched problems associated with the legacy of urban renewal. The data illustrate how the problems of communities within the boundaries of these citizens' district councils were more complex than the city of Detroit as a whole. For example, these communities were losing population and housing units over a protracted period. Also, the percentage of residents living below the poverty level was higher in these communities than in the city as a whole. Moreover, median household income growth was lower in these communities than in the city as a whole. At the same time, the percentage of residents receiving public assistance and social security income declined at a higher rate than in the city as a whole. In essence, poverty remained more concentrated in communities located within citizens'

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for City of Detroit and Citizens' District Council Boundaries

	City of Detroit 1990	City of Detroit 2000	City of Detroit Change 1990–2000	Council Boundaries 1990	Council Boundaries 2000	Council Boundaries Change 1990–2000
Total population	1,027,974	951,270	–76,704	36,284	34,197	–2,087
% Female	53.03	52.72	–0.31	45.94	50.87	+4.93
% White	22.18	12.24	–9.94	25.01	18.51	–6.50
% Black	74.94	81.77	+6.83	71.06	74.61	+3.55
% Below poverty level	31.95	27.84	–4.11	36.83	29.76	–7.07
% Age 25 and above without a high school diploma	39.45	31.71	–7.74	38.52	29.54	–8.98
Total households	373,857	336,482	–37,375	17,280	15,844	–1,436
Median income—U.S.\$	\$19,281	\$28,928	+ \$9,647	\$18,919	\$23,795	+ \$4,876
% Receiving public assistance	27.44	12.25	–15.19	28.70	10.41	–18.29
% Receiving social security	29.08	26.64	–2.44	27.48	22.97	–4.51
Total housing units	410,027	375,096	–34,931	21,972	19,245	–2,727
Median value—U.S.\$	\$24,991	\$60,457	+ \$35,466	\$23,633	\$66,072	+ \$42,439
% Owner (in occupied units)	51.11	52.16	+1.05	23.99	23.20	–0.79
% Renter (in occupied units)	48.89	47.84	–1.05	76.01	76.80	+0.79
% Vacant	9.00	11.13	+2.13	18.51	19.86	+1.35

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. *1990 Census of Population and Housing Summary Tape File 3A*. Washington D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, Data User Services Division, 1990; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. *2000 Census of Population and Housing Summary Tape File 3A*. Washington D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, Data User Services Division, 2000.

district council boundaries during the contemporary period, while residents absorbed the deepest cuts in the social welfare safety net.

The problems of communities within the boundaries of these citizens' district councils were more complex than the city of Detroit as a whole.

Interestingly, the percentage of residents living in citizens' district council communities who were black was lower than in the city as a whole. This appears to be the result of two processes. The first process, which scholars have labeled *Negro removal*,¹⁰ involved the displacement of African Americans during the urban renewal era. The second process involved an increase in gentrification in these com-

munities beginning in the 1980s. The unique nature of housing problems is illuminated in Table 1 in the examination of housing values and tenure. Despite modest growth in household incomes, housing costs in the communities within citizens' district council boundaries outpaced those in the city as a whole. This seems to be the result of high rates of housing abandonment and demolition in these communities, as well as the gentrification of remaining units. In addition to these factors, vacancy rates for the remaining housing units in the communities located within citizens' district council boundaries continued to rise in the contemporary period, and the population of renters far outpaced that of homeowners. In short, the city of Detroit witnessed a growing housing crisis during the contemporary period, and this crisis was experienced to a greater degree by communities located within the boundaries of citi-

zens’ district councils. The housing crisis was characterized by stagnant rates of homeownership, increased levels of abandonment, rising vacancy rates, an overall decline in the number of housing units, and rising housing costs.

In the wake of these socioeconomic and development obstacles, citizens’ district councils have continued to function, providing the residents of distressed communities with a voice in local planning and development decisions. In terms of citizen participation, questions arise concerning the degree to which citizens’ district councils reflect the views of the communities they represent. The data in Table 2 provide three key insights into the degree to which citizens’ district councils are representative bodies. First, the vast majority of the members of the citizens’ district councils studied were residents of the local community and were selected by their peers in regular elections. The dominance of elected members provided the councils with a great deal of legitimacy at the community level and in the city. The smaller group of nonelected members on citizens’ district councils were local entrepreneurs appointed by the mayor. Second, Table 2 indicates that a relatively equal number of men and women served as members of the citizens’ district councils. The presence of a cross-section of the community along gender lines added to the councils’ legitimacy. Finally, the racial composition of the citizens’ district councils seems to reflect the demographics of these communities. The representative nature of citizens’ district councils along racial lines, as with gender, added to the councils’ legitimacy. Moreover, citizens’ district councils served as one meaningful source of representation in local policymaking for working class and poor African Americans.

On the surface, citizens’ district councils seem to provide a form of representative democracy to distressed inner-city neighborhoods. In particular, they create an access point for working-class, poor, and minority residents who face potential displacement due to urban redevelopment efforts. In this narrow sense, citizens’ district councils appear to augment

Table 2: Characteristics of Citizens’ District Council Membership

	Average Number in District Council	Percentage of Total Members
Selection		
Elected	12	86.4
Appointed	1.9	13.6
Gender		
Female	7.5	45.8
Male	6.4	54.2
Race*		
Black	10.4	72.9
White	3.9	27.1

* This information was reported for a subset of the district councils

the level of citizen participation in local planning and community development decisions. However, questions about the scope and impact of the citizen participation that emerges from citizens’ district councils requires further discussion. These questions are addressed in the following two sections.

The Promise of Advisory Boards

One of the most important attributes of citizens’ district councils is their legitimacy in the community and with city officials. This characteristic stems from the community-based orientation of the citizens’ district councils and their specific role in poor communities. Although they function mainly as advisory boards, such councils have a specific charter to represent the interests of working-class and poor residents in communities facing development pressures from major institutions in the public and private sectors. This focus was described by one of the chairpersons interviewed: “In an area where there isn’t a citizens’ district council, the people are pretty much self-sufficient and they’re not threatened with displacement or they haven’t been displaced. So they don’t have the same needs as the people who are under attack or threatened with being uprooted or [have] already been thrown out of the community.” The chairpersons commonly identified equity issues related to redevelopment

and displacement as core foci of their citizens' district councils. The emphasis on these issues has served to enhance the councils' legitimacy.

Citizens' district councils have a specific charter to represent the interests of working-class and poor residents in communities facing development pressures.

This emphasis was well established in the citizens' district councils during their formation in the early 1970s. For instance, an educational handout titled "The District Council's Role in the Development Process," used in a 1973 workshop of a citizens' district council, stated:

The District Council automatically inherits the role of watchdog over developers by virtue of Public Act 344 and 189, and City Ordinance 622-G, which collectively give the District Council review authority over development proposals made in their areas. Usually this authority is confined to the approval of a developer based on the conformance of his proposal with the goals and objectives expressed by the Council, but can expand to include a working relationship with the developer over the course of packaging, designing and financing the project.¹¹

The watchdog role of citizens' district councils supported their role as independent advisory boards and to some degree prevented them from being marginalized in the urban planning process. The emphasis that citizens' district councils placed on serving the interests of working-class and poor residents in their communities also encouraged them to expand their activities. The chairpersons interviewed in this research described how the citizens' district councils of which they were members engaged in community development work that went beyond the scope of their chartered mission as a planning advisory board. For example, some of

the citizens' district councils provided residents with application materials for low-income redevelopment loans, organized neighborhood watch programs, reported abandoned cars and property to the city, and organized efforts to clean up graffiti and vacant lots in their communities. Other chairpersons described how their citizens' district councils delivered regular newsletters to residents and organized community block parties.

In addition to these activities, chairpersons described how their organizations provided an important liaison function to residents and developers. In a narrow sense, this meant that these citizens' district councils assisted individuals in navigating the city's bureaucracy as it related to the development process. For example, one of the chairpersons made these comments about how his council functioned as a liaison to developers:

A lot of us, including myself, went through the process before I even knew there was a citizens' district council—when we built our building, actually both buildings. So, we know some of the frustration involved with developing in the city. We want to try and smooth that out as much as we can and give them as much information so they have to do it once instead of twice. Going through the process with them so they're familiar with the process up to the point of getting the city to sell them the property.

The liaison function filled by these citizens' district councils made them important gatekeepers in the local development process. If a citizens' district council supported a developer's proposal, it could be a key player in the land acquisition process. This type of assistance goes beyond the advisory role of the citizens' district councils and results in an expanded scope of influence in the local development process.

Although citizens' district councils could act as liaisons to developers, it was more common for

them to provide assistance to residents. The extent to which they could function as community liaisons, however, was resource driven. Only one of the citizens' district councils whose chairpersons were interviewed had a full-time staff; the rest relied on volunteer workers. As a result, the level of assistance available to residents was inconsistent across the citizens' district councils. Yet all of the chairpersons interviewed indicated that providing such assistance to residents was a goal of theirs. In the case of the citizens' district council with a full-time staff, acting as a liaison between residents and the city was considered a central function of the organization. The chairperson of this citizens' district council described this aspect of its mission as follows:

We basically help a lot of people in the neighborhood so they don't have to deal with the city. It's like a maze of bureaucracy. So it's kind of our job to know the maze. Not that any of us fully do, because it's still a maze. But we have a little bit more access to it. And a lot of times the people in the city are available from 8:30 A.M. until 4:30 P.M., and that's not necessarily convenient to all citizens. So our mission statement is to basically work between the neighborhood and the city, particularly in issues of zoning and development. We do that, but we also, we're here forty hours a week, so we're actually dealing with the city, we're actually dealing with the state and our elected officials directly rather than having to rely on a volunteer board to do those kind of things. It's the difference between any nonprofit with just a volunteer board versus that next step where you have staff. We do the basic clerical stuff, we have to file a monthly report with the city, stuff like that. But then we also put out a newsletter that goes to six hundred people, we have a Web site that's updated every month, and we host events monthly.

This citizens' district council serves as an example of the promise of an advisory board with adequate resources to take on an expanded mission. Of course,

most of the citizens' district councils in Detroit fall short of this promise. Because of this, a more detailed discussion of the limits of using citizens' district councils to augment citizen participation is warranted.

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The Limits of Advisory Boards

The most obvious limitation of using citizens' district councils as mechanisms to promote citizen participation is their advisory role. This role limits the political power of citizens because elected officials and public administrators are not required to implement the recommendations of citizens' district councils. This characteristic has led scholars to view advisory boards as a weak form of citizen participation that mainly entails some level of consultation with citizens about urban development and policy proposals. In extreme cases where the recommendations of advisory boards are ignored by elected officials and administrators, citizens can become disenchanted and alienated from the public decision-making process. It is arguable, however, that when advisory boards are well institutionalized and composed of elected representatives from a community, they will be perceived as more legitimate, causing elected officials and administrators to take their recommendations more seriously. Despite this possible outcome, the chairpersons of Detroit's citizens' district councils sometimes described their advisory role as a “stumbling block,” particularly when they tried to expand the scope of their activities.

Another obstacle faced by the citizens' district councils was lack of predictability in the political and fiscal environments in which they were embedded. For example, the chairpersons indicated that political support and resources began to dry up beginning in the late 1990s, during Mayor Denise Archer's administration. One chairperson made the following

comment on the shift that took place with the change of political regimes:

Our role over the years has changed. When we first got started, in addition to the citizens' district council we had a nonprofit housing corporation. We bought, rehabilitated homes, rented homes. We had contracts with the city of Detroit to clear vacant lots within the community, and those kinds of things. We had our own office staff, we had our work staff, and we had property managers during that time. That was during the Young administration. During the Archer administration the role of . . . the citizens' district councils . . . was kind of restricted, and it was strictly an advisory role where if a developer approaches the city about wanting to do something within the community, the developer is obligated as it relates to our advisory role. He presents his proposal to the citizens' district council for input. The citizens' district council in turn asks questions, tries to get information so that the residents of the community can be informed about the particular proposal.

Other chairpersons recounted similar stories and added that during this period most of the citizens' district councils lost their funding. For example, only two citizens' district councils in Detroit received CDBG and Neighborhood Opportunity Fund monies during the 2001–2002 budget cycle. During that same period, no monies were appropriated by the city for annual citizens' district council elections. Some of this funding was restored with the election of a new mayor, Kwame Kilpatrick. However, a number of chairpersons indicated that although the new mayor was supportive, he was slow to make appointments to their citizens' district councils. This caused some of them to operate without a quorum for a portion of the first year of the Kilpatrick administration.

Political and fiscal instability hamstrung Detroit's citizens' district councils, but the most significant

change involved the creation of a centralized office for them in 2001. At the end of the Archer administration, citizens' district councils lost most of their funding; what remained was redirected to a centralized office that was to provide all of the unfunded citizens' district councils with staff support and technical assistance.¹² The chairpersons had a variety of opinions about the transition from an in-house to a centralized staff. Most felt that the central office did the best it could with the limited resources provided by the city. Others were indifferent and indicated that the central office offered limited clerical support. Regardless of their opinions about the central office, all of the chairpersons of citizens' district councils said they preferred to have their own in-house staff. In the following comment, one chairperson expressed a more critical view of the budget cuts that led to the creation of the central office and of their impact on Detroit's citizens' district councils:

I don't have a problem with the staff; I think the people want to do their job, but the statutes that govern urban renewal prohibit that. And really, they serve as a satellite office for the city and it's not providing; while they might document that they're doing a lot of stuff, they are not. I think they paid them \$1.4 million or they gave them a contract, but it's not serving the purpose the law intended. In fact, it's a conflict of interest. Because the law says there will be a citizens' district council within the jurisdictional boundaries of each urban renewal area, and that citizens' district councils will be accessible to the residents. Now that doesn't mean a citizens' district council board, it means an office and a staff. And while they say they don't have to have a citizens' district council office and staff, they do if they truly want it to serve the people. But what happened was the funding was taken from the citizens' district councils at a critical time when people were being displaced and removed from their property, and they had

nowhere to go for help. Then, to justify it, they set up [the central office]. To me the city should have funded the citizens' district councils—not just this one, but the other ones so they could provide the services as the law intended. Because the law requires that the citizens' district council is the official spokesperson for the community, the law mandates that the citizens' district councils exist in an urban renewal area. So, to me they should have funded the citizens' district councils so they could provide the services the law intended, so the CDBG money is allocated to the community to implement and plan things the community wanted. But what they did is they dumped the community out and planned things for new people. But the people who were here first, not only have they been displaced, but the plans they wanted were not implemented because the citizens' district council was not in place.

In short, without adequate funding and access to staff resources to assist elected members of citizens' district councils with the day-to-day activities in their communities, the equity goals of the statutes and ordinances that created citizens' district councils are not being met. Increasingly Detroit's citizens' district councils run the risk of being reduced to ineffectual advisory boards with little internal capacity to influence municipal decision making or engage in local community development.

Policy Recommendations

The findings from this research identify a number of areas in which planning advisory boards can be improved in order to expand the scope of citizen participation in municipal decision making and local community development. Specifically, the policy recommendations growing out of this research focus on suggested modifications in three areas: expanding the political power of planning advisory boards, creating stable and autonomous resources for them, and broadening the communities they represent.

The policy recommendations growing out of this research focus on suggested modifications in three areas: expanding the political power of planning advisory boards, creating stable and autonomous resources for them, and broadening the communities they represent.

The first modification suggested for planning advisory boards entails *expansion of their political power*. This is particularly justified when planning advisory boards are predominantly composed of members who are elected by the residents of a community, as was the case with Detroit's citizens' district councils. The main critique of advisory boards is that the recommendations they make to elected officials and public administrators are not binding. To give advisory boards more influence, state statutes and municipal ordinances should be amended to grant them veto power over local development projects. Where this would be impractical, states and municipalities should give advisory boards one vote at the planning commission or city council level on projects that will have impacts on the communities they represent. These types of progressive reforms would strengthen local democracy, bringing a grassroots emphasis to local decision making.

The second modification that is suggested entails *creating a stable revenue stream of autonomous resources for planning advisory boards*. This recommendation focuses on the impact that shifts in political regimes and public finance strategies have on local democracy. The discussion of Detroit's citizens' district councils highlighted how political support and budget instability can affect staffing decision on advisory boards as well as the scope of citizen participation. To address these issues, planning advisory boards need greater political and fiscal autonomy. Rather than relying exclusively on CDBG funds and other fiscal support from local government, tax revenues should be earmarked for planning advisory boards for staff and operating

expenses. These revenues should come from an increment of existing tax revenues generated in the communities that the boards represent. Depending on local revenue streams, earmarked funds could be pooled across communities or calculated for individual communities. This type of funding mechanism could be modeled after those used in Maryland's community benefits districts, where a portion of local property taxes are redirected to community-based organizations in designated areas.¹³ The stabilization of revenues would allow planning advisory boards, as well as other community-based organizations, to maintain in-house staff to work on an expanded scope of activities. Revenue stabilization would also provide a foundation for the development of what are sometimes referred to as *community planning centers*.¹⁴ These are places "where citizens can meet to develop plans, examine maps and data, and convene to discuss [community development] goal and objectives."¹⁵

The final modification that is suggested entails *broadening the communities that planning advisory boards represent*. This is a crucial issue because organizations like Detroit's citizens' district councils run the risk of becoming increasingly isolated. For planning advisory boards to benefit from the entire pool of resources, skills, and experiences in a city, the boundaries of the communities they represent should be drawn to include a broadened socioeconomic spectrum. Creating communities with mixed socioeconomic and class boundaries would bring a number of benefits to planning advisory boards, including, among other things, a larger tax base from which to earmark revenues for staff and operating costs, and added constituents with expertise and professional networks. Arguments for drawing boundaries in this manner are supported by past research on participation.¹⁶ Deliberately creating mixed socioeconomic and class boundaries also curbs patterns of race and class segregation that have the potential to undermine democratic institutions.

In summary, the findings from this research indicate that planning advisory boards have the potential to evolve into nodes for grassroots planning and community development. Their promise, however, is often cut short by limited organizational capacity, lack of political power, municipal budget constraints, and shifting political regimes. As a result, recommendations have been forwarded to expand the political power of planning advisory boards, to provide them with stable and autonomous resources, and to broaden the communities they represent. Two additional points should be made. First, many of the constraints faced by planning advisory boards are also faced by other community-based organizations. As a result, many of the recommendations offered in this article can be applied to these organizations as well. Second, planning advisory boards should not be viewed as organizations that operate in a vacuum. They interact with a variety of other organizations at the community and neighborhood levels. Given this situation, the next challenge for scholars and practitioners is to begin to formulate comprehensive strategies for expanding democratic processes in community-based organizations and to develop stable and autonomous mechanisms to finance their activities.

Planning advisory boards have the potential to evolve into nodes for grassroots planning and community development.

NOTES

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